Groton Daily Independent

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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.

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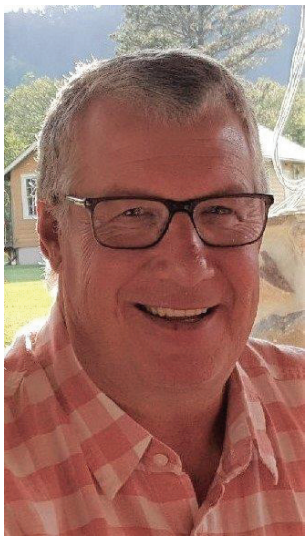
Four vying for two spots on Groton Area Board of Education

Compiled by Dorene Nelson

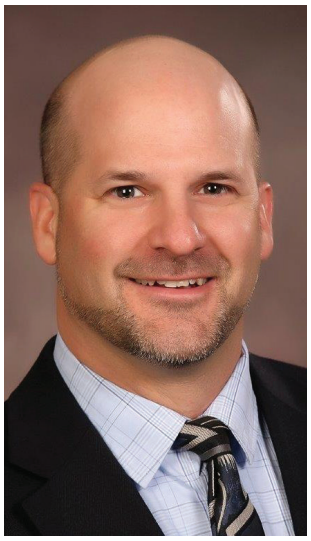


Incumbent
Marty Weismantel

Marty Weismantel owns Weismantel Insurance Agency in Columbia. After graduating from NSU, he started his career working in the banking industry. Weismantel is the only candidate who was born, raised, and lives and works in the district. He and his wife Amy have two daughters and live in Columbia.

Incumbent
Kara Pharis

Kara Pharis, a graduate of Bristol High School, has lived in the Groton community for over 20 years. After earning an associate's degree in business, she has been employed as a paralegal at Ronayne Law Office. Pharis and her husband Kevin farm north of Groton and have five children.



Ryan Tracy

Ryan Tracy is currently the General Manager of the SD region for an employee-owned company, Dakota Supply Group (DSG) and has lived in Groton for 16 years. He and his wife have four children with three of them currently attending school in Groton.

Anna Schwan

Anna Schwan is currently an Assistant Professor at NSU. Prior to working at the college, Schwan had been a classroom teacher for twelve years and a school administrator for four years. She lives in Groton with her husband and four children.

An election for the Groton Area Board of Education will be held on Tuesday, April 13, 2021. Four candidates are running for two open positions. The incumbents, Marty Weismantel and Kara Pharis, are being challenged by Anna Schwan and Ryan Tracy.

Each candidate was asked the same set of questions. Their answers are provided in the following paragraphs.

Reasons for Serving on the School Board

Marty Weismantel:

- has officiated high school athletics for over 32 years. This connection has helped him build a large network of school administrators with whom he keeps in contact.
- loves being around young people and is easily able to build relationships with other people of all ages. While on the school board, he has been willing to help in whatever way he can. He still officiates for junior

high games and helps with fund-raising.

• was elected to the South Dakota High School Activities Association Board of Directors in 2020, as the small school board representative. Having this spot on the SDHSAA board is beneficial to both our district and to northeast South Dakota.

Anna Schwan:

• is committed to meeting the needs of all students, a top priority for all school board members. With her background in education, it is easy to see why she is invested and interested in this position.

• has many years as a teacher and administrator have given her an authentic understanding of education and how to serve students and foster professional development for administrators, teachers, and staff.

• While working on her many college degrees, she has developed a deep understanding of learning environments, curriculum and instruction, leadership, psychology of learning, and educational finance.

• has a desire to not only serve her community but also to help with making decisions that will improve student achievement. She has been in a school building for over 35 years and believes that her knowledge and experience can contribute to a shared vision that will help in making good student-driven decisions.

Ryan Tracy:

• entire family has been very involved in the community with many sporting and church events, being part of the PAC, running a daycare and owning a building on main street, being on the Groton Fire/Rescue Team, coaching Groton Youth Sports, and volunteering in many other ways.

• job includes working in the Wholesale Distributor Industry in the plumbing, electrical, utility, and HVAC segments of construction. This career path has made him very familiar with all aspects of construction and finance, where he has been heavily involved with many projects, big and small.

• has been selected to serve on many high-level boards and committees, providing him with responsibilities and learning how to fulfill the role of a team board member. This experience will help him to be a good member of the Groton School Board and be able to work well with some of the upcoming decisions and challenges in front of them.

• who cares deeply about children and the Groton community, will give 100% to the job and the people he serves. He believes that boards need well rounded people who are willing to be open minded, listen to the others and their ideas, be willing to adapt to change, and yet challenge decisions to be sure that all options are being considered, even if it is not popular, "before" a decision is made.

Kara Pharis:

• Since her children range in ages from early elementary to college students, Pharis has a vested interest in the long-term success of the Groton Area School District. She also has the unique perspective of being currently involved in every level at Groton Area and into college. Pharis is also the only board member who was originally from Bristol. It is helpful for patrons from that part of the district to have a familiar face on the Board.

• Having served on the Groton Area School Board for three years has provided her with an insight into the ins and outs of public education in the state, as well as things that are distinctive to our district. Pharis feels that her strongest attributes are common sense and having high but realistic standards for the Groton School District. Her family is also directly impacted by all decisions the board makes, whether that be personnel, curriculum, or tax levies.

• In addition to this, Pharis' work in the legal system adds more understanding and a unique talent to the board. She is also a youth basketball and soccer coach, a Sunday school teacher, and had been an active member in the school district before serving on the board.

• has served on the district's COVID-19 Back to School task force last summer and is proud of the work that was done to get the kids and teachers back in the classroom and to keep them there as safely as possible and with minimal interruptions.

Job of the School Board Member

Weismantel is currently on the school board for one reason: to assist in maintaining the excellent academic reputation that Groton Area currently possesses. The primary work of the board is hiring and supervising the superintendent, developing policy that supports the mission of the school district, and overseeing the fiscal duties of the school district. Weismantel is objective and makes his decisions on what is best for the school and the students who attend here.

Schwan believes that the job of the board of education is to provide the foundation and to pave the way for schools to serve, without reservation, all students. The teachers, staff, administrators, and students depend upon the board to understand the issues and to spend the necessary time to be well-informed. The members of the board of education must be willing to listen and work together to be active problem solvers.

Tracy considers the school board to be the supervisor and support for the superintendent. As such the board should challenge, coach, provide knowledge, and evaluate performance and decisions of the school leaders. The board members need to lend real world expertise in areas they have knowledge and experience. The board must make sure every angle is looked at carefully, asking the right questions, hearing the whole story, and ultimately making the best decision possible in every scenario.

Pharis is running for her second school board term because she believes in a quality public education for the community's current and future students. She is committed to listening to parents, staff, students, and the community at large regarding issues and, as a parent, has a personal vested interest in preserving and improving the education that children receive. Her reason for being on the board is her belief that everyone needs to contribute to the continued success of the Groton school district.

Four-or-Five Day Week

Weismantel has not heard from anyone in favor of the four-day week. Students need the good nutritious meals from the school. Some kids ride a bus for well over an hour morning and night. It is definitely in their best interest to have as short a school day as possible.

Schwan believes that school serves so many more purposes for kids than just academics. For some kids, school is the only place where their needs are being addressed and met. School is a time where kids can develop social emotional skills that are modeled by caring adults in a safe, comfortable environment. Shortening the school week decreases instructional time and time on task which is concerning when total learning time is one of the strongest predictors of student success.

Tracy has not formed his final opinion about the issue of a four- or five-day school week. He has been researching this topic and is in favor of a hybrid scenario, if that were possible to set up and support. He has found that older students and their parents really enjoy the four-day school week. The younger children and their parents are more in line with the five-day school week. It appears as if the younger ones are suffering in their education and in personal growth compared to previous years. He feels it is important to learn more of why people feel strongly one way or another on this topic.

Pharis, as a current board member, has received feedback from multiple parents. There have been some very good discussions regarding the pros and cons of both the four-and five-day school week. At this point, her biggest concern is keeping the quality of education that the district patrons are accustomed to at Groton Area, regardless of whether it is packaged into a four-day, five-day, or mix of the four-and five-day school week.

Bond Issue

When the timing is right, Weismantel will once again support another bond issue to replace the old section of the high school. He also believes that any remodel project should include the current band/vocal department. He would like to see the stage gym area in the "old gym" to include movable theater style seating to give us a theater type atmosphere.

Ideally a replacement of the '34 building would include a theater similar to what other area schools have included in their new building projects. Groton Area has an outstanding reputation for its fine arts, and the

board needs to do something for that department to help instill and maintain more interest in that area.

Schwan believes that the Groton Area School District is in a great position to continue offering a stellar education to all students. She believes that the board needs to revisit and investigate options for bringing the old part of the high school into the 21st century of education.

At this time and with his current knowledge of the situation, Tracy is unable to support or oppose a bond issue for the replacement of the old high school. He would like to educate himself a lot more on the topic, such as current finances, loans, community support, cost of construction, etc.

Pharis admits that eventually that the issues of replacement or remodeling the eighty-year-old portion of the high school will need to be addressed again. However, since everyone is still financially crawling out of the pandemic, she believes that the citizens of this district will need time to economically recover. Ultimately, the Board and area communities will have to agree on a fiscally responsible remodel or replacement plan.

#380 in a series
Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Don't freak out when you see these numbers; I can explain, but let's just get it out there first. There were 106,300 cases reported today. This brings us up to 29,187,300 total cases in the US thus far in the pandemic, which is 0.4% more than yesterday. This jump is not real; I would say our real new-case count today was in the neighborhood of 50,000. Missouri adjusted the way it reports cases and dumped some 50,000 cases into the system today as a result of that adjustment. These are cases diagnosed with the antigen test, as opposed to the RT-PCR test over a period of months, so they were not all diagnosed today. As nearly as I can determine, there was no real spike in the state at all. We'll have a look at tomorrow's heat map and see whether these are going to cause a shift for the state into the red "unchecked spread" category; if so, they'll stay there a week until these work their way through the system. The overall news is that the country did not show a big surge; our seven-day new-case average is 59,090.

Hospitalizations resumed their downward march today after fluctuating upward yesterday. We are currently at 42,262. There were 1867 deaths reported today. This brings us to 527,300, which is 0.4% more than yesterday. So we're over the weekend reporting, but I am not yet worried. We'll see what the rest of the week has for us.

Cases in children have been declining for most of two months. Deaths are quite unusual in children; the mortality rate appears to be less than 0.05 percent.

On March 9, 2020, one year ago today, the US had 564 cases in 35 states plus the District of Columbia. There had been 22 deaths in three states, 19 in Washington, 2 in Florida, and 1 in California. Average age of death was 80. The remaining states with no reported cases, although there were some places where results were pending on tests, were as follows: Idaho, Alabama, Montana, Wyoming, New Mexico, South Dakota, North Dakota, Arkansas, Mississippi, Michigan, Virginia, West Virginia, Maine, Delaware, Arkansas. As we all know too well now, none of these states stayed case-free for long. The CDC had recommended no one go on a cruise, especially the elderly or those with health conditions that place them at risk. It looked as though they were also about to recommend avoiding long airplane flights, especially for those in high-risk groups. Finally, public health labs in all 50 states were able to test for coronavirus. Canada reported its first death.

MLB, MLS, the NBA, and the NHL had all limited locker room access to players and essential staff. Cancelations and closures: Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade, all of Ireland's St. Patrick's Day parades, most in-person classes and campus-sponsored events at UC Berkeley, Princeton University's in-person classes, Italy (all of it), schools in Madrid, all large gatherings in Egypt.

We had figured out that symptoms generally appeared within five days of exposure and certainly within two weeks so that 14 days of quarantine were appropriate for exposed individuals. The Director-General of the WHO said in a news conference this day that "of all the cases reported globally so far, 93% are from just four countries," adding that there was still time to control the epidemic. "The bottom line is, we are not at the mercy of this virus." I wish he'd been right about that.

I wrote, "The number of cases will continue to grow, both because this is spreading and because more people are being tested. Do not sit back, all smug because your state hasn't been hit yet: It will be. There have been some confusing messages coming out from official sources about risks and infection rates, so let me be clear--with zero political agenda:

"This is a serious epidemic. While it is too soon to know the actual death rate, it is almost certainly an order of magnitude greater than for the flu. . . . With the infection rates the infectious disease and pandemic experts expect, that's a LOT of bodies. I most sincerely do not want you or someone you love to be among those, so please take this seriously."

I then cautioned that a vaccine was, at best, a year away. Oops—wrong about that. But I more wisely added, "I am not trying to incite panic; I am trying to promote caution. This is here, and it is serious. You are at risk, if not of becoming critically ill (and you're not at great risk if you're young and healthy), then of passing it along to someone who is not young and healthy, maybe someone you care about. Time to

serious up about this."

We've been so focused on vaccines lately—to prevent infections—that we haven't really heard much about therapeutics, drugs we can use to treat existing infections. But there still are folks working away on those, which is a good thing because we already know there are people who aren't going to get vaccinated and there will continue to be cases for quite some time to come, maybe forever. Ridgeback Biotherapeutics and Merck announced preliminary results from a part of a phase 2a trial for such a therapeutic a couple of days ago. This, being a clinical trial, is a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, and the drug is molnupiravir, an antiviral. Importantly, this one can be taken orally; most of the drugs we've heard about must be administered parenterally (with a needle). Now this came from the company press release and we don't have a public data set yet, so it's important to bear that in mind, although the findings were presented to scientists at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections. And they are seeing a reduced time until the patient's nasopharyngeal swabs produce negative viral culture and/or a negative RT-PCR test, that is, until the virus is effectively cleared from the symptomatic patient's respiratory tract; at day 5 of treatment, those given the drug showed 0% positive cultures/results whereas those given placebo showed 24% positive cultures/results.

For my geeky friends, this antiviral works as a ribonucleoside analog, and for the rest of you, the drug provides building block pieces for making viral RNA, something an infected cell does so the virus can replicate and spread to more cells, making your infection worse. The trick is that analogs aren't working parts; they're look-alike fake parts that fool the cell into incorporating them into the viral RNA it's making, but then don't function once they're in there. That means you end up with a bunch of replicated viruses that can't do anything because their RNA is nonfunctional. Cute trick. When it works, it's cool. And this one looks like it works very early in infection before there's a lot of damage; it is intended to be given at home as a five-day course of treatment. The safety profile is looking pretty good too; at least in this small (202 participant) study, there were "no safety signals" and none of the four serious adverse events reported was drug-related. Most of the study remains blinded, so it will be some time before we have more than these preliminary findings. There also remain the larger phase 3 trials before we're sure what we have here; but there may be some promise here.

Here's something interesting—not super-important, but interesting. A recent CDC analysis of safety data from the first 14 million doses of vaccine given out in the US shows 79.1 percent of side effects were reported by women even though only 61.2 percent of vaccines were given to women. The only serious side effect reported in these first doses is the severe allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis. Of the 66 cases of anaphylaxis seen, only three occurred in men. That's quite a large sex difference. And apparently the experts didn't bat an eye at this. Sabra Klein, microbiologist and immunologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told the New York Times, "I am not at all surprised. This sex difference is completely consistent with past reports of other vaccines. Other work reinforces that women are far more likely to report side effects.

Now this isn't particularly scary with these vaccines which have remarkable safety profiles; most of the side effects seen tend to be mild. But what's going on here? Could be a couple of things. First, women may simply be more likely than men to report side effects. Apparently no one knows this for sure, but we do know women are far more likely to go to the doctor when they're sick, so it might follow they would also be more willing to report side effects. But there are some actual biological differences that can account for some or all of this effect too: Females tend to produce significantly more antibodies and stronger T-cell responses as a result of many other vaccines: influenza, MMR, yellow fever, rabies, and hepatitis. We know that exposure to estrogen (a female sex hormone) influences cells of the immune system to produce more antibodies. Additionally, women's body weight generally runs lower than men's, and so the same size dose of vaccine is going to be higher per body weight in the average woman than it will be for men. That larger dose might be eliciting a stronger response.

Novavax, a biotechnology company with a Covid-19 vaccine in phase 3 clinical trials now, is already working on boosters. They're thinking a booster might be needed every six months to one year to maintain protection. Their vaccine is a two-dose protein subunit vaccine. They say they're seeing a drop in

antibodies at six months, and so they're thinking some time after that a booster may be needed. We will learn more about this as time goes on; the company has initiated a study of boosting to see what they can find out. I should also note that, although this candidate is still in trials and I do not believe they have approval in any country, they do have two manufacturing facilities in the US making their product; it seems likely the supply will be there once authorization is granted. Results from the 30,000-participant phase 3 US/Mexico trial are expected by sometime in April; the results seen in the UK are very promising with something on the order of 89 percent efficacy. A decision on the candidate in the US is expected in late spring or early summer.

We also have some data from the CDC on vaccination of pregnant people. Dr. Tom Shimabukuro, vaccine safety lead with the Covid-19 Response Team at the CDC, told CNN, "The data we have so far are reassuring. We do not see any signs of a safety problem in pregnant women—both with respect to the pregnant women individually and with respect to the developing fetus." Additionally, according to Dr. Kathleen Dooling, a co-lead on the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, said, "There are no concerns that the vaccine would be in the breast milk or be dangerous to a breast-feeding infant." There isn't a large amount of data yet, but given the risks of Covid-19 for pregnancy, this is important information to making decisions. Shimabukuro says he believes it is important for pregnant people and those who are breastfeeding to be vaccinated.

Our vaccine supply is increasing again this week. An additional 600,000 doses of the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines will be shipped to states, bringing the shipment to 15.8 million doses this week in addition to the 2.7 million first doses going out to pharmacies. I haven't heard a total for the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine for the week; but if we can keep this up, maybe we can outrun this thing. In about six weeks, the number of doses administered daily has grown from 890,000 to 2.17 million. About 60 percent of people 65 and older have received at least one dose of vaccine; 30 percent of them are fully-vaccinated. Considering people from 65 to 74 are 1100 times more likely to die, those 75 to 84 are 2800 times more likely to die, and those 85 and older are 7900 times more likely to die, this is a huge step toward reducing mortality. We have around a tenth of the general population fully vaccinated and another tenth having received the first dose. We are also getting what's deliveredb into arms at a pretty good rate: About three-quarters of the doses delivered have been administered.

Julia Segal is a senior at Henry M. Gunn High School in Palo Alto, California. She pretty much lives for music; a classically-trained pianist and member of a choir, Segal also writes songs and belongs to an indie pop band. When the pandemic hit last spring and her state shut down, she was trying to figure out how to get along without playing music with others. She was looking for a way to share her love of music when her mom's friend asked her to hold a children's virtual songwriting workshop for a local elementary school. She agreed, capping enrollment at five students, but it turned out there was more demand than she'd anticipated: Forty kids signed up. So she divided them into four groups and revamped her plans for teaching to accommodate twice as many children in each session.

At that point Segal realized kids were looking for something to do, and with teens stuck at home needing an outlet, so she decided to bring the two together. She recruited a bunch of her music friends to teach virtual music lessons. The lessons are offered at no charge; any kid with an Internet connection can sign up. The array of instruments they cover is huge, so whatever the child's interest, there's probably someone prepared to teach it. They now have 250 teachers teaching 20 different instruments and also skills like songwriting and musical production. The goal is to instill a love for music into the children and make things fun so the kids will learn to enjoy music as much as the teachers do. Segal calls her organization QuaranTunes, and the oldest person on the board is a college freshman—some are as young as high school sophomores. These teens are making a real difference to 800 children throughout the pandemic and sharing their music with all of them.

Additionally, these QuananTune teens decided they could raise some money for a good cause sort of on the side, so they went to work on that. Their first beneficiary was the CDC Foundation, for which they raised around $35,000. Then they discovered Save the Music, a foundation that sponsors music education

in low-income public schools. They've raised over $30,000 for them too. When they first got started, they realized some of the kids they wanted to reach couldn't afford instruments, so they put together an effort to connect people who have unused instruments lying around the house with their students who want music lessons, thus extending their reach to those who would never have a chance for music education without QuaranTune. I've said it before, and I'll undoubtedly say it again: Nothing wrong with kids these days, nothing at all.

Be well. We'll talk tomorrow.

County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	454	432	874	15	Minimal	0.0%
Beadle	2805	2654	5895	39	Substantial	15.6%
Bennett	382	370	1181	9	None	0.0%
Bon Homme	1509	1477	2084	25	Minimal	3.8%
Brookings	3627	3523	12040	37	Moderate	2.6%
Brown	5179	5016	12750	89	Substantial	8.1%
Brule	696	680	1882	9	Minimal	8.6%
Buffalo	420	406	899	13	None	0.0%
Butte	987	952	3225	20	Moderate	9.0%
Campbell	131	125	258	4	Minimal	25.0%
Charles Mix	1309	1247	3934	21	Substantial	7.2%
Clark	376	361	955	5	Moderate	5.9%
Clay	1811	1769	5380	15	Substantial	3.0%
Codington	4037	3865	9711	77	Substantial	7.7%
Corson	472	454	1001	12	Minimal	14.8%
Custer	764	737	2726	12	Substantial	11.4%
Davison	2973	2878	6572	63	Moderate	6.3%
Day	675	630	1781	28	Substantial	6.5%
Deuel	476	461	1143	8	Minimal	0.0%
Dewey	1423	1383	3820	26	Substantial	4.7%
Douglas	434	420	913	9	Moderate	0.0%
Edmunds	487	465	1059	12	Moderate	5.0%
Fall River	547	508	2632	15	Substantial	9.8%
Faulk	362	347	700	13	Minimal	14.3%
Grant	981	922	2241	38	Substantial	6.8%
Gregory	548	502	1285	30	Moderate	11.9%
Haakon	257	240	539	10	Moderate	0.0%
Hamlin	723	664	1783	38	Substantial	21.9%
Hand	346	327	823	6	Moderate	5.3%
Hanson	368	353	723	4	Moderate	26.3%
Harding	92	90	183	1	Minimal	20.0%
Hughes	2323	2247	6605	36	Substantial	1.2%
Hutchinson	790	755	2388	26	Minimal	5.3%

Hyde	139	137	409	1	Minimal	5.3%
Jackson	280	263	918	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	275	251	557	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	85	85	223	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	648	621	1684	14	Moderate	5.6%
Lake	1221	1160	3345	18	Substantial	9.0%
Lawrence	2836	2766	8550	45	Moderate	3.4%
Lincoln	7869	7620	20336	77	Substantial	10.5%
Lyman	604	588	1878	10	Minimal	2.6%
Marshall	338	309	1202	5	Substantial	12.3%
McCook	753	714	1625	24	Moderate	12.1%
McPherson	241	231	555	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2623	2534	7725	31	Substantial	9.5%
Mellette	257	245	733	2	Moderate	8.8%
Miner	274	254	579	9	Minimal	18.2%
Minnehaha	28381	27527	78524	334	Substantial	8.7%
Moody	620	592	1754	17	Moderate	5.6%
Oglala Lakota	2065	1995	6648	49	Moderate	5.4%
Pennington	13005	12631	39516	189	Substantial	5.6%
Perkins	348	330	822	14	Minimal	2.8%
Potter	378	364	837	4	Moderate	0.0%
Roberts	1229	1145	4151	36	Substantial	19.4%
Sanborn	335	324	693	3	Minimal	5.2%
Spink	804	768	2139	26	Minimal	6.3%
Stanley	335	330	937	2	Moderate	2.9%
Sully	137	133	313	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1219	1188	4148	29	Minimal	0.0%
Tripp	716	675	1485	16	Substantial	20.0%
Turner	1077	1007	2733	53	Moderate	6.3%
Union	2007	1928	6287	39	Substantial	8.0%
Walworth	730	700	1831	15	Moderate	8.6%
Yankton	2824	2754	9358	28	Moderate	7.9%
Ziebach	336	326	863	9	Minimal	7.7%
Unassigned	0	0	1777	0		

South Dakota

New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Currently Hospitalized
124	33	2,097	109,755	71

Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases	PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
100,822	12,931	10.3%	428,873	997,981

Ever Hospitalized	Deaths Among Cases	% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)
6,725	1,901	241%	216%	58%

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4607	0
10-19 years	12875	0
20-29 years	20147	7
30-39 years	18700	18
40-49 years	16250	36
50-59 years	16051	113
60-69 years	13043	251
70-79 years	6948	435
80+ years	5132	1041

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	59209	896
Male	54544	1005

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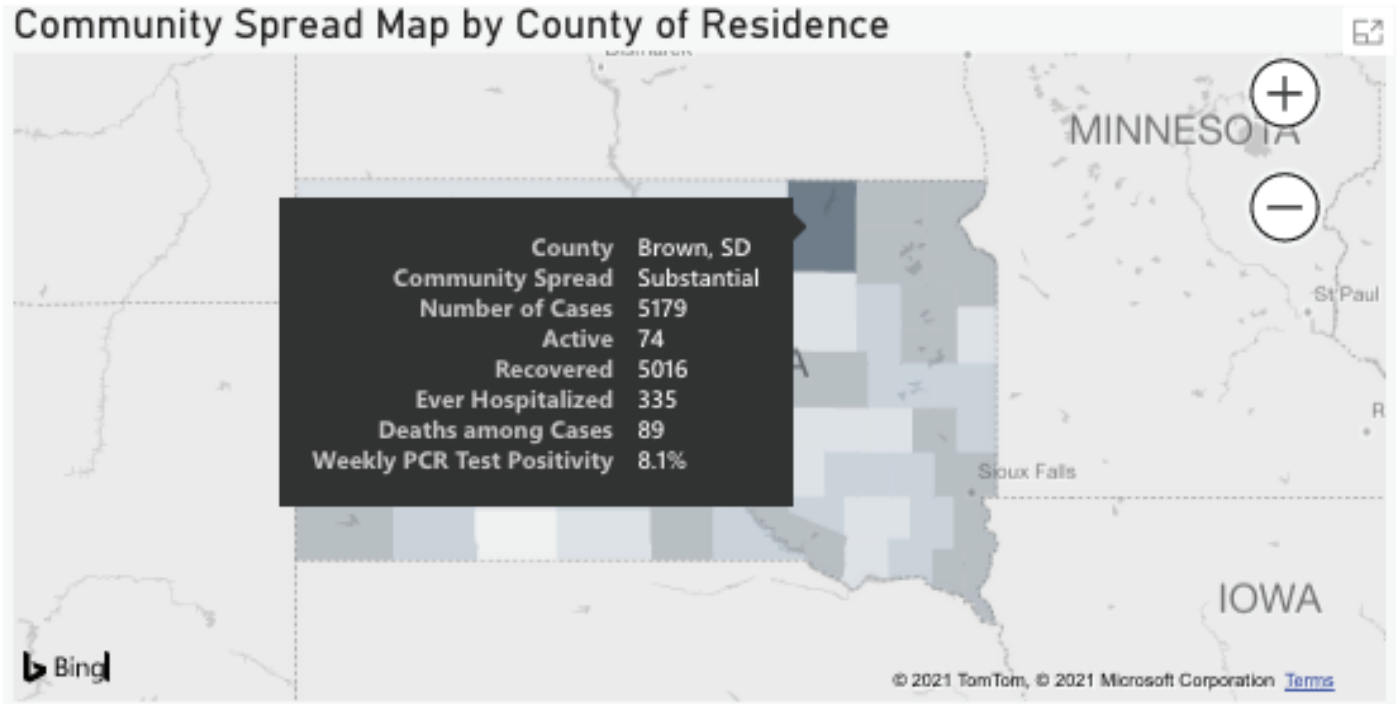
Brown County

New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Currently Hospitalized
2	2	74	5,016	71



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

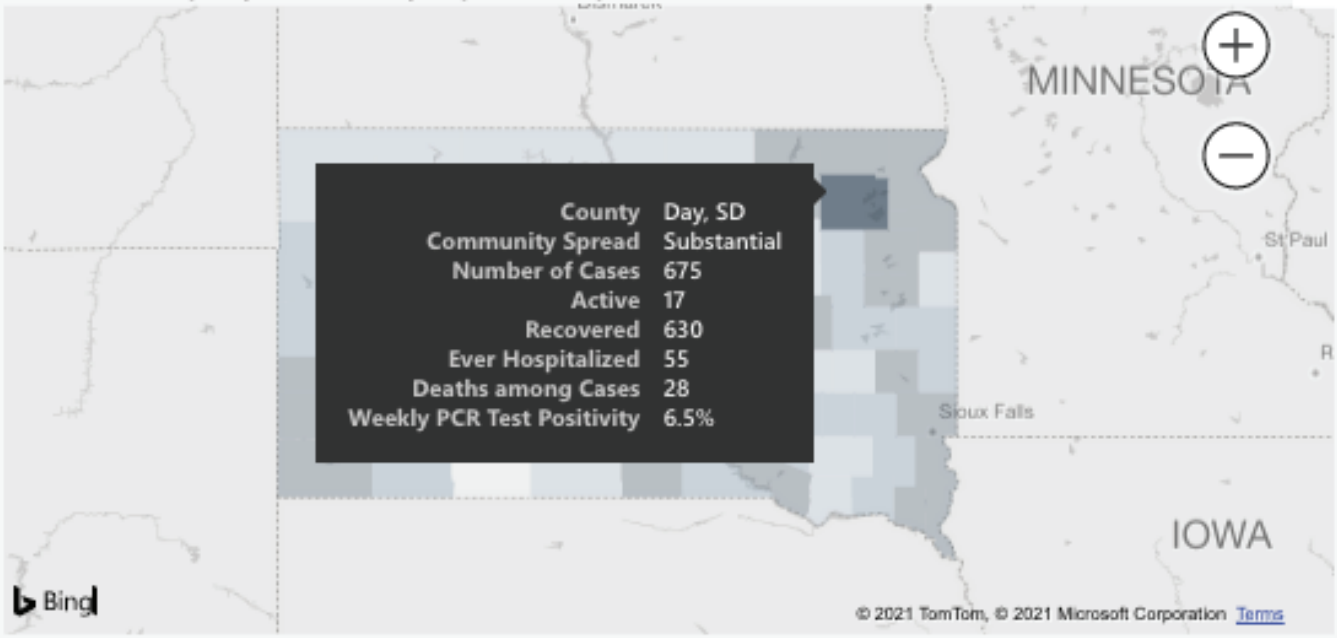
Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases	PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
4,617	562	0.0%	17,929	48,645

Ever Hospitalized	Deaths Among Cases	% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)
335	89	241%	216%	58%

Day County

New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Currently Hospitalized
0	3	17	630	71

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread None Minimal Moderate Substantial

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

Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases	PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
516	159	0.0%	2,456	8,236

Ever Hospitalized	Deaths Among Cases	% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)
55	28	241%	216%	58%

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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

262,250

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	522
Moderna	129,528
Pfizer	132,200

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

170,208

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	522
Moderna - 1 dose	41,448
Moderna - Series Complete	44,040
Pfizer - 1 dose	36,198
Pfizer - Series Complete	48,001

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

30%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	29.81%
Series Complete	16.14%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	695	243	226	**469**
Beadle	5274	1,834	1,720	**3,554**
Bennett*	436	122	157	**279**
Bon Homme*	2739	1,133	803	**1,936**
Brookings	7593	2,793	2,400	**5,193**
Brown	12332	2,820	4,756	**7,576**
Brule*	1565	513	526	**1,039**
Buffalo*	122	78	22	**100**
Butte	1794	756	519	**1,275**
Campbell	874	292	291	**583**
Charles Mix*	2501	1,065	718	**1,783**
Clark	988	336	326	**662**
Clay	4062	1,538	1,262	**2,800**
Codington*	8151	2,827	2,662	**5,489**
Corson*	246	98	74	**172**
Custer*	2324	892	716	**1,608**
Davison	6365	1,831	2,267	**4,098**
Day*	2124	772	676	**1,448**
Deuel	1214	426	394	**820**
Dewey*	332	72	130	**202**
Douglas*	973	313	330	**643**
Edmunds	1089	351	369	**720**
Fall River*	2208	734	737	**1,471**
Faulk	817	265	276	**541**
Grant*	2373	1,175	599	**1,774**
Gregory*	1439	609	415	**1,024**
Haakon*	477	159	159	**318**

Hamlin	1430	488	471	**959**
Hand	1058	376	341	**717**
Hanson	397	149	124	**273**
Harding	83	39	22	**61**
Hughes*	6522	1,736	2,393	**4,129**
Hutchinson*	2746	900	923	**1,823**
Hyde*	447	147	150	**297**
Jackson*	343	107	118	**225**
Jerauld	655	307	174	**481**
Jones*	554	164	195	**359**
Kingsbury	1914	848	533	**1,381**
Lake	3193	1,101	1,046	**2,147**
Lawrence	6752	2,641	2,055	**4,696**
Lincoln	22210	5,062	8,574	**13,636**
Lyman*	648	234	207	**441**
Marshall*	1382	466	458	**924**
McCook	1801	565	618	**1,183**
McPherson	208	64	72	**136**
Meade*	5158	1,734	1,712	**3,446**
Mellette*	37	17	10	**27**
Miner	713	237	238	**475**
Minnehaha*	68611	17,461	25,575	**43,036**
Moody*	1412	606	403	**1,009**
Oglala Lakota*	152	56	48	**104**
Pennington*	30848	8,682	11,083	**19,765**
Perkins*	555	275	140	**415**
Potter	685	311	187	**498**
Roberts*	3772	1,370	1,201	**2,571**
Sanborn	838	262	288	**550**
Spink	2442	870	786	**1,656**
Stanley*	998	268	365	**633**
Sully	309	73	118	**191**
Todd*	144	48	48	**96**
Tripp*	1727	557	585	**1,142**
Turner	2965	863	1,051	**1,914**
Union	2178	1,084	547	**1,631**
Walworth*	1535	459	538	**997**
Yankton	8400	2,028	3,186	**5,214**
Ziebach*	52	16	18	**34**
Other	5269	1,449	1,910	**3,359**

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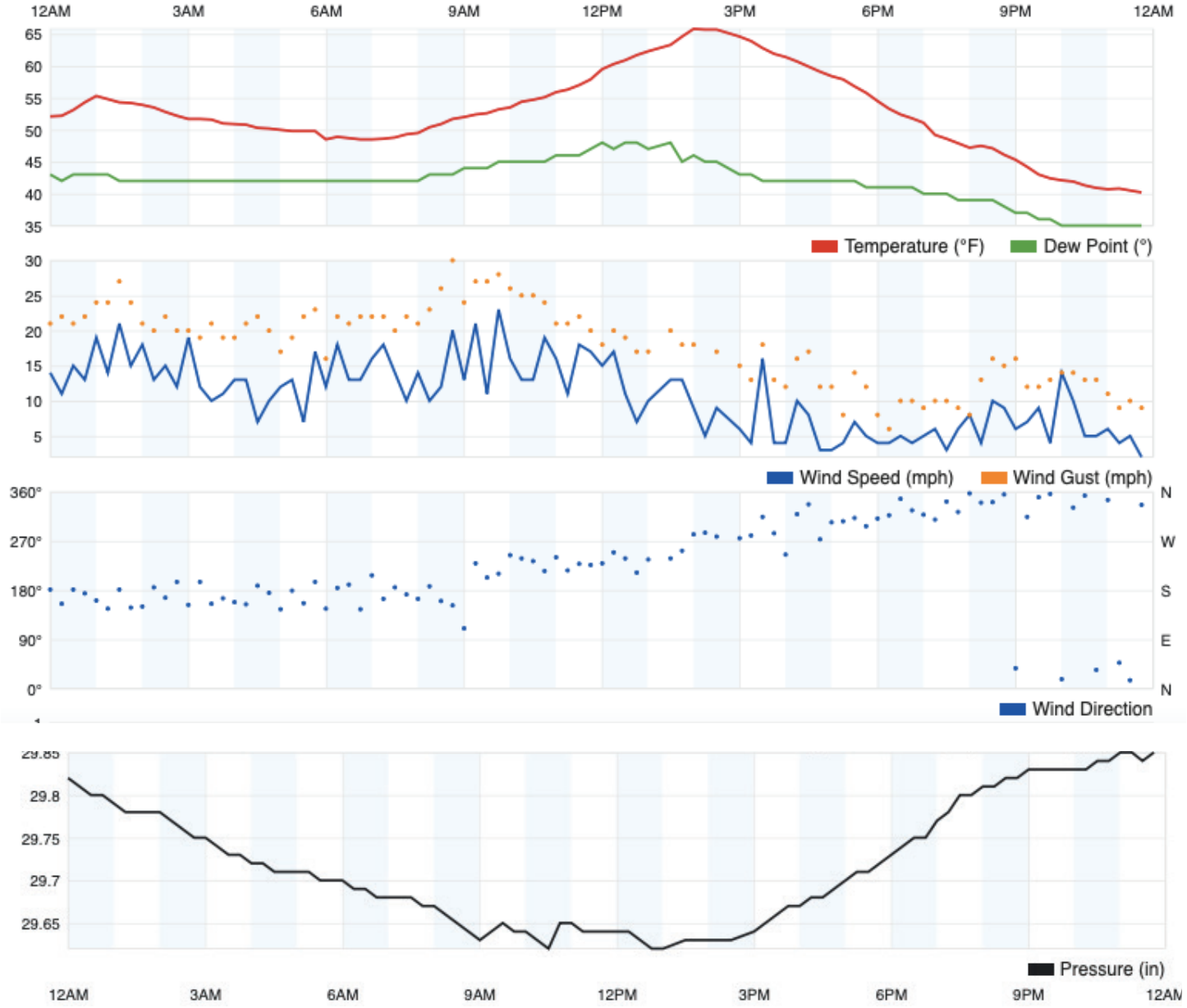
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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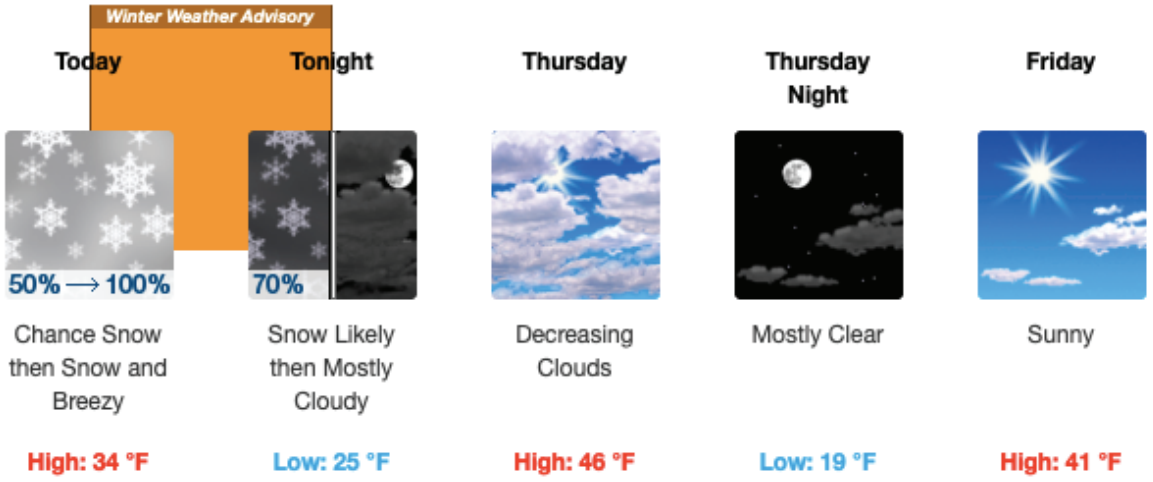

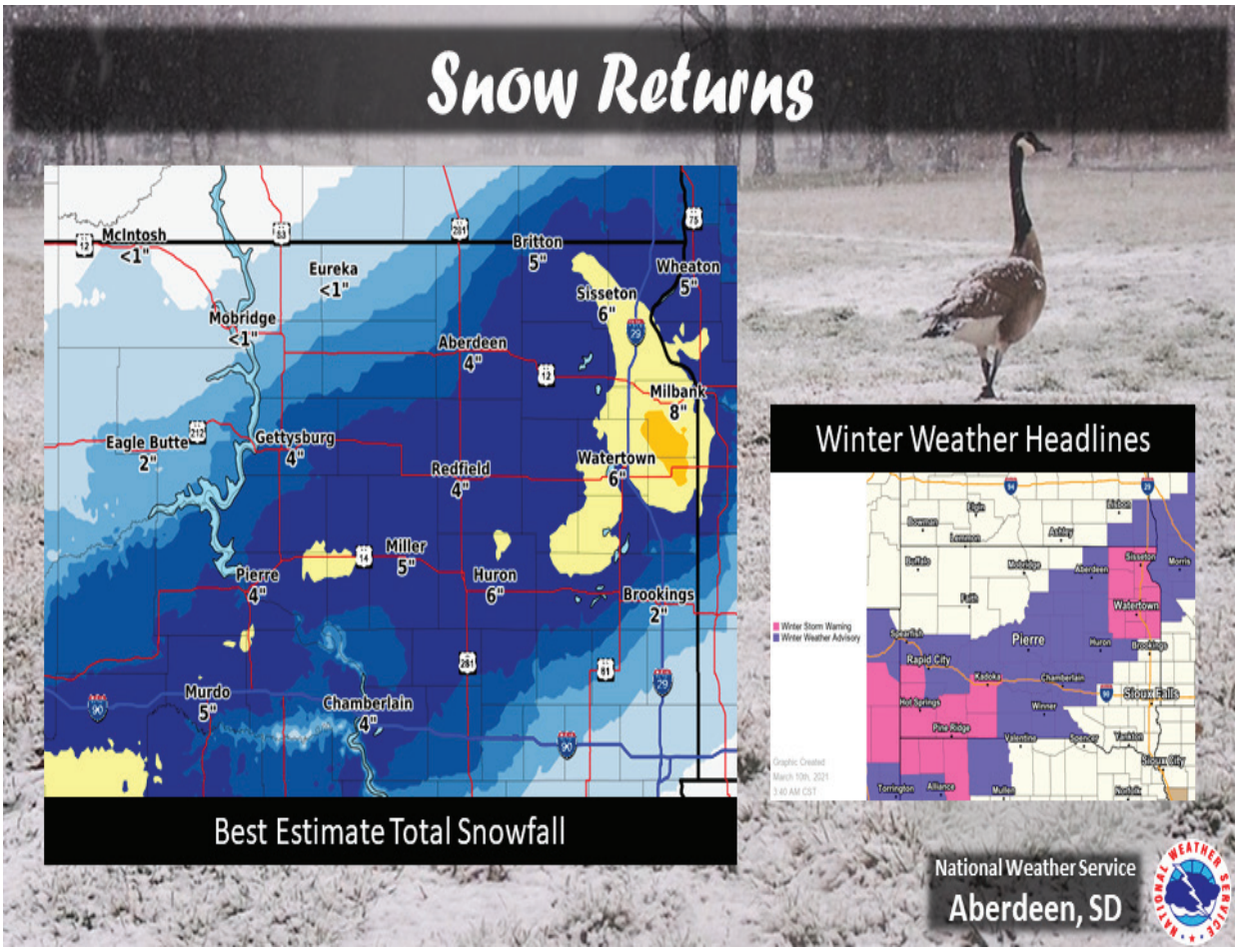

Precipitation presently ongoing over southwestern South Dakota will gradually expand northeastward this morning and become mostly snow over the next few hours. Snow will intensify this afternoon dropping a swath of 3 to 5 inches of total heavy, wet snow, with locally higher amounts possible, before tapering off from west to east this evening. In addition, higher amounts of snow in excess of 6 inches are expected on the Coteau. A Winter Weather Advisory is in effect over a large portion of South Dakota and west central Minnesota while a Winter Storm Warning is in effect for parts of northeastern South Dakota over the Coteau.

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Today in Weather History

March 10, 2005: High winds of 35 to 45 mph with gusts to near 70 mph occurred across all of central and northeast South Dakota from early morning to early evening. The high winds overturned a semi-truck near Mound City; knocked a large branch down onto a pickup truck in Selby; blew a glass door of a store in Clark off; tore a sign down in Aberdeen, and ripped the roof off a mobile home in South Shore.

March 10, 2009: A low-pressure system tracking across the panhandle of Oklahoma into the Great Lakes region produced moderate to heavy snow across northeast South Dakota from the morning to the evening of the 10th. Strong north to northwest winds gusting to 45 mph resulted in blizzard conditions. Travel became difficult, if not, impossible across northeast South Dakota. Interstate 29 between Watertown and the North Dakota border was closed for several hours. Several minor accidents occurred, along with some injuries. Snowfall amounts included; 3 inches near Milbank; 4 inches near Columbia, Summit, and at Sisseton; 5 inches at Waubay and Wilmot; 6 inches 10 miles northeast of Sisseton, Britton, and Roy Lake; 7 inches in Webster and Westport.

Bitter cold air filtered in behind the low-pressure system bringing record cold to the area. On the 11th, Aberdeen and Sisseton broke their record low highs for the date with afternoon highs only reaching zero. The record at Aberdeen had been in place since 1896. Sisseton also set a record low of 14 degrees below zero on March 12th.

1884: John Park Finley issued the first experimental tornado prediction. Finley had studied the atmospheric parameters that were present during previous tornadoes. Many of these same criteria are still used by operational forecasters today. But the use of tornado forecasts would be banned just a few years later and would remain banned until 1952.

1986: Severe thunderstorms and tornadoes hit Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. A total of 19 tornadoes occurred. Three of the tornadoes in Indiana reached F3 intensity. A densely populated subdivision of Southeast Lexington, Kentucky, was heavily damaged by a tornado. Twenty people were injured, and 900 homes were destroyed or demolished. A very strong thunderstorm downburst hit the Cincinnati area. At the Greater Cincinnati Airport, windows were blown out of the control tower, injuring the six controllers on duty. At Newport, Kentucky, 120 houses were destroyed from winds estimated from 100 to 140 mph.

1989: Thirty-four cities in the central and southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The high of 85 degrees at Hanksville, Utah, was a record for March, and Pueblo, Colorado, equaled their March record of 86 degrees. Hill City, Kansas warmed from a morning low of 30 degrees to an afternoon high of 89 degrees.

1912 - The barometric pressure reached 29.26 inches at Los Angeles, CA, and 29.46 inches at San Diego CA, setting all-time records for those two locations. (David Ludlum)

1922 - Dodge City, KS, reported a record 24 hour total of 17.5 inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Strong northwesterly winds ushered arctic air into the eastern U.S. Gales lashed the middle and northern Atlantic coast. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Manteo NC and Cape Hatteras NC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A winter storm produced snow and high winds in the Central Rocky Mountain Region. Snowfall totals in Utah ranged up to 42 inches at Alta, with 36 inches reported at the Brian Head Ski Resort in 24 hours. Winds gusted to 72 mph at La Junta CO and Artesia NM. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from southeast Iowa to central Indiana and north central Kentucky. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Fort Knox KY, and hail two inches in diameter west of Lebanon IN. Evening thunderstorms over central Oklahoma deluged Guthrie with 4.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010 - As many as four people are injured, one is killed and homes were damaged in Center Hill and Pearson, AR, by an EF2 tornado.

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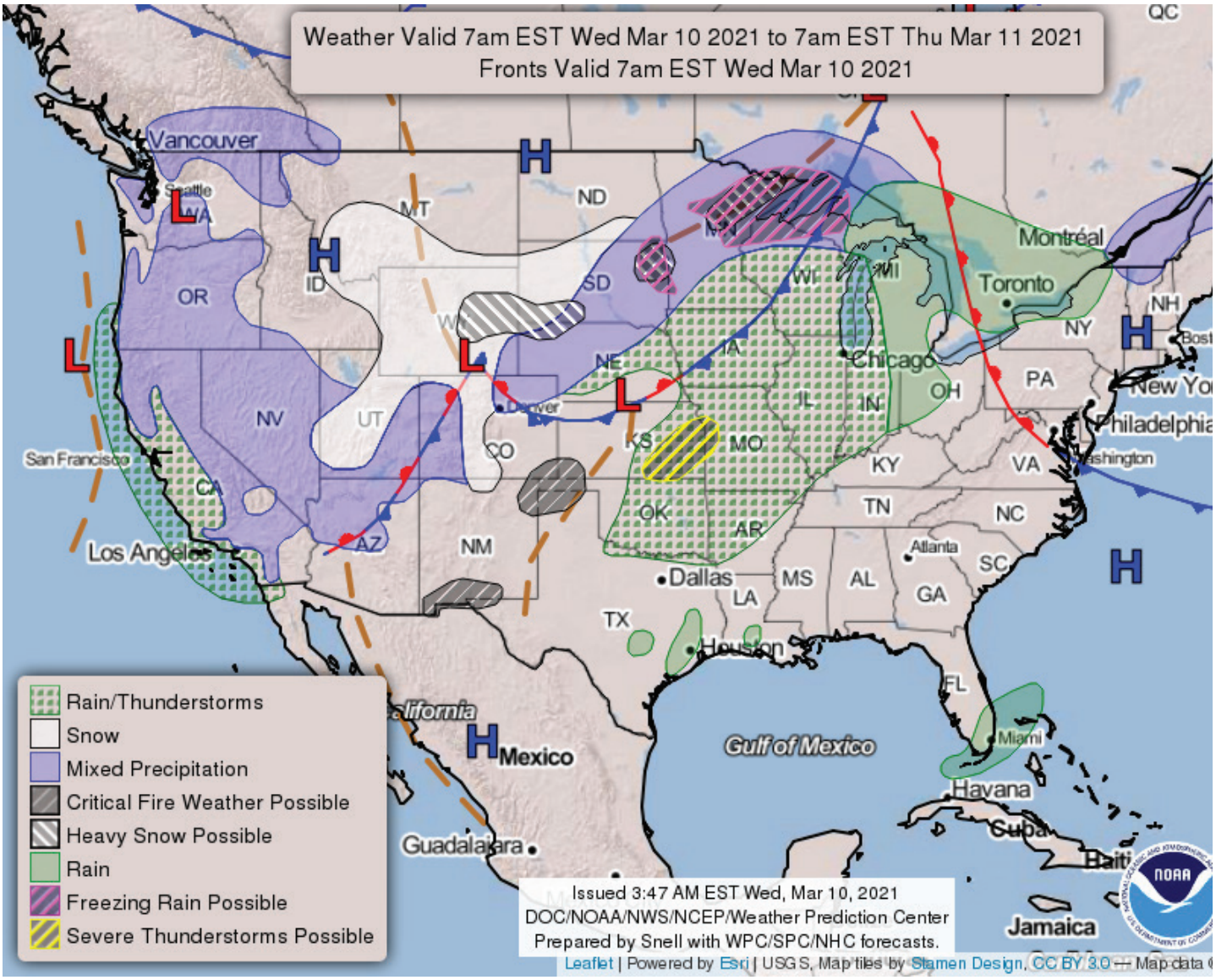
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 66 °F at 2:32 PM (RECORD HIGH)
Low Temp: 40 °F at 11:52 PM
Wind: 30 mph at 8:40 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 65° in 1913
Record Low: -24° in 1948
Average High: 37°F
Average Low: 18°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.27
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.29
Precip Year to Date: 0.18
Sunset Tonight: 6:33 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:53 a.m.



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MORE THAN A SHEPHERD

"Life is not fair," some claim. When they try to place the events of life on a balance sheet, the total seems to be much larger on the negative side of the ledger. They prove their point: Life is indeed unfair.

And if we stop reading Psalm 23 at the end of verse four, it seems that the struggles of life end in victory with no celebration. The battle is over, and we sit silently in comfort and security – but alone. Not so! Our Shepherd becomes a Host, and we are seated at a lavishly set table with an abundance of food.

After a successful battle in the days of David, the victor would be seated in a banquet hall as the ones he defeated stood and watched as he dined before them. They would watch but not enjoy. They were the losers and could not enter the joy of victory.

So our Lord will one day seat us in the presence of those who would have destroyed us. Not only is there the celebration of a feast that signifies victory over life's trials, but the honor of being anointed with "oil" – the sign of a true celebration. Then we read that our "cup" will be overflowing – a picture of the goodness and grace of God. It represents a picture of Him giving the very best to His child whom He bought at a great price.

In the New Testament, the banquet table is a sign of salvation. We conclude this psalm with a vision of being seated at a banquet with our Savior and Shepherd. A banquet where we will celebrate the joy of our salvation and being with Him forever.

Prayer: We look forward, Lord, to that day when we will rejoice in Your presence forever, first as our Shepherd, then our Savior, now our King! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Psalm 23:5

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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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined
PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:
Mega Millions
04-33-46-58-65, Mega Ball: 13, Megaplier: 2
(four, thirty-three, forty-six, fifty-eight, sixty-five; Mega Ball: thirteen; Megaplier: two)
Estimated jackpot: $68 million
Powerball
Estimated jackpot: $155 million

ORU wins Summit League tourney, beats North Dakota St. 75-72

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Max Abmas scored 23 points, Francis Lacis made a game-saving block and steal, and No. 4-seed Oral Roberts beat third-seeded North Dakota State 75-72 on Tuesday night in the Summit League tournament championship.

It's the first tournament title for Oral Roberts since 2007-08 and the first league championship since Oakland's in 2010-11 that doesn't include South Dakota State or North Dakota State.

Rocky Kreuser's layup capped a 14-4 run by the Bison that tied the game at 72 with 39 seconds to play. Abmas made the second of two free throws with 14.6 remaining. On the other end, Sam Griesel had possession in the corner and tried to drive the lane, but Lacis smothered his layup attempt with 2.2 seconds to go.

D'Mauria Jones added two free throws for Oral Roberts. The Bison heaved the ensuing inbound pass across midcourt to Kreuser, but it was deflected to Lacis.

Kevin Obanor, whose put-back at the buzzer beat top-seeded South Dakota State in a semifinal, had 21 points and nine rebounds for Oral Roberts (16-10). Kareem Thompson added 12 points.

Kreuser scored a career-high 34 points to lead North Dakota State (15-12). Tyree Eady had 15 points. Griesel finished with just six points on 1-of-12 shooting but had 11 rebounds and seven assists.

Oral Roberts built a 45-20 halftime lead and never trailed in the second half.

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For more AP college basketball coverage: https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press
BOYS BASKETBALL=
State Qualifier=
Class A=
SoDak 16=
Chamberlain 56, Flandreau 48
Dakota Valley 65, Sisseton 47
Dell Rapids 68, Rapid City Christian 54
Sioux Falls Christian 85, Custer 52
Sioux Valley 79, Wagner 49
St. Thomas More 45, Madison 43
Vermillion 67, Milbank 37
Winner 53, Mobridge-Pollock 50

Class B=
SoDak 16=
Aberdeen Christian 55, Platte-Geddes 43
Canistota 43, Wessington Springs 34
DeSmet 64, Timber Lake 38
Dell Rapids St. Mary 58, Elkton-Lake Benton 51
Lower Brule 80, Potter County 72
Lyman 49, Faith 34
Viborg-Hurley 65, Corsica/Stickney 54
White River 71, Waubay/Summit 52

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

Sjerven, Lamb lead South Dakota to Summit title over Omaha

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Hannah Sjerven scored 20 points with nine rebounds and second-seeded South Dakota earned its third straight NCAA Tournament bid with a 66-43 romp over eighth-seeded Omaha in the Summit League championship on Tuesday.

Chloe Lamb hit three 3-pointers and scored 17 points for the Coyotes (19-5), who won their ninth-straight game — including three tournament games by a total of 72 points. Lamb scored 57 points in the three games.

Freshman Lauren Frost led Omaha (7-13) with 10 points. The Mavericks became the first eight seed to win a game in the tournament when they got the program's first win over a ranked team with a 52-40 win over No. 21 South Dakota State in the opener.

The dream ended for the Mavericks in the third quarter when they were outscored 20-9 to fall behind 49-30. The Coyotes hit 3 of 4 3-pointers and led by as many as 22. The lead peaked at 27 in the fourth.

Due to COVID-19 issues, the teams did not play in the regular season. Their last meeting was in the tournament's first round last year with the Coyotes winning 99-40, which was the last game for coach Brittany Lange. Former Ohio State assistant Carrie Banks is now the head coach.

Omaha ended up shooting 32.5%, hitting 6 of 12 outside the arc, 7 of 28 inside, and had 17 turnovers.

South Dakota scored the first 13 points of the game, starting and ending with 3-pointers by Lamb. The Mavericks got back-to-back 3s from Mariah Murdie and Sophie Johnston to close within 21-20 but South Dakota scored eight straight, six by Sjerven, and led 29-21 at the break.

Four of the Coyotes' losses were to ranked teams, including No. 1 South Carolina and No. 18 Gonzaga to start the season in the same building. They also dropped a weekend series at rival South Dakota State, No. 23, the first weekend in February. The other loss was at Oklahoma.

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More AP women's basketball: https://apnews.com/hub/womens-college-basketball and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

South Dakota lawmakers begin redistricting amid uncertainty

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — As South Dakota lawmakers took their initial steps Tuesday to redraw legislative districts, they were warned they will likely be working on a tight timeline and with census data that is less accurate than in previous years.

Lawmakers held their initial meeting in the nearly yearlong process to discuss a timeline and potential pitfalls for redistricting. But instead of the months that lawmakers have had in previous years to pore over census data, they will likely only have weeks once they receive the data to meet a Dec. 1 deadline. The U.S. Census Bureau has said it won't be delivering data used for redrawing districts until the end of September.

But even that data has questions surrounding it. Concerns have been raised that the 2021 census is

less accurate than previous censuses, mostly due to the pandemic, said Matt Frame, a lawyer with the Legislative Research Council, which is tasked with guiding legislators through redistricting.

He told lawmakers, "Even if this committee does everything correct, there's still a potential that our maps would get overturned simply on this fact, because there could be a nationwide lawsuit about the quality of the data."

Frame also warned lawmakers that the new districts must ensure minority populations have adequate representation in the government.

But Sen. Troy Heinert, a Democrat who represents a legislative district that includes the Rosebud Indian Reservation, said that the pandemic has disrupted the census process. Several tribes in the state enacted lockdowns during the pandemic.

"I know many tribes during the census process, those census workers were pulled, so there may or may not be a very accurate census in tribal land," he said.

Heinert questioned whether the redistricting committee could use other data sets such as voter registration data. Lawmakers are required to use the census data as the basis for their decisions, but can also lean on other data sets to draw the legislative map.

In October, lawmakers will tour the state for three days and hold a series of hearings. They are also considering redistricting software that would allow people to comment on proposed boundaries.

Sen. Mary Duvall, the Republican chairing the committee, said her goal was "to make this just really open and transparent."

Democrats, whose numbers in the Capitol have been reduced to their lowest in over 60 years, hold just two seats on the redistricting committees.

If the Legislature is unable to meet its Dec. 1 deadline to approve new districts, the state Supreme Court would have to step in to complete the process.

Ex-senator pleads no contest to making false report

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A former South Dakota state senator has pleaded no contest to making a false domestic violence report against her ex-husband.

A magistrate judge Monday gave Lyndi DiSanto a suspended 90-day jail sentence, which means she would only serve the time if she violates terms of her probation.

Judge Todd Hyronimus granted a request by DiSanto's attorney for a suspended imposition of sentence which allows defendants to have their first conviction sealed if they successfully complete their sentence.

DiSanto was also ordered to pay a $250 fine. Defense attorney Robert Pasqualucci entered the plea on DiSanto's behalf, the Rapid City Journal reported.

According to police reports, DiSanto told an officer in January 2020 that her estranged husband, Mark DiSanto, had assaulted and choked her at his Box Elder house the day before. She also said he had abused and threatened to kill her in the past, but she never called police because he was a Pennington County commissioner.

Mark denied the allegations and said his estranged wife had stolen his dog, threatened him and caused a disturbance outside his house.

A detective said he tried to contact Lyndi DiSanto to get more information on her allegation but neither she nor Pasqualucci returned his calls. He then requested an arrest warrant for false reporting.

US narrows in on organized extremists in Capitol siege probe

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

As members of the Oath Keepers paramilitary group shouldered their way through the mob and up the steps to the U.S. Capitol, their plans for Jan. 6 were clear, authorities say. "Arrest this assembly, we have probable cause for acts of treason, election fraud," someone commanded over an encrypted messaging app some extremists used to communicate during the siege.

A little while earlier, Proud Boys carrying two-way radios and wearing earpieces spread out and tried to

blend in with the crowd as they invaded the Capitol led by a man assigned "war powers" to oversee the group's attack, prosecutors say.

These two extremist groups that traveled to Washington along with thousands of other Trump supporters weren't whipped into an impulsive frenzy by President Donald Trump that day, officials say. They'd been laying attack plans. And their internal communications and other evidence emerging in court papers and in hearings show how authorities are trying to build a case that small cells hidden within the masses mounted an organized, military-style assault on the heart of American democracy.

"This was not simply a march. This was an incredible attack on our institutions of government," Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason McCullough said during a recent hearing.

The Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers make up a fraction of the more than 300 Trump supporters charged so far in the siege that led to Trump's second impeachment and resulted in the deaths of five people, including a police officer. But several of their leaders, members and associates have become the central targets of the Justice Department's sprawling investigation.

It could mean more serious criminal charges for some rioters. On the other hand, mounting evidence of advance planning could also fuel Trump's and his supporters' claims that the Republican former president did not incite the riot and therefore should not be liable for it.

Defense attorneys have accused prosecutors of distorting their clients' words and actions to falsely portray the attack as a premeditated, orchestrated insurrection instead of a spontaneous outpouring of election-fueled rage to stop Congress' certification of Trump's defeat by Democrat Joe Biden.

And prosecutors' case against a man described as a leader in the Proud Boys' attack took a hit last week when a judge ordered him released while he awaits trial, calling some of the evidence against him "weak to say the least."

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The Oath Keepers began readying for violence as early as last November, authorities say. Communications show the group discussing logistics, weapons and training, including "2 days of wargames."

"I need you fighting fit" by the inauguration, one Ohio member, Jessica Watkins, told a recruit in November, according to court documents. "If Biden becomes president our way of life as we know it is over. Our Republic would be over. Then it is our duty as Americans to fight, kill and die for our rights," she said in another message later that month.

As Jan. 6 neared, they discussed stationing a "quick reaction force" outside Washington that could bring in weapons "if something goes to hell," according to court documents. Days before the attack, one man suggested getting a boat to ferry "heavy weapons" across the Potomac River into their "waiting arms."

"I believe we will have to get violent to stop this," that man, Thomas Caldwell of Virginia, said in a November message to Watkins. On Jan. 1, he took to Facebook to decry what he viewed as a rigged election, saying "we must smite them now and drive them down," authorities say.

There were plans for some Oath Keepers to be there in "grey man" mode without identifiable militia gear so they could blend in with the crowd.

"For every Oath Keeper you see, there are at least two you don't see," said a Jan. 4 email sent to members.

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Two days before the attack, the Proud Boys' top leader, Enrique Tarrio, was arrested shortly after he arrived in Washington and was charged with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a December protest.

Tarrio was ordered to stay away from the nation's capital, so Ethan Nordean was given "war powers" to take charge of the group's Jan. 6 activities, prosecutors say.

Nordean, a Proud Boys chapter president from Washington state known as Ruffio Panman, tapped his social media following to solicit donations of money and tactical gear for the rally, prosecutors said. On the day of Tarrio's arrest, Nordean posted a link to a podcast in which he discussed baseless claims about fraud in the election.

"Democracy is dead? Well, then no peace for you. No democracy, no peace," he said.

Publicly, Tarrio announced on social media that the Proud Boys wouldn't be wearing their customary yellow-and-black polo shirts on Jan. 6 so they could be "incognito." Joseph Biggs, a self-described Proud Boys organizer from Florida, echoed that in a social media post directed at counter-protesters.

"We will be blending in as one of you. You won't see us," Biggs wrote. "We are going to smell like you, move like you, and look like you."

Privately, according to prosecutors, the Proud Boys arranged for members to communicate using specific frequencies on Baofeng radios, Chinese-made devices that can be programmed for use on hundreds of frequencies, making it difficult for outsiders to eavesdrop.

One of the Proud Boys who heeded the call to meet in Washington was Dominic Pezzola. He traveled from Syracuse, New York, on Jan. 5 and stayed with other members at a hotel, authorities say.

Another group of members came from the Kansas City area. Investigators believe their chapter leader, William Chrestman, brought a helmet, a gas mask and an ax handle that he would conceal as a flag.

They were ready for a fight, prosecutors say.

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Long before the riot, Trump refused to condemn the Proud Boys during his Sept. 29 presidential debate against Biden, instead saying the group should "stand back and stand by." Proud Boys members celebrated his words on social media, before the president later claimed not to know who they were. It's unclear whether the Oath Keepers were on the White House radar.

Proud Boys members, who describe themselves as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists," have frequently engaged in street fights with antifascist activists at rallies and protests. Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, who founded the Proud Boys in 2016, sued the Southern Poverty Law Center for labeling it as a hate group.

The Oath Keepers are a loosely organized group of extremists who actively recruit current and former military, police and first responders who pledge to fulfill the oath to defend the Constitution against all enemies — foreign or domestic.

In the weeks before the attack, Trump and his supporters were making increasingly false and incendiary comments, designed to mobilize supporters to work to overturn the election results — even though there was no widespread fraud in the election, as was confirmed by election officials across the country and by Trump's attorney general.

Trump encouraged thousands at the rally preceding the riot to "fight like hell," but lawyers for the former president adamantly denied during his impeachment trial that he had incited the attack. They pointed to a remark during his speech in which he told the crowd to behave "peacefully" that day.

He was acquitted in a Senate trial of inciting the riot after he was impeached by the House, but GOP leaders said a more appropriate venue for his actions could be the courts.

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As the mob swarmed the Capitol, Stewart Rhodes, the leader of the Oath Keepers, was communicating with some of the alleged rioters.

"All I see Trump doing is complaining. I see no intent by him to do anything. So the patriots are taking it into their own hands. They've had enough," he said in a Signal message to a group around 1:40 p.m., authorities say. A little later, Rhodes, who has not been charged in the attack, instructed the group to "come to South Side of Capitol on steps."

Around 2:40 p.m., members of a military-style "stack" who moved up Capitol stairs in a line entered the building through a door on the east side, authorities say. Lawmakers and Vice President Mike Pence had been evacuated from the House and Senate chambers just about 20 minutes earlier.

"We are in the mezzanine. We are in the main dome right now. We are rocking it. They are throwing grenades, they are fricking shooting people with paint balls. But we are in here," Watkins declared over a channel called Stop the Steal J6 on the walkie-talkie app Zello.

"Get it, Jess. ... Everything we (expletive) trained for," someone responded, according to the communications obtained by WNYC's "On the Media" program and detailed in court documents.

Caldwell, who did not join the stack, climbed up to the west side balcony, authorities say.

"We are surging forward, doors breached," he said in a Facebook message about 10 minutes after the group went inside, according to court documents. Roughly 15 minutes later he sent another message: "Inside."

Caldwell received a Facebook message saying "all members are in the tunnels under capital seal them in," authorities said. "Turn on gas," the message said.

Hours after the siege, Caldwell was already talking about another attack "at the local level," authorities say.

"If we'd had guns I guarantee we would have killed 100 politicians. They ran off and were spirited away through their underground tunnels like the rats they were," Caldwell said in a message to a friend.

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The Proud Boys met at the Washington Monument and were already at the Capitol before Trump finished addressing thousands of supporters near the White House. Listening to the president's speech wasn't part of their plan, prosecutors say.

Nordean led the way with a bullhorn while they wore headgear marked with orange tape. Pezzola appeared to have an earpiece in his right ear. Biggs had what looked like a walkie-talkie device on his chest.

Nordean was spotted having a brief exchange near the Capitol with Robert Gieswein, a bat-wielding Colorado man. Proud Boys planning for Jan. 6 had discussed using non-members, or "normies," like Gieswein to "burn that city to ash" and "smash some pigs to dust," prosecutors said.

The Proud Boys arrived at the east side of the Capitol before noon. Nordean allegedly positioned them at a Capitol grounds pedestrian entrance guarded by a handful of police officers behind a movable metal barrier.

Around 12:50 p.m., just before the joint session of Congress was scheduled to start, a crowd including Proud Boys members broke through a front line of Capitol police officers and past sets of metal barriers. Nordean moved to the front of the crowd and "stalked" the line of officers to intimidate them and rile up the crowd, prosecutors wrote.

As the mob advanced to another line of officers in the Capitol's west plaza, Chrestman faced them and shouted, "Do you want your house back?"

"Yes!" the crowd replied.

"Take it!" Chrestman yelled.

Gieswein and Pezzola were among the first to enter the Capitol, through a window Pezzola shattered with a riot shield that he snatched from police, prosecutors say. It took Pezzola more than an hour to fight his way from the exterior of the Capitol grounds to the building's interior, they say.

Inside, Pezzola joined others in confronting Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman, who led the mob away from an entrance to the Senate chamber. Pezzola later took a video of himself smoking a cigar.

"Victory smoke in the Capitol, boys," he said.

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Nine people linked to the Oath Keepers have been indicted on charges that they planned and coordinated with one another in the siege. At least 11 leaders, members or associates of the Proud Boys charged in the riots are accused by the Justice Department of participating in a coordinated attack.

Several from both groups remain in federal custody while awaiting trial.

Their defense attorneys say prosecutors have painted a misleading account of the day's events based on shaky evidence. Other lawyers for those charged with storming the Capitol have tried to pin the blame on Trump for inciting the rioters.

Nordean's lawyers said prosecutors haven't presented any evidence that he used encrypted communications to lead a group's attack on the Capitol. While the government said investigators found a Baofeng radio in Nordean's home, his lawyers said he did not obtain it until after the day after the riot.

"The government has made repeated claims about Ethan's activities and then backed away from them without providing any support," said one of his attorneys, Nicholas Smith.

Caldwell's lawyer has accused prosecutors of twisting social media posts and messages to make fantastic claims with no hard evidence that any person or group had a premeditated plan to storm the Capitol. David

Fischer described Caldwell as a Hollywood-addicted amateur screenwriter full of bravado. The prosecutors' case is heavy on "dramatic language" but "light on specifics," the lawyer said in a recent court filing.

"What time was the 'invasion' scheduled to begin? Who would lead the attack? What was the goal once the planners entered the Capitol? Who was the leader in the attack? What was the exit strategy of the planners?" Fischer wrote.

Fischer said prosecutors' case crumbles when closely examined. The "quick reaction force" prosecutors have alleged the Oath Keepers were planning, for example, was actually one person — an obese man in his late 60s with a bad back — who planned to come to their aid if they were attacked by left-wing protesters, Fischer said.

During a hearing last month in which a judge ordered him to remain behind bars while he awaits trial, Caldwell exclaimed that his messages were being "taken out of context."

"These Oath Keepers thought they — " he said, before the audio was disconnected and the judge cut in to warn him that anything he said could be used against him by prosecutors.

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Richer reported from Boston, and Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland.

The Latest: EU gets more vaccines to target hard-hit borders

By The Associated Press undefined

BRUSSELS — The European Commission says it has secured an agreement with Pfizer-BioNTech for an extra four million doses of COVID-19 vaccines for its 27 nations to tackle the surge of cases in several coronavirus clusters.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said "this will help member states in their efforts to keep the spread of new variants under control. Through their targeted use where they are most needed, in particular in border regions, these doses will also help ensure or restore the free movement of goods and people.""

The European Union mentioned Tyrol in Austria, Nice and Moselle in France, Bolzano in Italy and some parts of Bavaria and Saxony in Germany where COVID-19 hospitalizations have been on the rise. The Commission said the new doses will be made available to all member states on a pro-rata basis this month.

EU officials have been dismayed at how virus surges driven by variants have prompted EU nations to put in border restrictions.

Overall, the EU has six contracts for more than 2 billion doses of vaccines to inoculate its 450 million people.

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THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— After a year of the pandemic, weary world looks back — and forward

— Ukraine's fight against COVID-19 hampered by widespread resistance to vaccines

— House set to vote on virus relief, President Joe Biden on cusp of triumph

— Los Angeles school district reaches deal to reopen classes

— Restaurants are big beneficiaries of COVID-19 relief bill

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

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HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

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LISBON, Portugal -- Portugal is joining other European countries in extending the use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to people age 65 and over, after initial uncertainty about its effectiveness in that age group.

The General Directorate for Health also announced Wednesday that people with Down syndrome will be

added to the Phase 1 priority groups due to their risk of developing serious COVID-19 symptoms.

Teachers, school auxiliary staff and social workers who deal with children are also moving to the front of the queue as authorities prepare to start easing a lockdown that began in January and brought school closures.

Health officials were due later Wednesday to unveil the country's first mobile vaccination units, part of a drive to accelerate inoculations. Portugal, a country of 10.3 million people, has so far administered just over 1 million vaccine jabs.

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AMSTERDAM — An expert group at the European Medicines Agency will meet Thursday to decide whether the one-dose coronavirus vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson should be authorized for use across the European Union.

If the shot is given the green light, it would be the fourth licensed COVID-19 vaccine in the 27-country bloc. The Amsterdam-based EU medicines regulator has already approved vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca — but all of those vaccines require two doses.

Health experts hope having another authorized COVID-19 shot might speed the slow pace of immunization across Europe, which has been struggling to get enough supplies and vaccinate the vulnerable.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted the J&J vaccine an emergency approval last month; Canada and Bahrain have also licensed the vaccine. A massive study across three continents found the J&J vaccine was 85% effective in protecting against severe illness, hospitalizations and death. That protection remained strong even in countries like South Africa, where variants have been identified.

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STOCKHOLM — The Swedish government says it will spend another 6.5 billion kronor ($1 billion) to buy more vaccines, bringing Sweden's total vaccine expenditures to 11 billion ($1.8 billion).

Social Affairs Minister Lena Hallengren says "we are talking about a lot of money, but little compared to what COVID-19 has cost society."

Sweden's vaccine coordinator, Richard Bergstrom, said the country expected an additional 14 million doses the first half of the year and 30 million doses in the second.

He said he expects Johnson & Johnson's one-shot vaccine to shortly be approved by the European Union's medical regulator.

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LONDON — Relations between the European Union and recently departed Britain took another diplomatic dip on Wednesday when the EU envoy in London was summoned to explain comments that Britain had issued a vaccine export ban.

The United Kingdom was so irate about Tuesday's comments from EU Council President Charles Michel that Britain had "imposed an outright ban on the export of vaccines," that it called in the ambassador for a morning meeting.

A British government statement said that it "has not blocked the export of a single COVID-19 vaccine. Any references to a UK export ban or any restrictions on vaccines are completely false."

The spat comes against a background that the COVID-19 vaccination drive in Britain is seen as a huge success while that in the 27-nation bloc has been a major failure. The United Kingdom has given about 35% of its adults a vaccine shot while the EU is further back with 9.5%.

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COPENHAGEN, Demark — Sales of Lego sets surged last year as more children stayed home during global pandemic lockdowns and parents bought the colorful plastic brick toys to keep them entertained through days of isolation.

The privately-held Danish company said its net profit rose 19% to 9.9 billion kroner ($1.6 billion) as sales jumped 21% and it grew its presence in its 12 largest markets.

Lego, which on top of its sets also earns money from video game apps, seems to be one of the businesses - like online retailers and technology companies - that were well placed to earn money from the massive disruptions in society worldwide during the pandemic.

Chief Executive Niels B. Christiansen told The Associated Press that the "super strong results" were thanks to strategic investments made years ago to move more sales online.

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GENEVA — On March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization declared a pandemic, few could foresee the long road ahead or the many ways in which they would suffer -- the deaths and agonies of millions, the ruined economies, the disrupted lives and near-universal loneliness and isolation.

A year later, some are dreaming of a return to normal, thanks to vaccines that seemed to materialize as if by magic. Others live in places where the magic seems to be reserved for wealthier worlds.

At the same time, people are looking back at where they were when they first understood how drastically life would change.

On March 11, 2020, confirmed cases of COVID-19 stood at 125,000, and reported deaths stood at fewer than 5,000. Today, 117 million people are confirmed to have been infected, and according to Johns Hopkins, more than 2.6 million people have died.

On that day, Italy closed shops and restaurants after locking down in the face of 10,000 reported infections. The NBA suspended its season, and Tom Hanks, filming a movie in Australia, announced he was infected.

On that evening, President Donald Trump addressed the nation from the Oval Office, announcing restrictions on travel from Europe that set off a trans-Atlantic scramble. Airports flooded with unmasked crowds in the days that followed. Soon, they were empty.

And that, for much of the world, was just the beginning.

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ISLAMABAD — Pakistan has started vaccinating people who are 60 years old or above to protect them from COVID-19 amid a steady increase in cases and fatalities from the disease.

Pakistan is currently using China's Sinopharm vaccine, which was donated to it by Beijing last month.

Pakistan hopes to start receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine this month under the World Health Organization's COVAX Facility. Authorities say Pakistan will receive 17 million doses of coronavirus vaccines under the scheme from March to June.

Fatalities and confirmed cases from the coronavirus have increased steadily since March 1, when Pakistan resumed regular classes at schools. On Wednesday, Pakistani authorities were expected to decide whether schools should again be closed.

Pakistan has reported 595,239 cases, including 13,324 deaths.

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KYIV, Ukraine — After receiving its first shipment of coronavirus vaccine, Ukraine found itself in a new struggle against the pandemic — persuading its widely reluctant people to get the shot.

Although infections are rising sharply, Ukrainians are becoming increasingly opposed to vaccination: an opinion poll released earlier this month by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology found 60% of the country's people don't want to get vaccinated, up from 40% a month earlier.

The resistance appears to be rooted in longstanding suspicion of vaccines dating back to the Soviet era, amplified by politicians' allegations about low-quality vaccines, corruption scandals and misinformation spread through social media. Even more surprisingly, the reluctance still appears even among those highest at risk: medical workers.

In the mining town of Selydove, 700 kilometers (420 miles) east of Kyiv, only 5% of the medical staff agreed to be vaccinated.

"I decided not to get vaccinated. I doubt the quality of the vaccine. I'm afraid there will be side effects," said Olena Obyedko, a 26-year-old nurse who works in the hospital's intensive care ward for COVID-19 patients.

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BERLIN — A German doctors' union is calling for its members to be able to vaccinate people with chronic illnesses against the coronavirus.

The Marburger Bund said in a statement Wednesday that GPs and specialists said people with chronic conditions are disadvantaged by Germany's vaccine current priority lists.

Some German states have begun allowing doctors to administer the shots in a limited number of practices. Officials are discussing whether to allow all doctors practices to offer vaccines as the available supply increases in the coming weeks.

Germany's disease control agency reported 9,146 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19 overnight, and 300 additional deaths. Since the outbreak began, Germany has recorded more than 2.5 million cases and 72,489 COVID-related deaths.

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JUNEAU, Alaska -- Gov. Mike Dunleavy says Alaska will become the first state to drop eligibility requirements and allow anyone 16 or older who lives or works in the state to get a COVID-19 vaccination.

Dunleavy, who made the announcement Tuesday following his own bout with COVID-19, hailed the move to open up eligibility as a historic step.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker shows Alaska leading states in the percentage of its population to have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

The state last week vastly expanded eligibility to include those ages 55 to 64 and those 16 and older who are classified as essential workers, at or potentially at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 or who live in multigenerational households or communities lacking in water or sewer systems.

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MIAMI — Hundreds of cars streamed bumper-to-bumper into a federally supported vaccination site that appeared to be offering shots to anyone who shows up, breaking from the eligibility requirements set by Gov. Ron DeSantis that were intended to put seniors at the head of the line.

The wider availability of the vaccine sowed confusion — and hope — among those wanting to protect themselves from a disease that has already infected more than 1.9 million Floridians and killed nearly 32,000.

State officials said they were sorting through the situation. It was unclear what authority state officials might be able to exert on federal facilities.

Already, federal sites in Florida are adhering to federally issued guidelines that allow teachers and other school workers to get vaccinated, instead of complying with the governor's directive setting an age minimum of 50 for educators and school staff.

Because of initially low demand, another federally funded vaccination site in Florida City last weekend began administering shots to any takers, regardless of age. The site was inundated the following day, prompting officials there to reimpose age restrictions.

On Tuesday morning, a traffic jam of vehicles formed in a parking lot at Miami Dade College North. People waited hours, but by 10 a.m., officials at the site announced they had depleted their supply of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

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SAN FRANCISCO -- California's counties remain skittish over switching up their vaccine delivery systems to a new statewide one, with Santa Clara County saying it will not participate.

The Mercury News reports that County Executive Jeff Smith said late Monday that the county will not sign a contract giving Blue Shield control over COVID-19 vaccine distribution in California.

Some counties are also pushing for Newsom to reconsider a plan to distribute more vaccine to vulnerable areas.

The pushback to Newsom's centralized plan for vaccine distribution comes as more of California reopens its economy and activities. Disney's CEO says Disneyland will likely reopen by late April after a yearlong closure.

Royals' comments raise race issue in Commonwealth nations

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — In countries with historic ties to Britain, allegations by Prince Harry and

Meghan that an unnamed member of the royal family had "concerns" over how dark their unborn baby's skin might be have raised a thorny question: Do those nations really want to be so closely connected to Britain and its royal family anymore?

It was expected the interview would expose more rifts in the royal family. Now it seems to be risking divisions within the "family" of the Commonwealth — an association of 54 countries, most of them former British colonies, held together by historic ties. For decades, Queen Elizabeth II has been the driving force behind the Commonwealth.

After the TV interview, shown in the U.S. on the eve of Commonwealth Day, former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull cited it as another reason for the country to sever its constitutional ties to the British monarchy.

"After the end of the queen's reign, that is the time for us to say: OK, we've passed that watershed," Turnbull told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "Do we really want to have whoever happens to be the head of state, the king or queen of the U.K., automatically our head of state?"

The value of the Commonwealth has been debated before, with critics questioning if countries and people once colonized — and even oppressed — should remain in such an association with a former colonizer. Its stated aim is to improve international relations, but Britain's relationship with the members has been clouded by diplomatic missteps and the legacy of empire. In a speech to mark Commonwealth Day on Monday, the queen spoke of "the spirit of unity."

Charismatic royals like Harry and Meghan have been deployed in the past to Commonwealth-related events with young people, businesses and volunteer groups.

But their interview this week "opens our eyes further" on the merits of the Commonwealth, wrote Nicholas Sengoba, a newspaper columnist in the former colony of Uganda.

He cited "unresolved issues" in his country relating to the abuses of colonialism and questioned whether the heads of Commonwealth countries should still be "proud to eat dinner" with members of the British royal family, considering the accusations.

Meghan, who is biracial, had said in the interview that an unidentified member of the royal family had raised "concerns" about the color of her baby with Harry when she was pregnant with her son, Archie, and that the palace failed to help her when she had suicidal thoughts. Buckingham Palace said Tuesday the allegations of racism by Harry and Meghan were "concerning" and would be addressed privately by the royal family.

Reaction to the interview was especially fierce in Africa. It was encapsulated by one Twitter user in South Africa who wrote: "It's Britain and the royal family. What did you expect? They oppressed us for years."

Meghan and Harry traveled to South Africa in 2019, where their impending split with the royal family became clearer and they even spoke of possibly living there.

Mohammed Groenewald, who showed them around at a mosque in Cape Town, was still digesting the interview, which was only shown in South Africa on Monday. But he said that, more than anything, it sparked memories of "British colonial racism."

"It comes out very clearly," he said.

In Kenya, a former colony where a young Princess Elizabeth was visiting in 1952 when she learned about the death of her father and thus that she would become queen, news of the interview also has begun appearing in the country's newspapers.

"We feel very angry seeing our fellow African sister being harassed because she is black," said Nairobi resident Sylvia Wangari, referring to Meghan. She added that Kenyans in 1952 did not show Elizabeth "any racism, and she stayed here without us showing her any discrimination."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declined to comment on the interview. He said many institutions in Canada are built around colonialism and systematic racism, including Parliament, and he said the answer is to listen to Canadians who face discrimination so that institutions can be fixed.

"The answer is not to suddenly toss out all the institutions and start over," Trudeau said.

"I wish all the members of the royal family all the best, but my focus is getting through this pandemic.

If people want to later talk about constitutional change and shifting our system of government that's fine, and they can have those conversations, but right now I'm not having those conversations."

Jagmeet Singh, leader of the opposition New Democratic Party, said the monarchy "is in no way beneficial to Canadians in terms of their everyday life."

"And with the systematic racism that we've seen, it seems to be in that institution as well," he said.

The interview was not shown on TV in India, the Commonwealth's most populous member country with 1.3 billion people, but it still was covered by the media and drew negative reactions from the public toward the royals.

"Behind that whole elegant facade are thoughts that are not so elegant." said fashion writer Meenakshi Singh.

Lawyer Sunaina Phul said the Commonwealth "is relevant to the royal family, of course, because it shows that they ruled so many places. I don't know why we are still a part of it."

Meghan and Harry's complaints of racism show that it is time for her country to end its relationship with the royal family, said a retired professor in Kingston, Jamaica.

"What it should mean for us is that we should jump up and get rid of the queen as the head of state," Carolyn Cooper said. "It's a disreputable institution. It's responsible for the enslavement of millions of us who came here to work on plantations. It's part of the whole legacy of colonialism and we need to get rid of it."

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Associated Press writers around the world contributed to this report.

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Follow all AP stories about the British royals at https://apnews.com/PrinceHarry

Biden's first 50 days: Where he stands on key promises

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden laid out an ambitious agenda for his first 100 days in office, promising swift action on everything from climate change to immigration reform to the coronavirus pandemic.

He hits his 50th day in office on Wednesday as his administration eyes a major milestone: final congressional passage of his massive $1.9 trillion coronavirus aid package. The bill includes direct payments to millions of Americans and money to help the White House deliver on a number of Biden's biggest campaign promises, like reopening schools and getting more Americans vaccinated.

Fifty days in, Biden has made major strides on a number of key campaign pledges for his earliest days in office, while others are still awaiting action. Where he stands on some of his major promises:

COMPLETED GOALS

Biden prioritized addressing the coronavirus pandemic during his first weeks in office, and the focus has paid off. He's on pace to hit his goal of 100 million vaccine doses administered in his first 100 days as soon as the end of next week. The daily rate of vaccinations now averages more than 2 million shots, and more than 75 million doses have been administered since Biden was sworn in.

Biden also took took several early actions that fulfilled pledges on climate policy. He signed an executive order on Inauguration Day that revoked the permit for the Keystone XL oil pipeline, halted development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and ordered the review of Trump-era rules on the environment, public health and science. A Jan. 27 executive order halted new oil and gas leases on federal lands and offshore waters.

Biden also easily delivered on top campaign pledges that involved rolling back Trump administration moves on everything from climate change to immigration. Early on, the Biden administration rejoined the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Accord, halted construction of the border wall, ended travel restrictions on people from a variety of Muslim-majority countries and created a task force to reunite families separated at the U.S.-Mexico border.

On immigration, Biden pledged to deliver a comprehensive reform bill to Congress within his first 100 days, and it was unveiled last month, although Biden already has signaled an openness to a piece-by-piece approach if necessary. Biden also issued an executive order directing the Homeland Security secretary to "preserve and fortify" protections for young immigrants brought to the U.S. by their parents.

Biden also made some early moves to deliver on a pledge to tighten ethical standards in his administration, including a Jan. 20 executive order imposing an ethics pledge on appointees governing activities such as lobbying and taking gifts, which included prohibiting political interference in the Justice Department.

IN PROGRESS

Still other Biden promises remain a work in progress.

Biden's national COVID-19 strategy pledged to establish 100 new, federally supported vaccination centers across the nation by the end of February. So far, the administration is at about 20 mass vaccination sites run end-to-end by the federal government and staffed by active-duty troops deployed by the Pentagon. Overall, the administration says, at least 441 vaccination sites are now federally supported. Many of those were not new sites, but nearly all have expanded capacity with the additional federal resources.

On immigration, Biden pledged to reverse the "public charge" rule put in place by the Trump administration to discourage immigrants from using public benefits, to streamline the naturalization process and to reform the U.S. asylum system within his first 100 days. An executive order he signed in early February directs the relevant agencies to review those policies and recommend changes within 60 days.

The administration has made some moves to reform the asylum system, including a move by the Department of Homeland Security on Biden's first day in office to suspend a Trump-era program requiring asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their claims were under review. But Biden has yet to articulate a plan to manage asylum flows beyond proposing that billions of dollars be spent to address root causes in Central America.

The president has also kept in place pandemic-related powers that allow his administration to immediately expel people at the border without an opportunity to seek asylum. Biden aides have said they have no immediate plans to end the authority, which Trump introduced a year ago using an obscure 1944 public health law.

Biden also promised to end the long-term detention of migrant families. Immigration and Customs Enforcement signaled last week it plans to discontinue the use of one such facility, but ICE will continue to hold families for three days or less at two other facilities in Texas. And the Biden administration is expanding capacity at a number of long-term facilities that hold immigrant children, to address an ongoing surge of unaccompanied minors at the border.

On climate change, Biden pledged to establish enforceable commitments from other nations to reduce emissions in global shipping and aviation and to convene a climate world summit to discuss new and more ambitious pledges to address climate change, within his first 100 days. The U.S. will hold such a summit on April 22, Earth Day.

Reopening America's schools is one of Biden's major campaign promises that's proven tougher to execute, in part because the decision on whether to return to in-person learning is left up to local officials and teachers' unions. After some back-and-forth over the details of his goal, Biden said last month that his 100-day mission was to have most elementary schools open five days a week for in-person learning.

This month he directed states to prioritize vaccinating teachers and announced he was directing federal resources toward vaccinating teachers in March. The Biden administration hopes that with the passage of the coronavirus relief bill and distribution of millions in aid for schools to improve safety measures, teachers will feel more comfortable returning to in-person learning.

According to Burbio, which tracks school reopening plans, about 47% of kindergarten through 12th grade students have access to in-person school every weekday.

AWAITING ACTION

The Biden administration has yet to take significant action on criminal justice reform, aside from an executive order terminating private prison contracts. Biden pledged to set up a police oversight board within

his first 100 days, but there's been no clear movement in that direction so far.

Other 100-day pledges also awaiting movement: creating a Cabinet-level working group focused on promoting union participation, and ordering an FBI review of issues with gun purchase background checks.

Some of Biden's 100-day pledges will require congressional action, like his promise to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act and increase taxes on corporations. Biden also promised to make passage of the Equality Act, which bars discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, a priority in his first 100 days. That bill has passed the House but not the Senate.

And some of his promises are waiting on Biden's Cabinet secretaries to be confirmed by the Senate. On gun control, Biden has said he would direct his attorney general to deliver recommendations to restructure key Justice Department agencies to more effectively enforce the nation's gun laws. He also pledged to have his secretary of Housing and Urban Development lead a task force to create recommendations for making housing a right for all Americans.

Both his attorney general nominee, Merrick Garland, and his nominee to lead the Housing Department, Rep. Marcia Fudge, are expected to win confirmation this week.

House set to vote on virus relief, Biden on cusp of triumph

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is poised to approve a landmark $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill, placing President Joe Biden on the cusp of an early triumph that advances Democratic priorities and showcases the unity his party will need to forge future victories.

The House was expected to give final congressional approval Wednesday to the package, which aims to fulfill Democrats' campaign promises to beat the coronavirus pandemic and revive the enfeebled economy. House and Senate Republicans have unanimously opposed the package as bloated, crammed with liberal policies and heedless of signs the dual crises are easing.

"It's a remarkable, historic, transformative piece of legislation which goes a very long way to crushing the virus and solving our economic crisis," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Tuesday.

For Biden and Democrats, the bill is essentially a canvas on which they've painted their core beliefs — that government programs can be a benefit, not a bane, to millions of people and that spending huge sums on such efforts can be a cure, not a curse. The measure so closely tracks Democrats' priorities that several rank it with the top achievements of their careers, and despite their slender congressional majorities there was never real suspense over its fate.

They were also empowered by three dynamics: their unfettered control of the White House and Congress, polls showing robust support for Biden's approach and a moment when most voters care little that the national debt is soaring toward a stratospheric $22 trillion. Neither party seems much troubled by surging red ink, either, except when the other is using it to finance its priorities, be they Democratic spending or GOP tax cuts.

A dominant feature of the bill is initiatives making it one of the biggest federal thrusts in years to assist lower- and middle-income families. Included are expanded tax credits over the next year for children, child care and family leave plus spending for renters, feeding programs and people's utility bills.

The measure provides up to $1,400 direct payments to most Americans, extended emergency unemployment benefits and hundreds of billions for COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, schools, state and local governments and ailing industries from airlines to concert halls. There is aid for farmers of color and pension systems, and subsidies for consumers buying health insurance and states expanding Medicaid coverage for lower earners.

Its very expansiveness is a chief GOP talking point.

"It's not focused on COVID relief. It's focused on pushing more of the far-left agenda," said No. 2 House GOP leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana.

The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll found last week that 70% of Americans back Biden's response to the virus, including a hefty 44% of Republicans.

Yet the bill's pathway has underscored Democrats' challenges as they seek to build a legislative record to persuade voters to keep them running Congress in next year's elections.

Democrats control the Senate, split 50-50, only because Vice President Kamala Harris gives them the winning vote in tied roll calls. They have just a 10-vote advantage in the House.

That's almost no wiggle room for a party that ranges from West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin on the conservative side to progressives like Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Progressives had to swallow big concessions in the bill to solidify moderate support. The most painful was dropping the House-approved federal minimum-wage increase to $15 hourly by 2025.

Moderates forced tightened eligibility for the $1,400 stimulus checks, now phased out completely for individuals earning $80,000 and couples making $160,000. The House's initial extension of the soon-to-end $400 weekly emergency jobless payments, paid on top of state benefits, was trimmed by the Senate to $300 and will now halt in early September.

Manchin was a leading holdout and in the middle of talks that resulted in curbing all of those initiatives. The Senate approved the bill on a party-line 50-49 vote on Saturday.

Dropping the minimum-wage boost was "infuriating," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., chair of the roughly 100-member Congressional Progressive Caucus. But she called the overall bill "incredibly bold," adding, "It hits all of our progressive priorities — putting money in people's pockets, shots in arms, unemployment insurance, child care, schools."

The independent Tax Policy Center said that the Senate-passed bill would give almost 70% of this year's tax breaks to households earning $91,000 or less. In contrast, the Trump-era GOP tax bill gave nearly half its 2018 reductions to the top 5% of households earning around $308,000, said the research center, which is run by the liberal-leaning Urban Institute and Brookings Institution.

Yet keeping Democrats united won't get easier as the party tries advancing the rest of its agenda. There are fault lines within the party over priorities like immigration, health care and taxes.

At some point it seems likely that progressives will draw their own lines in the sand. They are already demanding that the party revisit the minimum-wage boost, and amid all this Republicans are already demonstrating they are ready to pounce.

The American Action Network, tied to House GOP leaders, said it's launched digital ads in mostly moderate districts calling the relief bill "a freight train of frivolous spending to bankroll their liberal cronies."

The bill passed the Senate under budget rules that prevented Republicans from launching filibusters, which require 60 votes for most measures. That process won't be available for much legislation moving forward, but either way any Democratic Senate defections will make most bills there non-starters.

Even with their procedural advantage, Democrats' avenue to victory in the Senate was pockmarked with delays. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., forced clerks to spend nearly 11 hours reading the entire 628-page bill; negotiations with Manchin over jobless benefits lasted around nine hours; and votes on three dozen amendments, virtually all fated in advance to lose, took about 12 hours more.

Wide resistance to vaccines plagues Ukraine's COVID-19 fight

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — After receiving its first shipment of coronavirus vaccine, Ukraine found itself in a new struggle against the pandemic — persuading its widely reluctant people to get the shot.

Although infections are rising sharply, Ukrainians are becoming increasingly opposed to vaccination: an opinion poll released earlier this month by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology found 60% of the country's people don't want to get vaccinated, up from 40% a month earlier. The nationwide poll of 1,207 had a margin of error of 2.9 percentage points.

The resistance appears to be rooted in longstanding suspicion of vaccines dating back to the Soviet era, amplified by politicians' allegations about low-quality vaccines, corruption scandals and misinformation spread through social media. Even more surprisingly, the reluctance still appears even among those

highest at risk who administer lifesaving drugs to others every day: medical workers.

In the mining town of Selydove, 700 kilometers (420 miles) east of Kyiv, only 5% of the medical staff agreed to be vaccinated. Those declining included Olena Obyedko, a 26-year-old nurse who works in the hospital's intensive care ward for COVID-19 patients, where people die every week.

"I decided not to get vaccinated. I doubt the quality of the vaccine. I'm afraid there will be side effects," she said.

So few people chose to get the shots that the mobile brigade who came to Selydove to administer them ended up giving vaccinations to themselves in order not to let the vaccine go to waste.

"Such a low number of vaccinated people is associated with low confidence in the vaccine that has entered Ukraine," brigade head Olena Marchenko said of the AstraZeneca vaccine that was manufactured in India. "This is due to prejudice and information that is spread on social networks. People read a lot, they have a negative attitude towards the Indian vaccine."

Prominent politicians have fed that suspicion.

Former President Petro Poroshenko said in parliament this month that he asked doctors in one region about why there was resistance to vaccination and was told: "Because they brought shit. And they brought it because of corruption and incompetence."

Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko added to the discontent by demanding that parliament pass a law to give government compensation to those who face vaccine side effects.

Vaccine corruption scandals had started even before the first doses arrived in the country. The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine reported that it began an investigation into a September deal to purchase 1.9 million doses of the Chinese Sinovac vaccine at 504 hryvna ($18) per dose. Its Chinese makers have not released full reports on its efficacy and one study in Brazil said it only has a 50% efficiency.

"What these attacks lead to are consequences that will affect every Ukrainian," said Health Minister Maxim Stepanov. "We are talking about an attempt to disrupt the vaccination campaign in Ukraine."

Ukraine received its first shipment of vaccine — 500,000 AstraZeneca doses — in late February. Yet, only about 23,500 people have been vaccinated since then.

In that same period, as many as 10,000 new infections a day have been recorded. Overall, the country of 41 million has recorded 1.4 million infections and more than 28,000 deaths.

The health minister says only about 40% of medical workers treating coronavirus patients have agreed to receive the vaccine.

Speaking in parliament, Oleksandr Kornienko, a leading member of President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's Servant of the People faction, said medical facilities were forced to destroy many doses of the vaccine — which can only be stored for a few hours after a vial is opened — because the medical professionals who had been prescribed vaccinations did not show up.

"Now they are forced to destroy the coveted vaccine, because they fail to give it to people in time," said Kornienko.

Zelenskiy, who contracted the virus in November, tried to encourage vaccinations by publicly getting a shot himself.

"The vaccine will allow us to live again without restrictions," Zelensky said. "I believe that this vaccine is of high quality, it is one of the best in the world."

Yet his action seems to have had little effect.

The country designated 14,000 doses of its first vaccine shipment for the military, especially those fighting Russia-backed separatists in the east. But only 1,030 troops have been vaccinated thus far.

In the front-line town of Krasnohorivka, soldiers widely refused to vaccinate.

"I have little faith in a pandemic, I don't think it's some kind of serious disease," said Serhiy Kochuk, a 25-year-old soldier. "I am healthy, but the vaccine can provoke illness. Because of this vaccine you can get sick."

The head of the Kyiv sociology institute, Volodymyr Paniotto, told The Associated Press that a recent decline in the popularity of Zelenskiy's government has contributed to the vaccine resistance.

"The super-critical attitude of Ukrainians to the authorities was superimposed on the struggle of politicians and the information war, which led to massive distrust in society," he said.

Ukrainians have been skeptical about any vaccinations since Soviet times. In 2019, the country had Europe's largest measles outbreak due to widespread refusals to get a measles vaccine shot.

"Over the past 20 years, Ukraine has been among the European countries most opposed to vaccination as such," said Vadym Denysenko, an analyst at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future.

The United Nations Development Program says the country is suffering an "info-demic" of misinformation about the vaccine and has called on the government to step up its fight.

"Conspiracy theories, rumors and malicious disinformation can quickly go viral on social media, especially when there is a low level of public trust in state institutions," it said.

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Mstyslav Chernov in Selydove, Ukraine, and Jim Heintz in Moscow contributed to this story.

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

Greenpeace protests ECB's loans for carbon-heavy industries

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Greenpeace activists landed on the roof of a European Central Bank building Wednesday to drop a banner protesting the financial institution's loans policy, which climate activists say favors heavily polluting industries.

Activists used a powered paraglider to reach the roof of the reception building at the ECB's Frankfurt headquarters before unfurling their banner reading "Stop funding climate killers."

Greenpeace said that a recent study showed the bank gives companies that produce large amounts of greenhouse gases better risk ratings, while climate-friendly industries are burdened with a greater margin between the market value of their assets and the value ascribed to it by the ECB.

The environmental group accused the bank of "systematically undermining climate protection."

The ECB confirmed the activists had landed on its roof and said police were called.

"Climate change is one of the greatest challenges faced by mankind this century," the bank said. "The ECB is contributing to the response within its mandate as a central bank, acting in step with those responsible for climate policy."

The ECB said it was "conducting a review of its strategy which includes an in-depth analysis of how to respond to the climate crisis across all ECB policy areas."

The bank said earlier this year that it is setting up a dedicated unit to coordinate measures against climate change across its work.

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Follow all AP stories on climate change at https://apnews.com/hub/climate.

Myanmar police raid housing of striking railway workers

MANDALAY, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar security forces early Wednesday raided a neighborhood in the country's largest city that is home to state railway workers who have gone on strike to protest last month's military coup.

Police sealed off the Mingalar Taung Nyunt neighborhood in Yangon where the Ma Hlwa Kone train station and housing for railway workers are located. Photos and video on social media showed officers blocking streets and what was said to be people escaping. At least three arrests were reported but it was not immediately possible to independently confirm that.

The raid comes just days after several Myanmar unions, including the Myanmar Railway Worker's Union Federation, issued a joint call for a nationwide work stoppage. The statement said the strike would be part of a broader effort for "the full, extended shutdown of the Myanmar economy."

Myanmar has been roiled by protests and other acts of civil disobedience since the Feb. 1 coup that

toppled elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government just as it was to start its second term. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in the Southeast Asian nation after five decades of military rule.

Security forces have responded with mass arrests and at times lethal force. At least 60 protesters have been killed since the military takeover, according to the independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Authorities have also moved to shut down independent reporting on the situation, both through arrests of journalists the closure of media outlets.

Despite the increasingly violent tactics of security forces, protests continued Wednesday in cities and towns across the country, including Yangon, Mandalay, Monywa, Dawei and Myitkyina.

State railway workers were among the earliest organized supporters of the protest movement and their strike began soon after the coup.

Police last month made an effort at intimidating railway workers in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, by roaming through their housing area one night, shouting and randomly firing guns.

The junta now in control of the country, formally called the State Administration Council, indirectly acknowledged the effectiveness of the rail strike.

The state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper in a Tuesday report on a junta meeting, cited officials as saying that rail transport between Yangon-Mandalay would resume "in the near future."

It also acknowledged that the banking sector has been affected by the protest movement.

The dawn raid on the railway workers followed another night of intimidation by police marching through residential areas in several cities after an 8 p.m. curfew, firing guns and stun grenades, and staging selective raids to arrest people.

There were more reports Tuesday of protesters dying in custody after being arrested. The latest was a school principal who died of unknown causes after being taken into custody by security forces, according to media reports and an activist who knew him.

Previously, an activist with Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party died in custody. Witnesses said his body had wounds consistent with torture, according to New York-based Human Rights Watch.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, more than 1,930 people have been arrested in connection with the coup. Dozens of journalists have been arrested, including Thein Zaw of The Associated Press, who has been charged under a public order law that carries a penalty of up to three years in prison.

Authorities continued their assault on the media on Tuesday, raiding the offices of Kamayut Media and detaining its co-founder and editor-in-chief. The military also raided the offices of Mizzima, an online news service. No one was arrested in the latter raid, though equipment was vandalized and property was taken away.

The military government on Monday announced that the licenses of five local media outlets — Mizzima, DVB, Khit Thit Media, Myanmar Now and 7Day News — had been canceled. All five had been offering extensive coverage of the protests.

EXPLAINER: Why is Harry and Meghan's son not a prince?

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — One of the most dramatic claims in Prince Harry and Meghan's interview with Oprah Winfrey was the allegation that their son was denied a royal title, possibly because of his skin color.

Harry and Meghan's son, seventh in line to the British throne, is Archie Mountbatten-Windsor. In contrast, the children of Harry's older brother, Prince William, are Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis.

Meghan said that while she was pregnant "they" — presumably the palace — "were saying they didn't want him to be a prince … which would be different from protocol."

She implied it might be a case of "the first member of color in this family not being titled in the same way that other grandchildren would be."

WAS ARCHIE SNUBBED?

Queen Elizabeth II has nine great-grandchildren, including Archie. They are not princes and princesses, apart from the three children of Prince William, who is second in line to the throne and destined to be king one day.

A decree issued by King George V in 1917 limits the titles of prince and princess to the children of the monarch, children of the monarch's sons and "the eldest living son of the eldest son of the Prince of Wales" — that's William's son Prince George.

Bob Morris from the Constitution Unit at University College London, said the rule was drawn up to trim the increasingly unwieldy number of princely titles.

"Queen Victoria had nine children who were all princes and princesses, and then they had children and so forth, and George V took the view ... that something needed to be done to tidy up the situation," he said.

The queen has the power to amend the rules, and in 2012 she decreed that all the children of Prince William and his wife, Catherine, not just the eldest, would be princes and princesses.

Under the George V convention, Archie is not a prince, but will become one as the grandchild of a monarch once current heir to the throne Prince Charles is king.

In her interview, Meghan said she was told that "they want to change the convention for Archie."

It is unclear what she was referring to, but Morris said Prince Charles has let it be known "that he favors a smaller royal family" when he takes the throne.

Archie was eligible for a "courtesy title" at birth, such as Lord Archie Mountbatten-Windsor. At the time, it was reported that Harry and Meghan had chosen not to give him a title.

But Meghan told Winfrey that "it was not our decision to make."

DOES THE TITLE AFFECT ARCHIE'S SECURITY?

Meghan expressed concern that without a title, Archie "wasn't going to receive security."

But a royal title such as prince or princess does not automatically bring security protection. Full-time working royals — including Meghan and Harry before they moved to North America last year — receive taxpayer-funded police bodyguards. Senior royals who have jobs outside the family, such as Prince Andrew's daughters Princess Beatrice and Princess Eugenie, do not.

WHAT DOES THE PALACE SAY?

Buckingham Palace has not responded to specific allegations in the interview. In a statement, it said "the issues raised, particularly that of race, are concerning. While some recollections may vary, they are taken very seriously and will be addressed by the family privately."

Burning tires: Lebanon's protesters send dark, angry message

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — It's an expression of anger but also of helplessness: Anti-government protesters in Lebanon are burning tires to block key roads, releasing dense palls of smoke that rise above the capital Beirut and other parts of the country.

The tactic has become the hallmark of a new flare-up of demonstrations against an intransigent political class that appears to do little as its country slides toward the political and economic abyss. Lebanon is mired in the worst economic crisis in its modern history, and the situation has been exacerbated by pandemic restrictions and an overwhelmed health care sector.

"The fire releases our anger. It quiets our hearts," said Mounir Hujairi, a 23-year-old protester from Baalbek in northeastern Lebanon, who juggles his time between low-paying day jobs and protests.

The tire soot and smoke blacken the faces of protesters in anti-virus masks at make-shift roadblocks that cut off traffic around Beirut and between cities. The persistence of the protesters and the daily burning of tires underscore how intractable the country's problems have become.

Anti-government rallies first began gripping Lebanon in late 2019. Since then, the local currency has collapsed, after being pegged to the dollar for nearly 30 years. Salaries have remained the same as inflation skyrocketed. People lost their jobs and poverty affected nearly 50% of the population.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's sectarian-based political system is stuck. Politicians have refused to compromise on forming a government or on making difficult financial decisions for fear of losing their clout or support base.

Exhausted, scared and restricted by the coronavirus, Lebanese have watched as members of the ruling elite blame each other for the crisis.

Last week, the currency hit a record low, trading in the black market at 11,000 pounds to the dollar, down from the official 1,500 — sparking a new wave of protests.

"The solution will only come through the streets," said Hujairi, who has taken part in protests since October 2019. "Of course, those whose streets — or the streets of their political parties — are blocked will be angered."

The roadblocks are a desperate way to reclaim the anger felt nationwide in 2019, when the government was forced to resign, sparking a brief period of euphoria and hope that change may be possible.

The national mood is now more fearful. Officials have warned of chaos and some have argued the protests were manipulated by political groups to ignite violence or extract concessions from rivals.

Many fear the social tension has reached levels not seen since before the civil war broke out in April 1975. For the next 15 years of conflict, burning tires became common — a cheap way to set up roadblocks between warring factions.

Tire fires are hard to put out and can go on for hours, drawing attention and keeping rivals away.

The tactic has been used in the Palestinian territories, Iraq and Sudan.

Palestinians burned tires during protests against Israeli occupation starting in their first uprising that erupted in 1987. Three decades later, during protests against an Israeli-Egyptian border blockade of Gaza, young men formed "tire crews" that drove around the small coastal strip in motorcycle rickshaws to collect tires for burning. The dark black smoke served to obscure the identities of those throwing stones at Israeli forces.

Open tire fires, which were used in some countries to power kilns, have been outlawed in most of the world because of their high emission of pollutants.

Sahar Mandour, a Lebanon researcher with Amnesty International, said the practice of burning tires as a form of protest picked up in many countries in the 1980s. But it has since been out of fashion because of the environmental impact.

"The world moved on. ... But Lebanon didn't," she said. "We have the same parties and the same leaders, so the tools are the same."

Hujairi claims he and his friends burn between 100 and 150 tires a day. He said they collect used and punctured tires from refuse piles, dismissing claims that political parties hand them out.

"A little black smoke won't hurt," Hujairi said, in response to criticism. "There is no way for us to reach the houses of politicians."

A price tag on trauma? College town weighs Black reparations

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

AMHERST, Mass. (AP) — Professor Edwin Driver arrived in Amherst in 1948 as one of the first Black teachers hired at a flagship state university in the country.

But the 23-year-old sociology instructor at what would become the University of Massachusetts Amherst says he was denied pay raises for decades, despite being one of its most published professors.

Driver and his wife, who was from India, also encountered roadblocks trying to buy a house in the mostly white college town. Their three children faced racism from neighbors and school officials alike.

"There's a lot of people in Amherst that have not gotten a proper share of things," the now 96-year-old professor emeritus said at his home in nearby South Hadley recently. "I ended up being the lowest paid professor in the department, but also its most productive."

Driver and other current and former Black residents may one day be compensated for their hardships.

Amherst, some 90 miles (145 kilometers) from Boston, is among hundreds of communities and organi-

zations across the country seeking to provide reparations to Black people. They range from the state of California to cities like Providence, Rhode Island, religious denominations like the Episcopal Church and prominent colleges like Georgetown University in Washington.

The efforts, some of which have been underway for years, have gained momentum in the wake of the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd last May. President Joe Biden has even expressed support for creating a federal commission to study Black reparations, a proposal that's languished for decades in Congress.

Kamm Howard, co-chair of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, said the wide-ranging approaches could provide models for a national reparations program. He's also not surprised Amherst, long a liberal bastion, is tackling the issue.

"It validates that every community in America, no matter the size, is a microcosm of the broader problem," Howard said. "You're going to find these things, if you dig. "

Amherst's effort started with a petition launched last summer by two white yoga instructors, which led to a town council-approved resolution in December committing Amherst to a "path of remedy" for Black residents "injured or harmed by discrimination and racial injustice."

Michele Miller and Matthew Andrews, who led the petition effort as co-founders of the group Reparations for Amherst, said they wanted to provide something "tangible and healing" for local Black families amid nationwide protests and turmoil.

They argue that Amherst, a college town of nearly 38,000 residents, didn't become more than 75% white and just 5% Black by accident.

For decades, restrictive housing policies prevented Black families from purchasing homes in desirable parts of town, according to Miller and Andrews' research. Black people were also shut out of jobs and educational opportunities at UMass Amherst, one of the state's largest and most prominent institutions.

As a result, the median income for Amherst's white families is more than two times that of Black families, and more than half its Black population lives below the poverty line.

"Amherst likes to think of itself as progressive, but that idealism isn't always borne out," Andrews said. "The economic and social disparities are clear."

Kathleen Anderson, a former president of the Amherst NAACP chapter, said she's encouraged that white residents initiated the reparations effort.

But the next step needs to come from the Black community, she said. Anderson and other Black residents are taking part in virtual conversations this spring to talk about what reparations should look like.

A former school committee member, Anderson would like to see the process address a broader, systemic need, such as racial disparities in the public schools. Black teachers, she said, have complained of racist harassment and hostile work environments for years.

"Reparations can be more than a check," Anderson said.

Amilcar Shabazz, a professor of Africana studies at UMass, said he'd like to see better recognition of the local Black community in town landmarks and monuments. Celebrated authors Chinua Achebe and James Baldwin both taught at UMass but aren't recognized anywhere in town, he noted.

"We have a lot to talk about," he said. "I wonder if the town is ready for this. Can these scars be healed? Can you put a price tag on trauma?"

Miller and Andrews, meanwhile, have looked to Evanston, Illinois as a potential model, inviting a leading alderman from that community to speak with Amherst's Black residents next month.

The Chicago suburb's reparations fund, established in 2019, is focused on housing inequities, using a 3% tax on recreational marijuana sales to help Black residents with homeownership, including mortgage assistance and funding for home improvements.

Driver believes the town's higher education institutions — UMass Amherst, Amherst College and Hampshire College — should be part of the solution because of the role they've played in the town's racial divide. The three institutions expressed support for the town's effort in separate statements to The Associated Press, but stopped short of committing any resources.

When he was hired, Driver was the first person of color to be employed in any capacity at university.

By the late 1960s, UMass Amherst had just six Black faculty members and 36 Black students in a student body of nearly 17,000, according to university historical records.

Driver said he'd personally like to be compensated for years of being underpaid.

He earned tenure in 1954, but remained the lowest paid professor in his department until the 1970s, when a new department head sought to rectify the imbalance.

"We are in a position of having to admit that Driver is an extremely impressive professional with an outstanding scholarly record whom we have not sufficiently recognized locally," wrote Thomas Wilkinson to other school officials in 1970.

Driver continued to lead a distinguished career. The graduate of Temple and the University of Pennsylvania has written numerous books and is currently at work on another. He served as a visiting professor at UCLA and other top colleges. He even had stints as a United Nations advisor in Iran and consulted and taught in France, India and elsewhere. Throughout, Driver remained firmly rooted at UMass, where he retired in 1987.

"If reparations could make up the lost salary, I would appreciate it," Driver said. "I would enjoy it. I would celebrate it, but I don't think that's going to ever happen."

He hopes UMass can at least acknowledge the contributions pioneering Black professors made.

Driver already has a spot in mind: his first office on campus, which was tucked in the basement by the furnace, in a place where the janitor didn't even bother to empty the trash bins.

"If they would rename that after me," Driver said. "That would be the ideal reparation."

After pandemic year, weary world looks back — and forward

By MICHELLE R. SMITH and ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

No one has been untouched.

Not the Michigan woman who awakened one morning, her wife dead by her side. Not the domestic worker in Mozambique, her livelihood threatened by the virus. Not the North Carolina mother who struggled to keep her business and her family going amid rising anti-Asian ugliness. Not the sixth-grader, exiled from the classroom in the blink of an eye.

It happened a year ago. "I expected to go back after that week," said Darelyn Maldonado, now 12. "I didn't think that it would take years."

On March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization declared a pandemic, few could foresee the long road ahead or the many ways in which they would suffer -- the deaths and agonies of millions, the ruined economies, the disrupted lives and near-universal loneliness and isolation.

A year later, some are dreaming of a return to normal, thanks to vaccines that seemed to materialize as if by magic. Others live in places where the magic seems to be reserved for wealthier worlds.

At the same time, people are looking back at where they were when they first understood how drastically life would change.

On March 11, 2020, confirmed cases of COVID-19 stood at 125,000, and reported deaths stood at fewer than 5,000. Today, 117 million people are confirmed to have been infected, and according to Johns Hopkins, more than 2.6 million people have died.

On that day, Italy closed shops and restaurants after locking down in the face of 10,000 reported infections. The NBA suspended its season, and Tom Hanks, filming a movie in Australia, announced he was infected.

On that evening, President Donald Trump addressed the nation from the Oval Office, announcing restrictions on travel from Europe that set off a trans-Atlantic scramble. Airports flooded with unmasked crowds in the days that followed. Soon, they were empty.

And that, for much of the world, was just the beginning.

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Today, thanks to her vaccination, Maggie Sedidi is optimistic: "By next year, or maybe the year after, I really do hope that people will be able to begin returning to normal life."

But it is a hard-earned optimism. Sedidi, a 59-year-old nurse at Soweto's Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital, the largest hospital in South Africa and the entire continent, recalls she was devastated when the first cases appeared there last March.

And she recalls being terrified when she got COVID-19. Her manager fell ill at the same time and died.

South Africa has had by far Africa's worst experience with the virus. The country of 60 million people has had more than 1.5 million confirmed cases, including more than 50,000 deaths.

"You can imagine, I was really, really frightened. I had all the symptoms. except dying," she said, with a survivor's grim smile. Her recuperation period was lengthy.

"I had shortness of breath and tightness of the chest. It lasted for six months," she said. "I didn't think it would ever go away."

But she mended, and she's back at work in the surgical ward. Others have not been so lucky. In the United States -- the world's most COVID-wracked country -- 29 million have been infected, and 527,000 have died.

Latoria Glenn-Carr and her wife of six years, Tyeisha, were diagnosed at a hospital emergency room near their home outside Detroit on Oct. 29. Despite Latoria's qualms, they were sent home.

Tyeisha, 43, died in bed next to her wife three days later.

"I woke up on Sunday, and I didn't feel a pulse," Glenn-Carr said.

One month later, COVID killed Glenn-Carr's mother, too.

In quiet times, in prayer, Glenn-Carr thinks she should have pushed for the hospital to keep Tyeisha, or should have taken her to a different hospital. She is also angry at America's political leaders — in particular, Trump, who she believes was more worried about the economy than people's lives.

"If he was more empathetic to the issues and concerned about people, in general, he would have taken it more seriously," she said. "And because of that, 500,000 people are dead."

She joined a survivor's group for people who lost loved ones to COVID. They meet weekly on Zoom, text each other and help with the grieving process. Glenn-Carr knows she will dread birthdays and Mother's Days that will go uncelebrated.

"Nothing goes back to the way it was" she said.

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At Queen Anne Healthcare in Seattle, 96-year-old Jean Allen was infected and recovered. But 19 of her fellow residents and two beloved staff members died.

The deaths trailed off, but the isolation and boredom continue. Allen is now fully vaccinated. She has had enough of sleeping her days away, of having only limited visits with other residents.

She recalled the yarn shop she ran decades ago, where she taught knitting and gabbed with the customers, and thought maybe she'd resume that old hobby, which she learned from her grandmother around 1930.

"I'm starting to get that feeling: It's time to go back and do something," she said. "If you find some knitting needles, let's say size 3 and 5, pass the word on to the front desk. They'll get them to me."

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With the pandemic came hard times to so many places. In Nepal, the stream of foreign adventurers arriving to climb Mount Everest stopped — a disaster for guides like Pasang Rinzee Sherpa.

Sherpa has scaled Mount Everest twice and spent 18 years helping climbers up the highest Himalayan peaks, generally earning about $8,000 a year. In the past 12 months, he had no income.

Sherpa had to beg his landlord in Kathmandu to waive his rent. He borrowed money from friends, cut down on expenses, stopped sending money to his parents, who have a small farm. He lives on two simple meals a day, cooking them in his room.

It's been difficult. "We are mountain people who are used to walking freely in nature," Sherpa said. "But for months during lockdown we were forced to be confined in a room in Kathmandu city. It was mental torture for us."

In Mozambique, one of the world's poorest countries, domestic worker Alice Nharre remembered the desperation of people forced to stay home for a virus that some initially thought was not real.

"People were thinking: 'We're going to stay at home, with no help from the government -- how are we going to survive?'" she said.

The southern African country's government pledged that relief pay of the equivalent of $20 would be given for three months to those thrown out of work.

"It never happened," said Nharre, 45. "My mother signed up, but the money never arrived. We don't know what happened to it."

With a delivery from the COVAX initiative this week, the country has nearly 700,000 vaccine doses for its 30 million people. It's not clear when they will be widely available.

"Maybe, it's for doctors, and the big people. For us, the little people, we don't know," she shrugged.

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When Trump began calling COVID-19 the "China virus," Joyce Kuo tensed up.

"It was like 'Here we go, brace yourself,'" said the 36-year-old furniture manufacturer from Greensboro, North Carolina.

Soon after, she recalled, when she took her three children to the dentist, a white woman in the waiting area pulled her daughter close and loudly instructed: "You need to stay away from them. They probably have that virus."

More than once during the pandemic, Kuo and others in her family encountered that kind of racism. Though born in America, she was unnerved by reminders that others felt she did not belong there.

Meanwhile, Kuo and her husband were trying to pivot their outdoor furniture business in the face of government shutdowns. They started using upholstery materials to make cloth masks, which allowed them to stay open as an essential business keep paying their 25 employees.

Kuo recalls being constantly stressed; it seemed grocery store shelves were always out of basic foods and toilet paper. Later, because of a teacher shortage, she began homeschooling her children -- ages 4, 6 and 8 -- while also trying to get work done.

"I think for any parent with children, working from home is almost a joke. You do what you can," Kuo said. "A lot of times my work from home happened after the kids have gone to bed."

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Life pivoted for Darelyn Maldonado last March during her library class. She recalls sitting at a table with her close friends, talking with the teacher about COVID-19. The teacher told them their school in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, would be shutting down -- briefly, she said.

In the 12 months since, she has lived in limbo and online.

Where she once awakened excited to go to school, she now struggles without the give-and-take that comes with sitting in a classroom.

There are good moments. Sometimes her Shih Tzu sits on her lap and licks the computer screen during class. Or her 1½-year-old brother, who has grown from an infant into a toddler in the course of the pandemic, opens her bedroom door.

But Darelyn lives with the worry that someone she loves could die. There's also the frustration of having to give up softball and so much else that brings her joy.

"I don't have very many friends anymore," Darelyn said.

There is a light at the end of her tunnel. Parents in her city waged a pressure campaign to reopen schools, and she is due back in the classroom on March 16.

A year from now, on March 11, 2022, she pictures herself doing all the things she missed in this endless pandemic year.

"Playing outside with friends, playing softball with the dog," she said. "Being with the people that I love most."

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Associated Press writers Corey Williams in West Bloomfield, Michigan, Binaj Gurubacharya in Kathmandu, Nepal, Tom Bowker in Maputo, Mozambique, Terry Tang in Phoenix and Gene Johnson in Seattle contributed to this report.

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More AP coverage of the pandemic's first year: Pandemic: One Year

GOP struggles to define Biden, turns to culture wars instead

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and the Democrats were on the brink of pushing through sprawling legislation with an eyepopping, $1.9 trillion price tag.

But many Republican politicians and conservative commentators had other priorities in recent days. A passionate defense of Dr. Seuss. Serious questions about the future of Mr. Potato Head. Intense scrutiny of Meghan Markle.

The conservatives' relentless focus on culture wars rather than the new president highlights both their strategy for regaining power in Washington and their challenge in doing so. Unlike previous Democratic leaders, Biden himself simply isn't proving to be an easy target or animating figure for the GOP base, prompting Republicans to turn to the kind of cultural issues the party has used to cast Democrats as elitist and out of touch with average Americans.

"There's just not the antipathy to Biden like there was Obama. He just doesn't drive conservative outrage," said Alex Conant, a longtime GOP operative, who worked for the Republican National Committee in 2009 as they labored to undermine then-President Barack Obama.

"They never talk about Biden. It's amazing," Conant said of the conservative news media. "I think Fox covered Dr. Seuss more than Biden's stimulus bill in the week leading up to the vote."

The challenge is a continuation of the 2020 campaign, when then-President Trump struggled to land a consistent attack on Biden. The branding of Biden as "sleepy" never stuck in the same way as Trump's derision of Hillary Clinton as "crooked" in 2016. Other GOP efforts to define Biden as a radical or to attack his mental acuity also didn't resonate.

Merchandise stands outside Trump's rallies featured buttons and shirts mocking Clinton and Obama, but few bashing Biden. Clinton, who remains reviled on the right, was featured far more prominently on stage at last month's annual Conservative Political Action Conference in Florida than the current occupant of the Oval Office.

The GOP is focusing more on America's culture wars than on Biden, including a relatively new villain decried as "cancel culture."

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy tweeted a video of himself reading from Dr. Seuss in the days after the author's publishing house announced it was discontinuing several books that contained racist imagery. And former Trump aide Stephen Miller joined others on the right in launching a Twitter defense of Buckingham Palace after Markle, in a blockbuster interview with Oprah Winfrey, alleged racist treatment by an unnamed member of the monarchy.

"It's gonna take Republicans a few weeks to realize how badly they got rolled on the COVID bill while they wasted all their precious time and energy whining about Dr. Seuss," tweeted Amanda Carpenter, a former adviser to Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas.

Biden's strategy on the culture war issues has been to largely not engage. White House press secretary Jen Psaki danced around questions about Dr. Seuss.

Biden himself has largely stayed gaffe-free, with the exception of his calling decisions by Republican governors to lift mask mandates "Neanderthal," which generated a brief tempest on the right.

Instead, the West Wing has focused on the relief bill, believing that Americans will reward results, not controversy.

"The cancel culture is a huge meme on the right and it may work with the base, but the base is not the country at large," said David Axelrod, former senior adviser to Obama. "That is a sideshow right now, the main event is the virus and how quickly are we going to be able to get back to normal."

Biden, Axelrod said, has remained "a difficult target" for the Republicans.

"He does not engage, he does not personalize his disputes, and while he is pursuing a progressive platform, he does not use the conventional ideological language about it," Axelrod said. "He's not a provocative personality."

Biden, who focused a portion of his campaign trying to win back working-class white voters who left the Democratic Party for Trump, also inherently does not face the racist attacks aimed at Obama or the sexist ones targeted at Clinton.

Much of Trump's campaign's vitriol was directed not at Biden, who sold himself as a middle-of-the-road unifier, but soon-to-be Vice President Kamala Harris, a woman of color. Harris, the Trump team argued, would be truly in charge, with Biden a mere "empty vessel" being used to enact others' radical agendas.

Additionally, Republican efforts to combat Biden have been slowed by the civil war in its own ranks as the party grapples with its direction in Trump's persistent shadow.

Some Republicans argue it will simply take time for the GOP to organize against Biden, given the honeymoon period most new presidents enjoy. Biden has also staked a lower profile than Obama, making him a less effective foil in uniting Republicans.

"I think that's just what happens with a new president," said Josh Holmes, a former aide to Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell, who spearheaded a move to stymie Obama after the 44th president was inaugurated.

"When you lose a big election, there's sort of a scattering effect, (and) it wasn't until June or so and the beginnings of the discussion on Obamacare where we were really able to cohesively fight back," Holmes said. "I think by the spring, you're dealing with a much more cohesive Republican Party than you are the first couple weeks."

Republicans believe there will be opportunities to better push back when the White House moves onto thornier issues like immigration, voting rights legislation and a potentially massive infrastructure and jobs bill. Many also believe that the ongoing herky-jerky process to reopen schools for in-person learning could end up damaging Biden.

All the while, the Biden White House is underscoring its attempts at bipartisanship, putting the Republicans on the defensive for not signing onto the broadly popular COVID relief bill.

"Many of the Republicans who voted against this are outliers and are against the grain of what the people in their own districts supported," Psaki said. "So they may be getting questions about that once relief goes out, once schools are able to upgrade facilities and benefit from these checks."

Attorneys sift strong opinions, anxiety among Chauvin jurors

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — One was anxious, worried about high emotion surrounding the case. One worried his family might be targeted. And one was delighted to receive her jury summons — even after learning she might wind up on the panel considering whether to convict a former police officer in George Floyd's death.

Jury selection for Derek Chauvin opened Tuesday, a grinding process during which attorneys asked the prospective jurors one by one whether they could keep an open mind, what they think of the criminal justice system, how they resolve conflicts and much more.

"I definitely have strong opinions about the case," one woman said. "I think I can try to be impartial — I don't know that I can promise impartiality."

She was dismissed. So was another woman, who said she didn't understand why Chauvin didn't get up when Floyd — in a widely seen bystander video that showed Chauvin with his knee pressed on Floyd's neck — kept saying he couldn't breathe.

"That's not fair because we are humans, you know?" she said.

Three in the pool were seated on the jury, and six others were dismissed by day's end.

The three jurors who were selected — two men and one woman — all said they had heard some details about the case against Chauvin but would be able to put aside what they heard or opinions they had formed and make a decision based on evidence in court. One of the selected jurors said he hadn't seen the bystander video of Floyd's arrest at all, while the others described seeing it minimally.

The person who worried about the divisiveness of the case was dismissed, as was the potential juror who feared his family could be targeted.

The exchanges between potential jurors, attorneys and the judge illustrate the challenges in seating a jury in such a well-known case. Judge Peter Cahill has set aside at least three weeks for jury selection. Opening statements are scheduled no sooner than March 29.

Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death, and jury selection is proceeding despite uncertainty over whether a third-degree murder charge will be added. The state has asked the Minnesota Court of Appeals to stop proceedings until that's resolved, which could mean a delay of weeks or months.

Floyd was declared dead on May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against the Black man's neck for about nine minutes. Floyd's death sparked sometimes violent protests in Minneapolis and beyond, leading to a nationwide reckoning on race.

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

The first man who was selected to serve on the jury, a chemist who says he works to find facts and thinks analytically, said he has never watched the video of Floyd's arrest but that he has seen a still image from it. When asked if he could decide the case based on the evidence, he said, "I'd rely on what I hear in court."

The man, whom prosecutors said identifies as white, said he supports the Black Lives Matter movement, but views the organization itself unfavorably. He also has an unfavorable view of the Blue Lives Matter movement. He said everyone should matter the same.

"The whole point of that is that all lives should matter equally, and that should include police," he said.

The races of the second and third jurors selected were not made clear in court.

A woman who was selected described herself as a "go-with-the-flow" person who could talk with anyone about anything. The woman, who is related to a police officer in greater Minnesota, said she initially had a negative perception of Chauvin because of what she saw in the bystander video, but said she doesn't know him and could be proven wrong.

"That video just makes you sad," said the woman. "Nobody wants to see somebody die, whether it was his fault or not."

She said there could be many reasons why Chauvin would pin Floyd to the ground, and that while she has heard Floyd had drugs in his system when he died, she understands that may not have been a factor in his death.

The third juror selected, an auditor, also told the court he would be open-minded. When asked how he resolves conflicts on teams at work, he said: "We use more facts over emotions in those cases."

Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, exercised two of his 15 peremptory challenges on potential jurors who identify as Hispanic, which led prosecutors to object that the jurors were being rejected because of their race. Cahill disagreed, noting that the second Hispanic juror to be dismissed had martial arts experience and referred to Chauvin's restraint as an "illegal" move. The judge also said that man made it clear he would stick to his opinions until someone told him otherwise, improperly shifting the burden of proof to the defense.

Cahill ruled on several pretrial motions Tuesday, setting parameters for trial testimony. Among them, Cahill said jurors will hear when Chauvin stopped working for the police department, but not that he was fired or that the city made a "substantial offer" to settle a lawsuit from Floyd's family. Those details won't be allowed because they could imply guilt, Cahill said.

Minneapolis City Attorney Jim Rowader said the city made an offer to the Floyd family last summer that was rejected. He didn't provide details. A message left with an attorney for the Floyd family hasn't been returned.

Cahill also ruled that a firefighter, who can be heard in the bystander video urging the officers to check Floyd's pulse, will be allowed to testify about what she saw and whether she thought medical intervention was needed. But she won't be allowed to speculate that she could have saved Floyd if she had intervened. Testimony about what training Chauvin received will be allowed.

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

Asian stocks follow Wall St higher after tech rally

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock prices followed Wall Street higher on Wednesday following a rally for major tech companies.

Shanghai, Tokyo, Seoul and Hong Kong advanced. Sydney declined.

Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index closed up 1.4%, led by gains for Apple, Amazon and other tech majors. The Nasdaq composite index, dominated by tech shares, surged 3.7% for its biggest gain in four months.

Markets have been adjusting to a rise in long-term interest rates in the bond market, which has pulled money out of stocks. A reversal in bond market trends at least temporarily sent investors back to companies they hope will thrive after the coronavirus pandemic ends.

The swing shows "how fragile sentiment has become, driven by the absolute uncertainty" about the outlook for interest rates and inflation, said Stephen Innes of Axi in a report.

The Shanghai Composite Index rose 0.7% to 3,383.09 and the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo gained less than 0.1% to 29,040.82. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 0.6% to 28,954.48.

The Kospi in Seoul advanced 0.3% to 2,985.57 while Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 slid 0.3% to 6,753.50. New Zealand rose while Singapore retreated.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 rose Tuesday to 3,875.44. Communication companies and those that rely on consumer spending contributed to the increase. Financial, energy and industrial stocks lagged the broader market.

Apple rose 4.1%, chipmaker Nvidia climbed 8% and Tesla jumped 19.6% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which is weighted less toward tech, rose 0.1% to 31,832.74.

The Nasdaq advanced to 13,073.82. Despite that, the index is 7.2% below its Feb. 12 high. On Monday it closed 10% below its peak in what is known as a correction on Wall Street.

Some of the big technology stocks that fueled last year's market rebound after the coronavirus outbreak upended the global economy have been shedding gains since the Nasdaq peak on Feb. 12.

Apple was down 14% through the end of last week.

Financial sector stocks, which had benefited from the rise in bond yields, were the biggest decliners Tuesday. Bank of America fell 2.2%, while American Express slid 3.4%. Banks and credit card issuers tend to do well when interest rates are rising because they can charge higher rates.

Bond yields, or the difference between a bond's market price and the payout at maturity, have been widening due to rising expectations for growth and the inflation that could follow. Inflation erodes the value of that future bond payout, encouraging investors to shift to stocks.

The fall in bond prices drew investors who didn't want to pay high prices for stocks, especially tech stocks that looked most expensive.

Investors are betting the $1.9 trillion in coming government stimulus approved by the U.S. Senate on Saturday will help lift the U.S. economy out of its coronavirus-induced malaise. It provides direct payments of up to $1,400 for most Americans and extends emergency unemployment benefits that help to support consumer spending, the economy's main engine.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude lost 27 cents to $63.74 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract sank $1.04 on Tuesday to $64.01. Brent crude, used to price international oils, declined 38 cents to $67.14 per barrel in London. It retreated 72 cents the previous session to $67.52.

The dollar rose to 108.82 yen from Tuesday's 108.47 yen. The euro declined to $1.1882 from $1.1901.

ANALYSIS: Communist Party seeking China's 'rejuvenation'

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The catchword "rejuvenation" has been tucked into the major speeches at China's biggest political event of the year, the meeting of its 3,000-member legislature.

It encapsulates the ruling Communist Party's overriding long-term objective: To build the nation into a truly global power, one that commands respect from the rest of the world.

That goal is intertwined with another one: retaining a hold on power. The party keeps a tight grip by censoring the digital space, controlling the news media and locking up those who publicly challenge its line. But it also tries to woo the public by stoking national pride in the country's growing global clout to justify its continued rule after more than 70 years at the helm.

"By enabling the Chinese nation to make another giant stride toward rejuvenation, the (Communist Party) Central Committee has delivered impressive results that our people are happy with and that will go down in history," Li Zhanshu, the party's No. 3 official, told lawmakers this week.

Rejuvenation is repeated like a mantra, even woven into a sprawling exhibit at the national art museum marking the Year of the Ox in the Chinese zodiac. The exhibit's introduction invokes the diligent ox and credits party leader and head-of-state Xi Jinping for deepening "the understanding of the great striving of the Chinese nation."

That perspective is an important dynamic as policymakers in Washington and other capitals work out how to navigate China's rise and the global changes in its wake.

Chinese leaders are bent on developing a more sophisticated economy and a more powerful military, and accelerating growth of the domestic market and high-tech capabilities in the face of U.S. tariffs and restrictions. They are looking for opportunities to demonstrate global leadership, from the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change. And they are less willing to accede to the demands of others on issues such as human rights.

That presents a multitude of challenges for U.S. President Joe Biden. There is room for cooperation on climate change. There are differences on trade and technology to try to hash out. Their navies are jockeying for position in the western Pacific. And deep divisions remain over Taiwan, Hong Kong and China's largely Muslim Xinjiang region, where both sides are digging in their heels.

In its march to hoped-for rejuvenation, the Communist Party is marking two centennials. This July will be the 100th anniversary of its founding. And 2049, that of its taking power in 1949.

For this year, the goal was creation of a "moderately prosperous" society. Per capita GDP has topped $10,000, putting China solidly in the ranks of upper middle income countries, though the wealth gap between urban rich and rural poor is huge and widening.

The goal for 2049 is grander. The aim, Xi told the 19th party congress in 2017, is achieving basic common prosperity for all Chinese so they enjoy happier, safer and healthier lives. China would also be a global leader in national strength and international influence.

As an interim goal, Xi has said that the economy could double in size by 2035, which would take per capita GDP to about $20,000.

To that end, the National People's Congress, at its annual meeting that wraps up Thursday, is expected to endorse the party's next five-year plan, laying out its economic, military and other goals.

There are potential bumps in the road. China's population is aging before the economy is fully developed, an outgrowth of it's once harsh one-child policy. It's unclear if the party's rigid system can manage an increasingly complex society and economy that increasingly depends on creativity instead of central planning for growth.

The term "rejuvenation" harkens back to the peak of China's imperial era, when it was a technological and cultural leader in Asia. The Qing Dynasty later weakened in the 19th century, and western nations that had become more militarily powerful forced it to make a series of territorial and trade concessions.

The idea of rejuvenation underpinned not only the appeals of the communists but other revolutionaries and reformers in the early 20th century. But as various forces vied for power and China descended into chaos, Japan invaded and occupied much of the country through the end of World War II.

The Communist Party often invokes this "century of humiliation" in its bid to make China strong again. After decades of rapid economic growth, it is closer to achieving its ultimate goal than ever before.

"The Chinese nation, which since modern times began had endured so much for so long, has achieved a tremendous transformation: It has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong; it has come to embrace the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation," Xi said in his 2017 party congress speech.

The question is what China's rejuvenation would mean for the rest of the world. Is it a driver of global economic growth, the world's biggest consumer market and a source of investment for other countries? A military and industrial threat that will bully smaller neighbors and steal technology? Will its success encourage some other countries to pursue authoritarian governments and turn away from the democracy espoused by America?

"China's got the wind at its back as it heads towards a position of greater power and eventual, from their perspective, preeminence in the global balance of power," said Bonnie Glaser, director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "And that's a huge challenge for the Biden administration."

Biden and his deputies have signaled a tough line on China. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a recent speech, called China "the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system – all the rules, values, and relationships that make the world work the way we want it to."

The public posturing may give way to diplomacy, but China's ultimate goals — whether to become a technology leader or extend its naval reach in the South China Sea — are unwavering. As America struggles with recession and the pandemic, China and its leaders grow more confident about its rejuvenation.

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Moritsugu, the Associated Press news director for Greater China, has covered Asia for more than 15 years.

Japan seeks 'recovery of people's hearts' decade after quake

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and HARUKA NUGA Associated Press

TOMIOKA, Japan (AP) — Ten years after Japan's earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, the lives of many who survived are still on hold.

On March 11, 2011, one of the biggest temblors on record touched off a massive tsunami, killing more than 18,000 people and setting off catastrophic meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Nearly half a million people were displaced. Tens of thousands still haven't returned home.

More than 30 trillion yen ($280 billion) has been spent on reconstruction so far — but even Reconstruction Minister Katsuei Hirasawa acknowledged recently that while the government has charged ahead with new buildings, it has invested less in helping people to rebuild their lives, for instance, by offering mental health services for trauma.

The Associated Press talked to people affected by the disasters about how far they have come — and how much more needs to be done.

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"AS LONG AS MY BODY MOVES"

Yasuo Takamatsu, 64, lost his wife, Yuko, when the tsunami hit Onagawa, in Miyagi prefecture.

He has been looking for her ever since.

He even got his diving license to try to find her remains, and for seven years he has gone on weekly dives — 470 and counting.

"I'm always thinking that she may be somewhere nearby," he said.

Besides his solo dives, once a month he joins local authorities as they conduct underwater searches for some 2,500 people whose remains are still unaccounted for across the region.

Takamatsu said the city's scars have largely healed, "but the recovery of people's hearts ... will take time."

So far, he has found albums, clothes and other artifacts, but nothing that belonged to his wife.

He said he will keep searching for his wife "as long as my body moves."

"In the last text message that she sent me, she said, 'Are you okay? I want to go home,'" he said. "I'm sure she still wants to come home."

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"STARTING LINE AGAIN"

Just a month after a tsunami as high as 17 meters (55 feet) smashed into the city of Rikuzentakata, Michihiro Kono took over his family's soy sauce business.

That he was even able to continue the two-century-old business is a miracle, he says. The precious soy yeast was only saved because he had donated some to a university lab.

For the last decade, Kono has worked to rebuild the business in Iwate prefecture, and later this year he will finish construction on a new factory, replacing the one that was destroyed, on the same ground where his family started making soy sauce in 1807. He has even launched a soy sauce named "Miracle" in honor of the saved yeast.

"This is a critical moment to see if I can do something meaningful in the coming 10 years," said the ninth-generation owner of Yagisawa Shoten Co. "I was born here, and now I'm at the starting line again."

But challenges remain: His customer base has been decimated. The city's population has plunged more than 20% to about 18,000, so he is trying to build business networks beyond the city.

Kono often thinks of the people killed by the tsunami, many of whom he used to discuss town revitalization plans with.

"Those folks all wanted to make a great town, and I want to do things that will make them say, 'Well done, you did it,' when I see them again in the next life," he said.

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"WHO WANTS TO COME BACK?"

About 10 kilometers (6 miles) south of the wrecked nuclear plant, rice farmer Naoto Matsumura defied a government evacuation order a decade ago and stayed on his farm to protect his land and the cattle abandoned by neighbors.

He's still there.

Most of the town of Tomioka reopened in 2017. But dozens of neighboring homes around Matsumura are still empty, leaving the area pitch dark at night.

The Fukushima prefecture town's main train station got a facelift. A new shopping center was built. But less than 10% of Tomioka's former population of 16,000 has returned after massive amounts of radioactive material spewing from the plant forced evacuations from the town and other nearby areas. Parts of the town remain off-limits; houses and shops stand abandoned.

"It took hundreds of years of history and effort to build this town, and it was destroyed instantly," he said. "I grew up here ... but this is nothing like a home anymore."

Because it took six years to lift the evacuation order, many townspeople already found jobs and homes elsewhere. Half of the former residents say they have decided never to return, according to a town survey.

This has been true across the region.

In Tomioka, radioactive waste from decontamination efforts in the town are still stored in a no-go zone.

"Who wants to come back to a place like this?" Matsumura asked. "I don't see much future for this town."

For company, Matsumura has several cows, a pony and a family of hunting dogs that help him chase away wild boars. The cows are descendants of those from neighboring farms that he has kept, as a protest, after the government issued an order to destroy thousands because of radiation fears.

This spring, for the first time since the disaster, the 62-year-old farmer plans an experimental rice planting, and to expand his beekeeping efforts.

"I will stay here until the end of my life," he said.

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"THEIR HOME IS STILL HERE"

Yuya Hatakeyama was 14 when he was forced to evacuate from Tomioka after the disaster.

Now 24, the former third baseman for the Fukushima Red Hopes, a regional professional league team, is

in his first year working at the Tomioka town hall — but he still hasn't returned to live in the town, joining the many who commute into it from outside.

Hatakeyama has bittersweet memories of Tomioka. The area that's now a no-go zone includes Yonomori park, where people used to gather for a cherry blossom festival. Decontamination work is being stepped up in the area and the town plans to lift the rest of the no-go zone in 2023.

"I want to reach out to the residents, especially the younger generation, so they know their home is still here," Hatakeyama said. One day, he said, he wants to see young families playing catch, like he used to do with his father.

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"A PLACE OF COMFORT"

Hazuki Sato was 10 when she fled from her elementary school in Futaba, home of the wrecked nuclear plant.

She's now preparing for the coming-of-age ceremony that is typical for Japanese 20-year-olds, hoping for a reunion in town so she can reconnect with her former classmates who have scattered.

Despite horrifying memories of escaping from her classroom, she still considers Futaba her home.

After studying outside the region for eight years, Sato now works for her hometown — though from an office in Iwaki, another city in the Fukushima prefecture.

None of Futaba's 5,700 residents can return to live there until 2022, when the town is expected to re-open partially. An area outside a train station reopened last March only for a daytime visit to bring in the Olympic torch.

Sato has fond memories of Futaba — a family barbecue, riding a unicycle after school and doing homework and snacking with friends at a childcare center while waiting for her grandma to pick her up.

"I want to see this town become a place of comfort again," she said.

Protesters adapt tactics after Myanmar police use violence

MANDALAY, Myanmar (AP) — Protesters against the military takeover in Myanmar carried homemade shields and moved with more caution and agility Tuesday, adapting their tactics to the escalating violence from security forces not reluctant to use lethal force to break up crowds.

In Mandalay, the nation's second-largest city, about a thousand demonstrators emerged onto the streets, those in the vanguard carrying shields marked with a three-fingered salute, the movement's symbol of defiance. They marched for just a few minutes before dispersing to avoid a possible confrontation with riot police. Another group made a mobile protest, driving through the streets on motorbikes.

Security forces trying to stop people from gathering have used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets most often, but also have fired live ammunition at crowds. The crackdown has left more than 60 protesters dead but has failed to slow the widespread protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

A school principal involved in the protest movement died Tuesday from unknown causes after being taken into custody by security forces, according to media reports and an activist who knew him.

The death of Zaw Myat Lin in custody was the second in recent days. He was a member of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

The deaths of Zaw Myat Lin and Khin Maung Latt, a party activist detained on Saturday night whose body was retrieved from a military hospital the next day, have raised questions about whether the government is torturing and killing detainees. Witnesses said Khin Maung Latt's body had wounds consistent with torture, according to New York-based Human Rights Watch.

Zaw Myat Lin was arrested Monday night as he tried to escape from a police raid, the Voice of Myanmar online news service and other media reported.

Maung Saungkha, an activist and friend of Zaw Myat Lin, said his family was summoned to retrieve his body on Tuesday and was not told how he died.

Nighttime hours have become increasingly dangerous. Police and army units routinely range through

neighborhoods, shooting randomly to intimidate residents and making targeted arrests.

According to the Myanmar-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, more than 1,930 people have been arrested in connection with the coup. Dozens of journalists have been arrested, including Thein Zaw of The Associated Press, who has been charged under a public order law that carries a penalty of up to three years in prison.

In what has become a daily occurrence, protest marches were held Tuesday in cities and towns across the country, according to local news reports and social media.

Protests occurred in Ye, a town in Mon State in southern Myanmar; Kyaukpadaung, a town in central Myanmar; Mohnyin, a town in Kachin State in the north; and Myeik Taung, in the southeast. The authorities reportedly used force in each case.

Armed police carried out night patrols on Monday, yelling abuse, firing at buildings and making targeted arrests in a tactic apparently aimed at spreading fear and weakening the resolve of those opposed to the army's takeover.

One video recorded Monday night in a district of Yangon, the country's biggest city, shows more than 20 police swarming down a street, around a corner and then opening fire. They return, point up at a window or balcony overlooking them and fire once again.

Their actions came during a dramatic night when thousands of residents broke the 8 p.m. curfew to show support for protesters who had been trapped by police in an enclave of streets. They came out of their homes, sang songs against the coup and banged pots, pans and other implements together, partly in the hope of diverting police from the hunted protesters, estimated to number 200.

Witnesses said several dozen of those who had sought shelter in the city's Sanchaung neighborhood were arrested, but others made their way home at dawn, several hours after police withdrew from the area.

The authorities continued their assault on the media on Tuesday, raiding the offices of Kamayut Media and detaining its co-founder, Han Thar Nyein, and editor-in-chief, Nathan Maung. Some of the company's protest coverage can be found on its YouTube channel.

A member of Han Thar's family said that according to witnesses, seven military trucks were involved in the raid and took away office material and equipment as well as the two men. The family member was unaware of where the men were taken.

Maung studied film and video production and political science at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro before joining the media company.

The military also raided the offices of Mizzima News. No one was arrested in the raid, though equipment was vandalized and property was taken away.

The military government on Monday imposed a major curb on media coverage of the crisis. It announced that the licenses of five local media outlets — Mizzima, DVB, Khit Thit Media, Myanmar Now and 7Day News — had been canceled.

All five had been offering extensive coverage of the protests, often with livestreaming video online. The offices of Myanmar Now were raided by the authorities on Monday before the measure was announced.

DVB, or Democratic Voice of Burma, said it was not surprised by the cancellation and would continue broadcasting on satellite TV and online.

"We worry for the safety of our reporters and our staff, but in the current uprising, the whole country has become citizen journalists and there is no way for military authorities to shut the information flow," Executive Director Aye Chan Naing told AP.

The International Press Institute, which promotes press freedom, denounced the license cancellations.

"Revoking the licenses of independent media outlets that have been providing vital information about ongoing events in the country is a draconian measure that amounts to direct censorship and breaches fundamental rights and international standards, to which Myanmar has committed," IPI Executive Director Barbara Trionfi said in a statement.

Roger Mudd, longtime network TV newsman, dies at 93

By DAVE BRYAN Associated Press

Roger Mudd, the longtime political correspondent and anchor for NBC and CBS who once stumped Sen. Edward Kennedy by simply asking why he wanted to be president, has died. He was 93.

CBS News says Mudd died Tuesday of complications of kidney failure at his home in McLean, Virginia.

During more than 30 years on network television, starting with CBS in 1961, Mudd covered Congress, elections and political conventions and was a frequent anchor and contributor to various specials. His career coincided with the flowering of television news, the pre-cable, pre-Internet days when the big three networks and their powerhouse ranks of reporters were the main source of news for millions of Americans.

Besides work at CBS and NBC, he did stints on PBS's "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour" and the History Channel.

When he joined Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer's show in 1987, Mudd told The Associated Press: "I think they regard news and information and fact and opinion with a reverence and respect that really is admirable."

He wrote a memoir, "The Place To Be," which came out in early 2008, and described the challenges and clashing egos he encountered working in Washington, where among other things he covered Congress for CBS for 15 years.

In an April 2008 interview on the "NewsHour," he said he "absolutely loved" keeping tabs on the nation's 100 senators and 435 representatives, "all of them wanting to talk, great access, politics morning, noon and night, as opposed to the White House, where everything is zipped up and tightly held."

Mudd received a George Foster Peabody Award for his November 1979 special "CBS Reports: Teddy," which aired just days before Kennedy officially announced his attempt to challenge then-President Carter for the 1980 Democratic presidential nomination.

In the report, Mudd asked the Massachusetts senator a simple question: "Why do you want to be president?"

Kennedy was unable to give a focused answer or specify what he personally wanted to do.

"Well, I'm, uh, were I to make the announcement to run, the reasons that I would run is because I have a great belief in this country. ... We're facing complex issues and problems in this nation at this time but we have faced similar challenges at other times. ... And I would basically feel that it's imperative for this country to move forward, that it can't stand still, for otherwise it moves backward."

It was enough to prompt New York Times columnist Tom Wicker to give Kennedy the "Safire Prize for Nattering Nabob of the Year." Carter went on to win the nomination for a second term, only to fall to Ronald Reagan in the general election.

As Mudd told viewers: "On the stump Kennedy can be dominating, imposing and masterful, but off the stump, in personal interviews, he can become stilted, elliptical and at times appear as if he really doesn't want America to get to know him."

Mudd spent a fair amount of time in the "CBS Evening News" anchor chair, substituting for Walter Cronkite when he was off and anchoring the Saturday evening news broadcasts from 1966 to 1973.

But he lost out to Dan Rather in the competition to succeed Cronkite as the news anchor at CBS when the latter retired in 1981. Cronkite, for one, had backed Rather because he didn't think Mudd had enough foreign experience.

It was then that Mudd jumped to NBC as its chief Washington correspondent. In addition, he co-anchored NBC's "Nightly News" with Tom Brokaw for a year before Brokaw went solo in 1983, and for a time co-hosted "Meet the Press," the Sunday morning interview show.

But when he left NBC, he said management viewed news as "a promotable commodity" rather than a public service. His departure had been rumored since he sharply criticized NBC News for canceling the newsmagazine show "1986," which he co-anchored with Connie Chung.

"Roger Mudd was one of the most gifted journalists of my lifetime. An astute political reporter and guardian of the highest standards. Roger's dedication to fundamental journalistic practices remains a marker for future generations," Brokaw said.

In five years on "NewsHour," Mudd served as a senior correspondent, essayist and occasional anchor. He hosted a number of reports on American history and education, including "Learning in America: Schools

That Work" and "The Wizard: Thomas Alva Edison."

Mudd left the "NewsHour" in 1992 to teach journalism at Princeton University, describing the offer to teach at the Ivy League school as simply too appealing to turn down. He also was a host and correspondent for The History Channel from 1995 to 2004.

Among his other awards over the years, Mudd shared in a Peabody for the 1970 CBS documentary "The Selling of the Pentagon," which looked at the military's public relations efforts. Mudd was the narrator of the program, which the Peabody judges said was "electronic journalism at its best."

Early in his career at CBS, Mudd was teamed with Robert Trout to anchor coverage of the 1964 Democratic convention after CBS — using Walter Cronkite as anchor — trailed NBC's Chet Huntley and David Brinkley in the ratings at the Republican convention. The memorably named Mudd-Trout team did not conquer NBC's duo, and Cronkite was back as anchor on election night that November.

In 1990, he received the Joan Shorenstein Barone award for distinguished Washington reporting.

Before joining CBS News, Mudd worked at radio station WTOP in Washington. Before that, he was news director at WRNL Radio in Richmond, Virginia, a reporter for the Richmond News Leader and a research assistant with the House Committee on Tax-Exempt Foundation. He was also an English and history teacher and football coach at Darlington School in Rome, Georgia.

In 1977, Mudd received an honorary doctorate from Washington and Lee University, his alma mater. He donated his 1,500 volume collection of 20th-century Southern writers to the university in 2006. He earned a master's degree in American History from the University of North Carolina in 1951.

Mudd, who was born in Washington, was a distant relative of Dr. Samuel Mudd, the doctor who was arrested for treating an injured John Wilkes Booth shortly after Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln. The doctor, who was eventually pardoned, said he hadn't been aware of the killing when he aided Booth.

According to CBS News, Mudd and his late wife, the former E.J. Spears, are survived by their four children, as well as 14 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Arkansas governor signs near-total abortion ban into law

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson on Tuesday signed into law legislation banning nearly all abortions in the state, a sweeping measure that supporters hope will force the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit its landmark Roe v. Wade decision but opponents vow to block before it takes effect later this year.

The Republican governor had expressed reservations about the bill, which only allows the procedure to save the life of the mother and does not provide exceptions for those impregnated in an act of rape or incest. Arkansas is one of at least 14 states where legislators have proposed outright abortion bans this year.

Hutchinson said he was signing the bill because of its "overwhelming legislative support and my sincere and long-held pro-life convictions."

The bans were pushed by Republicans who want to force the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide. Conservatives believe the court is more open to striking down the decision following former President Donald Trump's three appointments to the court.

"We must abolish abortion in this nation just as we abolished slavery in the 19th century – all lives matter," Republican Sen. Jason Rapert, the bill's sponsor said in a statement.

Hutchinson has signed several major abortion restrictions into law since taking office in 2015, but he had voiced concerns that this bill directly challenges Roe and about the lack of rape and incest exceptions. He repeated those concerns as he announced his decision.

"(The ban) is in contradiction of binding precedents of the U.S. Supreme Court, but it is the intent of the legislation to set the stage for the Supreme Court overturning current case law," he said in a statement released by his office. "I would have preferred the legislation to include the exceptions for rape and incest, which has been my consistent view, and such exceptions would increase the chances for a review by the U.S. Supreme Court."

As the Legislature considered the measure, Hutchinson shared with lawmakers a letter written by an attorney for abortion opponents National Right to Life that said the chances of the bill leading to Roe being overturned were "very small and remote." National Right to Life didn't take a position on the bill, though its Arkansas affiliate supported the ban.

The legislation won't take effect until 90 days after the majority-Republican Legislature adjourns this year's session. That means it can't be enforced until this summer at the earliest. Abortion rights supporters said they plan to challenge the ban in court before then.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas called the ban "cruel and unconstitutional."

"Governor Hutchinson: we'll see you in court," ACLU of Arkansas Executive Director Holly Dickson said.

"This is politics at its very worst," Alexis McGill Johnson, president of Planned Parenthood Action Fund, said in a statement. "At a time when people need economic relief and basic safety precautions, dismantling abortion access is cruel, dangerous, and blatantly unjust."

Hutchinson had until Wednesday afternoon to take action on the bill before it would have become law without his signature, a move past governors have taken to express displeasure with a bill without risking an override fight with the Legislature. It takes a simple majority for the Legislature to override a governor's veto in Arkansas.

Arkansas has some of the strictest abortion measures in the country and two years ago Hutchinson signed into law a measure that would ban the procedure if the Roe decision was overturned. Another measure Hutchinson signed in 2019 banning abortions after 18 weeks of pregnancy is on hold due to a legal challenge.

Several other restrictions are still being considered in the Legislature, including one approved by the Senate a day earlier that would require a woman having an abortion to first be shown an ultrasound.

Another sweeping abortion ban was signed into law by South Carolina's governor last month but was quickly blocked by a federal judge due to a legal challenge by Planned Parenthood. Alabama enacted a near-total ban on abortions in 2019 that has been blocked because of court challenges.

Volunteers are key at vaccine sites. It pays off with a shot

By TERRY TANG and MANUEL VALDES Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — When Seattle's largest health care system got a mandate from Washington state to create a mass COVID-19 vaccination site, organizers knew that gathering enough volunteers would be almost as crucial as the vaccine itself.

"We could not do this without volunteers," said Renee Rassilyer-Bomers, chief quality officer for Swedish Health Services and head of its vaccination site at Seattle University. "The sheer volume and number of folks that we wanted to be able to serve and bring in requires … 320 individuals each day."

As states ramp up vaccination distribution in the fight against the coronavirus, volunteers are needed to do everything from direct traffic to check people in so vaccination sites run smoothly. In return for their work, they're often given a shot. Many people who don't yet qualify for a vaccine — including those who are young and healthy — have been volunteering in hopes of getting a dose they otherwise may not receive for months. Large vaccination clinics across the country have seen thousands trying to nab limited numbers of volunteer shifts.

It's raised questions at a time when supplies are limited and some Americans have struggled to get vaccinated even if they are eligible. But medical ethicists say volunteers are key to the public health effort and there's nothing wrong with them wanting protection from the virus.

Ben Dudden, 35, of Roanoke, Virginia, volunteered at a mass vaccination clinic in the nearby city of Salem on a day off from his part-time job at the Roanoke Pinball Museum. His wife, a nurse practitioner who was administering doses, encouraged him to volunteer in case he could get vaccinated.

He spent that January day helping people fill out questionnaires, not knowing if he might get the coveted dose.

"It wasn't an official thing like, 'Everybody who needs a vaccine come this way.' I kind of had to ask,"

Dudden said. "At end of day, I found whoever was in charge of that."

He got what he was hoping for and still wants to volunteer again.

"It was a little bit of a selfish thing — 'I'm gonna get the vaccine if I do this' — but for me, it wasn't the only factor," Dudden said.

At the Seattle vaccination clinic, Swedish Health Services considers volunteers part of the state's Phase 1 vaccination group. About 5,000 have been inoculated, and about 1,000 of them have come back to work again, Rassilyer-Bomer said.

During their shifts, volunteers are handed colored vests matched to their skill level and experience. The majority wear orange for general tasks, which includes sanitizing clipboards, asking people to fill out forms, taking temperatures and monitoring the newly vaccinated to ensure no dangerous side effects.

Some may question whether it's fair for volunteers to get to the front of the line for what's often clerical work.

Nancy Berlinger, a bioethicist at the Hastings Center, a research institute in Garrison, New York, said the bottom line is that volunteers are interacting with the public and there's nothing wrong with them wanting protection.

They also go through training and other obligations.

"There would be easier ways to game the system," Berlinger said. "If that was really your goal, this could take more work I think than some other routes I can think of."

While many volunteer shifts are several hours on weekdays, Berlinger said that doesn't necessarily mean only people of a certain class or demographic can sacrifice that much time.

"That could apply to students, it could apply to people who are unemployed, people who are retired. It could be people who are family caregivers," Berlinger said.

On a chilly January night in suburban Phoenix, Lou Ann Lovell, a 67-year-old retiree, got the Pfizer vaccine after volunteering from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. at a state-run site at State Farm Stadium, where the Arizona Cardinals play. Her daughter persuaded her and other relatives to volunteer.

Lovell committed before realizing those 65 and older would be eligible for vaccines days later. Still, she's glad she did.

"For the first time, I felt I was part of something that was really important and big," said Lovell, who has since volunteered a second time and hopes to do it a third. "You stand there and see all these headlights and people are just continually pouring in there."

The stadium and another state-run site in metro Phoenix require a combined 3,900 volunteers a week. HandsOn Greater Phoenix, a nonprofit handling online volunteer recruitment, opens 1,400 to 2,000 spots a few times a week, and interest hasn't waned, CEO Rhonda Oliver said. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people try to sign up every time new spots open, she said.

Volunteers who have nabbed shifts say they shouldn't be lumped in with those who believe they're entitled to a vaccine.

In the Seattle area, three King County hospitals came under fire last month after revelations that donors, board members and some hospital volunteers used their connections to get shots. The King County Council approved a measure calling on state lawmakers and Gov. Jay Inslee to make it illegal to grant special access to the vaccine.

Berlinger said there's a clear delineation between a connected official and a volunteer at a vaccine clinic getting a shot.

"The volunteers we're talking about at registration centers are people who are part of the public health effort. They are performing a crucial role," Berlinger said. "It's easier to help people who already have privilege. The thing about COVID is we have to push away from that and we have to say, 'No, we must allocate vaccine and vaccination.'"

Lovell, the retired volunteer in Arizona, said critics should target the healthy 20-somethings she saw trying to get the vaccine the night she volunteered.

"If you want to volunteer, volunteer and work," she said. "If you say, 'I don't want to do that,' then wait until your number comes up."

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Tang reported from Phoenix.

Arrested journalist pleaded with officer: 'This is my job'

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — An Iowa journalist recounted getting pepper-sprayed and arrested while covering a protest for racial justice last year, testifying in her own defense Tuesday at her trial on charges stemming from the incident.

Des Moines Register reporter Andrea Sahouri told jurors she was running away from a scene where riot police had shot tear gas and were advancing to disperse protesters outside a mall in Des Moines, Iowa. She said that after she rounded the corner of a Verizon store, she saw an officer charging at her and put her hands up.

"I wasn't doing anything wrong," Sahouri said. "I said, 'I'm press, I'm press, I'm press.' He grabbed me, pepper-sprayed me and as he was doing so said, 'That's not what I asked'."

Sahouri said the pepper spray was "extremely painful" and made her think she was going to go blind.

Sahouri's testimony came on the second day of a trial in which Sahouri and her former boyfriend, Spenser Robnett, are charged with failure to disperse and interference with official acts. The case has drawn widespread criticism from media and human rights advocates, who call the charges an attack on press freedom. The pair face fines and potentially jail time if convicted of the misdemeanors.

Judge Lawrence McLellan on Tuesday reserved a ruling on the defense's motion for an acquittal, and could issue one from the bench Wednesday. A six-member jury is expected to begin deliberations Wednesday morning.

Body camera video played for jurors before Sahouri's testimony backed up her account, showing that she was temporarily blinded and hurting from pepper spray and repeatedly told police she was a reporter.

"This is my job," Sahouri tells an officer. "I'm just doing my job. I'm a journalist."

The Freedom of the Press Foundation called the video powerful evidence that Sahouri was "arrested while doing her job reporting on historic protests" and should have never faced prosecution.

Robnett, who accompanied Sahouri to the protest for safety reasons, also took the stand Tuesday. He said he saw Officer Luke Wilson spray Sahouri from close range, and that he stepped forward to say that Sahouri was a Register reporter. The officer then shot pepper spray at him, knocking him to the ground, before he was handcuffed and jailed, Robnett said.

Robnett and Sahouri testified that they did not hear any earlier police orders to leave the scene, and that they did not interfere with the officers who arrested them.

The newspaper assigned Sahouri to cover the protest at Merle Hay mall days after the death of George Floyd, a Black Minneapolis man who was declared dead after a white officer put his knee on his neck for about nine minutes.

Des Moines Register executive editor Carol Hunter testified that Sahouri did her job "very well" that night, reporting observations and images of the event live on Twitter. She noted the protests were the largest in the city in decades.

A second Register reporter who was with Sahouri, Katie Akin, testified that she was surprised to see Sahouri get arrested because "I didn't understand us to be breaking any laws." Akin yelled that they were journalists and showed a press badge, before Akin was told to leave without arrest.

Wilson, an 18-year Des Moines Police Department veteran, said he responded to the protest and found a "riotous mob" breaking store windows and throwing rocks and water bottles at officers. He said his unit was told to clear a parking lot, and he used a device known as a fogger to blanket the area with clouds of pepper spray.

He said he decided Sahouri needed to be arrested when she did not leave and that he was unaware she was a journalist when he grabbed her. He said that Robnett tried to pull Sahouri out of his grasp, and he deployed more pepper spray that "incapacitated" Robnett.

Sahouri had her hands cuffed in zip ties and was taken to jail in a police van.

Under cross-examination by defense attorney Nicholas Klinefeldt, Wilson said that he charged Sahouri with interference because she briefly pulled her left arm away while he was arresting her. He acknowledged that he didn't mention that claim in his police report.

Wilson said he failed to activate his body camera before arresting Sahouri, saying he mistakenly believed it was recording.

The cameras are always capturing video when on and can retrieve video of incidents that were not recorded in some circumstances. Officers who fail to record significant incidents are required by department policy to notify supervisors, who can then try to recover video. Wilson said he didn't do that.

Prosecutors say Sahouri and Robnett ignored police orders to leave the area that were broadcast over a public address system about 90 minutes before their arrests.

The defense argued those orders intended only to clear an intersection where protesters were surrounding a squad car. Body camera video played for jurors showed officers yelling at protesters to get out of the intersection and be peaceful. Separate orders to disperse could be heard faintly in the background — so quiet that an officer testifying for the prosecution struggled to make them out.

Sahouri testified she didn't hear any dispersal orders and continued reporting on what she called a historical moment.

"It's important for journalists to be on the scene and document what's happening," she said.

California recall threat puts pressure on Newsom speech

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom is set to give perhaps the most important speech of his political life Tuesday, and he's spent weeks laying the groundwork for an upbeat address aimed at nearly 40 million people exhausted by a year of coronavirus restrictions.

Newsom's popularity has fallen significantly after reaching record highs at the start of the pandemic and he's likely to face a recall election later this year driven by critics of his stewardship during the crisis. That makes Tuesday's State of the State a critical step for keeping voters on his side.

Dr. Mindy Romero, founder and director of the Center for Inclusive Democracy at the University of Southern California, said the speech is an opportunity and a test. Newsom needs to assert his focus on vaccination equity, reassure the general population that California is on the right track and back up his claims that his pandemic restrictions were the right choice.

And the often wonky-sounding governor must speak plainly, Romero said.

"He has to really make the case that he has positively changed the tide in California, that he really has protected Californians," she said.

The speech traditionally is delivered in the Capitol to a joint session of the Legislature. This time, Newsom will speak from Dodger Stadium, which has served as a mass testing and vaccination center.

It comes a year after Newsom enacted the nation's first statewide stay-at-home order. California fared relatively well for many months but by the end of the year was in the throes of the worst surge, and virus deaths skyrocketed to more than 54,000, the most in the country.

The anti-Newsom effort is driven by Republicans hoping to regain a political foothold in California by tapping into widespread frustration over business restrictions and school closures. Organizers say they have more than the 1.5 million signatures needed to force an election, likely late in the year.

Newsom previously delivered his State of the State on a February morning, attracting a limited public audience. Waiting until March gives him the benefit of much improved virus conditions and by delivering it in the evening from the largest media market in the state he will draw far more public attention.

The state updated its reopening map hours before his speech, announcing nine counties have moved to less restrictive tiers. The San Francisco Bay Area counties of Alameda, home to Oakland, and Solano were among six that moved from the most restrictive purple tier io the lower red tier, allowing for the resumption of some indoor business activities. Three sparsely populated counties moved into even less restrictive tiers.

Meanwhile, vaccinations are increasing. California has administered more than 10 million doses, and for nearly a month Newsom has been on a tour of sites around the state to highlight that it has established an enormous capacity that will allow far more inoculations as federal shipments increase.

On Monday, he was in the Central Valley for the fifth time in recent weeks, showing off progress and pledging attention to the area hard hit by the virus and one of the few that's still represented in Washington by Republicans, including GOP House leader Kevin McCarthy.

Newsom is coming off a strong week that saw him outline a speedier reopening plan tied to vaccinating 2 million of California's most vulnerable residents; sign a law aimed at getting the youngest kids back in classrooms by April 1; and announce that outdoor sports stadiums, theme parks and concert venues can reopen with limited attendance next month.

"Sports is a rallying cry that is bipartisan," said Jaime Regalado, an emeritus professor of political science at California State University, Los Angeles.

"For an incumbent under the gun from seemingly so many different directions and so many forces, this is an opportune time to talk about what you're doing right and how things are going in California," he said.

Newsom's approval rating fell from 65% last spring to 54% last month, according to the Public Policy Institute of California. He took a major hit when it was revealed he went to the high-end French Laundry restaurant for a lobbyist's birthday party as he was urging Californians to stay home. Photos from the event showed Newsom not wearing a mask and sitting close to other guests.

"He comes into this State of the State address really, I think, needing to show Californians that he's in charge and he has a plan," said Mark Baldassare, the institute's president and chief executive officer.

Two Republicans running for governor — former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer and businessman John Cox, have painted Newsom as an out-of-touch elitist and pointed to the French Laundry dinner and Newsom's failure to get public schoolchildren back into classrooms while his own children received in-person instruction at a private school.

While Newsom has faced criticism throughout the pandemic from some Democratic lawmakers and local officials who felt he wasn't including them in decision-making, in recent weeks Democrats have lined up behind Newsom and offered regular praise for his leadership.

Even Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who won California's 2020 Democratic presidential primary, stepped in Monday.

"Right-wing Republicans in CA are trying to recall Gavin Newsom for the crime of telling people to wear masks and for listening to scientists during COVID," he tweeted. "We must all unite to oppose the recall in California."

Romero said while it's unlikely Newsom will actually be recalled, even facing an election could harm his political future and be a distraction for Democrats nationally.

"Nothing in California happens in a bubble. It damages a politician to face a recall election, period," Romero said.

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This story has been corrected to say that Sanders won California's 2020 presidential primary, not both the 2016 and 2020 presidential primaries.

EXPLAINER: How Myanmar is cracking down on journalists

By ELAINE KURTENBACH Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Myanmar's military-controlled government is cracking down on coverage of mass protests, raiding media companies and detaining dozens of journalists since its Feb. 1 coup, including Thein Zaw of The Associated Press.

The crackdown comes as the military has escalated violence against mass protests and as independent media continue to cover the arrests and shootings by troops in cities across Myanmar. In some instances, journalists are using social media to get the information out.

How has the media landscape in Myanmar changed since the coup? Here's a look:

HOW IS THE GOVERNMENT SUPPRESSING NEWS?

Authorities raided the offices of Kamayut Media on Monday, detaining its co-founder, Han Thar Nyein, and editor-in-chief, Nathan Maung. Witnesses said seven military trucks were involved in the raid, according to a member of Han Thar Nyein's family. The military also raided the offices of Mizzima News.

A day earlier, five local outlets — Mizzima, DVB, Khit Thit Media, Myanmar Now and 7Day News — were banned from broadcasting or providing any information on any media platform or using any technology after their licenses were canceled, state broadcaster MRTV reported. All had covered the protests extensively and often livestreamed video.

Myanmar Now, an independent news service, reported that police broke down the door of its office Monday and seized computers, printers and parts of the newsroom's data server. It cited unnamed witnesses and showed a photo of CCTV footage. But it said the office had been evacuated in late January.

Human rights groups an journalism organizations have condemned the attacks on freedom of the press.

HOW ARE INDEPENDENT MEDIA OUTLETS RESPONDING?

For now, they are vowing to press on despite the risks.

"What is certain is that we will not stop covering the enormous crimes the regime has been committing throughout the country," said Swe Win, Myanmar Now's editor-in-chief.

Mizzima, another privately owned, independent local news outlet, put out a statement on its website saying it "continues to fight against the military coup and for the restoration of democracy and human rights" using various online and multimedia platforms. Other outlets also still reported on protests Tuesday. Some media organizations are trying to operate from abroad.

WHAT KIND OF MEDIA ARE STILL LEGALLY OPERATING IN MYANMAR?

Myanmar seems to be reverting to its old system where officially sanctioned media are entirely state-controlled, as they were before August 2012. Even before the coup, under the military-dominated, quasi-civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, journalists faced arrest and harassment for reporting on sensitive topics such as abuses against its Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority.

Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were given seven-year prison sentences, but later pardoned, for trying to investigate a massacre of Rohingya civilians. Myanmar ranked 139th of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' 2020 World Press Freedom index. Journalists often have faced criminal prosecution for online defamation.

The English-language Myanmar Times announced it had suspended all publications for three months beginning Feb. 21. That move came after many of its staff quit to protest the paper's agreement to follow a junta order not to use the word "coup" to describe the military takeover.

Another state-controlled newspaper, the Global New Light of Myanmar, is still publishing. Other state media include the Myanmar News Agency and army-controlled Myawaddy TV.

WHAT ARE THE LONGER-TERM RAMIFICATIONS?

Suppressing all reporting would require a complete blackout of all internet and satellite communications. Apart from the legal and human rights implications, that would be a huge setback for the country's economy. Myanmar's businesses are highly reliant on the internet and on digital platforms like Facebook, having developed quickly in the past few years after decades of relative isolation under previous military governments.

So far, the junta has chosen to shut down internet links at night, hindering but not completely stopping such communications. Because modern businesses rely heavily on the internet and the free-flow of communication and information, the military's actions are further damaging a business environment already devastated by the coup and its aftermath.

GOP struggles to define Biden, turns to culture wars instead

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and the Democrats were on the brink of pushing through sprawling legislation with an eyepopping, $1.9 trillion price tag.

But many Republican politicians and conservative commentators had other priorities in recent days. A passionate defense of Dr. Seuss. Serious questions about the future of Mr. Potato Head. Intense scrutiny of Meghan Markle.

The conservatives' relentless focus on culture wars rather than the new president highlights both their strategy for regaining power in Washington and their challenge in doing so. Unlike previous Democratic leaders, Biden himself simply isn't proving to be an easy target or animating figure for the GOP base, prompting Republicans to turn to the kind of cultural issues the party has used to cast Democrats as elitist and out of touch with average Americans.

"There's just not the antipathy to Biden like there was Obama. He just doesn't drive conservative outrage," said Alex Conant, a longtime GOP operative, who worked for the Republican National Committee in 2009 as they labored to undermine then-President Barack Obama.

"They never talk about Biden. It's amazing," Conant said of the conservative news media. "I think Fox covered Dr. Seuss more than Biden's stimulus bill in the week leading up to the vote."

The challenge is a continuation of the 2020 campaign, when then-President Trump struggled to land a consistent attack on Biden. The branding of Biden as "sleepy" never stuck in the same way as Trump's derision of Hillary Clinton as "crooked" in 2016. Other GOP efforts to define Biden as a radical or to attack his mental acuity also didn't resonate.

Merchandise stands outside Trump's rallies featured buttons and shirts mocking Clinton and Obama, but few bashing Biden. Clinton, who remains reviled on the right, was featured far more prominently on stage at last month's annual Conservative Political Action Conference in Florida than the current occupant of the Oval Office.

The GOP is focusing more on America's culture wars than on Biden, including a relatively new villain decried as "cancel culture."

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy tweeted a video of himself reading from Dr. Seuss in the days after the author's publishing house announced it was discontinuing several books that contained racist imagery. And former Trump aide Stephen Miller joined others on the right in launching a Twitter defense of Buckingham Palace after Markle, in a blockbuster interview with Oprah Winfrey, alleged racist treatment by an unnamed member of the monarchy.

"It's gonna take Republicans a few weeks to realize how badly they got rolled on the COVID bill while they wasted all their precious time and energy whining about Dr. Seuss," tweeted Amanda Carpenter, a former adviser to Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas.

Biden's strategy on the culture war issues has been to largely not engage. White House press secretary Jen Psaki danced around questions about Dr. Seuss.

Biden himself has largely stayed gaffe-free, with the exception of his calling decisions by Republican governors to lift mask mandates "Neanderthal," which generated a brief tempest on the right.

Instead, the West Wing has focused on the relief bill, believing that Americans will reward results, not controversy.

"The cancel culture is a huge meme on the right and it may work with the base, but the base is not the country at large," said David Axelrod, former senior adviser to Obama. "That is a sideshow right now, the main event is the virus and how quickly are we going to be able to get back to normal."

Biden, Axelrod said, has remained "a difficult target" for the Republicans.

"He does not engage, he does not personalize his disputes, and while he is pursuing a progressive platform, he does not use the conventional ideological language about it," Axelrod said. "He's not a provocative personality."

Biden, who focused a portion of his campaign trying to win back working-class white voters who left the Democratic Party for Trump, also inherently does not face the racist attacks aimed at Obama or the sexist ones targeted at Clinton.

Much of Trump's campaign's vitriol was directed not at Biden, who sold himself as a middle-of-the-road unifier, but soon-to-be Vice President Kamala Harris, a woman of color. Harris, the Trump team argued, would be truly in charge, with Biden a mere "empty vessel" being used to enact others' radical agendas.

Additionally, Republican efforts to combat Biden have been slowed by the civil war in its own ranks as the party grapples with its direction in Trump's persistent shadow.

Some Republicans argue it will simply take time for the GOP to organize against Biden, given the honeymoon period most new presidents enjoy. Biden has also staked a lower profile than Obama, making him a less effective foil in uniting Republicans.

"I think that's just what happens with a new president," said Josh Holmes, a former aide to Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell, who spearheaded a move to stymie Obama after the 44th president was inaugurated.

"When you lose a big election, there's sort of a scattering effect, (and) it wasn't until June or so and the beginnings of the discussion on Obamacare where we were really able to cohesively fight back," Holmes said. "I think by the spring, you're dealing with a much more cohesive Republican Party than you are the first couple weeks."

Republicans believe there will be opportunities to better push back when the White House moves onto thornier issues like immigration, voting rights legislation and a potentially massive infrastructure and jobs bill. Many also believe that the ongoing herky-jerky process to reopen schools for in-person learning could end up damaging Biden.

All the while, the Biden White House is underscoring its attempts at bipartisanship, putting the Republicans on the defensive for not signing onto the broadly popular COVID relief bill.

"Many of the Republicans who voted against this are outliers and are against the grain of what the people in their own districts supported," Psaki said. "So they may be getting questions about that once relief goes out, once schools are able to upgrade facilities and benefit from these checks."

Biden dog Major in doghouse after injuring security agent

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has Major trouble.

Family dogs Major and Champ have been banished from the White House for a doggie time out in Delaware after Major caused a "minor injury" to a Secret Service agent.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki explained the canine caper Tuesday by saying the dogs "are still getting acclimated and accustomed to their new surroundings and new people."

"On Monday, the first family's younger dog Major was surprised by an unfamiliar person and reacted in a way that resulted in a minor injury to the individual, which was handled by the White House medical unit, with no further treatment needed," Psaki said.

She would not confirm that a Secret Service agent was injured in Monday's incident, but an administration official later said an agent was Major's victim. The agent was not seriously injured, said the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

Psaki said plans already had been made to send the dogs to Delaware for care while Biden's wife, Jill, left town on Monday to spend Tuesday and Wednesday touring U.S. military installations in Washington state and California. The dogs will return to the White House soon, Psaki said.

"With the first lady traveling for three days, Champ and Major went to Delaware to stay with family friends," Michael LaRosa, spokesperson for Jill Biden, said Tuesday in an email.

Jill Biden has been preoccupied with getting the German shepherds settled in at the White House, which can be a difficult place even for a human to get used to. The president said a few weeks ago that even he is still getting used to the trappings of his office.

"I've been obsessed with getting our dogs settled because we have (an) old dog and we have a very young dog," the first lady told talk-show host Kelly Clarkson in a recent interview.

"They have to take the elevator. They're not used to that. They have to go out on the South Lawn with lots of people watching them," she said. "So, you know, that's what I've been obsessed with, just getting everybody settled and calm."

Major, who is about 3 years old, burst onto the national scene late last year after Biden slipped during

doggie playtime at home near Wilmington and broke a bone in his right foot.

The Bidens adopted Major in 2018 from the Delaware Humane Association.

They got Champ, who at age 13 is less spry and likely calmer, from a breeder. He joined the family after Joe Biden was elected vice president in 2008.

Jill Biden brought the dogs to the White House shortly after the inauguration in January.

White House furniture is off limits, she said, but Major has showed his disobedient side. "I caught him on the couch the other day, but he quickly jumped down," the first lady told Clarkson last month. The dogs are allowed to run around on the South Lawn, she said.

Their favorite spot is "wherever we are. Even if my door's closed, they're sitting right outside the door like, 'Let me in, let me in,'" Jill Biden said.

CNN reported late Monday, citing unidentified sources, that the dogs were sent to Delaware after Major was involved in a "biting incident" with an unidentified White House security team member.

Kitty Block, president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, said serious dog bites are rare and that owners can reduce the likelihood of a bite or other accident by getting to know the canines and the signals they send when they're scared or feeling stressed.

Like humans, some dogs adapt to new environments quickly while others may need weeks or a few months, Block said.

"Introducing dogs slowly to new rooms, environments and people can help make the adjustment period smoother," she said in an email, adding that each dog is different.

Meanwhile, Jill Biden previously promised to broaden the family's pet pool by eventually introducing a cat to the mix, too.

Psaki had no update to offer Tuesday on the cat's arrival but predicted the announcement of White House feline "will break the internet."

The White House hasn't had a feline resident since President George W. Bush's cat India.

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Associated Press writer Colleen Long contributed to this report.

Royal family says Harry, Meghan racism charges 'concerning'

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Buckingham Palace said Tuesday that allegations of racism made earlier this week by Prince Harry and Meghan were "concerning" and would be addressed privately by the royal family.

The comments, made in a statement issued on behalf Queen Elizabeth II, are the first from the palace since the two-hour television interview with Meghan and Harry rocked the royal family. Meghan, who is biracial, said the palace had failed to help her when she had suicidal thoughts and that an unidentified member of the royal family had raised "concerns" about the color of her baby's skin when she was pregnant with her son, Archie.

"The whole family is saddened to learn the full extent of how challenging the last few years have been for Harry and Meghan," the palace said. "The issues raised, particularly that of race, are concerning. While some recollections may vary, they are taken very seriously and will be addressed by the family privately."

The interview, conducted by Oprah Winfrey and which aired Sunday night in the U.S. and a day later in Britain, has divided people around the world. While many say the allegations demonstrate the need for change inside a palace that hasn't kept pace with the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, others have criticized Harry and Meghan for dropping their bombshell while Harry's 99-year-old grandfather, Prince Philip, remains hospitalized in London after a heart procedure.

Anna Whitelock, a professor of history and director of the Centre for the Study of Modern Monarchy at Royal Holloway, University of London, said the palace's brief message was an effort to quiet the controversy.

"It's not very long, but it's very precise and it has a clear intent — and that is to close this down as a family matter; to make clear that this is clearly a family in crisis, that there's family issues to sort out, but to separate this very clearly from any criticism or discussion about the institution of monarchy itself," she

told The Associated Press. "And I think time will tell whether that's a distinction that the public will accept."

While the palace often tries to stay above controversy by remaining silent and riding out the storm, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's charges proved so damaging that the family was forced to respond.

The response was likely delayed by the queen's struggle to balance her sometimes-conflicting roles as monarch and grandmother, said Angela Levin, author of "Harry, a Biography of a Prince," before the statement was released. During past crises, the 94-year-old monarch has usually come down on the side of the 1,000-year-old institution she has led since 1952.

"The queen has a motto: Never complain, never explain," Levin told the AP. "And she's stuck with this for decades. But I think in this climate and 2021, everything goes everywhere. There's so much social media that in this instance, she really can't not say anything."

Harry and Meghan married in May 2018 in a ceremony at Windsor Castle that ended with a ride around the town in a horse-drawn carriage. In the early days of their marriage, the couple were seen as the fresh young face of the monarchy for an increasingly multicultural nation.

But the story quickly turned sour. The couple stepped away from royal duties last year and moved to California, saying they wanted to escape racist coverage and unwanted intrusions on their privacy by the British media.

During the interview, Meghan described feeling so isolated and miserable inside the royal family that she had suicidal thoughts, yet when she asked for mental health assistance from the palace's human resources staff, she was told they couldn't help because she wasn't a paid employee. She also said Harry told her there were "concerns and conversations" about how dark Archie's skin would be.

Winfrey later said Harry told her off camera that the family member wasn't Queen Elizabeth II or Prince Philip, sparking a flurry of speculation about who it could be.

Harry also revealed that the stresses the couple endured had ruptured relations with his father, Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, and his brother, Prince William, illuminating the depth of the family divisions that led the couple to step away from royal duties and move to California last year.

But the most explosive issue was race. The royal family has tried to address that head on, although the rest of the discussion is likely to take place in private, Whitelock said.

"I'm sure there will be a lot of soul searching within the royal family, but this is going to be very much behind closed doors and we're not going to see dramatic statements, dramatic changes," she said. "This is going to be about a family who are going to have to look at themselves and reflect on what's happened and what needs to happen and what needs to change."

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Follow all stories on Prince Harry and Meghan's interview at https://apnews.com/PrinceHarry

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This story has been corrected to show that the name of center is Centre for the Study of Modern Monarchy, not Centre for the Study of the History of the Monarchy.

Pandemic shapes trial of Minneapolis ex-cop in Floyd's death

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Because the trial of a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death is being held during the coronavirus pandemic, the courtroom has been overhauled for safety.

Gone are the traditional jury box and gallery, replaced with widely spaced seats and desks for a limited contingent of attorneys, jurors and media. Plexiglas barriers and hand sanitizer are everywhere, and the participants – even the judge – wear masks.

The pandemic has upended court systems across the country, delaying jury trials and creating huge backlogs of cases. Video and teleconference hearings have allowed judges to keep the wheels of justice grinding, albeit slowly. Many courts have installed barriers or moved jury orientation and even trials themselves to bigger spaces such as convention centers to get at least some jury trials going again.

In Minnesota, in-person criminal jury trials have been mostly on hold since November. Chief Justice Lorie Gildea last month allowed them to resume effective March 15, with proper safety protocols consistent with

guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health. Most other proceedings will continue to be held remotely through April 30. A handful of exceptions have been allowed, including for the trial of Derek Chauvin's trial, the former Minneapolis officer charged in Floyd's death.

"We are gradually increasing in-person activities in court facilities in a safe and responsible manner that will allow the courts to fulfill our constitutional obligation, while we continue to do all that we can to protect public health and safety," Gildea said in a statement.

Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter. Floyd was declared dead May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against the Black man's neck for about nine minutes, holding his position even after Floyd went limp. Floyd's death sparked sometimes violent protests in Minneapolis and beyond, leading to a nationwide reckoning on race and one of the highest-profile trials of a police officer in U.S. history.

Citing the need to comply with social distancing and other safety rules, Hennepin County District Judge Peter Cahill separated Chauvin's case from that of the three other ex-officers charged in Floyd's death, who are set for trial in August. Among other things, Cahill concluded in January, no courtroom in the building was big enough to safely accommodate four defense teams and the prosecution team all at once.

Prosecutors tried unsuccessfully to persuade Cahill to reconsider his decision to hold two trials. They argued instead for holding a single joint trial sometime this summer when they hoped enough Minnesotans would have been vaccinated to reduce the risk of any participants getting COVID-19.

They submitted an affidavit from prominent University of Minnesota epidemiologist Michael Osterholm, who warned that it could be "extremely dangerous" to try Chauvin this month, with "potentially catastrophic consequences for public heath." He expressed fear that it could become a "superspreader event," given the large number of protesters and out-of-town journalists it was likely to draw, especially if more-contagious coronavirus variants cause a spike in cases.

But Cahill provided little explanation for rejecting those arguments, having already ruled that the proceedings would comply with court safety rules, and he kept the case on course for the trial's opening on Monday.

The 18th-floor courtroom Cahill borrowed is the largest in the Hennepin County Government Center, and it has been overhauled for the purposes of Chauvin's trial. The seating capacity was sharply reduced in the remodeling. The theater-style seating in what was the gallery was removed to create space. Tall plexiglass dividers separate the judge and court staffers from the limited number of other people in the courtroom. Clear plastic sheets also run down the middle of the defense and prosecution tables. When Chauvin and defense attorney Eric Nelson want to confer, they need to lean back a bit.

The normal jury box has been replaced with two rows of office chairs, spaced out, with small desks. There is no space for the general public. Seats are reserved in the back for just one Floyd family member and just one Chauvin family member. Only two pool reporters are allowed in at a time, plus a member of the Court TV team that's providing the feed.

The constitutional requirement for a public trial is being satisfied by allowing gavel-to-gavel TV coverage, which is rare in Minnesota courts. Cahill has taken pains to keep the identities of the potential jurors secret, prohibiting them from being shown on camera. But he got a surprise Tuesday when a retired judge watching from home texted him to let him know that he could see a reflection of Juror No. 1 in one of the plexiglass panels. The problem was quickly fixed.

Everyone in the courtroom is required to wear a face mask. The main exceptions are when attorneys speak at the podium, which has plastic panes on three sides, and when potential jurors respond to questions.

When the judge and the attorneys need to conduct a sidebar discussion, they don't huddle around the judge's bench like they normally would. Instead they put on headsets so they can hash out legal or procedural issues out of earshot of jurors.

Only four prosecutors and two defense attorneys are in court at any given time; the rest of their teams must participate remotely. So must the defense teams for the three other ex-officers facing trial this summer.

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

When to expect payments, other benefits from relief package

By SARAH SKIDMORE SELL AP Personal Finance Writer

As the latest federal pandemic relief package makes its way to President Joe Biden's desk, Americans may be wondering when the benefits will reach them.

The $1.9 trillion known as the "American Rescue Plan" is massive, both in size and scope. It includes direct payments to most Americans, aid to small businesses, financial help for schools and much more to help the country recover from the financial ravages of the pandemic.

The house is expected to give its final approval early this week and then it heads to Biden for his signature. The timing of its passage is crucial — most notably because some pandemic unemployment benefits will be coming to an end on Sunday.

Millions of taxpayers could begin see direct benefits almost immediately, some later this month and others taking several months to accomplish.

Here's you need to know about the main planks of the spending plan:

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RELIEF CHECKS

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

The size of the check would shrink for those making slightly more, with a hard cut-off at $80,000 for individuals and $160,000 for married couples.

Biden estimates that 85% of Americans will be eligible for the payment. Some groups that were not eligible for prior payments — such as dependent college students and disabled adults — are now eligible.

Biden said the goal is to send out the payments starting this month.

"That means the mortgage can get paid. That means the child can stay in community college. That means maintaining the health insurance you have," Biden said. "It's going to make a big difference in so many of lives in this country."

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that the administration is doing everything in its power to expedite payments. As such, the Treasury is working to get more payments to taxpayers by direct deposit. The agency will be able to send direct deposit payments to those who have their information on file from 2019 or 2020 tax filings or who provided it through other programs.

Biden's signature will not appear on the checks, a move his predecessor made that was criticized as a delay in getting payments out.

A new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that 30% of Americans say their current household income remains lower than it was when the pandemic began.

The IRS and the Treasury Department began to issue the last round of payments by both direct deposit and check in only a matter of days after the outlays became law in late December.

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UNEMPLOYMENT

Expanded unemployment benefits from the federal government would be extended through Sept. 6 at $300 a week. That's on top of payments from state unemployment insurance program.

Despite a modest recovery, millions of Americans remain unemployed. The plan would also extend two key pandemic programs, which benefit about 11.8 million Americans.

These pandemic unemployment benefits were set to expire Sunday, so if there is a delay in the bill's passage there could be a gap in benefits. But the National Employment Law Project anticipates if things are finalized this week, states and existing beneficiaries likely won't see any interruption in payments.

The first $10,200 of jobless benefits would be non-taxable for households with incomes under $150,000 but only for benefits from 2020. The IRS will have to issue guidelines on how to put this into practice.

Additionally, the measures provides a 100% subsidy of COBRA health insurance premiums to ensure

that the laid-off workers can remain on their employer health plans at no cost from April 1 through the end of September.

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TAX BREAKS

The package contains a number of valuable tax breaks. One of the most notable is an increase in the tax credit that taxpayers can claim for dependent children.

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

Families would get the full credit regardless of how little they make in a year.

The aim is to deliver the money, which is an advance payment on the tax credit, in smaller monthly payments instead of one larger lump sum.

The exact timing of when this money would arrive is still unclear. If the Treasury determines that a monthly payment isn't feasible, then the payments are to be made as frequently as possible.

Elaine Maag, principal research associate in the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, said monthly payments could begin as soon as July but if the government opts for a quarterly payments it take until could fall.

Add in the $1,400 checks and other items in the proposal, and the legislation would reduce the number of children living in poverty by more than half, according to the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University.

The bill also significantly expands the Earned Income Tax Credit for 2021 by making it available to people without children. The credit for low and moderate-income adults would be worth $543 to $1,502, depending on income and filing status.

The benefit of the EITC would not be felt until taxpayers file their returns for the 2021 tax year, which would typically be in the beginning of 2022.

The plan does not include student loan forgiveness, but it does allow for any income from the forgiveness of student loans be to be tax-free from 2021 through 2025.

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AP congressional reporter Kevin Freking and staff reporter Josh Boak in Washington contributed to this report.

'Umbrella of stress' on GM staff, 2 years after plant closed

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

When General Motors ended a half-century of building cars in Ohio's blue collar corner, 1,600 workers had to decide whether to accept the automaker's offer to move to another factory.

Those with enough seniority retired. A few started new careers. Everyone else from GM's shuttered assembly plant in Lordstown went as far away as Texas, Tennessee, and Missouri, some leaving behind their families so they could hang onto their pensions and high-paying union jobs.

Now, two years later, many of those autoworkers are finding that their lives and futures are just as unsettled.

Worries about the fast-changing auto industry and the stability of their jobs have left hundreds still unsure whether to uproot entirely and sell their homes. Some are spending every weekend driving hundreds of miles back to Ohio to see their children. Others are holding out hope that the next contract will give them a chance for an early retirement.

No matter their situation, they all face the same question: is it worth chasing a job always seen as a sure path to the American dream?

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'IT'S LIKE HE WASN'T EVEN THERE'

By now, Tiffany Davis figured she and her two children would be settling into a new place with her husband, Tom. That was the plan — to join him when the past school year ended — after he transferred

to GM's Corvette factory in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Instead, she's been a single mom much of the past 18 months to their two children back in Ohio, where she also teaches fifth grade. Only on weekends are they all together when Tom makes the 16-hour round trip home.

Even then, they only get one full day together that's usually filled with catching up on household chores.

When the weekend is over, "It's like he wasn't even there," Tiffany Davis said.

"I knew this would be difficult, but I could not have anticipated how difficult it would be. I'm worn out and exhausted," she said. "We're always under this umbrella of stress."

Tom Davis, 39, has been home more than expected this year because of work shutdowns caused by the pandemic and supply issues. That's added more worries, and comes at a time when GM is beginning a transition to making battery-powered vehicles that will need fewer workers.

"It brings up all of those scary feelings we had before," she said.

Tom, who started working for GM soon after high school and has about 11 years before he can retire, said he and his wife don't know what will come next now that their plans to move to Kentucky are on hold.

Do they continue living apart? Do they uproot their kids from school? Whose job is more stable? Should he transfer to a closer plant when he's eligible in another year?

"I still have days where I'm like, 'Did I do the right thing?'" he said.

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'IT'S TOUGH NOW'

That's a question Jim Moyers asks just about every day he's away from his family.

Moyers transferred almost two years ago to GM's assembly plant in Lansing, Michigan, that makes Cadillacs and Chevy Camaros. He shares a sparsely furnished apartment with another former Lordstown worker.

It's a four-hour drive every weekend — 263 miles to be exact — back to his wife and three children in the Youngstown area.

What he misses most are the routine things, like father-daughter dances and helping his son change the oil in his car.

"It's tough now. That's all my wife's responsibility," he said.

He also missed his son's last high school track meet, and most of his youngest daughter's volleyball games. His wife, Mindy, said that until the move, he never missed an event. Now he watches the volleyball games on FaceTime.

"She could hear him cheering," said Mindy Moyers. "My husband's very loud. She definitely knew he was there."

Moyers, 54, said he didn't have much choice in accepting a transfer, being too young to retire and too late to start a new career.

Now, he's hoping the next round of United Auto Workers contract talks in 2023 will give him a ticket to early retirement if GM decides that fewer workers will be needed in the years to come.

"I'll get out at the first opportunity I have," he said.

GM is building a new electric vehicle battery plant near its former factory in Lordstown, which was sold to an upstart electric truck maker that plans to begin production later this year. Both projects will bring new jobs, but very few of the GM workers who moved out of state see those as a path back to Ohio because its doubtful they would get the same kind of pay and benefits.

Dave Green, former president of the UAW local in Lordstown, said quite a few of the plant's former workers are within sight of retirement and looking for a chance to move on.

While just about all of the workers are quick to say they're thankful they have jobs, they also feel "stuck" far from home.

Green estimated that 40% of those who transferred to factories around the country still have their families in Ohio or haven't sold their homes and plan to move back once they can start collecting a pension.

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'NOT THE LIFE I WAS PLANNING'

Matt Moorhead tried to stick it out.

Like so many others, the 48-year-old Moorhead didn't want to uproot his wife from her career or their daughter from high school. And he didn't want to walk away from a job that he was counting on to put his two children through college.

So he went by himself in the summer of 2019 to Lansing where he paid for an apartment on top of his mortgage back in Ohio. His days were spent staring at the TV and eating frozen meals "just so you could go to work."

The new job on the assembly line left him with a knee that was ailing him. "It was not the life I was planning on living," he said.

After six months of traveling back and forth and "trying to be a dad through a cellphone," his wife convinced him to quit.

They're now getting by on savings and his wife's job at a hospital. What happens next for Moorhead, after 24 years at GM, is still up in the air. He spent last summer managing a golf course.

"When GM was closing there was a fear of what happens next and everything was going to end, but it doesn't," he said. "Our futures aren't guaranteed. But I guess our futures were never guaranteed."

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This story was updated to correct that Moyers' drive home is 263 miles, not 463 miles.

Four oaks, one sacred destiny: Recreating Notre Dame's spire

BY THOMAS ADAMSON and NICOLAS GARRIGA undefined

JUPILLES, France (AP) — Four French oaks that have been standing for hundreds of years in a once-royal forest now have a sacred destiny. Felled Tuesday in the Loire region's Forest of Berce, they have been selected to reconstruct Notre Dame cathedral's fallen spire.

The 93-metre-high spire, made of wood and clad in lead, became the most potent symbol of the April 2019 blaze when it was seen engulfed in flames, collapsing dramatically into the inferno.

Last July amid a public outcry, French President Emmanuel Macron ended speculation that the 19th century peak designed by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc could be rebuilt in a modern style. He announced it would be rebuilt exactly as it was before. And that began a nationwide tree hunt, culminating in a painstaking selection in January and February of this year.

Some 1,000 oaks in more than 200 French forests, both private and public, were chosen to make the frame of the cathedral transept and spire — destined to be admired on the Paris skyline for potentially hundreds of years.

"Given the place occupied by the cathedral in the hearts of the French, in the history of France and the world ... we are happy (that) the entire industry — from foresters to sawyers — is mobilized to meet this challenge," said Michel Druilhe, President of France Bois Foret, a national interprofessional forestry network.

Reconstruction of a 12th-century cathedral such as Notre Dame in wood is a daunting prospect. The inside was such a lattice of beams and supports that it was affectionately called the "forest." Calls to reinforce it with fireproof concrete were dismissed, even after such material helped limit the fallout from a blaze in the Gothic Nantes Cathedral last year.

Understandably, the dimensions required for Notre Dame's anointed timbers are clinically precise: Many trunks have to measure over 1 meter (more than 3 feet) wide and 18 meters (60 feet) long. Eight of the trees — destined for the most monumental part of the spire — were found in the Forest of Berce that once belonged to the Kings of France.

On Tuesday, chainsaw-wielding tree surgeons in Berce scaled the special oaks to fell them in a race against the clock. All 1,000 must be "harvested" all around the country by the end of March, otherwise harmful tree sap and moisture could enter the wood fibers. So far, so good.

"We have just measured one, it fits the required criteria in length and diameter. The only thing left to do is make the beam for Notre Dame," Anthony Jeanneau, ONF Forestry Technician, told AP as trees fell noisily around him.

There is in fact one other requirement: Patience. The trunks must be left out to dry for up to 18 months.

That fact alone show why Macron's pledge to rebuild the cathedral within five years — by 2024 — has been widely dismissed as unrealistic.

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Adamson reported from Leeds, England

Report finds 'no racist intent' behind song 'Eyes of Texas'

By JIM VERTUNO AP Sports Writer

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The University of Texas' long-awaited report on "The Eyes of Texas" has found that the school song has "no racist intent," but the school president said athletes and band members will not be required to sing or participate when the song is played at games and campus events.

The 58-page report, released Tuesday, was commissioned last year by school President Jay Hartzell after a group of Texas athletes, most notably football players, demanded the school drop the song as part of racial injustice protests.

Football players sparked outrage among alumni when they chose to leave the field instead of taking part in the traditional sing-along with fans after several games. Some fans sent emails to Hartzell warning the school would lose financial donors.

A 24-person panel charged with studying the song's origins, lyrics and history determined it was rooted in a message of accountability and striving toward excellence. The report also noted the song was first performed at a minstrel show, most likely with performers in blackface.

"These historical facts add complexity and richness to the story of a song that debuted in a racist setting, exceedingly common for the time, but, as the preponderance of research showed, had no racist intent," the report states in its executive summary. "'The Eyes of Texas' should not only unite us, but hold all of us accountable to our institution's core values."

Written in 1903 and sung to the tune of "I've Been Working on the Railroad," the song is an old standard in Longhorns country. For decades, it has been sung after games and graduation ceremonies, and is a popular sing-along at weddings and even funerals

It has also been a sore subject for decades for some minority students. The title was taken from a favored saying of a former school president who had reportedly mimicked remarks by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. The song was routinely performed by musicians in blackface.

The panel was not charged with making a decision on the song's future. Hartzell, with the strong backing of the school's Board of Regents, had already decided the song would stay and insisted that did not undermine the report's credibility.

Hartzell reiterated the song will continue to be played at games and events.

"This report gives us a common set of facts for more conversations," Hartzell said. "It's possible the committee could have uncovered something that could have caused us to reconsider. It did not."

One of the few issues still to be determined was campus participation, particularly among Longhorns athletes. New football coach Steve Sarkisian has said his team will sing the song "proudly" after games but the report included a recommendation that students not be required to sing it.

"Nobody has been, or will be, required to sing the song," Hartzell said. "That's going to be going forward the way we continue to operate. We hope that as people go through the report, read through the facts, they'll find ways to participate in some way. Whether it's the case of the athletes standing on the field, or the fans in the stands as we sing, there's going to be no punishment, no mandate, no requirement if people choose not to participate."

Hartzell said he planned to meet Tuesday with the football team and other athletes.

"They started this, they should get to hear about the report first," Hartzell said. "I hope we'll get more to a point of mutual respect where if you choose to sing and I don't, we don't necessarily judge something about each other in a stark way."

The panel that studied the song was comprised of campus professors, staff and historians and representatives of student and band alumni groups. It also had one current athlete, band member and cheerleader.

Key findings include:

— Researchers said they could find no direct link between the signature line "the eyes of Texas are upon you" and anything Lee might have said to his students at Washington and Lee University, where he was president after the Civil War. The panel determined there is a "very low likelihood" the line originated with Lee.

— The song borrows the melody of "I've Been Working on the Railroad," a song with racist lyrics, most likely because it was already well known and easy to sing.

— Performances at campus minstrel shows with actors in blackface, which continued into the 1960s, are a "painful reality," but the song does not appear to have been composed as a minstrel tune.

— The panel's 40 recommendations include teaching the song's history at student orientation events, and allowing new alternative versions composed or performed by Black musicians.

"The report does not have a vindication or a smoking gun," said panel chairman Richard Reddick, associate dean for equity, community engagement and outreach in the college of education. "Reading the report will help us reflect on what it means to be a university found in the post-bellum era in the Jim Crow south, and to have parts of our history in that moment, and what it means to evolve over time."

Meghan's racism claims come as no surprise to Black Britons

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Explosive allegations by Meghan, Duchess of Sussex that she faced racist attitudes from both the palace and the U.K. press have sent ripples of shock around the world. But they came as no surprise to many Black Britons.

Whether it's the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people of color or the lack of non-white faces at the top of British media and politics, ethnic minorities in the U.K. say racist attitudes and structures of discrimination are pervasive — and all too often denied by society at large.

"This is a country that doesn't want to have an honest conversation about race," historian David Olusoga, who presented the TV series "Black and British: A Forgotten History," said Tuesday.

In a TV interview with Oprah Winfrey, the former Meghan Markle said isolation and a lack of support from the royal household after her marriage to Prince Harry drove her to thoughts of suicide. She also said an unnamed member of the royal family expressed "concerns" to Harry about the color of her unborn child's skin — a statement that drew an astonished "What?" from Winfrey.

Tiwa Adebayo, a communications consultant and journalist, said the couple's revelations in the interview bore out her worst fears.

"When Meghan joined the royal family, every person of color in the U.K. was worried," she said. "This is an institution that is rooted in colonialism. It's based on white supremacy. I mean, for me, it kind of seemed like 'How could this possibly end well?'

"I expected there to always be that undercurrent of racism," she added. "But to hear it so outright, it's really scary. It's very shocking. And it's hard to see how the royal family is going to come back from this."

It's a long way from the optimism that surrounded Harry and Meghan's royal wedding in 2018. The relationship between a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II and a biracial American actress was hailed as evidence that, in modern Britain, skin color and background no longer mattered.

Harold Wilson, a 57-year-old local authority worker in Brixton, a district at the heart of London's Afro-Caribbean community, said Meghan joining the royal family "should have been an opportunity for them to move forward — but the royal family are not like that."

"Even before the child has been brought into the world, they are worried about the actual tone of the skin of the baby," he said. "That tells you everything about them."

The fairy tale image surrounding the wedding at Windsor Castle faded quickly. Meghan faced tabloid stories about her allegedly demanding behavior and was even criticized for eating avocadoes, which the Daily Mail claimed fuel "human rights abuses, drought and murder."

Even before the wedding, Harry had complained in 2017 about the "racial undertones" in British media

coverage of his then-girlfriend. One tabloid columnist referred to Meghan's "exotic" DNA. A Daily Mail headline described her Los Angeles roots as "(almost) straight outta Compton" and claimed she came from a "gang-scarred" neighborhood. A TV host described Meghan as "uppity."

Meghan and Harry cited the intrusive, racist scrutiny of Britain's tabloid press as a reason for their decision a year ago to give up their jobs as senior royals and move to North America.

The palace issued a rare public statement on a personal matter, saying the royal family was "saddened to learn the full extent of how challenging the last few years have been for Harry and Meghan."

"The issues raised, particularly that of race, are concerning," the statement said. "While some recollections may vary, they are taken very seriously and will be addressed by the family privately."

Like other countries, Britain has faced an uncomfortable reckoning with race since the death of George Floyd, a Black American, at the knee of a U.S. policeman in May 2020 sparked anti-racism protests around the world.

Large Black Lives Matter protests in cities across the U.K. called on the government and institutions to face up to the legacy of the British Empire and the country's extensive profits from the slave trade.

The toppling of a statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston in the city of Bristol in June prompted a pointed debate about how to deal with that history. Many felt such statues extol racism and are an affront to Black Britons. Others argued that removing them was erasing a piece of history.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has criticized the removal of statues, saying "we cannot edit our past." Opponents accuse him of trying to sweep the negative aspects of British history under the carpet.

Olusoga said many Britons like to believe that racism is an American problem, something that takes place elsewhere. He said the U.K. had failed to live up to the story it told itself at the time of Harry and Meghan's wedding: "that we were this modern multicultural country, a country with a Black princess, a country that was at ease with itself, with its history, with its multiculturalism."

"We need to look at ourselves more honestly," he told the BBC. "Now is a moment for self-reflection, not just for the palace, but for the country."

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Hilary Fox and Jo Kearney contributed to this report. ___

Follow all stories on Prince Harry and Meghan's interview at https://apnews.com/Prince Harry

NBA star Russell Westbrook scoring big with own philanthropy

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

Russell Westbrook is known for his magic on the basketball court, his finely honed fashion sense and his media interviews that have spawned memes and GIFs across social media.

A nine-time NBA All-Star and former star at UCLA, Westbrook has also channeled his energies into an off-the-court pursuit long important to him: Philanthropy.

Last month, he unveiled plans to expand his Russell Westbrook Why Not? Foundation and his enterprise firm, Russell Westbrook Enterprises. The expansion will focus on education and investments in finance and other areas that are intended to aid underserved communities.

As the 32-year-old point guard settles into his first season with the Washington Wizards, Westbrook says he plans to continue his philanthropic work full time once his playing days are over — whenever that may be.

The Associated Press spoke recently with Westbrook about his philanthropy and other work. The interview was edited for clarity and length.

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Q: The name of your foundation is called The Russell Westbrook Why Not? Foundation. Why that name?

A: Why Not is like my mantra and attitude. It's the mindset I was able to instill at a young age. A few buddies of mine came up with the mindset, and it got me through adversity and naysayers. It instilled confidence in me to believe, "Why not me? — why not be the person to change this?" That's something I try to spread throughout the world, with basketball as my platform. Alongside that, making sure I use it in the community to give back as well. That's where the Russell Westbrook Why Not? Foundation originated.

I wanted to have a positive, strong message to give to people and our youth. To give them a sense of confidence and swagger when they see the Why Not? Foundation.

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Q: You recently partnered with the LA Promise Fund to launch the Russell Westbrook Why Not? Academy in Los Angeles. What are you aiming to do with that project, and are you planning to expand it to other cities, like Washington, D.C.?

A: It's a blessing to be able to partner with the LA Promise Fund. It's such an amazing partnership when given the opportunity to help our underserved communities, especially in education, given that I started my foundation around education. It was an amazing opportunity to get in the middle and high school: To create curriculums, to help after high school and in job creation. Finding ways to give better education to our youth and underserved communities — proper books and the good things other schools have. And internships for people. When you grow up in the inner city, like myself, you understand how the schools in the city are not as good as the schools outside of the city.

That's something I wanted to make sure my foundation and I took control over, especially in our education system. To start with Los Angeles, and hopefully in the years to come there's opportunity to create somewhere else. Los Angeles was something I wanted to wrap my hands around since I'm from there. I wanted to make sure I have resources for inner-city kids, so they have somewhere to go where they can feel they have the resources they need in job creation and even with mental health. And, obviously, having the best education provided for them.

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Q: You are also partnering with Varo, the online bank, to create financial literacy programs and also joined forces with businessman Chad Brownstein to invest in renewable resources and other areas. Is there a reason you're focusing on these areas? How do you see it fitting into your overall philanthropic work?

A: Chad is a UCLA alum, which is where we created our connection. The biggest thing that I always try to connect with somebody on is: What do they want to do for the underserved communities?

Chad had already done a lot of work in underserved communities. We had conversations on what we can better do to help those communities in Los Angeles. We've been able to create different vehicles and partnerships. We just did a partnership with Varo to help in financial literacy and find ways to impact our financial system, which has been plagued over many years, especially for the underserved and people of color. That's the area I want to tap into with the help of people that have the same goals and visions.

There's been such a huge disparity in our financial system. In order to close that gap, you have to be able to put systems in place and partner with the right people to help underserved communities. Because that's who gets hurt the most — especially African American communities. Those are the people that don't create family wealth or generational wealth.

I want to make sure I have something in place. So I partnered with Varo, because they understand how important it is to serve the underserved and the unbanked. I'm excited about creating a curriculum and strategy. We're in a process of trying to figure out exactly what that is. But I want to make sure I lead the way.

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Q: You're producing a documentary about the 1921 Tulsa race massacre. How did your years playing with the Oklahoma City Thunder influence you and what you learned about this event?

A: I was in Oklahoma for 11 years and kind of grew up in Oklahoma City. I wanted to understand more about the origins of Oklahoma and Tulsa. I had been going to Tulsa almost every season, and I had a camp in Tulsa. I heard about Black Wall Street but never really dived into it or understood the impact of the people and community.

Once I was able to learn the history and dive more deep into it, I was in shock. It's truly sad what happened to all the business and African Americans and people of color that had their businesses wiped away. Now, more than ever, I want to be able to show how history can affect our future. To make sure we understand our history and know that there were people that paved the way and had to struggle and

things were taken away from them. I want to be able to share that with the world and the significance of Black Wall Street.

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Q: What are you thinking about for your future philanthropic work?

A: The overarching theme of my enterprise, foundation and everything I do is for the underserved communities. Every aspect of my business, whether it's financial literacy, education or anywhere I work — I'm always focused on giving our underserved communities access and resources to be able to educate themselves and do anything they want to do in this world.

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AP-NORC poll: Many in US still face COVID-19 financial loss

By KEN SWEET and EMILY SWANSON The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Roughly 4 in 10 Americans say they're still feeling the financial impact of the loss of a job or income within their household as the economic recovery remains uneven one year into the coronavirus pandemic.

A new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research provides further evidence that the pandemic has been devastating for some Americans, while leaving others virtually unscathed or even in better shape, at least when it comes to their finances. The outcome often depended on the type of job a person had and their income level before the pandemic.

The pandemic has particularly hurt Black and Latino households, as well as younger Americans, some of whom are now going through the second major economic crisis of their adult lives.

"I just felt like we were already in a harder position, so (the pandemic) kind of threw us even more under the dirt," said Kennard Taylor, a 20-year-old Black college student at Jackson College. Taylor lost his job as a server in the campus cafeteria in the first weeks of the pandemic and struggled to make rent and car payments while continuing his studies. He had to move back in with his family.

The poll shows that about half of Americans say they have experienced at least one form of household income loss during the pandemic, including 25% who have experienced a household layoff and 31% who say someone in the household was scheduled for fewer hours. Overall, 44% said their household experienced income loss from the pandemic that is still having an impact on their finances.

The poll results are consistent with recent economic data. Roughly 745,000 Americans filed for unemployment benefits the week of Feb. 22, according to the Labor Department, and roughly 18 million Americans remain on the unemployment rolls.

Thirty percent of Americans say their current household income is lower than it was when the pandemic began, while 16% say it is higher and 53% say there's been no change. About half of those who experienced any form of household income loss during the pandemic say their current household income is lower than it was.

The poll's findings reflect what some economists have called a "K-shaped recovery," where there have been divergent fortunes among Americans. Those with office jobs were able to transition to working from home while those who worked in hard-hit industries such as entertainment, dining and travel suffered. The poor have struggled to recover financially compared to the wealthy and Black and Latino households have not bounced back as well as their white counterparts.

Logan DeWitt, 30, kept his job with the government through the pandemic because he could work remotely. But his wife, a childcare worker, lost her job and after months of searching for a new one has returned to school. Their financial situation was further complicated by the fact that their first child was born in the early months of the pandemic.

"We had plans to get a house. Had to scrap that idea, and we consolidated down to just one car. We do a lot of cooking from home and buying in bulk," DeWitt said.

About 1 in 10 Americans say they couldn't make a housing payment in the last month because of the pandemic, and roughly as many say that of a credit card bill. Overall, about a quarter of Americans say they've been unable to pay one or more bills in the last month.

Thirty-eight percent of Hispanics and 29% of Black Americans have experienced a layoff in their household at some point during the past year, compared with 21% of white Americans.

This recession has been particularly hard on younger Americans, too. Forty percent of Americans under 30 report lower income now, compared to March 2020. About 4 in 10 have been scheduled for fewer hours. Roughly a quarter say they quit their job. Many millennials, who experienced the Great Recession early in their adult lives, are now experiencing yet another major financial crisis.

Congress is about to finalize the Biden administration's $1.9 trillion stimulus package that includes aid for many Americans and business still feeling the impact of the pandemic. Timing is crucial — many of the relief measures passed earlier by Congress, most notably unemployment benefits, will be coming to an end in the next few weeks.

"It's really going to help us," said Nikki Luman, 43, from Ohio. Luman worked part-time at her local library, which had to close in the early weeks of the pandemic. The library is still operating at low capacity due to COVID restrictions, which translates into fewer hours for her each week.

"That's $400 a month that we have been missing for the past year," she said.

Things are not as dire as they were in the early stages of the pandemic for some Americans, in part because of the previous measures taken by Washington. Also the changes in lifestyle — less eating out, less traveling, no live entertainment — have allowed some Americans to make their financial lives healthier. In the poll, roughly 4 in 10 say they've been saving more money than usual, and about 3 in 10 have been paying down debt faster than usual.

Tracie Jurgens, 44, works in the trucking industry. Jurgens said her income evaporated in the first weeks of the pandemic as demand for truckers plummeted. Jurgen's boss was able to get a loan through the Paycheck Protection Program for small businesses, which he used to purchase new equipment in the summer as things started to recover.

"I don't know what I would have done if he didn't get another truck," she said.

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Swanson reported from Washington. AP Reporter Nathan Ellgren contributed to this report from Washington.

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The AP-NORC poll of 1,434 adults was conducted Feb. 25-March 1 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points.

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Online:
AP-NORC Center: http://www.apnorc.org/.

Miami janitor quietly feeds thousands, and love's the reason

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Doramise Moreau toils long past midnight in her tiny kitchen every Friday — boiling lemon peels, crushing fragrant garlic and onion into a spice blend she rubs onto chicken and turkey, cooking the dried beans that accompany the yellow rice she'll deliver to a Miami church.

She's singlehandedly cooked 1,000 meals a week since the pandemic's start — a an act of love she's content to perform with little compensation.

Moreau, a 60-year-old widow who lives with her children, nephew and three grandchildren, cooks in the kitchen of a home built by Habitat for Humanity in 2017.

Her days are arduous. She works part-time as a janitor at a technical school, walking or taking the bus. But the work of her heart, the reason she rises each morning, is feeding the hungry.

As a little girl in Haiti, she often pilfered food from her parents' pantry — some dried rice and beans, maybe an onion or an ear of corn — to give to someone who needed it.

"Sometimes when you're looking at people in their face, they don't need to ask you," she explained. "You can see they need something."

Her mother was furious, constantly scolding and threatening Moreau, even telling the priest to refuse to give her communion. But she was not deterred.

"I told her, 'You can whup me today, you can whup me tomorrow, but I'm going to continue to do it.'"

Decades later, Moreau is still feeding the hungry.

She borrows the church truck to buy groceries on Thursday and Friday and cooks into the wee hours of the night for Saturday's feedings. Notre Dame d'Haiti Catholic Church pays for the food, relying on donations. Moreau prepares the meals singlehandedly, while church volunteers serve or deliver them to shut-ins.

"Americans, Spanish, Haitian, they come here," she said. "Even when I'm closing, they say, 'Please, can I have some,' and I give it to them, because if they go home and have nothing it hurts my feelings."

Moreau also feeds people back in her little village north of Port-au-Prince. Despite her meager salary, she sends food pallets monthly to her sisters and brother, nieces, nephews and neighbors, telling her sister over the phone to make sure this person gets a bag of rice and that person gets the sardines.

Every morning before work, for the church's staff, police and local community leaders, Moreau prepares a table with a special Haitian hot tea to ward off colds. She lays out vapors to inhale and other remedies from her homeland believed to strengthen the immune system.

"She takes care of everybody from A to Z," said Reginald Jean-Mary, pastor at the church. "She's a true servant. She goes beyond the scope of work to be a presence of hope and compassion for others."

A few years ago when the church couldn't afford to hire a cleaning crew, Moreau offered to do it for a negligible sum. She does it with a cheerful heart.

And until recently, she's done it all without a car.

But last month, Moreau was surprised with a new Toyota Corolla topped with a big red bow. As part of a local anti-poverty initiative, community leaders nominate residents known for community service. The Martin Luther King Economic Development Corporation purchases the cars wholesale through a grant, and Moreau pays $125 a month and will own it after three years.

With her janitorial job and all her work at the church, people often ask Moreau if she's exhausted. But she says she is fueled by her faith.

"I can keep all the money for myself and never give anyone a penny," she said. "But if you give from your heart and never think about yourself, God will provide for you every day. The refrigerator will never be without food."

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"One Good Thing" is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small. Read the collection of stories at https://apnews.com/hub/one-good-thing

Provincial Italian hospital overrun by virus variant

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

CHIARI, Italy (AP) — The 160-bed hospital in the Po River Valley town of Chiari has no more room for patients stricken with the highly contagious variant of COVID-19 first identified in Britain that has put hospitals in Italy's northern Brescia province on high alert.

That history was repeating itself one year after Lombardy became the epicenter of Italy's pandemic was a sickening realization for Dr. Gabriele Zanolini, who runs the COVID-19 ward in the M. Mellini Hospital in the once-walled city that maintains its medieval circular street pattern.

"You know that there are patients in the emergency room, and you don't know where to put them," Zanolini told The Associated Press.

"This for me is anguish, not to be able to respond to people who need to be treated. The most difficult

moment is to find ourselves again in a state of emergency, after so much time."

The U.K. variant surge has filled 90% of hospital beds in Brescia province, bordering both Veneto and Emilia-Romagna regions, as Italy crossed the grim threshold of 100,000 pandemic dead on Monday and marks the one-year anniversary Wednesday of Italy's draconian lockdown, the first in the West.

While Zanolini was able to offer a safety valve to hard-hit Bergamo during last spring's deadly surge, and to Milan and Varese in the fall, now he must ask hospitals elsewhere in the region to take virus patients he himself cannot admit.

New measures are again being considered in Rome to tamp down the increase in new cases attributed to virus variants, including also those identified in South Africa and Brazil. With the U.K. variant prevalent in Italy and racing from school age children and adolescents through families, Lombardy has again put all schools on distance learning, as have several regions in the south where the health care system is more fragile.

In this surge, patients in the Chiari hospital COVID-19 ward are increasingly family members — husbands and wives, fathers and sons — Zanolini said. And unlike previous spikes, the average age has dropped, with many of the virus patients needing breathing aid between 45 and 55 years of age. "We have seen, however, that they respond well to treatment," Zanolini said of the younger patients, noting that mortality remains high among the elderly.

Despite months of renewed restrictions starting in October, Italy's death toll remains stubbornly high — several hundred a day. It topped 100,000 this week, the second-highest in Europe after Britain.

Italy's new premier, Mario Draghi, is focusing on vaccines to help the country emerge from pandemic, pledging in a video message this week to intensify the campaign significantly in the coming weeks.

"Everyone must do his part to contain this spread of this virus," Draghi said Tuesday. "But above all, the government must to its part. Rather, it must try to do more every day. The pandemic is not yet defeated."

The vaccine is the only way out, Zanolini concurs. He sees all around him that people have grown weary of the restrictions, and are getting relaxed — too relaxed — with gatherings, distancing and masks.

"We are worried because we don't see an end. It seems like the tunnel is still very long," Zanolini said. "We find ourselves hit by another wave, and we are very tired."

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

$1.9T Biden relief package a bet government can help cure US

By JOSH BOAK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden wants America to know that he's from the government and he's here to help.

That sentiment became a well-worn punchline under Ronald Reagan and shaped the politics of both parties for four decades. Democrat Bill Clinton declared the era of big government over in the 1990s, Barack Obama largely kept his party in the same lane and Republican Donald Trump campaigned on the premise that Washington was full of morons, outplayed by the Chinese and others.

But Biden is now staking his presidency on the idea that the government can use his $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan not only to stop a pandemic and jobs crisis but also to catapult the country forward to tackle deep issues of poverty, inequality and more. The massive bill could be approved by Congress as early as Tuesday.

"When I was elected, I said we were going to get the government out of the business of battling on Twitter and back in the business of delivering for the American people," Biden said after the huge bill passed the Senate on Saturday. "Of showing the American people that their government can work for them."

Taken together, provisions in the 628-page bill add up to one of the largest enhancements to the social safety net in decades, pushing the country into uncharted territory.

Besides stopping the pandemic and jumpstarting hiring, money in the rescue package — now awaiting

final approval in the House — is supposed to start fixing income inequality, halve child poverty, feed the hungry, save pensions, sustain public transit, let schools reopen with confidence and help repair state and local government finances. And Biden is betting that the government can do all of this with the speed of a nation mobilizing for war without touching a tripwire of inflation.

"People have lost faith government can do good for them," says Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who spoke daily with Biden while ushering the bill through the Senate last weekend. Now, as vaccines become more available and other changes take place, "people are going to see that government actually is making their lives better — which is how Americans used to think of it, and we've gotten away from it."

Republicans say Americans have plenty of reason to be skeptical, calling the American Rescue Plan excessive and wasteful. They warn the sweeping package will run up the national debt to precarious new heights after $4 trillion in aid has already been provided.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell argues against the package as missing the moment — too big at a time when the virus is showing signs of easing and the economy is poised to come "roaring" back.

Instead of working across the aisle toward unity, as Biden has promised, McConnell says Democrats are "ramming through what they call 'the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation,'" quoting the White House chief of staff.

"They explained their intent very clearly: to exploit this crisis as 'a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision,'" McConnell says. This is the first COVID-19 bill that had zero support from Republicans in the House or Senate.

Biden's bet, more than others in modern politics and economics, is full of questions.

Can the federal money push economic growth above 6% for the first time since Reagan in 1984? Will the 9.5 million lost jobs quickly return? Will inflation surge? Will the national debt spook voters in next year's midterm elections? Biden has placed the biggest of markers on the theories of the 20th Century British economist John Maynard Keynes that the government can stimulate a dormant economy back to health.

Sweeping in scope, Biden's plan largely relies on existing health care and tax credits, rather than new programs, but it expands that standard fare in ambitious new ways that are designed to reach more people who are suffering in an unprecedented time.

"We haven't done this before," said Syracuse University economics professor Len Burman, a co-founder of the Tax Policy Center. "If it actually does work the way it does in theory and the economy is back at full employment in a year, that would be amazing. It would save a lot of hardship and suffering."

But Burman also has misgivings about the design of Biden's package because it distributes direct payments and other benefits to almost every household in the United States, rather than directing the money to the poor and to businesses and organizations most damaged by the pandemic and ensuing shutdowns.

"It kind of reminded me of this idea when I was in grad school of helicopter money — which was basically dropping money from the air and seeing if it raised incomes," he said. "The money could have been better targeted."

Final passage of the bill is expected this week — before expanded unemployment benefits are set to expire mid-March. But Biden's signing celebration will just be the start. His administration will have to show that the funds can be spent effectively and efficiently, helping those in need while giving the broader public enough confidence to awaken growth through hiring and spending.

Felicia Wong, CEO of the liberal Roosevelt Institute, sees parallels to the Great Depression, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt brought about an unprecedented series of government interventions that realigned U.S. politics. Wong said she is monitoring the process by which the money from the COVID-19 relief package gets distributed.

"That's going to matter as much as the scale of the package because it's going to build trust," Wong said.

Republicans are poised to portray the spending as bloated and inefficient, much the way they attacked the Obama-era recovery act during the 2009 financial crisis.

At the same time, much of the aid is temporary, set to expire in a year or so, leaving Congress to assess Biden's approach ahead of the next election season.

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Associated Press writer Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 10, the 69th day of 2021. There are 296 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 10, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln assigned Ulysses S. Grant, who had just received his commission as lieutenant-general, to the command of the Armies of the United States.

On this date:

In 1785, Thomas Jefferson was appointed America's minister to France, succeeding Benjamin Franklin.

In 1848, the U.S. Senate ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War.

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell's assistant, Thomas Watson, heard Bell say over his experimental telephone: "Mr. Watson — come here — I want to see you" from the next room of Bell's Boston laboratory.

In 1906, about 1,100 miners in northern France were killed by a coal-dust explosion.

In 1913, former slave, abolitionist and Underground Railroad "conductor" Harriet Tubman died in Auburn, New York; she was in her 90s.

In 1914, the Rokeby Venus, a 17th century painting by Diego Velazquez on display at the National Gallery in London, was slashed multiple times by Mary Richardson, who was protesting the arrest of fellow suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst. (The painting was repaired.)

In 1927, the Sinclair Lewis novel "Elmer Gantry" was published by Harcourt, Brace & Co.

In 1969, James Earl Ray pleaded guilty in Memphis, Tennessee (on his 41st birthday) to assassinating civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. (Ray later repudiated that plea, maintaining his innocence until his death.)

In 1985, Konstantin U. Chernenko, who was the Soviet Union's leader for 13 months, died at age 73; he was succeeded by Mikhail Gorbachev.

In 1988, pop singer Andy Gibb died in Oxford, England, at age 30 of heart inflammation.

In 2000, Pope John Paul II approved sainthood for Katharine Drexel, a Philadelphia socialite who had taken a vow of poverty and devoted her fortune to helping poor Blacks and American Indians. (Drexel, who died in 1955, was canonized in October 2000.)

In 2015, breaking her silence in the face of a growing controversy over her use of a private email address and server, Hillary Rodham Clinton conceded that she should have used government email as secretary of state but insisted she had not violated any federal laws or Obama administration rules.

Ten years ago: The House Homeland Security Committee examined Muslim extremism in America during a hearing punctuated by tearful testimony and angry recriminations. (Chairman Peter King, R-N.Y., accused U.S. Muslims of doing too little to help fight terror in America; Democrats warned of inflaming anti-Muslim sentiment.)

Five years ago: Donald Trump and his Republican rivals turned their presidential debate in Miami into a mostly respectful but still pointed discussion of Social Security, Islam, trade and more. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made an official visit to the White House.

One year ago: Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden canceled primary-night rallies in Cleveland amid concerns over the spread of the coronavirus. Biden won primaries in the battleground state of Michigan and three other states, dealing a serious blow to Sanders. Clusters of the coronavirus swelled on both U.S. coasts, with more than 70 cases linked to a biotech conference in Boston and infections turning up at 10 nursing homes in the Seattle area. Infections in Italy topped the 10,000 mark, as authorities enforced a sweeping nationwide lockdown. Stocks recouped most of their historic losses from a day earlier, amid fluctuating hopes on Wall Street that the government would try to cushion the economic pain from the coronavirus.

Today's Birthdays: Talk show host Ralph Emery is 88. Bluegrass/country singer-musician Norman Blake is 83. Actor Chuck Norris is 81. Playwright David Rabe is 81. Singer Dean Torrence (Jan and Dean) is 81.

Actor Katharine Houghton (Film: "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?") is 79. Actor Richard Gant is 77. Rock musician Tom Scholz (Boston) is 74. Former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell is 74. TV personality/businesswoman Barbara Corcoran (TV: "Shark Tank") is 72. Actor Aloma Wright is 71. Blues musician Ronnie Earl (Ronnie Earl and the Broadcasters) is 68. Producer-director-writer Paul Haggis is 68. Alt-country/rock musician Gary Louris is 66. Actor Shannon Tweed is 64. Pop/jazz singer Jeanie Bryson is 63. Actor Sharon Stone is 63. Rock musician Gail Greenwood is 61. Magician Lance Burton is 61. Movie producer Scott Gardenhour is 60. Actor Jasmine Guy is 59. Rock musician Jeff Ament (Pearl Jam) is 58. Music producer Rick Rubin is 58. Britain's Prince Edward is 57. Rock singer Edie Brickell is 55. Actor Stephen Mailer is 55. Actor Philip Anthony-Rodriguez is 53. Actor Paget Brewster is 52. Actor Jon Hamm is 50. Rapper-producer Timbaland is 49. Actor Cristian (kris-tee-AHN') de la Fuente is 47. Rock musician Jerry Horton (Papa Roach) is 46. Actor Jeff Branson is 44. Singer Robin Thicke is 44. Actor Bree Turner is 44. Olympic gold medal gymnast Shannon Miller is 44. Contemporary Christian singer Michael Barnes (Red) is 42. Actor Edi Gathegi is 42. Actor Thomas Middleditch is 39. Country singer Carrie Underwood is 38. Actor Olivia Wilde is 37. R&B singer Emeli Sande (EH'-mihl-ee SAN'-day) is 34. Country singer Rachel Reinert is 32. Country musician Jared Hampton (LANCO) is 30. Actor Emily Osment is 29.