

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 5th Annual Middle School Talent Show

**Thursday, March 11, 2021  
7 p.m. in the GHS Gym**



### **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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## Groton Prairie Mixed

**March 3 Team Standings:** Shih Tzus 14, Jackelopes 14, Cheetahs 11, Chipmunks 9

**Men's High Games:** Brad Waage 239, 227, 226, Roger Spanier 203, 200, Brody Sombke 186

**Women's High Games:** Brenda Waage 192, Nancy Radke 166, Lori Wiley 160

**Men's High Series:** Brad Waage 692, Roger Spanier 583, Ron Beldon 452

**Women's High Series:** Darci Spanier 432, Brenda Waage 425, Karen Spanier 424

**Feb. 25 Team Standings:**

**Men's High Games:** Doug Jorgensen 211, Brad Waage 193, Brody Sombke 187

**Women's High Games:** Sue Stanley 161, Karen Spanier 159, Brenda Waage 154

**Men's High Series:** Brad Waage 536, Doug Jorgensen 515, Brody Sombke 498

**Women's High Series:** Sue Stanley 448, Karen Spanier 420, Hayley Merkel 404

## Conde National League

**March 8 Team Standings:** Giants 34, Mets 34, Pirates 28½, Braves 27½, Cubs 25, Tigers 7

**Men's High Games:** Butch Farmen 202, 192; Lance Frohling 202, 201, 194; John Lowery 192, 176; Collin Cady 177

**Men's High Series:** Lance Frohling 597, Butch Farmen 564, John Lowery 509

**Women's High Games:** Nancy Radke 190, Mary Larson 186, Joyce Walter 185

**Women's High Series:** Nancy Radke 504, Michelle Johnson 478, Mary Larson 475

**March 1 Team Standings:** Mets 31, Giants 30, Braves 26½, Cubs 25, Pirates 24½, Tigers 7

**Men's High Games:** Russ Bethke 208, Brody Somke 207, Topper Tastad 181

**Men's High Series:** Russ Bethke 562, Brody Somke 529, Topper Tastad 493

**Women's High Games:** Mary Larson 187, Sam Bahr 180, Vickie Kramp 162

**Women's High Series:** Mary Larson 443 Sam Bahr 410, Vickie Kramp 404



## Flihs Earns Top State Honors in National Corn Yield Contest

ST. LOUIS - The National Corn Yield Contest, sponsored annually by the National Corn Growers Association, recognizes farmers from across the country for their efforts and exceptional results. Although the past year posed numerous tests for all sectors of the American public, farmers continued to drive agricultural production in the face of incredible obstacles. Through their efforts, NCGA members contributed valuable data that will help all growers face current challenges and those still to come.

Whether entrants set a national record or strive to beat their personal best, every NCYC participant contributes to the body of agronomic research. This valuable information helps farmers feed and fuel the world while preserving natural resources for Americans in rural and urban areas alike. We are proud of our agricultural community and growers and salute this year's winners.

Jeffery Flihs of Groton, SD, placed Third in the state in the C:No-Till Non-Irrigated Class Class with a yield of 255.3137 bushels per acre. The hybrid used in the winning field was Pioneer P9880AMTM. The winning field was located in South Dakota.

Jeffery Flihs was one of 506 state winners nationwide. The 2020 contest participation included 7,844 entries from 48 states. Of the state winners, 27 growers – three from each of nine classes – were named national winners, representing 12 states.

The average yield among national winners was more than 346 bushels per acre – greater than the projected 2020 U.S. average of 175 bushels per acre. While there is no overall contest winner, yields from first, second and third place farmers' overall production categories topped out at 476.9052 bushels per acre.

"In hindsight, 2020 looked much different for all of us. For farmers, the year brought unique challenges, true tests of their determination, grit and ability to persevere. As always, America's farm families did not waiver in optimism or commitment. That dedication, along with eyes holding the future steadily in their gaze, allowed farmers to find abundance, opportunity and success in an unforeseeable time," said NCGA President John Linder, a corn grower from Edison, Ohio.

"Farmers relied upon an innovative nature and ability to adapt practices while adopting technologies. They did more with less. They planned for the future, focusing on both environmental and economic sustainability. Drawing from knowledge rooted in tradition while exploring ever-evolving choices, farmers used the best of both old and new to provide food, feed and fiber for the world."

Farmers are encouraged through the contest to utilize new, efficient production techniques. Agronomic data gleaned from the contest revealed the following:

- Average planting population for the national winners was 38,425 seeds per acre, compared to 34,163 for all entrants.
- National winners applied an average of 277.9525 pounds of nitrogen, 92.5185 pounds of phosphorus and 108.7837 pounds of potassium per acre.
- Average commercial nitrogen use per bushel of yield was 0.88 pounds for the national winners and 0.84 pounds for all entrants.
- 23 percent of the national winners applied trace minerals, compared to 19 percent of all entrants.
- 15 percent of national winners applied manure, the same percentage of all entrants.

The National Corn Yield Contest began in 1965 with 20 entries from 3 states. At that time, the highest overall yield was 218.9 bushels per acre, while the national yield average was in the mid-60 bushel-per-acre range.

All 2020 contest winners were invited to attend the first ever virtual Commodity Classic. For a complete list of winners and for more information about NCYC, visit the NCGA website at [www.ncga.com](http://www.ncga.com).

The National Corn Growers Association represents our nearly 40,000 members, 50 affiliated state corn grower and checkoff organizations, and over 300,000 corn farmers who contribute to state checkoff programs.





## National Honor Society

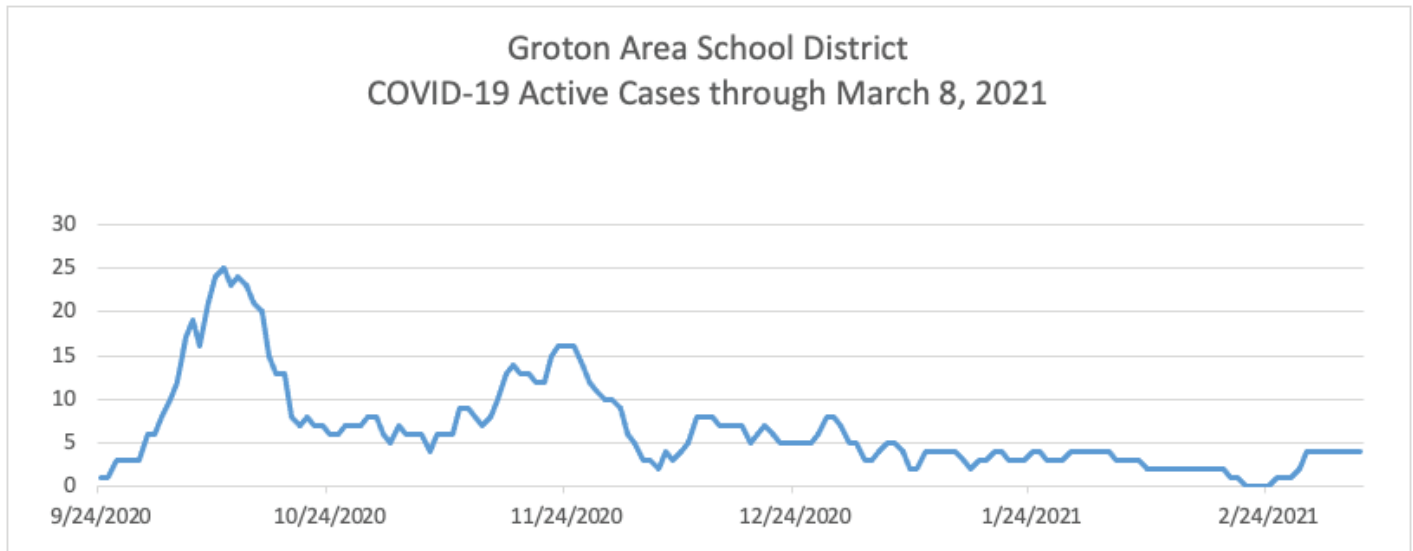
**2021 National Honor Society Inductees back row left to right: Kansas Kroll, Madeline Flihs, Regan Leicht and Travis Townsend; front row left to right: Alyssa Thaler, Allyssa Locke, and Trista Keith.** (Courtesy Photo)

Groton area High School will be inducting National Honor Society members from the 2020 school year as well as members from the 2021 school year. The ceremony will be held in the Groton Area High School Gymnasium on March 15, 2021 at 7:00pm.

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## Superintendent Joe Schwan's Report to the Board of Education



To date we've had 102 total confirmed cases of COVID-19 [14.07%] of students or staff members of our District (35 staff members [35.0%], 21 elementary students [6.9%], 15 middle school students [11.4%], and 28 high school students [21.4%]).

Brown County data to date indicates 5,175 infections of total population 38,839 [13.32%].

Statewide data to date indicates 113,596 infections of total population 884,659 [12.84%].

Abbott BinaxNOW Rapid Testing. As of the end of the day, we've conducted 160 tests. 35 have been positive (21.88%).

State Vaccination Plan. We received notice today that school employees are able to begin scheduling their appointments to receive the COVID-19 Vaccine. The clinical partner that has been assigned to our school is Avera. They're scheduling vaccinations for school employees on Friday, March 19 and Friday, March 26 beginning at 3:30 PM.

Collective Bargaining Training. To date, I've attended four virtual workshops pertaining to collective bargaining. I have access to the recordings and or slideshow presentations from those trainings, if anyone is interested. One session remains and is scheduled for March 17.

Langford Cooperative. Mr. Gibbs emailed this afternoon requesting a meeting with our committee during the evening on one of the following dates: April 6, April 8, April 13, April 15, April 20, or April 22 to be discussing a football cooperative (and possibly other sports) starting with the 2022-2023 school year. According to his email, they're looking to meet with three districts in April and perhaps once again in the fall before taking a recommendation to their board.

2021 Legislative Update. The legislative session is quickly winding down. Final day of the regular session is Thursday, March 11. Veto day is scheduled for March 29.

HB 1046. Limit liability for certain exposures to COVID-19. [Signed by Governor]

HB 1066. Authorize the transfer of wind energy tax revenue from a school district general fund. [Signed by Governor]

SB 171. Provides needs-based scholarship funding for South Dakota students, make an appropriation therefor, and declare an emergency. [Sent to Governor]

SB177. Revise the provisions of parental choice regarding compulsory school attendance and matters ancillary thereto. [Sent to Governor]

Many funding issues are yet to be resolved and a lot of vehicle bills remain in play for this week.

Associated School Boards Health Fund Renewal Meeting. Our annual renewal meeting is scheduled for March 24 at which time we should learn what our insurance rates will be for the 2021-2022 school year.

## #381 in a series

### Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

New-case numbers are back where they should be today. There were 56,600 new cases reported today in the US. That brings us up to 29,243,900, which is 0.2% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations were steady at 42,262; since the number is exactly the same as yesterday's, which seems unlikely, I'm going to guess there were no new data reported today. And we are now at 528,692 deaths, 0.3% more than yesterday. There were 1392 new deaths reported today.

The CDC's new ensemble forecast for deaths is out for the week. The last one was for deaths by March 27 and projected a high of 564,000 deaths. This week's forecast is lower than last weeks', even though it goes out one more week into the future; now they are forecasting 547,000 by April 3. This is not a bad sign.

On March 10, 2020, one year ago today, my own South Dakota announced its first cases of Covid-19, five of them along with one death. There were still 13 states without reported cases, but it should be noted that four of them were not testing, which as I said back then, "makes it easier to keep your case counts at zero." No US territories had reported cases yet either. In the US, daily new case reports were running over 200; when your total case count is only 973, an additional 200 per day is a pretty rapid increase. New York had 173 cases. There'd been 30 deaths in the US, 24 of those in Washington and nearly all of them in people over 70. The nursing home in Washington which was the site of our first large outbreak was up to 55 residents infected, 34 of them hospitalized and 19 of whom had died. Access to testing continued to be a problem. People over 60 or with underlying health conditions were being advised to avoid crowds and to stay home as much as possible.

Worldwide, more than 113,000 cases and 4000 deaths had occurred. There had been 168 Covid-19 deaths in Italy in just 24 hours; the country had reported 9172 cases and 463 deaths. With the announcement of two cases in Cyprus, every European country had now reported cases. Spain had reported 1204 cases and 28 deaths. Many countries shut down flights to and from Italy and Spain. Iran had 8042 cases and 291 deaths, but China was still leading the world with 80,754 cases and 3136 deaths. This was a point, however, at which things were winding down in China; it closed its last two field hospitals on this day. The US was #8 on a list of countries ranked by case numbers behind China, Italy, South Korea, Iran, Japan, France, and Germany.

The CDC director testified to a House Appropriations subcommittee that public health departments across the country were inadequately staffed and funded; we have certainly witnessed the fallout from that problem over the past year. The Tokyo Marathon was restricted to elite runners; the Coachella and Stagecoach festivals were postponed to fall. The NCAA, having considered its options for its annual tournament scheduled to get underway in a week, announced they were going ahead with events as planned. Google asked employees to work from home. Cancellations and closures: the Ivy League postseason basketball tournament, in-person classes at many US universities, then-candidate Biden's and Senator Sanders' Cleveland rallies, outside visitors at VA nursing homes, all meetings of the World Trade Organization, all schools and universities in Greece, Harvard University's campus (with classes held remotely), the UN headquarters in New York City, St. Peter's Square and Basilica in Vatican City, the Indian Wells tennis tournament, all the schools in the Czech Republic, the Ayatollah Khamenei's annual Persian New Year speech, live audiences for tapings of Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune. The Olympic torch lighting ceremony was closed to the public.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, spoke at a White House briefing, saying, "We would like the country to realize that as a nation, we can't be doing the kinds of things we were doing a few months ago. It doesn't matter if you're in a state that has no cases or one case."

The first time we talked about convalescent plasma was way back on March 19, 2020. It's been discussed, tested, researched, and used from the earliest days of the pandemic—as soon as we had enough recovered individuals to provide us with a supply. You will recall this is derived from blood taken from recovered individuals and contains whatever antibodies that recovered person has against this virus; it is then administered to Covid-19 patients with active disease in the hope those donated antibodies will help



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the patient to fight the virus. More than half a million people have received it as an experimental therapy in the US, but there is mounting evidence it does not really offer a benefit. There had been hints for some time, but two recent very large cohort trials, the RECOVERY Trial in the UK and CONCOR-1 in Canada included thousands of patients, and neither showed any benefit. The Canadian trial stopped recruiting patients because the researchers concluded it would simply be a waste of resources to continue. Now these were both trials involving hospitalized patients, so there is still some possibility people who are earlier in disease, that is, not as sick, may benefit; but even this is starting to look unlikely. Just such a trial called, amusingly, C3PO (no idea whether there is a connection to the droid) has stopped enrolling patients for the same reason. Dr. Derek Angus, chair of critical care medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, told CNN, "I don't see any point in offering plasma outside a clinical trial."

There are a few trials still underway, but I wouldn't hold my breath. Could be that enough of the damage from Covid-19 is immunological that administering antibodies after the fact simply misses the point. And if any of these ongoing studies turns up evidence this is a useful treatment in some subgroup of patients, we can shift to using it again at that point. But for now, things don't look good.

I don't generally stray into matters of policy here because I don't need to go to the political wars; but I do want to mention that we now have 18 states which are suspending (or never had) mask mandates. These are Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming (coming up next week), Utah (coming up April 10), Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Iowa, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. This is an exceptionally foolhardy move at this delicate point in the pandemic. The next two to four weeks are absolutely critical to preventing another surge before we can get vaccines into more people; and stopping with the mask mandates is simply a terrible plan. Please wear yours, whether it is required or not.

Booster vaccines are receiving research attention, as we've discussed. You may recall that Moderna had designed and shipped off to the NIH its first modified vaccine intended to deal with emerging variants. They received approval to proceed to trials and have now administered to the first participants in a booster trial; these are 60 people who've already received two doses of the original Moderna vaccine. Twenty of them will receive a booster designed against B.1.351, 20 more will receive a larger dose of the booster, and the remaining 20 will receive a combination of original vaccine and the B.1.351 booster. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases is also waiting for approval to conduct a trial of the redesigned vaccine both as a booster and as a primary series for those who have not yet been vaccinated. To be clear, no one thinks we need these boosters right now; it appears the current vaccines still cover the emerging variants we're seeing at the moment; but we all agree being unprepared isn't such a great plan: That's what put us where we are today, so getting out ahead of the game looks smart from all sides here.

Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNN today that there are two valid approaches to boosters: (1) to just add a booster against the current variant or (2) to administer a modified vaccine designed to target a variant. He said, "You're going to see two ways of going at this, boost against the regular virus which will have a spillover and protect you against the variant, or specifically boost against the variant. And I think both of those are going to be promising." It appears the current vaccines will work against the variants just by producing an even more overwhelming response to the current variant. These new tests will also look at vaccines designed specifically against the new variants.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have new guidance for nursing home visitation rules. There are details, but the short version is that they are recommending allowing indoor visits irrespective of the vaccination status of either visitor or resident unless the resident is in quarantine or is unvaccinated and lives in a facility where less than 70 percent of residents are unvaccinated. It also allows "compassionate visits" for those in deteriorating health no matter how many people are vaccinated. Maybe these folks don't have to die alone anymore.

The latest projections still have us on track to have enough vaccine available to fully vaccinate every American adult by the end of May. No one thinks all these people can actually be vaccinated at that time—it's going to take a while to accomplish that; but it will be good to have our only limiting factor be how fast we can line people up and stick needles in them. This big boost in supply is largely due to the

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cooperative manufacturing efforts of Johnson & Johnson with Merck. Merck adds a lot of capacity to J & J's production abilities. I just have to say it must take quite a lot, when you're one of the world's preeminent vaccine-makers and your own efforts failed, to swallow hard and go to work to help one of your biggest competitors succeed at the thing which eluded you.

And we are doing pretty well at getting this stuff produced, distributed, and delivered right now. The CDC reported today that almost 128 million doses have been distributed and nearly 96 million of those have been administered to date. Our seven-day average doses administered has been above two million every day for a week, and we continue to administer more than two million each day—almost 2.2 million lately. It would be nice to go faster, but it could be worse. By quite a lot.

We have all been seeing reports of physical attacks on Asian-Americans because people have been misled into believing Asian people are responsible for the pandemic—and yes, I am fully aware of the racism built into that belief. Asian-Americans have had acid poured on them, been cut with knives, been beaten up, and been really traumatized as a result; elderly people have been particular targets. Some have died. Enter Jess Owyong, native to the Bay Area in California, which has a large population of Asian-American people, and a person of Chinese descent as well. He joined up with Jacob Azevedo who proposed on Instagram that a corps of like-minded people offer escorts in Oakland's Chinatown for those who feel unsafe.

They founded Compassion in Oakland last month to put volunteers in touch with elders in the Asian-American community who may not feel safe going out alone. Volunteers are asked to provide a negative Covid-19 test and be tested regularly so they don't endanger their protectees. They come from all racial backgrounds, cultures, and ages. They also offer translation assistance and help with police reports as needed. They have 700 volunteers and are working to establish chapters across the country so they can serve more communities.

Owyong told CBS News, "It's a beautiful conversation that we have together about our individual experiences . . . and how we can build each other up, how we have so many commonalities and differences. But it's what makes America so wonderful."

Be well. I'll be back tomorrow.



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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	453	431	874	15	Minimal	0.0%
Beadle	2813	2662	5913	39	Substantial	15.6%
Bennett	382	370	1181	9	None	0.0%
Bon Homme	1510	1477	2091	25	Minimal	3.8%
Brookings	3630	3528	12076	37	Moderate	2.6%
Brown	5183	5021	12791	89	Substantial	8.1%
Brule	697	680	1886	9	Minimal	8.6%
Buffalo	420	406	899	13	None	0.0%
Butte	987	953	3239	20	Moderate	9.0%
Campbell	131	125	258	4	Minimal	25.0%
Charles Mix	1311	1247	3944	21	Substantial	7.2%
Clark	377	361	955	5	Moderate	5.9%
Clay	1815	1772	5427	15	Substantial	3.0%
Codington	4052	3874	9719	77	Substantial	7.7%
Corson	473	454	1002	12	Minimal	14.8%
Custer	766	739	2734	12	Substantial	11.4%
Davison	2982	2881	6584	63	Moderate	6.3%
Day	675	631	1793	29	Substantial	6.5%
Deuel	476	461	1146	8	Minimal	0.0%
Dewey	1423	1383	3822	26	Substantial	4.7%
Douglas	434	420	918	9	Moderate	0.0%
Edmunds	487	466	1062	13	Moderate	5.0%
Fall River	549	510	2637	15	Substantial	9.8%
Faulk	362	347	701	13	Minimal	14.3%
Grant	983	924	2248	38	Substantial	6.8%
Gregory	549	503	1297	30	Moderate	11.9%
Haakon	257	240	541	10	Moderate	0.0%
Hamlin	724	666	1791	38	Substantial	21.9%
Hand	347	328	824	6	Moderate	5.3%
Hanson	368	354	726	4	Moderate	26.3%
Harding	92	90	183	1	Minimal	20.0%
Hughes	2326	2252	6620	36	Substantial	1.2%
Hutchinson	790	755	2394	26	Minimal	5.3%

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Hyde	139	137	411	1	Minimal	5.3%
Jackson	280	263	918	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	275	251	559	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	85	85	223	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	648	623	1688	14	Moderate	5.6%
Lake	1222	1161	3363	18	Substantial	9.0%
Lawrence	2838	2770	8562	45	Moderate	3.4%
Lincoln	7894	7636	20397	77	Substantial	10.5%
Lyman	605	589	1882	10	Minimal	2.6%
Marshall	338	310	1205	5	Substantial	12.3%
McCook	756	715	1631	24	Moderate	12.1%
McPherson	241	232	555	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2628	2540	7740	31	Substantial	9.5%
Mellette	257	246	734	2	Moderate	8.8%
Miner	274	254	579	9	Minimal	18.2%
Minnehaha	28449	27586	78692	335	Substantial	8.7%
Moody	620	597	1759	17	Moderate	5.6%
Oglala Lakota	2066	1996	6653	49	Moderate	5.4%
Pennington	13026	12650	39596	189	Substantial	5.6%
Perkins	348	330	823	14	Minimal	2.8%
Potter	378	364	838	4	Moderate	0.0%
Roberts	1235	1152	4166	36	Substantial	19.4%
Sanborn	335	324	694	3	Minimal	5.2%
Spink	804	768	2142	26	Minimal	6.3%
Stanley	336	330	939	2	Moderate	2.9%
Sully	137	133	313	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1220	1188	4165	29	Minimal	0.0%
Tripp	719	676	1490	16	Substantial	20.0%
Turner	1080	1008	2737	53	Moderate	6.3%
Union	2012	1932	6298	39	Substantial	8.0%
Walworth	730	701	1834	15	Moderate	8.6%
Yankton	2827	2760	9374	28	Moderate	7.9%
Ziebach	336	326	864	9	Minimal	7.7%
Unassigned	0	0	1777	0		

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## South Dakota



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

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4621	0
10-19 years	12914	0
20-29 years	20172	7
30-39 years	18741	18
40-49 years	16281	36
50-59 years	16076	114
60-69 years	13069	251
70-79 years	6956	435
80+ years	5132	1043

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	59306	897
Male	54656	1007



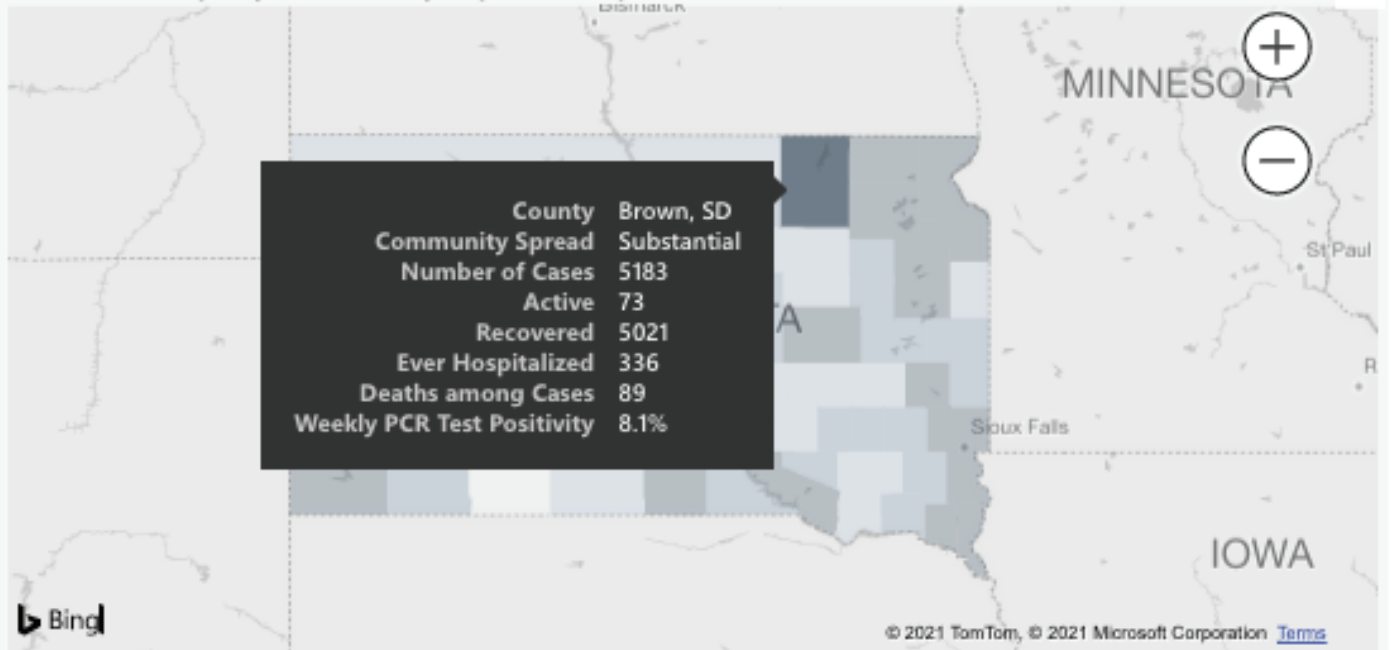
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## Brown County

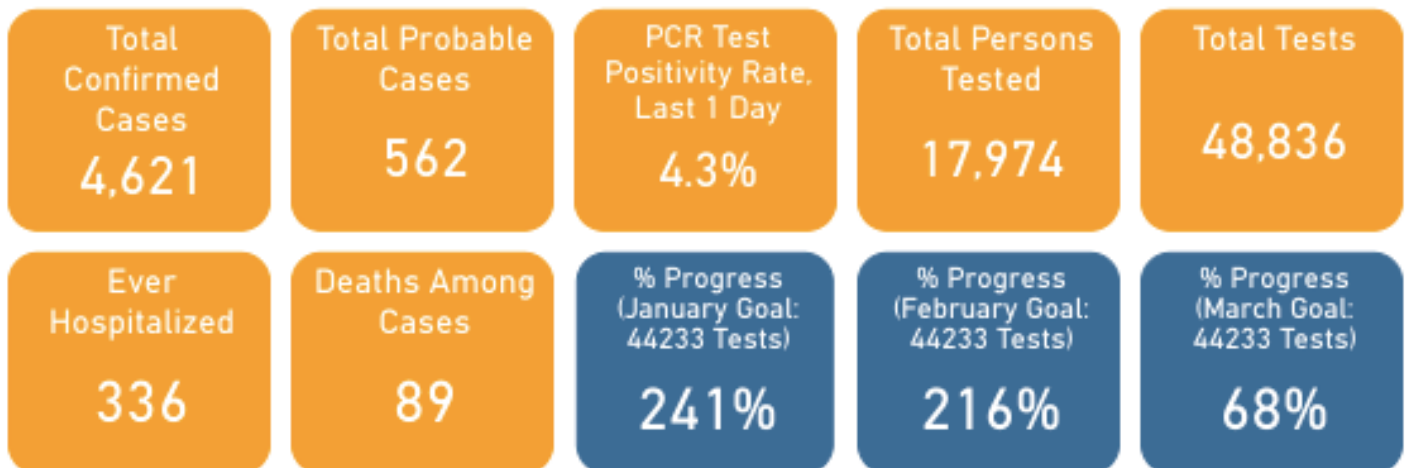


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

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



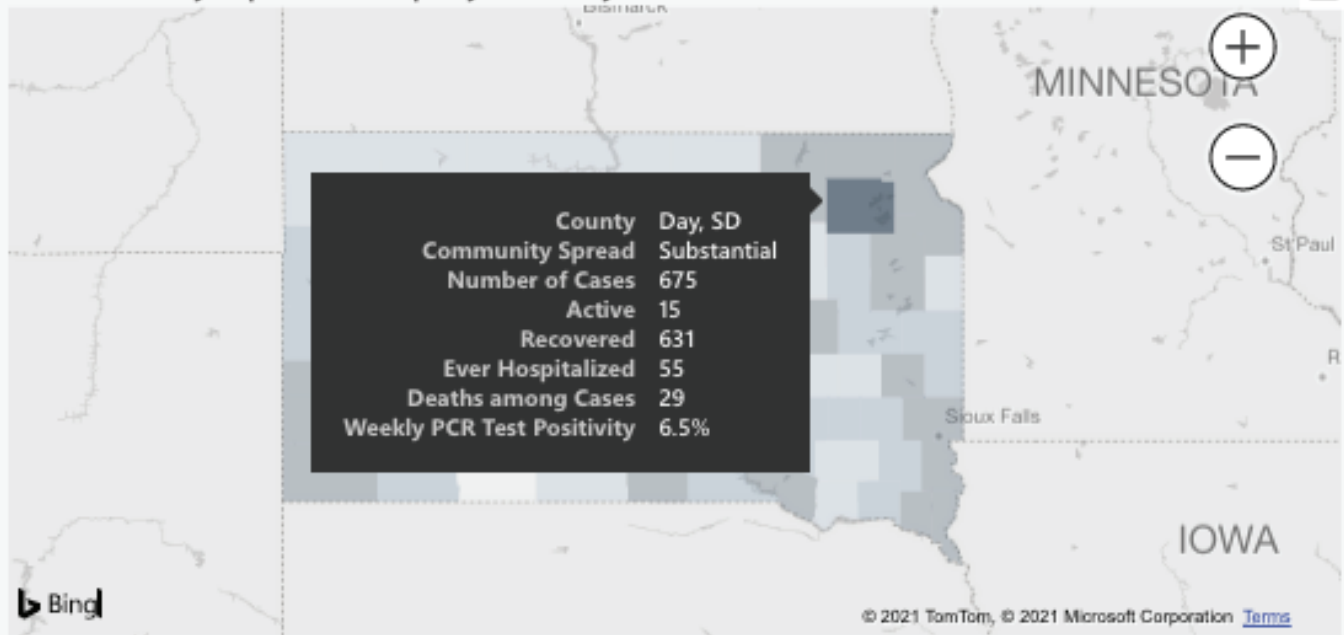
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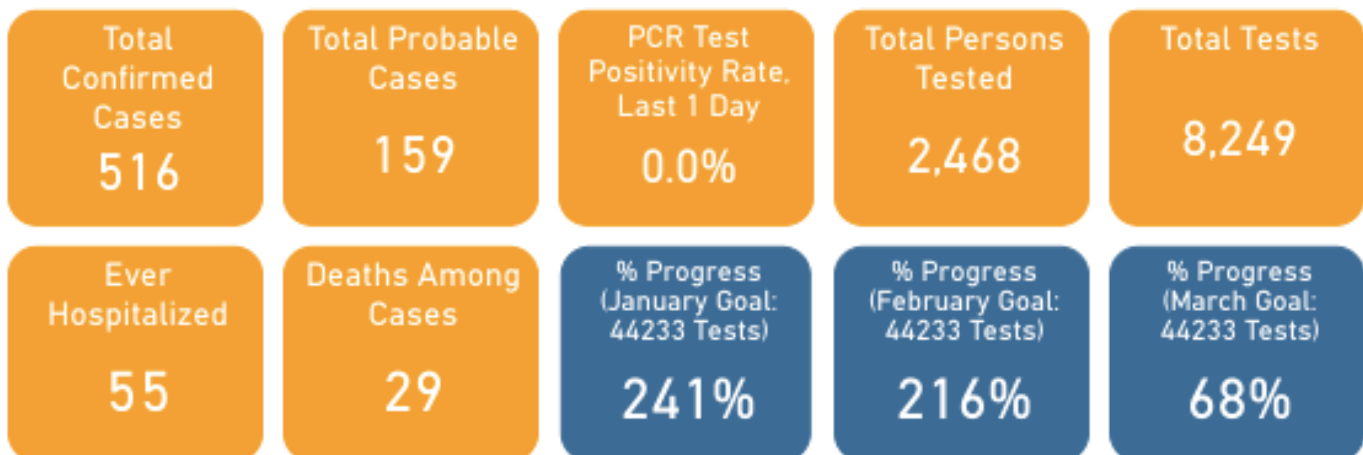
## Day County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

267,743

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	773
Moderna	131,528
Pfizer	135,442

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

173,596

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	773
Moderna - 1 dose	42,188
Moderna - Series Complete	44,670
Pfizer - 1 dose	36,490
Pfizer - Series Complete	49,476

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

30%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	30.30%
Series Complete	16.48%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	698	244	227	471
Beadle	5337	1,869	1,734	3,603
Bennett*	438	124	157	281
Bon Homme*	2898	1,282	808	2,090
Brookings	7685	2,875	2,405	5,280
Brown	12998	2,766	5,116	7,882
Brule*	1581	517	532	1,049
Buffalo*	123	77	23	100
Butte	1845	789	528	1,317
Campbell	875	291	292	583
Charles Mix*	2696	968	864	1,832
Clark	993	341	326	667
Clay	4118	1,590	1,264	2,854
Codington*	8287	2,939	2,674	5,613
Corson*	249	101	74	175
Custer*	2390	892	749	1,641
Davison	6429	1,799	2,315	4,114
Day*	2144	782	681	1,463
Deuel	1219	431	394	825
Dewey*	332	72	130	202
Douglas*	1011	315	348	663
Edmunds	1154	374	390	764
Fall River*	2218	738	740	1,478
Faulk	897	229	334	563
Grant*	2373	1,175	599	1,774
Gregory*	1463	591	436	1,027
Haakon*	478	158	160	318



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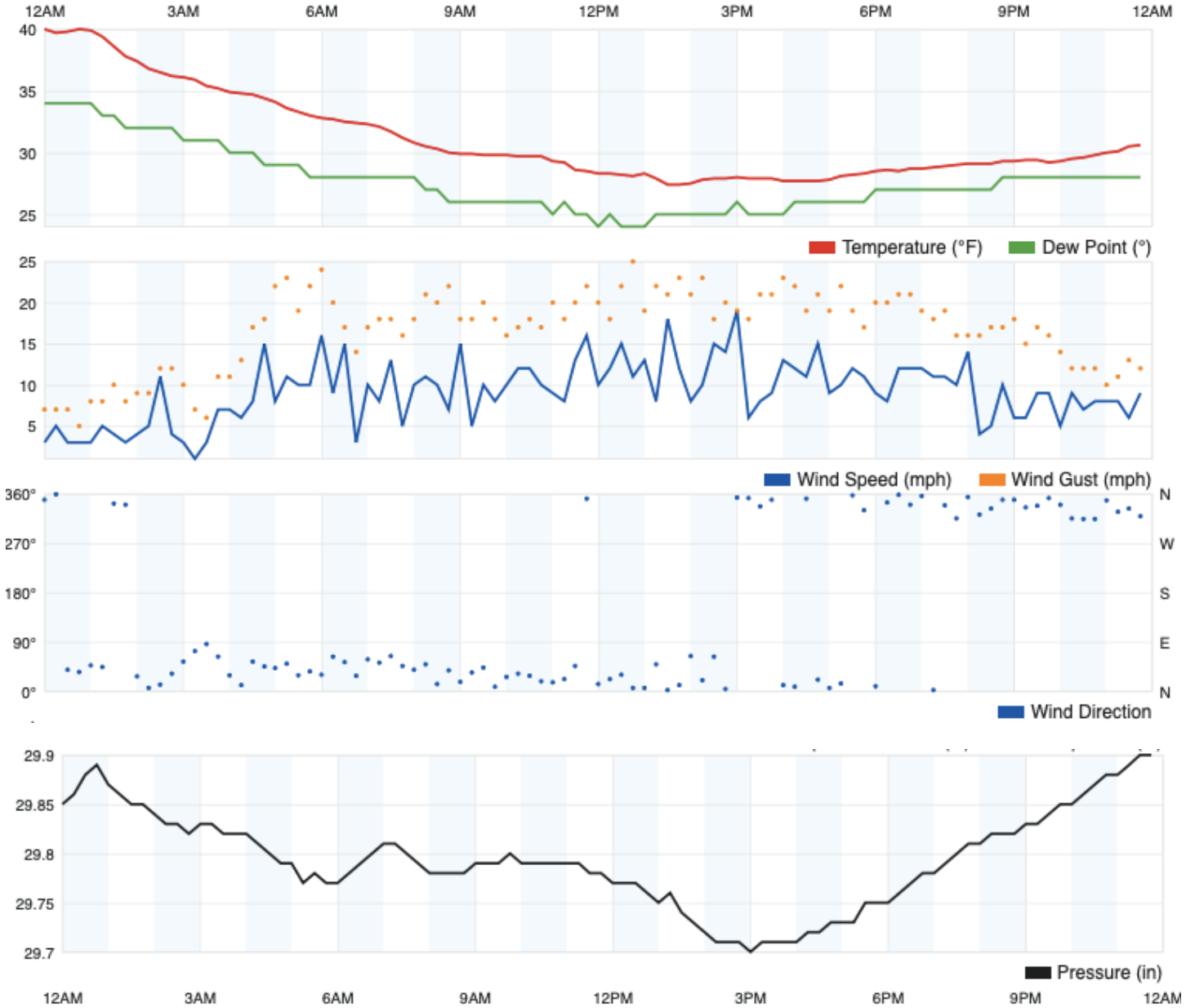
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Hamlin	1438	494	472	966
Hand	1303	443	430	873
Hanson	399	149	125	274
Harding	86	42	22	64
Hughes*	6567	1,747	2,410	4,157
Hutchinson*	2828	977	925	1,902
Hyde*	491	147	172	319
Jackson*	344	108	118	226
Jerauld	657	309	174	483
Jones*	554	164	195	359
Kingsbury	1938	858	540	1,398
Lake	3214	1,112	1,051	2,163
Lawrence	6830	2,688	2,071	4,759
Lincoln	22586	5,166	8,710	13,876
Lyman*	654	232	211	443
Marshall*	1399	477	461	938
McCook	1819	573	623	1,196
McPherson	220	68	76	144
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*	3808	1,360	1,224	2,584
Sanborn	846	270	288	558
Spink	2465	877	794	1,671
Stanley*	1003	271	366	637
Sully	310	74	118	192
Todd*	144	48	48	96
Tripp*	1728	558	585	1,143
Turner	3014	902	1,056	1,958
Union	2407	1,305	551	1,856
Walworth*	1536	460	538	998
Yankton	8420	2,048	3,186	5,234
Ziebach*	52	16	18	34
Other	5321	1,475	1,923	3,398

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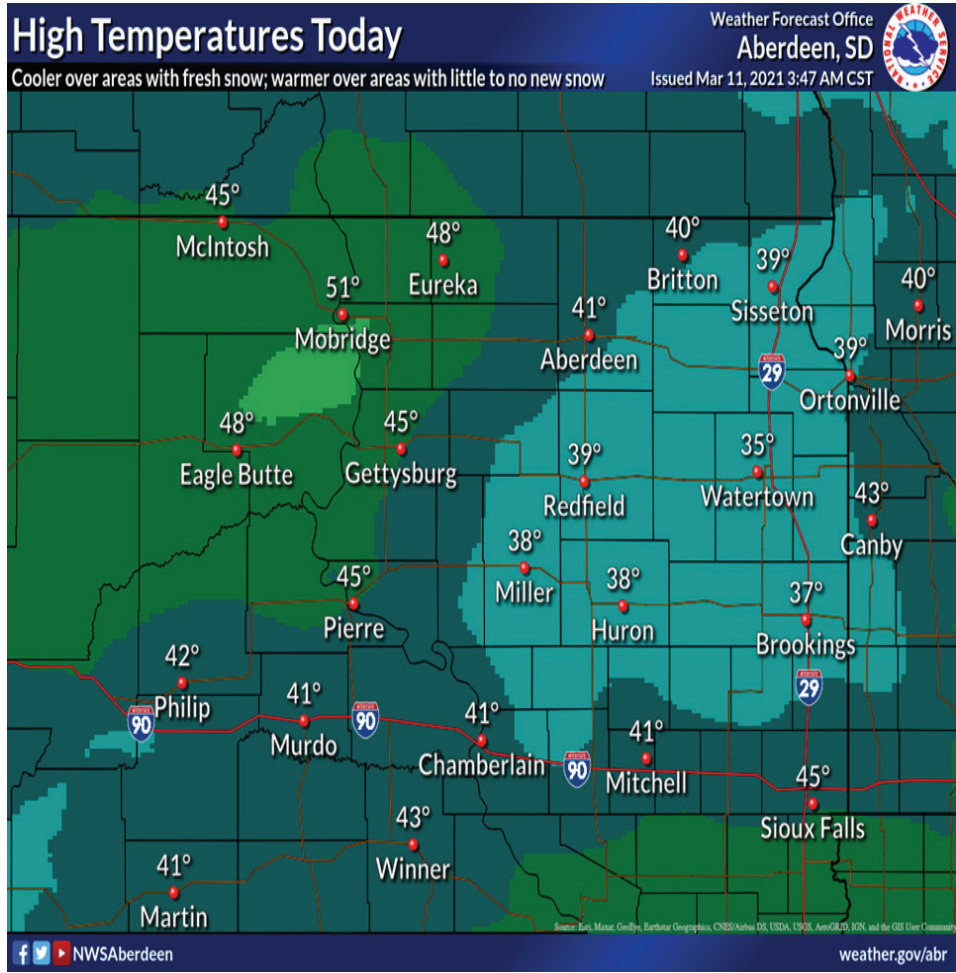
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Decreasing Clouds	Partly Cloudy then Patchy Fog	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 40 °F	Low: 19 °F	High: 44 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 52 °F



High Temperatures today will range from the mid-30s to around 50 degrees. Areas that received fresh snow will be on the cooler end of the spectrum while areas that received little to no snow will be on the warmer side. A strong low pressure system looks to move across the central plains Saturday night through Monday. Presently the biggest impacts are likely to remain along and south of the South Dakota/Nebraska border, however we will continue monitoring the trends over the next couple days.



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## Today in Weather History

March 11, 1991: A developing winter storm, centered to the south of the Black Hills, caused heavy snow to fall on the northern Black Hills the evening of March 11 until the morning of March 12th. Snowfall totals of 3-9 inches were reported, including 9 inches at Custer, 8 inches at Deerfield, and 8 inches at Lead.

March 11, 2011: A very intense low-pressure area moving across North Dakota brought widespread blizzard conditions to central and northeast South Dakota. The low-pressure area brought 1 to 3 inches of snowfall to the region. This new snow combined with 30 to 50 mph winds with gusts to 60 to 70 mph brought widespread whiteout conditions. Traffic was brought to a standstill, with many motorists having to be rescued and taken to a shelter. Hundreds of cars were stranded on mainly Highway 12 and Interstate-29. Two people traveling on Highway 10 in McPherson County told about how they became stuck and were picked up by another vehicle and that it took them over 2 1/2 hours to travel just a few miles to safety. Interstate-29 was closed from Watertown to Sisseton from 6 pm on the 11th until noon on the 12th. Many events were affected, including the Girls State Basketball Tournament in Watertown. There were several overturned semis along with several vehicle accidents across the area. Some of the highest wind gusts included 56 mph at Watertown; 58 mph at Mobridge, Sisseton, and Faulkton; 59 mph at Aberdeen; 61 mph at Bowdle; 66 mph near Hillhead, and 71 mph west of Long Lake.

1888: The Great Blizzard of 1888 paralyzed the east coast from the Chesapeake Bay to Maine on March 11 through the 14th. The blizzard dumped as much as 55 inches of snow in some areas, and snowdrifts of 30 to 40 feet were reported. An estimated 400 people died from this blizzard. Click [HERE](#) for more information from History.com.

1897: The coldest March reading at Medicine Hat, Alberta Canada, occurred as the temperature dropped to 38 degrees below zero.

1911: Tamarack, California, reported 451 inches of snow on the ground, a record for the U.S.

1990: Forty-four cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Record highs included 71 degrees at Dickinson and Williston, North Dakota and 84 degrees at Lynchburg Virginia, Charleston, and Huntington West Virginia. Augusta Georgia and Columbia South Carolina tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation with record highs of 88 degrees.

1948 - Record cold followed in the wake of a Kansas blizzard. Lows of -25 degrees at Oberlin, Healy and Quinter established a state record for the month of March. Lows of -15 at Dodge City, -11 at Concordia, and -3 at Wichita were also March records. (The Weather Channel)

1962 - One of the most paralyzing snowstorms in decades produced record March snowfalls in Iowa. Four feet of snow covered the ground at Inwood following the storm. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., and a storm over the Gulf of Mexico spread rain and sleet and snow into the Appalachian Region. Sleet was reported in southern Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A blizzard raged across the north central U.S. Chadron NE was buried under 33 inches of snow, up to 25 inches of snow was reported in eastern Wyoming, and totals in the Black Hills of South Dakota ranged up to 69 inches at Lead. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Mullen NE. Snow drifts thirty feet high were reported around Lusk WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-one cities in the central and southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 95 degrees at Lubbock TX equalled their record for March. (The National Weather Summary)

2006 - Phoenix's record run for dry days finally ends at 143 days. The last measured rain fell on October 18, 2005. Not only did the rain break the dry spell, the 1.40 inches that fell was a record amount for the date.

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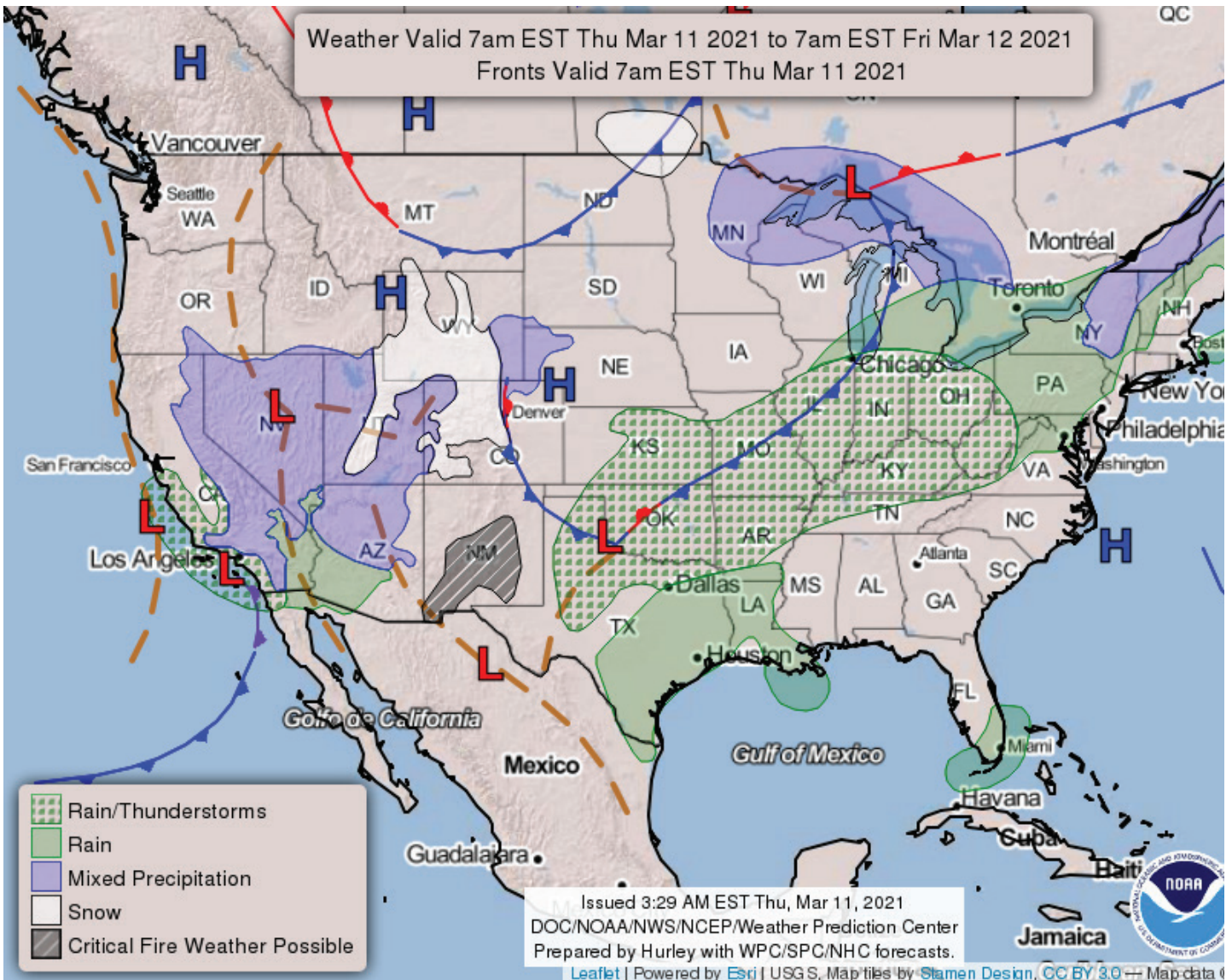
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 40 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Low Temp: 27 °F at 1:29 PM**  
**Wind: 25 mph at 12:40 PM**  
**Precip: 6" of Snow**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 71° in 2016**  
**Record Low: -27° in 1948**  
**Average High: 37°F**  
**Average Low: 18°F**  
**Average Precip in Mar.: 0.30**  
**Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 1.32**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.18**  
**Sunset Tonight: 6:35 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:51 a.m.**



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## GOD'S MERCY

Valentine's Day is a day that has been set aside as a day to express love and affection. Cards and candy, gifts and flowers are given freely and are usually intended to make a statement of appreciation and love to someone who has a special place in our heart.

We read in Psalm 23 that the "goodness and mercy of God will follow us all the days of our lives." But the word mercy is best translated "love" – a love that is not readily visible in our world but is vitally needed by each of us. It is God's love that we can only know and experience through His promises.

Rather than being pursued and punished by a god who is angry with us for breaking his laws, we have a God who pursues us and promises to provide for our every need from His limitless love and grace. It is this God that David knew and trusted. It is this God that David knew that he could go to for hope and help, healing and forgiveness. It is this God that David knew could be trusted to protect him in times of trouble. It is this God that David knew.

And, we too can come to know this God as David knew Him. And, we too can come to trust Him as David trusted Him. If we chose.

When we speak of God's love, we speak of a love that comes first from loyalty – He will never leave us nor abandon us. We know that it is a love that will surround us and sustain us with care and compassion. We know that this love will be available to meet our every need every day. Accept His love by accepting His Son.

Prayer: We thank You, loving Father, for a love that is never ending, always available, and freely given to us through Your Son, our Savior. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23:6



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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 Princess Prom (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
- 06/19/2021 Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon
- 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
- 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 Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

16-18-26-33-35

(sixteen, eighteen, twenty-six, thirty-three, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$62,000

Lotto America

04-15-31-36-39, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 2

(four, fifteen, thirty-one, thirty-six, thirty-nine; Star Ball: six; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$3.57 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$79 million

Powerball

17-18-37-44-53, Powerball: 18, Power Play:

(seventeen, eighteen, thirty-seven, forty-four, fifty-three; Powerball: eighteen; Power Play: zero)

Estimated jackpot: \$155 million

### Pot advocates make first arguments in Supreme Court appeal

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Advocates for recreational marijuana in South Dakota argued the future of the ballot initiative process is at stake as the state Supreme Court weighs a voter-passed constitutional amendment to legalize marijuana, according to documents filed Wednesday.

South Dakota voters in November passed a constitutional amendment legalizing marijuana, but a state circuit judge in January struck that down as unconstitutional. Marijuana advocates have appealed to the Supreme Court in a case that will determine whether recreational pot becomes legal in the state.

"This case is not just about marijuana. It is also about the future of the initiative process in South Dakota," attorneys Timothy Billion and Brendan Johnson wrote to open their arguments filed to the Supreme Court.

The attorneys, representing South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws and several other marijuana advocates, argued that their opponents should face a high burden to prove that the state's constitution was violated by the amendment.

"The ability of voters to decide what rights their constitution guarantees is a fundamental and sacred right," the attorneys wrote.

Two law enforcement officers, Highway Patrol Superintendent Col. Rick Miller and Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom, sued to block marijuana legalization by challenging its constitutionality. Miller was effectively acting on behalf of South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, who had opposed the effort to legalize pot.

Circuit Judge Christina Klinger last month ruled in favor of Miller and Thom, finding problems with technicalities in the constitutional amendment to legalize marijuana. The judge reasoned that it violated constitutional law requiring constitutional amendments address a single subject. She also found it would have created broad changes to state government by granting authority to the Department of Revenue to oversee the marijuana program.

Attorneys for Miller and Thom have two weeks to file their arguments to the Supreme Court. A hearing date for oral arguments has not been set.

### Noem's medical marijuana plan scuttled by Senate

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By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's push to scale back a voter-approved measure to legalize medical marijuana failed Wednesday after Republican senators defied her.

Noem's proposal died after the House and Senate could not agree on the bill, paving the way for a voter-passed medical marijuana law to go into effect on July 1. Noem had argued that her administration needed more time to implement the program, but senators from within her own party defied her plan, reasoning they owed it to voters to end marijuana prohibitions in some form.

The Senate on Monday passed a proposal with key deviations from Noem's plan, which aimed to delay legalization until next year. Notably, it decriminalized possession of small amounts of pot for all adults starting July 1 and protected medical users' ability to possess up to three ounces (85 grams). It would have kept a six-month delay to medical marijuana legalization.

That forced a choice upon the governor and her allies in the House: Accept the senate's proposal or reject the bill, allowing the medical marijuana program — as passed by voters — to go into effect July 1.

Sen. Blake Curd, a Republican proponent of the Senate proposal, called it a "reasonable attempt to bridge the gap" between the governor's desire to take extra months to develop a program and honoring the will of voters.

In an attempt to scuttle the Senate proposal and move the bill forward, the governor and House lawmakers made major concessions from her original plan. She had argued that it would take months to properly implement a medical marijuana program, but a six-month delay was scrapped. House lawmakers proposed a compromise to legalize medical marijuana on July 1, but kept caveats that people under 21 could not use it, medical users could only possess one ounce (28 grams) at a time, and people could not cultivate cannabis plants in their homes.

"I was hoping for some time to do it right," said House Speaker Spencer Gosch, a Republican who had been the main proponent of the governor's plan to delay the medical marijuana program and set up a committee to study the issue.

But many lawmakers, even those who have said they were personally opposed to marijuana legalization, have recognized they risked running afoul of voters in denying some form of marijuana legalization.

"The people, the public wanted adult-use marijuana, and they wanted medical-use marijuana," said Republican Rep. Craig Jamison during a House debate on accepting the Senate's proposal.

Noem, however, has remained adamant in her opposition to recreational pot. Her office spent much of the day putting pressure on lawmakers to turn to her plan. At one point, a hallway of the Capitol echoed with a terse exchange between a senator and the governor's staff. But a committee of lawmakers tasked with working out a compromise dissolved after less than 20 minutes of debate.

Gosch told the committee, "I think we're pretty stuck in gridlock and at this particular time I don't see a path forward."

Noem's spokesman Ian Fury declined to discuss the governor's position on the legislation, saying, "We're not going to negotiate that through the press."

Late Wednesday, the House elected not to continue negotiations with the Senate, effectively killing the bill. However, Noem has the ability to call a special legislative session to have lawmakers take up the issue.

## List of vaccine eligible people expands in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Health announced Wednesday that the state is expanding the list of people eligible for the coronavirus vaccine.

The remainder of individuals in the priority group D who are now eligible include teachers, childcare workers, college staff, college students and funeral workers.

"Given South Dakota's strong position on vaccination efforts and the increased points of access for vaccine distribution and administration, we are happy to fully open up Phase D starting today," Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said. "Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is a significant step in getting back to normal, and I encourage those eligible to schedule their vaccination today."

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Health officials say South Dakota has been making significant progress moving down the list of vaccination priority groups. Those that have already been eligible include healthcare workers, long-term care residents, emergency medical service workers, law enforcement, persons aged over 65 years old, high risk patients and those with underlying medical conditions.

Healthcare providers have administered 262,250 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. More than 86,000 people have received two doses.

The Department of Health also said 30% of the state's population has received at least one dose.

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined  
Yankton Press & Dakotan. March 9, 2021.

Editorial: The Influenza Season That Really Wasn't

With March here and our COVID winter waning, let's talk about what happened to the flu season.

In short, it practically didn't happen at all.

Not completely, of course, but the influenza numbers have been so low this season that it's almost impossible to look at it as anything other than a terrific upside of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been reporting for weeks that influenza numbers this season are running "unusually low," but in fact, cases have been markedly down from past years. In fact, "this is the lowest flu season we've had on record," according to Lynnette Brammer of the CDC.

One amazing statistic published by the CDC last week indicated that, so far this season, there has been just one pediatric death in the U.S. due to influenza. Last year, there were about 200.

Obviously, this is no small thing. Influenza can generate up to 800,000 hospitalizations and 60,000 deaths each season in the U.S. This year, it's practically nonexistent.

It isn't just the United States seeing this. For instance, Canadian media reported Monday that there "have been so few cases of influenza this year that Canadian public health officials still can't declare the official start of flu season," based on set criteria used to make that designation.

It's fair to say that the COVID-19 safety precautions that have been drilled into us the past year have had a huge effect. Things like staying socially distant, washing hands, covering your coughs and wearing face masks were bound to bolster our defense against influenza.

Another likely factor is the push made since last fall to get people vaccinated against the flu, citing it as one way to keep your body's defenses up and to avoid exposure to COVID-19. As a result, more than 190 million flu shots have been administered this season. Oddly, it's difficult to determine the efficacy of this year's flu vaccine to prevalent strains because of the other defensive measures people have taken, which have limited exposure.

This may lead to one negative consequence about the lack of activity this flu season: It may make it more difficult for researchers to formulate a flu vaccine for next season. Scientists usually gauge what flu strains are dominant this season and use that information to devise what will be a greater threat next season. "But there's not a lot of (flu) viruses to look at," Brammer admitted.

Nevertheless, this historically light flu season offers a profound insight into the importance of the actions we embrace to stay healthy, especially when numerous threats are around. Forget mask mandates and whatever else: Simply choosing to take precautions can have a big impact in how you fight off things like the flu or a cold. These may seem like smaller skirmishes compared to the COVID-19 war, but we now have a much better idea of the best way to defend our health during infectious viral seasons.

END

## Snowstorm will be limited in its impact on drought

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Weather experts say a winter storm that could deliver up to 8 inches (20.3 centimeters) of snow in parts of southwest South Dakota through Wednesday will be beneficial, but won't do a lot to mitigate the ongoing drought in the region.



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Nearly all of the region west of the Missouri River is experiencing a severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

National Weather Service hydrologist Melissa Smith says benefits of the latest storm will be limited because of an abnormally dry winter.

"It's not going to be as helpful as if we were going to get a bunch of extra runoff. When this goes to melt, we're not expecting a lot of the runoff to help with some of those already dry stock ponds or smaller creeks," Smith told the Rapid City Journal.

The weather service has issued a winter storm warning for the Black Hills and southern plains until 5 p.m. Wednesday and a winter weather advisory is in effect until 5 p.m. Wednesday for Rapid City and the Northern Hills.

Wednesday's storm is expected to provide anywhere between 2 inches (5 centimeters) to 5 inches (12.7 centimeters) of snow in Rapid City, with higher amounts up to 8 inches possible in portions of the Black Hills.

## Prince William defends UK royal family against racism claims

LONDON (AP) — Prince William on Thursday defended Britain's royal family against accusations of racism made by his brother Prince Harry and sister-in-law Meghan, saying the royals are "very much not a racist family."

In comments made during a visit to an east London school, William became the first royal to directly address the explosive interview broadcast Sunday in the U.S. that his brother and the Duchess of Sussex gave to Oprah Winfrey.

Buckingham Palace's sought to respond to Harry and Meghan's allegations of racism and mistreatment in a 61-word statement, but it has failed to quell the controversy.

William, second in line to the throne after his father Prince Charles, says he hadn't yet spoken to Harry in the aftermath of the interview, "but I will do."

Harry and Meghan's comments have rocked the royal family — and touched off conversations around the world about racism, mental health and even the relationship between Britain and its former colonies.

Those tensions have only built as the public waited to see how the royal family would respond.

Meghan, who is biracial, said in the interview she was so isolated and miserable as a working member of the royal family that she had suicidal thoughts. She also said Harry told her there were "concerns and conversations" by a royal family member about the color of her baby's skin when she was pregnant with their son, Archie.

## Ethiopia's leader faces intense pressure to end Tigray war

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Ethiopia's government on Thursday faced mounting pressure to withdraw troops from the northern region of Tigray amid growing reports of war crimes in an embattled area that now faces a humanitarian crisis.

Criticism of the conduct of government troops and their allies from neighboring Eritrea grew after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted Wednesday that "ethnic cleansing" has happened in parts of Tigray.

"The challenge in Ethiopia is very significant, and it's one that we are very focused on, particularly the situation in Tigray, where we are seeing very credible reports of human rights abuses and atrocities that are ongoing," Blinken told the foreign affairs committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Although Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed expressed concerns about the actions of the fugitive leaders of Tigray, Blinken said, "the situation in Tigray today is unacceptable and has to change, and that means a few things. It means making sure that we are getting into the region, into Tigray. Aid workers and others ... to make sure that the people are cared for, provided for and protected."

Eritrean troops as well as fighters from Amhara, an Ethiopian region bordering Tigray, "need to come out," he said, adding that the region needs "a force that will not abuse the human rights of the people of

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Tigray or commit acts of ethnic cleansing, which we've seen in western Tigray. That has to stop."

There was no immediate comment from Ethiopian authorities.

But the fugitive leaders of Tigray seized on Blinken's comments, issuing a statement on Thursday condemning what they called "the genocidal campaign" targeting their people.

"Thousands of civilians have been massacred, hundreds of thousands forcibly displaced from their homes, civilian installations and Infrastructures systemically destroyed," said the statement posted on Twitter by Getachew Reda, one of the fugitive leaders of Tigray. "Despite shamelessly protesting its innocence and profusely promising to allow access to humanitarian agencies and international investigation into allegations, Abiy Ahmed's regime and its partners in crime have only stepped up their war crimes and crimes against humanity in recent weeks and days."

A senior Ethiopian diplomat on Wednesday quit his post in Washington over concerns about the reported atrocities in Tigray. Berhane Kidanemariam, who served as the deputy chief of mission at the Ethiopian embassy in Washington, slammed Abiy as a reckless leader who is dividing his country.

Accounts of atrocities by Ethiopian and allied forces against residents of Tigray have been detailed in reports by The Associated Press and by Amnesty International. Ethiopia's federal government and regional officials in Tigray both maintain that each other's governments are illegitimate after the pandemic disrupted elections.

The conflict began in November, when Abiy sent government troops into Tigray after an attack there on federal military facilities. No one knows how many thousands of civilians have been killed in the conflict.

Humanitarian officials have warned that a growing number of people might be starving to death in Tigray. The fighting erupted on the brink of harvest in the largely agricultural region and sent an untold number of people fleeing their homes. Witnesses have described widespread looting by Eritrean soldiers as well as the burning of crops.

## Still recovering, Japan marks 10 years since tsunami hit

MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan fell quiet at 2:46 p.m. Thursday to mark the minute that an earthquake began 10 years ago, setting off a tsunami and nuclear crisis that devastated the country's northeast coast in a disaster that one survivor said he fears people are beginning to forget.

Carrying bouquets of flowers, many walked to the seaside or visited graves to pray for relatives and friends washed away by the water. Emperor Naruhito and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga were among those observing a moment of silence at a memorial in Tokyo. Dignitaries and representatives of the survivors spoke — but most watched the ceremony online or on television because of restrictions to slow the coronavirus pandemic.

The magnitude-9.0 quake that struck on March 11, 2011 — one of the biggest on record — triggered a wall of water that swept far inland, destroying towns and causing meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The days following the quake were terrifying for many in Japan and farther afield, as hydrogen explosions released radiation into the air and technicians worked furiously to try to cool the plant's nuclear fuel by pumping in seawater. There were concerns and confusion about the extent of meltdowns, and how far radiation might travel, including fears that Tokyo and even the U.S. west coast were at risk. Officials said they were not, but panicked shoppers as far away as China and Russia scrambled to stock up on goods they thought would protect them.

More than 18,000 people died, mostly in the tsunami, and nearly half a million people were displaced. The government recognizes another 3,700 — mostly from Fukushima prefecture — who died of causes linked to the disaster, such as stress.

Ten years on, more than 40,000 people are still unable to return home, and areas near the wrecked plant are still off-limits due to contamination from the initial radiation fallout. Many in Japan have said that the country's intense focus on physically rebuilding has at times ignored other healing that needed to be done.

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"Reconstruction in disaster-hit areas has moved forward significantly, but recovery of the survivors' hearts is not making as much progress as we wish," Makoto Saito, a teacher at an elementary school in Minamisoma who lost his 5-year-old son Shota in the tsunami, said in a speech at the Tokyo ceremony.

The government has said this is the last year it will organize a national commemoration for the disaster. Saito, representing Fukushima survivors, said that he is afraid memories are fading outside the disaster zone and he is committed to preventing that from happening by continuing to recount the lessons from the disaster and telling the stories of his son.

Naruhito said "my heart aches" when he thinks of those who have struggled to adapt to drastic changes to their lives because of the triple disaster, including the loss of loved ones, jobs and whole communities.

"I also consider it important to heal emotional scars and watch over the mental and physical health of those afflicted, including the elderly and children," he said. He stressed that it's important for people to stand by them and help reconstruct their lives "without leaving even a single soul behind in this difficult situation."

In Tokyo's posh shopping district of Ginza, pedestrians stopped to observe the moment of silence as in previous anniversaries. But a memorial concert at the nearby Hibiya park, which has drawn many people in past years, was held online this year due to the pandemic and attracted only a small audience.

Beyond Tokyo, many marked the day by raising awareness for disaster prevention. In Kyoto, authorities conducted emergency drills.

Roads, train lines, houses and other key infrastructure have mostly been rebuilt in the disaster-hit region at the cost of more than 30 trillion yen (\$280 billion). But no-go zones remain in parts of Fukushima, where shops and houses were abandoned and cordoned off and massive amounts of radioactive waste from decontamination pile up. Swaths of empty land remain in coastal towns farther north in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, which were already seeing people move away before the disaster and have seen that trend accelerate.

In Otsuchi town in Iwate prefecture, where the tsunami destroyed the town hall, killing about 40 employees, families in dark suits gathered on a piece of empty land where the building used to stand. In Ishinomaki, Miyagi prefecture, dozens of residents prayed at a cenotaph carrying the names of more than 3,000 victims.

In Rikuzentakata, another Iwate city where a tsunami as high as 17 meters (56 feet) killed more than 1,700 residents, dozens of police officials wearing orange life vests combed the coastline in search of remains of those who have not been found — an effort that is still repeated in many towns every month. The remains of a woman found in February were returned to her family on Tuesday.

No deaths have been confirmed directly from the radiation, but Fukushima has fallen behind in the recovery efforts, with pieces of land totaling 33,000 hectares (81,500 acres) in seven towns near the nuclear plant still classified as no-go zones. Securing the nuclear fuel, dismantling the reactors and decontaminating the plant is an unprecedented challenge, with some questioning after 10 years of work whether it can be done.

But the president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings, which ran the plant, said in a statement Thursday that the company is determined to continue the cleanup and help develop jobs and businesses related to that process.

"We do not consider the 10th anniversary a breaking point, and will never let the Fukushima Daiichi accident fade," Tomoaki Kobayakawa said.

Thursday's ceremony comes just two weeks before the Olympic torch relay begins from Fukushima for the delayed Tokyo Summer Games in July.

Suga has said the Olympics will showcase Japan's recovery from the disaster and will be proof of human victory over the coronavirus pandemic. Some survivors, however, say the recovery is not yet done.

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Follow Mari Yamaguchi at <https://www.twitter.com/mariyamaguchi>

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Follow AP's coverage of the anniversary of Japan's triple disaster at <https://apnews.com/hub/tsunamis>

## Congress OKs \$1.9T virus relief bill in win for Biden, Dems

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Congress riven along party lines has approved the landmark \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill, as President Joe Biden and Democrats claimed a major triumph on legislation marshaling the government's spending might against twin pandemic and economic crises that have upended a nation.

The House gave final congressional approval Wednesday to the sweeping package by a near party line 220-211 vote precisely seven weeks after Biden entered the White House and four days after the Senate passed the bill. Republicans in both chambers opposed the legislation unanimously, characterizing it as bloated, crammed with liberal policies and heedless of signs the crises are easing.

"Help is here," Biden tweeted moments after the roll call, which ended with applause from Democratic lawmakers. Biden said he'd sign the measure Friday.

Most noticeable to many Americans are provisions providing up to \$1,400 direct payments this year to most people and extending \$300 weekly emergency unemployment benefits into early September. But the legislation goes far beyond that.

The measure addresses Democrats' campaign promises and Biden's top initial priority of easing a one-two punch that first hit the country a year ago. Since then, many Americans have been relegated to hermit-like lifestyles in their homes to avoid a disease that's killed more than 529,000 people — about the population of Wichita, Kansas — and plunged the economy to its deepest depths since the Great Depression.

"Today we have a decision to make of tremendous consequence," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., "a decision that will make a difference for millions of Americans, saving lives and livelihoods."

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.

Republicans noted that they've overwhelmingly supported five previous relief bills that Congress has approved since the pandemic struck a year ago, when divided government under then-President Donald Trump forced the parties to negotiate. They said this one solely reflected Democratic goals by setting aside money for family planning programs and federal workers who take leave to cope with COVID-19 and failing to require that shuttered schools accepting aid reopen their doors.

"If you're a member of the swamp, you do pretty well under this bill. But for the American people, it means serious problems immediately on the horizon," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., referring to the added federal borrowing the measure will force.

Even so, Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., touted the bill's \$29 billion for the ailing restaurant industry, tweeting it would help them "survive the pandemic" without mentioning he had voted against the legislation. Democrats predicted this week that Republicans would do that, with Pelosi saying, "It's typical that they will vote no and take the dough."

Wicker told reporters, "I'm not going to vote for \$1.9 trillion just because it has a couple of good provisions."

A dominant feature of the 628-page bill is initiatives making it one of the biggest federal efforts 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 — some of them credits that Democrats have signaled they'd like to make permanent — plus spending for renters, feeding programs and people's utility bills.

Besides the direct payments and jobless-benefit extension, the measure has hundreds of billions for



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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, pension systems and student borrowers, and subsidies for consumers buying health insurance and states expanding Medicaid coverage for lower earners.

"Who's going to help? Do we say this is all survival of the fittest? No," said House Budget Committee Chairman John Yarmuth, D-Ky. "We rise to the occasion. We deliver."

The legislation would reduce the number of people living in poverty this year by around one-third, from 44 million down to 28 million, the liberal-leaning Urban Institute estimated Wednesday. The poverty rate for children would be reduced by over half, said the institute, which examined the impact of the measure's stimulus checks, jobless benefits, food stamps and tax credits for children.

Rep. Jared Golden of Maine was the only Democrat to oppose the measure. He said some of the bill's spending wasn't urgent.

The measure was approved amid promising though mixed signs of recovery.

Americans are getting vaccinated at increasingly robust rates, though that is tempered by coronavirus variants and people's growing impatience with curbing social activities. The economy created an unexpectedly strong 379,000 jobs last month, but there remain 9.5 million fewer than before the pandemic struck.

Republicans said the country will pay a price for the extra spending.

"It's certainly good politics to say, 'Hey, we're going to hand you a check for \$1,400,'" said Rep. Tom Rice, R-S.C. "But what they don't talk about is what this bill costs."

An 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. According to a CNN poll released Wednesday, the relief bill is backed by 61% of Americans, including nearly all Democrats, 58% of independents and 26% of Republicans.

Yet until November 2022, when control of the Senate and House will be at stake, it will be uncertain whether voters will reward Democrats, punish them or make decisions on unforeseen issues.

The bill's pathway has underscored Democrats' challenges as they seek to build a legislative record to appeal to voters.

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 New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

On the relief bill, progressives had to swallow big concessions to solidify moderate support.

The most painful was eliminating the House-approved federal minimum-wage increase to \$15 hourly by 2025. Moderates also succeeded in trimming the emergency jobless benefits, which in an earlier version were \$400 weekly, and phasing out the \$1,400 stimulus checks completely for earners at lower levels than originally proposed.

At some point it seems likely that progressives will draw their own lines in the sand.

## **Biden's speech goals: Mourn loss, urge caution, offer hope**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Marking a year of loss and disruption, President Joe Biden will use his first prime-time address since taking office to steer the nation toward a hungered-for sentiment — hope — in the "next phase" of the fight against the pandemic that has killed more than 529,000 Americans.

Previewing his remarks, Biden said he would "talk about what we've been through as a nation this past year, but more importantly, I'm going to talk about what comes next."

Biden's challenge Thursday night will be to honor the sacrifices made by Americans over the last year while encouraging them to remain vigilant despite "virus fatigue" and growing impatience to resume normal activities given the tantalizing promise of vaccines. Speaking on the one-year anniversary of the World Health Organization's declaration of a pandemic, he'll mourn the dead, but also project optimism about the future.

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"This is a chance for him to really beam into everybody's living rooms and to be both the mourner in chief and to explain how he's leading the country out of this," said presidential historian and Rice University professor Douglas Brinkley.

"This is a big moment," Brinkley added. "He's got to win over hearts and minds for people to stay masked and get vaccinated, but also recognize that after the last year, the federal government hasn't forgotten you."

Biden's evening remarks in the East Room are central to a pivotal week for the president as he addresses the defining challenge of his term: shepherding the nation through the twin public health and economic storms brought about by the virus.

On Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released initial guidance for how vaccinated people can resume some normal activities. On Wednesday, Congress approved the president's \$1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan," aimed at easing the economic impact of the virus on tens of millions of people. And the nation was on pace to administer its 100 millionth dose of vaccine as soon as Thursday.

Biden said he would focus his remarks on what his administration plans to deliver in the coming months, but also reiterate his call for Americans to continue to practice social distancing and wear face coverings to hasten the end of the pandemic.

"I'm going to launch the next phase of the COVID response and explain what we will do as a government and what we will ask of the American people," he said.

He added: "There is light at the end of this dark tunnel of the past year. There is real reason for hope."

Almost exactly one year ago, President Donald Trump addressed the nation to mark the WHO's declaration of a global pandemic. He announced travel restrictions and called for Americans to practice good hygiene but displayed little alarm about the forthcoming catastrophe. Trump, it was later revealed, acknowledged that he had been deliberately "playing down" the threat of the virus.

For Biden, who has promised to level with the American public after the alternate reality of Trump's virus talk, the imperative is to strike the correct balance "between optimism and grief," said Princeton history professor and presidential scholar Julian Zelizer.

"Generally, the country likes optimism, and at this particular moment they're desperate for optimism, but you can't risk a 'Mission Accomplished' moment," he said, warning against any premature declaration that the threat has been vanquished.

Fifty days into his presidency, Biden is experiencing a polling honeymoon that his predecessor never enjoyed. Yet public sentiment remains stubbornly polarized and fewer people among his critics seem willing to say they'll give him a chance than was the case for earlier presidents. Overall, he has earned strong marks on his handling of the pandemic.

According to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research released last week, 70% of Americans back the Democratic president's handling of the virus response, including 44% of Republicans.

The White House hopes that as Biden assumes the role of cheerleader for the virus relief package, the elements of the \$1.9 trillion bill that are popular with Republicans will boost his support even further.

Brinkley said Biden's decision to deliver a speech aimed directly at the nation before he makes the traditional presidential address to a joint session of Congress signals that it is as much an "introduction" of the president and his administration to the American people as a status report on his first 50 days in office.

Presidential addresses to Congress "tend to be a series of soundbites," Brinkley said. "This way, he can make his case directly."

Still, the prime-time speech is in many ways an anachronism, better suited for an era when Americans had vastly fewer television options and in which a presidential address could reframe the national conversation.

The fragmented media landscape makes it more difficult for Biden to reach people, Zelizer said, but that may be beside the point.

"Everything he's doing is throwback," said Zelizer. "It's part of his effort to create normalcy after the last four years."

## UK press body chief quits as Meghan racism claims roil media

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The head of a major British press organization has resigned over his response to Meghan and Harry's television interview — the second senior U.K. media figure to leave amid a heated debate over the royal couple's allegations of racism and bias.

Ian Murray said he was stepping down as executive director of the Society of Editors after issuing a statement that many felt downplayed the problem of racism in the media. —

Murray said late Wednesday that the statement, which accused Harry and Meghan of mounting an attack on the press, "could have been much clearer in its condemnation of bigotry and has clearly caused upset."

"As executive director I lead the Society and as such must take the blame and so I have decided it is best for the board and membership that I step aside so that the organization can start to rebuild its reputation," he said.

In the interview with Oprah Winfrey, Meghan and Harry spoke about the intense pressure of media scrutiny and suggested there was a racist element to coverage of the biracial duchess. Harry also said the British royal family was "scared" of the tabloid press, which he said exercised "control by fear."

The Society of Editors, an umbrella group for almost 400 newspapers and other news outlets, released a strongly worded statement about the interview, saying "the U.K. media is not bigoted and will not be swayed from its vital role holding the rich and powerful to account following the attack on the press by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex."

But some journalists disagreed. More than 160 reporters and editors signed a letter saying the Society of Editors was "in denial" about racism. Katherine Viner, editor of The Guardian, said media outlets needed to become "much more representative and more self-aware."

ITV News presenter Charlene White pulled out of hosting the society's annual Press Awards, saying the organization had asked her to get involved in order to improve its diversity, but failed to live up to its words.

"I only work with organizations who practice what they preach," she said.

"Since the Black Lives Matter movement really took hold in the U.K. last year, every single institution in this country has had to finally look at its failings and its position in terms of how they treat ethnic minorities both inside and outside of its walls. But for some unknown reason, you feel as though the U.K. press is exempt in that discussion."

Murray's exit follows the departure of Piers Morgan from TV show "Good Morning Britain" amid an outcry over his comments about Meghan.

Morgan, a former tabloid editor, quit on Tuesday, a day after he said "I don't believe a word she says" in reference to Meghan's interview. The duchess told Winfrey that she was so miserable during her time as a working member of the royal family that she had suicidal thoughts, and claimed she had not received support from palace staff.

The U.K.'s media watchdog said it had received more than 41,000 complaints about Morgan's comments.

## One Good Thing: In Kosovo, virus lets humanity shine through

By FLORENT BAJRAMI and LLAZAR SEMINI Associated Press

PRISTINA, Kosovo (AP) — Helping her elderly father beat back his coronavirus infection on her own taught Arta Jashari how the power of one can offer hope to others and change things for the better.

The 32-year-old soprano took it upon herself to treat her father, Baki Bashari — the Kosovo Philharmonic's maestro who suffers from diabetes and a heart ailment — after she discharged him last June from the country's overwhelmed Pulmonological Clinic.

Under quarantine, the job was difficult. It was with the kindness of neighbors who provided Jashari with food and other essentials that she was able to cope. Her father recovered a month later, but it was the compassion of strangers that made her understand the world is in this together and that kindness should be paid forward.

Jashari, a famous artist at home, resolved to help by donning protective gear and heading back to the

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Pulmonological Clinic to offer whatever assistance she could.

"You give them hope when you are around. They know that you are here to help," she told The Associated Press.

Jashari has no medical training, but assisted doctors in any way that was needed, offering succor to those suffering either at the clinic or at home. For patients recovering at home, she would often act as a liaison between them and the overworked medical staff, even guiding nurses to some who needed hands-on treatment.

Flamur Marku, a pulmonologist at the clinic, said everybody could hardly believe "why somebody is risking her health, risking getting infected."

"Even with protective clothes and other things, it is always more dangerous to be with a patient with COVID-19," Marku said. "It was a great thing from her."

Jashari never received official permission to help out at the clinic, but no one ever got in her way.

"I never thought about whether it would be a problem for me if I got infected or not because I think people's lives matter more than if I get infected or not," said Jashari. What's most important is just being there, she said, for patients who "long for your presence, since they need so much support emotionally."

Jashari graduated from universities in Pristina, Berlin and Ljubljana after studying singing. She works with the Kosovo Philharmonic. The apple didn't fall far from the tree — Jashari's mother is also a soprano.

A concert in late February was among the very few held over the last year because of the pandemic.

Jashari said she misses the intensity of a full season of concerts, which are now held mostly online or with a very limited audience. But her time at the clinic, combined with translating world operas into Albanian, have kept her busy. She says the outpouring of love in any performance is similar to helping out at the clinic.

"You give so much love and so much hope and so many emotions ... and here (at the clinic) it is the same."

Kosovo has had 1,674 virus-confirmed deaths and over 73,600 cases, according to government data tallied by Johns Hopkins University. To try to limit new infections, the government has ordered an overnight curfew and banned public gatherings of over 50 people.

It was difficult to get Jashari to open up about her outreach to COVID-19 patients. She has shunned the spotlight, saying she hasn't done this for publicity.

"I think it's very important that the entire world now is going through the same situation and (the pandemic is) restoring humanity in the world," she said.

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Semini reported from Tirana, Albania.

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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>

## 'People are starving': New exodus in Ethiopia's Tigray area

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — Skinny, hungry, fleeing threats of violence, thousands of people who have been hiding in rural areas of Ethiopia's Tigray region have begun arriving in a community that can barely support them — and more are said to be on the way.

For months, one great unknown in the Tigray conflict has been the fate of hundreds of thousands of people in vast rural areas beyond the reach of outside aid. With the region largely cut off from the world since November, fears of violence and starvation have grown.

Now those people are starting to arrive, many by foot, in the community of Shire, aid workers who are there and who have visited say. The Associated Press obtained permission to use rare photos largely from the International Rescue Committee of the dire conditions facing these displaced people. Photos from the region have been hard to come by, with electricity cut for much of the conflict and ethnic Tigrayans telling



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the AP that being caught with photos endangered their lives.

Some 5,000 people had arrived between last Wednesday and Sunday, and humanitarian teams are being sent to find those said to be on the way, Oliver Behn, general director for Doctors Without Borders-Holland, told the AP.

"They are coming in very bad conditions ... very exhausted, dehydrated, skinny," Behn said after a visit. "It's becoming a desperate situation very quickly."

The people arriving bring an idea of the deprivation gnawing at the Tigray countryside. Aid workers say some describe surviving by eating leaves — or the seeds they had put aside for planting, in a sign of even worse hunger to come.

It is not clear exactly what new threats of violence caused these thousands of people to flee western Tigray, where U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday said "acts of ethnic cleansing" have been seen. Some people from Ethiopia's neighboring Amhara region are accused of occupying communities. In speaking with humanitarian workers, the ethnic Tigrayans described hiding in the hills for weeks after the fighting erupted between Ethiopian and allied forces and those of the Tigray regional leaders who once dominated the country's government but were sidelined under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Shire is a base of operations for humanitarian efforts that workers say are not enough to meet the growing needs. Some 16,000 displaced people already occupy three crowded camps set up in schools, including unfinished buildings with perilous drop-offs and empty elevator shafts. Some people sleep 40 or 50 to a room, possessing little but mats and clothes.

There is no space in these camps for the thousands of new arrivals. Hundreds are now sleeping outdoors. Communities across Tigray have been in little condition to support even their own residents. The conflict erupted on the brink of harvest, and after months of a locust outbreak. Banks were closed, and stores were looted. Even now, as Ethiopia's government asserts that it has reached over 4 million people with food aid, it is not enough.

"People are starving," Madiha Raza with the International Rescue Committee told the AP after visiting Shire recently. "There is a severe issue of access to food. One interviewee told me she survived on just leaves for a month while she hid in a forest. There have been some food distributions at the internally displaced people centers but not nearly sufficient amounts."

The United States estimates that 4 million people, or two-thirds of Tigray's population, urgently need food aid. Even as access slowly improves to the region, worries grow.

"What we know is extremely concerning, but what we don't know might be even worse," said Manuel Fontaine, director of emergency programs with UNICEF.

The newly arriving people from rural areas are a constant reminder of how grim life might be for those still hiding from the conflict.

"Our teams have seen people arriving in main towns, (internally displaced people's) sites that are in extremely bad shape," Dominik Stillhart, director of operations with the International Committee of the Red Cross, told reporters late last month.

Some Tigray communities remain out of reach. Only in recent weeks have Doctors Without Borders workers begun arriving in places that had been inaccessible.

Health centers have been looted and few health workers remain, Behn said, meaning that people have had little or no help for childbirths and other emergencies or even basic care.

"It's very clear these communities are in significant need," he said. "Coping mechanisms after four months are really at the edge."

## Will the coronavirus ever go away?

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Will the coronavirus ever go away?

No one knows for sure. Scientists think the virus that causes COVID-19 may be with us for decades or longer, but that doesn't mean it will keep posing the same threat.

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The virus emerged in late 2019 and it's difficult to predict how it will behave over the long term. But many experts believe it's likely the disease will eventually ease from a crisis to a nuisance like the common cold.

That would happen as people build up immunity over time, either through infection or vaccination. Other viruses have followed a similar path.

The 1918 flu pandemic could also offer clues about the course of COVID-19.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that a third of the world's population became infected with that virus, which originated in birds. Eventually, after infected people either died or developed immunity, the virus stopped spreading quickly. It later mutated into a less virulent form, which experts say continues to circulate seasonally.

However, the emergence of new COVID-19 variants could complicate the picture if future virus mutations cause more severe disease or evade vaccines.

It's unlikely the virus will ever be completely stamped out, given the possibility that people might be able to get reinfected after they've already been sick or vaccinated.

The only virus that's ever been eradicated from the human population is smallpox. That's because people develop lasting immunity to that virus after getting sick or vaccinated.

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The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: [FactCheck@ap.org](mailto:FactCheck@ap.org).

Read previous Viral Questions:

When will children be able to get COVID-19 vaccines?

How would COVID-19 vaccine makers adapt to variants?

How do we know the COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

## **A year on, WHO still struggling to manage pandemic response**

By MARIA CHENG and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — When the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic one year ago Thursday, it did so only after weeks of resisting the term and maintaining that the highly infectious virus could still be stopped.

A year later, the U.N. agency is still struggling to keep on top of the evolving science of COVID-19, to persuade countries to abandon their nationalistic tendencies and help get vaccines where they're needed most.

The agency made some costly missteps along the way: It advised people against wearing masks for months and asserted that COVID-19 wasn't widely spread in the air. It also declined to publicly call out countries — particularly China — for mistakes that senior WHO officials grumbled about privately.

That created some tricky politics that challenged WHO's credibility and wedged it between two world powers, setting off vociferous Trump administration criticism that the agency is only now emerging from.

President Joe Biden's support for WHO may provide some much-needed breathing space, but the organization still faces a monumental task ahead as it tries to project some moral authority amid a universal scramble for vaccines that is leaving billions of people unprotected.

"WHO has been a bit behind, being cautious rather than precautionary," said Gian Luca Burci, a former WHO legal counsel now at Geneva's Graduate Institute. "At times of panic, of a crisis and so on, maybe being more out on a limb — taking a risk — would have been better."

WHO waved its first big warning flag on Jan. 30, 2020, by calling the outbreak an international health emergency. But many countries ignored or overlooked the warning.

Only when WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared a "pandemic" six weeks later, on March 11, 2020, did most governments take action, experts said. By then, it was too late, and the virus had reached every continent except Antarctica.

A year later, WHO still appears hamstrung. A WHO-led team that traveled to China in January to investigate the origins of COVID-19 was criticized for failing to dismiss China's fringe theory that the virus might

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be spread via tainted frozen seafood.

That came after WHO repeatedly lauded China last year for its speedy, transparent response — even though recordings of private meetings obtained by The Associated Press showed that top officials were frustrated at the country's lack of cooperation.

"Everybody has been wondering why WHO was so praising of China back in January" 2020, Burci said, adding that the praise has come back "to haunt WHO big-time."

Some experts say WHO's blunders came at a high price, and it remains too reliant on iron-clad science instead of taking calculated risks to keep people safer — whether on strategies like mask-wearing or whether COVID-19 is often spread through the air.

"Without a doubt, WHO's failure to endorse masks earlier cost lives," said Dr. Trish Greenhalgh, a professor of primary care health sciences at Oxford University who sits on several WHO expert committees. Not until June did WHO advise people to regularly wear masks, long after other health agencies and numerous countries did so.

Greenhalgh said she was less interested in asking WHO to atone for past errors than revising its policies going forward. In October, she wrote to the head of a key WHO committee on infection control, raising concerns about the lack of expertise among some members. She never received a response.

"This scandal is not just in the past. It's in the present and escalating into the future," Greenhalgh said.

Raymond Tellier, an associate professor at Canada's McGill University who specializes in coronaviruses, said WHO's continued reluctance to acknowledge how often COVID-19 is spread in the air could prove more dangerous with the arrival of new virus variants first identified in Britain and South Africa that are even more transmissible.

"If WHO's recommendations are not strong enough, we could see the pandemic go on much longer," he said.

With several licensed vaccines, WHO is now working to ensure that people in the world's poorest countries receive doses through the COVAX initiative, which is aimed at ensuring poor countries get COVID-19 vaccines.

But COVAX has only a fraction of the 2 billion vaccines it is hoping to deliver by the end of the year. Some countries that have waited months for shots have grown impatient, opting to sign their own private deals for quicker vaccine access.

WHO chief Tedros has responded largely by appealing to countries to act in "solidarity," warning that the world is on the brink of a "catastrophic moral failure" if vaccines are not distributed fairly. Although he has asked rich countries to share their doses immediately with developing countries and to not strike new deals that would jeopardize the vaccine supply for poorer countries, none have obliged.

"WHO is trying to lead by moral authority, but repeating 'solidarity' over and over when it's being ignored by countries acting in their own self-interest shows they are not recognizing reality," said Amanda Glassman, executive vice president of the Center for Global Development. "It's time to call things out for the way they are."

Yet throughout the pandemic, WHO has repeatedly declined to censure rich countries for their flawed attempts to stop the virus. Internally, WHO officials described some of their biggest member countries' approaches to stemming COVID-19 as "an unfortunate laboratory to study the virus" and "macabre."

More recently, Tedros seems to have found a slightly firmer voice — speaking truth to leaders like Germany's president about the need for wealthy countries to share vaccines or criticizing China for dragging its heels in not quickly granting visas to the WHO-led investigative team.

Irwin Redlener of Columbia University said WHO should be more aggressive in instructing countries what to do, given the extremely unequal way COVID-19 vaccines are being distributed.

"WHO can't order countries to do things, but they can make very clear and explicit guidance that makes it difficult for countries not to follow," Redlener said.

WHO's top officials have said repeatedly it is not the agency's style to criticize countries.

At a press briefing this month, WHO senior adviser Dr. Bruce Aylward said simply: "We can't tell individual countries what to do."

AP Medical Writer Maria Cheng reported from London.

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

## Brazil hospitals buckle in absence of national virus plan

By DAVID BILLER and DÉBORA ÁLVARES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazil's hospitals are faltering as a highly contagious coronavirus variant tears through the country, the president insists on unproven treatments and the only attempt to create a national plan to contain COVID-19 has just fallen short.

For the last week, Brazilian governors sought to do something President Jair Bolsonaro obstinately rejects: cobble together a proposal for states to help curb the nation's deadliest COVID-19 outbreak yet. The effort was expected to include a curfew, prohibition of crowded events and limits on the hours non-essential services can operate.

The final product, presented Wednesday, was a one-page document that included general support for restricting activity but without any specific measures. Six governors, evidently still wary of antagonizing Bolsonaro, declined to sign on.

Piauí state's Gov. Wellington Dias told The Associated Press that, unless pressure on hospitals is eased, growing numbers of patients will have to endure the disease without a hospital bed or any hope of treatment in an intensive care unit.

"We have reached the limit across Brazil; rare are the exceptions," Dias, who leads the governors' forum, said. "The chance of dying without assistance is real."

Those deaths have already started. In Brazil's wealthiest state, São Paulo, at least 30 patients died this month while waiting for ICU beds, according to a tally published Wednesday by the news site G1. In southern Santa Catarina state, 419 people are waiting for transfer to ICU beds. In neighboring Rio Grande do Sul, ICU capacity is at 106%.

Alexandre Zavascki, a doctor in Rio Grande do Sul's capital Porto Alegre, described a constant arrival of hospital patients who struggle to breathe.

"I have a lot of colleagues who, at times, stop to cry. This isn't medicine we're used to performing routinely. This is medicine adapted for a war scenario," said Zavascki, who oversees infectious disease treatment at a private hospital. "We see a good part of the population refusing to see what's happening, resisting the facts. Those people could be next to step inside the hospital and will want beds. But there won't be one."

The country, he added, needs "more rigid measures" from local authorities.

Over the president's objections, the Supreme Court last year upheld cities' and states' jurisdiction to impose restrictions on activity. Even so, Bolsonaro consistently condemned their moves, saying the economy needed to keep churning and that isolation would cause depression. Measures were relaxed toward the end of 2020, as COVID-19 cases and deaths ebbed, municipal election campaigns kicked off and home-bound Brazilians grew fatigued by quarantine.

The most recent surge is driven by the P1 variant, which Brazil's health minister said last month is three times as transmissible as the original strain. It first became dominant in the Amazonian city Manaus and in January forced the airlift of hundreds of patients to other states.

Brazil's failure to arrest the virus' spread since then is increasingly seen as a concern not just for Latin American neighbors, but also as a warning to the world, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director of the World Health Organization, said in a March 5 press briefing.

"In the whole country, aggressive use of the public health measures, social measures, will be very, very crucial," he said. "Without doing things to impact transmission or suppress the virus, I don't think we will be able in Brazil to have the declining trend."

Last week's tally of more than 10,000 deaths was Brazil's highest since the pandemic began, and this



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week's toll is on track to be even greater after the country posted nearly 2,300 deaths on Wednesday — blowing away the prior day's total that was also a record.

"Governors, like a lot of the population, are getting fed up with all this inaction," said Margareth Dalcolmo, a prominent pulmonologist at the state-run Fiocruz Institute. She added that their proposed pact is vague and will remain symbolic unless it becomes far-reaching and confronts the federal government.

Brazil's national council of state health secretaries last week called for the establishment of a national curfew and lockdown in regions that are approaching maximum hospital capacity. Bolsonaro again demurred.

"I won't decree it," Bolsonaro said Monday at an event. "And you can be sure of one thing: My army will not go to the street to oblige the people to stay home."

Restrictions can already be found just outside the presidential palace after the Federal District's governor, Ibaneis Rocha, implemented a curfew and partial lockdown. Rocha warned Tuesday that he could clamp down harder, sparing only pharmacies and hospitals, if people keep disregarding rules. Currently, 213 people in the district are on the wait list for an ICU bed.

Bolsonaro told reporters Monday that the curfew is "an affront, inadmissible," and said that even the WHO believes lockdowns are inadequate because they disproportionately hurt the poor. While the WHO acknowledges "profound negative effects," it says some countries have had no choice but to impose heavy-handed measures to slow transmission, and that governments must make the most of the extra time provided to test and trace cases, while caring for patients.

Such nuance was lost on Bolsonaro. His government continues its search for silver-bullet solutions that so far has served only to stoke false hopes. Any idea appears to warrant consideration, except the ones from public health experts.

Bolsonaro's government spent millions producing and distributing malaria pills, which have shown no benefit in rigorous studies. Still, Bolsonaro endorsed the drugs. He has also supported treatment with two drugs for fighting parasites, neither of which have shown effectiveness. He again touted their capacity to prevent hospitalizations during a Wednesday event in the presidential palace.

Bolsonaro also dispatched a committee to Israel this week to assess an unproven nasal spray that he has called "a miraculous product." Fiocruz's Dalcolmo, whose younger sister is currently in an ICU, called the trip "really pathetic."

Camila Romano, a researcher at the University of Sao Paulo's Institute of Tropical Medicine, hopes a test her lab developed to identify worrisome variants, including P1, will help monitor and control their spread. She also wants to see stricter government measures, and citizens doing their part.

"Every day is a new surprise, a new variant, a city whose health system enters collapse," Romano said. "We're now in the worst phase. Whether this will be the worst phase of all, unfortunately we don't know what's yet to come."

\_\_\_ Alvares reported from Brasilia. Associated Press videojournalist Tatiana Pollastri contributed from Sao Paulo.

## As pandemic enters 2nd year, voices of resilience emerge

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has seen death, economic hardship and anxiety on an unprecedented scale. But it has also witnessed self-sacrifice, courage and perseverance.

In India, Brazil, South Africa and other places around the globe, people are helping others and reinventing themselves.

"I've been adaptable, like water," said a woman whose dream of becoming a U.S. boxing champion was dealt a blow by the crisis, though not necessarily a knockout punch.

Their voices and images can inspire, even though the future is as uncertain for them as it is for everyone else.

THE VIOLINIST

Mauricio Vivet's talent as a violinist had earned him a route out of a slum in Rio de Janeiro. As a teen,

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he played classical music in the streets for money. He got noticed and received a scholarship to a prestigious music school.

After graduation, Vivet earned a living by playing at events and giving lessons. He moved out of the neighborhood and planned to open a music studio.

COVID-19 put a stop to all that. Concerts, weddings and other events were canceled. Vivet, 27, now struggles just to pay for food. He left his apartment and moved back to his mother's house in the favela.

Vivet's biggest fear is not having money to provide for his 4-year-old son, Angelo.

Vivet has gone back to square one.

On a recent day, he carefully wrapped his violin in a red cloth, placed it inside a battered black suitcase and made his way to Ipanema Beach. There, he sat on a stone bench and played his violin, the sweet notes amplified by a speaker. Passersby stopped to listen. Some dropped money into the red cloth.

"It is the only stage that I have, the only thing that they have not prohibited," Vivet said. "It's the only way I can make money."

## THE BOXER

On a recent day, Melody "Mel" Popravak was in a boxing gym in New York City, her arms tattooed, her hands wrapped in yellow tape. Three years ago, she started boxing and was a finalist in two national tournaments.

After the shutdown, she trained in a friend's garage.

"I'm determined not to give up and to continue to move on to be a professional boxer," the 35-year-old said.

She has also started an online personal training company where she gives tips on staying in shape.

"I'm checking in with people all over the country who are going through various situations related to COVID," she said. "I think I've been staying strong. I've been adaptable, like water, melding into the situation."

## THE BURIAL WORKER

Yehuda Erlich, a worker with Israel's official Jewish burial society, remembers the first signs that coronavirus had arrived: empty streets and deathly silence. Then a surge of deaths overwhelmed his morgue, with bodies placed in the corridor.

"I really hope we are nearing the end," Erlich said of the pandemic.

## THE STRICKEN DOCTOR

Near the beginning of the pandemic, Gabriella Formenti, a doctor from the village of Tavernola Bergamasca in northern Italy, started feeling exhausted and had a high fever. Hit by the virus, she wound up intubated in an intensive care unit.

Eventually she woke up but could move only her head, having lost muscle mass. Today, Formenti undergoes rehabilitation and is often out of breath and weak. Forced by her condition to retire, she greatly misses her patients.

"This disease emphasized, even more, how close they are to me emotionally and personally," she said. "They even celebrated when I came back home. They all came to see me and helped me."

## THE ACTRESS

Shikha Malhotra is a Bollywood actress whose Instagram feed highlights her film and TV projects. During the pandemic, they have also featured her as a nurse.

It is a real-life role that Malhotra, who has a nursing degree, has taken on while volunteering at a crowded Mumbai hospital. Mumbai was one of the worst-hit cities in India, the country with the second-highest caseload of COVID-19 in the world.

"I am first a nursing officer, then an actress," Malhotra said at her home, wearing a white nurse's uniform, a white cap over her luxuriant black hair. Next to her was a poster of a movie she starred in.

After working in a COVID-19 ward for months, she became infected, spent a month alone in the hospital recovering, then suffered a stroke that paralyzed the right side of her body.

"It was a big setback for me," the 25-year-old said, tears streaming down her face as she recalled believing that she would never walk again. She recovered and plans to continue her acting career while also staying ready to serve as a nurse whenever she is needed.

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"Seeing life and death in the hospital changed me," Malhotra said. "I became a more mature person, more grounded. Seeing the people in pain, every single second now I thank God for all that I have."

## THE CENTENARIAN

At 101, Boris Novikov is one of the oldest survivors of COVID-19 in Russia.

A decorated World War II veteran, Novikov was hospitalized with oxygen support. Now recovered, he celebrated his birthday last week at a senior care center near Moscow, where he lives with his wife, Yelena, 93. They have been together 70 years.

Novikov told a visitor he feels "excellent."

"We can't complain about anything, for now at least," his wife added. "We're living it day by day."

## THE VACCINATOR

Dr. Anil Mehta has been going with his small team of physicians and nurses to homeless centers in London to offer free COVID-19 vaccinations. The team has vaccinated hundreds of people.

"It makes sense to focus energy on groups that are underrepresented and those most reluctant to go to their doctors," he said.

Mehta is driven by a desire to help everyone get back to normal as quickly as possible.

"Our lives have been turned upside down in the past year," he said. "This is the most important thing any of us doctors have done in our lives."

## THE TOUR GUIDE

Shi Jinjie, a tour guide in Beijing, saw a 90% drop in business last year because of the pandemic. But he is confident domestic tourism will make a comeback very soon.

Already, a few customers are trickling in. He showed them around a park featuring centuries-old pavilions.

"Is Jingshan beautiful?" he asked them. As he took their photo, they responded: "Beautiful!"

## THE RESEARCHER

Sandile Cele was pursuing a doctorate at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa when the pandemic hit, creating an obvious research topic.

He made a splash when he figured out how to grow the South African variant of the coronavirus in the laboratory. That enabled the lab to test it and discover that people previously infected with COVID-19 don't produce antibodies against the mutant version, which has spread to numerous countries.

Cele, 33, said it is every graduate student's dream "to have a project for your Ph.D. that's going to have so much impact in the world."

## THE BLAST VICTIM

On Aug. 4, Angelique Sabounjian was at a coffee shop in Beirut when a thunderous explosion at a warehouse containing a chemical commonly used as fertilizer rocked the city, blowing out windows and cutting Sabounjian's face. She bled profusely.

On that day, she also became infected with the coronavirus.

"Catching corona and being in that isolation really helped me realize I was crying all day, every day, and I think I needed that," she said. "I needed to have that release in some way."

## THE SURVIVOR

Cynthia Archambault, of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, lost her brother Daniel Remillard and her father, Ronald Remillard, to COVID-19 within an hour of each other.

"It's left a really big gaping hole in all of our hearts," she said.

## THE SOLDIER

In a front-line trench, the soldier in eastern Ukraine faces two enemies: the Russian-backed separatist rebels and the coronavirus that threatens to infiltrate the ranks.

"We are used to living with dangers," said the soldier, who asked to be identified only by his call sign, Kram. "The pandemic has become another stress for me."

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Associated Press journalists Rafiq Maqbool in Mumbai, India; Lucas Dumphries in Rio de Janeiro; Kathy Willens in New York; Bram Janssen in Durban, South Africa; Sylvia Hui in London; Alexander Zemlianichenko in Moscow; Evgeniy Maloletka in Krasnohorlivka, Ukraine; Fay Abuelgasim in Beirut; Maria Grazia Murru

in Tavernola Bergamasca, Italy; Borg Wong and Caroline Chen in Beijing; Laurie Kellman in Holon, Israel; and Stew Milne in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, contributed to this report.

More AP coverage of the pandemic's first year: [Pandemic: One Year](#)

Follow Andrew Selsky on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>

## **Biden's deal with Seoul points to a swift shift on alliances**

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new agreement with South Korea on sharing the cost of keeping U.S. troops on the Korean peninsula is early evidence that President Joe Biden is shifting America's approach to alliances in Asia and beyond. It shows he will cut allies a break to build unity in competition against China and Russia.

President Donald Trump had demanded South Korea pay billions more to keep American troops on its soil. In his view, the United States was getting fleeced by what he suggested were freeloaders masquerading as allies. Initially, Trump insisted the South Korean government pay five times as much as it previously had. Seoul balked, diplomacy went nowhere, and relations with a treaty ally began to fray.

Biden, by contrast, settled for a 13.9% boost and follow-on increases that put the issue to rest.

Biden's view is that well-functioning alliances are central to competing with China, which his administration sees as America's biggest long-term security challenge, along with Russia. Biden's promise to focus more on Asia mirrors commitments by the two previous administrations — with both having their plans stymied by persistent turmoil in the Mideast. In a sign that Biden could face similar obstacles, his first known military attack was against extremist targets in Syria.

In what the White House called a sign of Biden's commitment to partnering in the Asia-Pacific region, on Friday he will meet virtually with the leaders of three other regional powerhouses — India, Australia and Japan. Biden also is sending Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to Japan and South Korea next week for security consultations; on his way home Blinken will join Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, for talks with Chinese officials in Alaska.

A few days before the election last November, candidate Biden foreshadowed his intentions toward Seoul in an opinion article he wrote for South Korea's Yonhap news agency. He praised the South Koreans' role in an alliance "forged in blood," and he pointedly promised a new approach to Seoul if he were to win.

"Words matter — and a president's words matter even more," Biden wrote. "As president, I'll stand with South Korea, strengthening our alliance to safeguard peace in East Asia and beyond, rather than extorting Seoul with reckless threats to remove our troops." He promised "principled diplomacy."

He might also have mentioned quick diplomacy. Last weekend, U.S. and South Korean negotiators reached an agreement that, if ratified by the South Korean national assembly, would end an impasse over Seoul's share of the cost of keeping approximately 28,500 U.S. troops on the peninsula. The troops serve as a symbol of the U.S. commitment to a defense treaty born of the 1950-53 Korean War.

The new cost-sharing deal comes after a stopgap one-year arrangement by the Trump administration in March 2019 that required Seoul to pay about 1 trillion Korean won, the approximate equivalent of \$910 million. Trump then demanded a five-fold increase starting in 2020. The South Korean government refused.

Biden took office in January with what he apparently viewed as a chance to end the acrimony, and the State Department team of negotiators quickly wrapped up a multiyear deal that requires a 13.9 percent increase in Seoul's payments this year, followed by four years of increases tied to rises in its defense budget.

"This administration is trying to say alliances are important for us," said Bruce Bennett, an Asia specialist at the RAND Corp., adding that this goes beyond South Korea to include other traditional Asian allies like Japan. Biden officials "know they've got a substantial issue trying to deal with the Chinese threat. So making their relationship closer with allies is a key part of the strategy for doing that."

Japan and South Korea for decades have been linchpins of the U.S. defense strategy in the broader Asia-Pacific region, which the top U.S. commander there, Adm. Philip Davidson, has called "the most con-



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sequential region for America's future." Last month, the U.S. and Japan agreed to a one-year extension of their cost-sharing agreement for the U.S. troop presence; the State Department said this allowed more time to negotiate a longer deal.

Part of the backdrop to the speedy deal with Seoul is Biden's focus on China's military modernization, its ambitions to be a global power, and its potential to help contain North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

"There is a widely held view in the Biden administration that the U.S. should deal with China from a position of strength, which requires strengthening our alliances as well as renewing our own country," said Bonnie S. Glaser, director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Trump was hardly the first president to push allies to pay more of the cost of hosting American forces. The difference was that Trump took an unbending — some would say insulting — approach to European and Asian allies that was at odds with his Pentagon chiefs, starting with Jim Mattis, who put a high value on alliance cooperation. This difference was a key reason Mattis resigned in December 2018.

In addition to trying to squeeze more money out of Seoul, Trump had questioned the need for U.S. military exercises with South Korea, calling them wasteful and an affront to North Korea.

Jonathan D. Pollack, an East Asia policy expert at the Brookings Institution, said it's no surprise that Biden would move quickly to make a cost-sharing deal with Seoul and ease strains from the Trump administration.

"If the administration is serious, as I think they are, about trying to restore some modicum of normalcy to alliance relations, this is a very good way to do it," Pollack said. He thinks this applies also in Europe, where U.S. relations with NATO allies were strained by Trump demands over sharing the burdens of defense.

"I do think it's indicative of the way I expect Biden will proceed on other fronts as well with respect to alliance enhancement," he said.

## Myanmar's searing smartphone images flood a watching world

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

The images ricochet across the planet, as so many do in this dizzying era of film it, upload it, tell it to the world: scenes from a protest-turned-government crackdown, captured at ground level by smartphone users on the streets of Myanmar.

Images shot across barricades and furtively through windows. From behind bushes and through smudged car windshields. Horizontal video. Vertical video. Video captured by people running toward chaos and away from it. People shouting. People helping. People demanding.

People dying.

The world is watching violent events unfold in Myanmar for many reasons, but perhaps one above all: because it can.

It is a dynamic completely unlike the uprising that spread through the Southeast Asian nation in the pre-internet, pre-smartphone summer of 1988. Then, when student-led demonstrations were violently put down by the government, cementing Myanmar's global notoriety as an isolated, repressive state, it took months, even years, for the outside world to understand the full story of what had happened.

This time around, the imagery is plentiful and unsettling. Filmed by participants on the ground and uploaded, sometimes immediately, the protests and crackdowns are reaching millions of handheld devices around the planet, also almost immediately.

It's a vivid example of a technological truism in an age when capturing images has become utterly democratized: If you can glimpse it up close, you're more likely to pay attention.

"You know the old adage that a picture speaks a thousand words. It makes you feel like, 'This is happening, this is true,'" says Kareem El Damanhoury, a media scholar at the University of Denver who is writing a book about visuals in times of conflict.

In Myanmar today, he says, "The images are not just complementing what's happening. Over time they become defining of the conflict itself."

As of Wednesday, more than 60 people were dead from the government crackdown on mass protests in Myanmar after a coup early last month. Nearly 2,000 are estimated to be imprisoned, and media outlets

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are being targeted. Among those held: Thein Zaw, an Associated Press journalist taken into custody in a chokehold by authorities while doing his job 10 days ago — an arrest also captured on video and widely shared.

“The video is extremely disturbing,” U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said last week of footage chronicling attacks on journalists — footage captured in some cases by non-professional, non-media sources.

The ability of on-the-ground imagery from amateurs to define a conflict, through still photos and particularly video, has been accelerating for more than a decade.

Many media scholars cite the 2009 election protests in Iran and the chronicling of government violence there, particularly the shooting death of a young musician named Neda Agha-Soltan, as an inflection point.

That came four years after the dawn of YouTube and two years after Apple introduced the iPhone, which ushered in a trio of watershed moments: Amateur video became easily shareable, smartphones with decent-quality video and instant uploads became affordable, and many humans suddenly always had cameras in their pockets.

The decade that followed brought many opportunities for democratized, phone-shot imagery — from the 2011 Arab Spring to the Hong Kong protests of 2014 and the increasing government crackdown against them in ensuing years.

Last year in the United States, the killing of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer was captured on nearly nine minutes of anguished video — only the latest imagery of police violence against Black Americans to command worldwide attention.

Floyd’s death set off a summer of anti-racism protests and law-enforcement responses, both of which sometimes turned violent — and were chronicled by millions of minutes of shared on-the-ground video, which became central to Americans’ understanding of the events. Same story with amateur video shot by participants in the siege of the U.S. Capitol in January, which has been used to understand the events, to propagandize them and to prosecute suspected insurrectionists.

In the case of Myanmar, the sheer amount and quality of the amateur video is particularly striking when contrasted with “8.8.88” — the August 1988 pro-democracy uprising against dictator Ne Win that produced a military coup the following month in the nation then known as Burma.

Imagery from those days was relatively scant, and communications from within the country — visual and otherwise — were vigorously muzzled. Any iconic images came from, or were amplified by, established news outlets. There was no internet yet, no shared video or social platforms to host it. And then much of the world forgot about Myanmar for nearly a generation.

It’s different this time. Though YouTube has taken down some Myanmar military channels for violating its terms of service, citizen video is plentiful. And representatives of governmental bodies from the United States to the United Nations have cited the video as a muscular reminder of the power of the image to impact perception and, possibly, policy.

“I was struck by the vibrancy of the images I have seen — the color, the kinetic energy in them, which seemed pretty distinctive,” says Mitchell Stephens, a New York University professor and author of “The Rise of the Image, the Fall of the Word.”

The imagery out of Myanmar, he says, “brings back bad memories of all the failed democracy protests we’ve had in recent decades around the world. I can’t help thinking of the Arab Spring, which was such an immense disappointment and tragedy, or Tiananmen Square.”

The difference, of course, is that imagery from the 1989 Chinese government crackdown on democracy protesters was, in an era of fax machines, also almost exclusively disseminated by professional media outlets until they were restricted or expelled. The most-remembered image of that period, the photo of a lone man confronting a column of tanks just off the square, was captured by four news photographers with professional cameras from high-altitude balconies.

Same story with much of the visuals that chronicled global unrest over the past 50 years. The most iconic images of the Vietnam War — the ones that helped change the U.S. government’s commitment to it, such as AP photographer Nick Ut’s photo of Kim Phuc running down a street, naked and burned by a South Vietnamese napalm attack — came from professional journalists. After all, they were the ones who

had the infrastructure and support to transmit their images to the wider world.

Now pretty much everyone has that infrastructure in their pockets. But does that mean the global attention will last? If precedent is any indication, global news consumers in a landscape weighed down by a glut of imagery may surrender to short attention spans — even if the scenes coming out of Myanmar exhort them to do otherwise.

“I’m very hesitant about whether and how the democratization of image(s) can put pressure on outside forces,” says Wei-Ting Yen, who teaches Asian politics at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania.

“It does provide a closer-to-reality kind of understanding,” she says. But beyond that? Perhaps not so much.

“In Myanmar, the first few days it was amazing, and then you saw the cracking down, which was horrifying,” Yen says. “But as it goes on, people have a short memory. They forget, and the next time they see the image — people who don’t understand what’s going on — they say, ‘Oh, this is what’s happening,’ and they move on.”

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Ted Anthony, director of digital innovation for The Associated Press, was the AP’s director of Asia-Pacific News from 2014 to 2018 and oversaw coverage of Myanmar. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/anthonyted>

## Jury selection resumes as Chauvin faces possible new charge

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Potential jurors in Derek Chauvin’s murder trial return Thursday to continue a selection process moving more quickly than expected. Meanwhile, the former policeman charged in George Floyd’s death faced the prospect of an additional third-degree murder charge.

Five jurors have been seated after just two days of screening by attorneys and Judge Peter Cahill, who had set aside at least three weeks to fill the panel.

Cahill was expected to start Thursday’s proceeding by discussing next steps in the state’s effort to add a third-degree murder charge. Cahill rejected the charge twice before an appellate ruling in an unrelated case provided new grounds for it right before the trial began. On Wednesday, the state’s Supreme Court rejected Chauvin’s effort to block the charge.

Attorneys have given considerable attention to the jury pool’s attitudes toward police in the first two days of questioning, trying to determine whether they’re more inclined to believe testimony from law enforcement over evidence from other witnesses to the fatal confrontation.

The first juror picked Wednesday, a man who works in sales management and grew up in a mostly white part of central Minnesota, acknowledged saying on his written questionnaire that he had a “very favorable” opinion of the Black Lives Matter movement and a “somewhat unfavorable” impression of the Blue Lives Matter countermovement in favor of police, yet “somewhat agreed” that police don’t get the respect they deserve. He said he agrees that there are bad police officers.

“Are there good ones? Yes. So I don’t think it’s right to completely blame the entire organization,” he told the court under questioning from prosecutor Steve Schleicher.

He also said he would be more inclined to believe an officer over the word of another witness. But he said he could set aside any ideas about the inherent honesty of an officer and evaluate each witness on their own.

The second, a man who works in information technology security, marked “strongly agree” on a question about whether he believes police in his community make him feel safe. His community wasn’t specified — jurors are being drawn from all over Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis and many of its suburbs.

“In my community, I think when there is suspicious activity the police will stop by, they will ask a question,” he said. “I think that sense of community is all we want right? We want to live in a community where we feel safe regardless of race, color and gender.”

Schleicher noted that the man also stated in his questionnaire that he strongly disagreed with the con-

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cept of “defunding” the police, which has become a political flashpoint locally and across the country in the wake of Floyd’s death.

“While I necessarily might not agree with the police action in some situation, I believe that in order for police to make my community safe they have to have the money,” he replied.

The questionnaire explores potential jurors’ familiarity with the case and their own contacts with police. Their answers have not been made public, and the jurors’ identities are being kept secret. Their racial backgrounds often aren’t disclosed in open court.

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 defense hasn’t said whether Chauvin will testify in his own defense.

Schleicher used a peremptory challenge Wednesday to remove from the panel a woman who has a nephew who’s a sheriff’s deputy in western Minnesota. She said she was dismayed by the violence that followed Floyd’s death.

“I personally didn’t see any usefulness to it,” she said. “I didn’t see anything accomplished by it, except I suppose bring attention to the frustrations of the people involved. But did I see anything useful coming out of the burning of Lake Street and that sort of thing? I did not.”

The dispute over the third-degree murder charge in Chauvin’s case revolves around the conviction of another former Minneapolis police officer in the unrelated killing of an Australian woman. The appeals court affirmed Mohamed Noor’s third-degree murder conviction in the 2017 shooting death of Justine Ruszczyk Damond.

The state argued that the Noor affirmation established precedent for the third-degree murder charge under the circumstances of Floyd’s death. If the Minnesota Supreme Court had taken up Chauvin’s appeal, it might have meant months of delay in his trial. After their ruling, the Court of Appeals rejected as moot the state’s request to pause the trial pending the appeal.

Legal experts said adding the charge would give prosecutors an additional option as they seek to gain a conviction.

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

## Asian shares advance as yields, inflation fears moderate

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

Stocks climbed in Asia on Thursday after a key measure of inflation in the U.S. came in lower than expected, easing worries that price pressures could push interest rates higher.

Shares rose in Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong but edged lower in Sydney.

On Wall Street, energy and financial stocks rose while Big Tech shares declined. The S&P 500 added 0.6% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average hit a record high, though tech stocks pulled the Nasdaq slightly lower.

The Labor Department reported that U.S. consumer prices, a key measure of inflation at the consumer level, rose 0.4% in February, the biggest gain in six months, led by a jump in gasoline prices. But core inflation, excluding food and energy, posted a much smaller 0.1% gain, easing fears that the inflation might surge as the economy recovers from the pandemic.

The timing could not have been better, Stephen Innes of Axi said in a commentary.

“As Biden’s . . . \$1.9 trillion fiscal stimulus plan was passed by the House, CPI data revealing softer sequential core pressures were there to greet and subdue fears of runaway inflation,” Innes said. “Upshot being, U.S. inflation data appears to have bought some space for, and lent credence to, prolonged and unwavering stimulus.”

Treasury yields fell broadly following the report, including the benchmark 10-year Treasury note, which influences interest rates on mortgages and other consumer loans. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note



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was steady at 1.53% on Thursday after rising as high as 1.60% late last week.

Bond yields have risen in the past month. The fall in bond prices, which are inversely related to yields, attracted investors reluctant to pay high prices for stocks, especially tech stocks that looked most expensive.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gained 0.4% to 29,154.19 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 1.6% to 29,371.23. South Korea's Kospi surged 2.1% to 3,019.72, buoyed by a 1.7% rise in shares in Samsung Electronics, the biggest listed company. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 slipped 0.2% to 6,701.30.

The Shanghai Composite index jumped 1.8% to 3,417.63 as Chinese leaders prepared to wrap up the annual session of the largely ceremonial legislature.

In New York, the S&P 500 rose 23.37 points to 3,898.81. The Dow gained 1.5% to a record 32,297.02, thanks partly to a 6.4% jump in Boeing. The Dow's previous all-time high was about two weeks ago.

The Nasdaq slipped less than 0.1% to 13,068.83, taking it about 7.3% below the all-time high it reached on February 12.

Traders also bid up shares in smaller companies, extending the Russell 2000's winning streak to a fourth day. The index picked up 1.8%, to 2,285.68.

Investors are also betting the latest \$1.9 trillion in government stimulus will help lift the U.S. economy out of its coronavirus-induced malaise. The House approved the sweeping pandemic relief package over Republican opposition on Wednesday, sending it to President Joe Biden to be signed into law. The package would provide \$1,400 checks for most Americans and direct billions of dollars to schools, state and local governments, and businesses.

Banks were among the biggest gainers. JPMorgan rose 2.2%, Bank of America gained 2.9% and Citigroup climbed 3.9%. More than 75% of companies in the S&P 500 notched gains.

Technology stocks lagged the broader market. Apple fell 0.9% and Microsoft slid 0.6%

In other trading, U.S. benchmark crude oil gained 53 cents to \$64.97 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It picked up 43 cents to \$64.44 per barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude, the international standard, gained 56 cents to \$68.46 per barrel.

The U.S. dollar was at 108.52 Japanese yen, up from 108.41 yen on Wednesday. The euro rose to \$1.1930 from \$1.1928.

AP Business writers Damian J. Troise and Alex Veiga contributed.

## Michelle Obama hooked on knitting, thinking about retirement

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Michelle Obama is knitting and thinking about retiring from public life.

The former first lady says in a new People magazine interview that she picked up knitting needles to pass time during the coronavirus pandemic. And now she's hooked.

"Knitting is a forever proposition," she said. "You don't master knitting, because once you make a scarf, there's the blanket. And once you do the blanket, you've got to do the hat, the socks."

She's working on her first crewneck sweater for her husband, former President Barack Obama.

"I'm figuring out how to make sleeves and a collar," she said. "I could go on about knitting!"

The former first lady also talks about how the pandemic helped her and her husband reclaim "stolen moments" with Malia, 22, and Sasha, 19, who both returned home from college to quarantine with their parents at the family homes in Washington and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

Mrs. Obama also discusses what she says is the "low-grade depression" she experienced during the pandemic lockdowns and after George Floyd's killing by Minneapolis police last May, along with her shift away from high-impact exercise and what she wants out of retirement.

The woman whose buffed biceps and exercise workouts went viral during her time as first lady said she taught herself to be a better lap swimmer during quarantine "because I'm finding in my old age that the high-impact stuff I used to do doesn't work." Michelle Obama is 57.

Now that Malia and Sasha are independent, young adults, Mrs. Obama said she enjoys that their conversations have become more "peer-oriented than they are mother-to-daughter."

"I've been telling my daughters I'm moving towards retirement right now," she said, adding that she's choosing her projects and chasing summer. Her new Netflix children's food show, "Waffles + Mochi," premieres Tuesday, and the Obama Presidential Center is under construction in Chicago.

"Barack and I never want to experience winter again," Mrs. Obama said. "We're building the foundation for somebody else to continue the work so we can retire and be with each other, and Barack can golf too much, and I can tease him about golfing too much because he's got nothing else to do."

## Mexican lawmakers advance bill to legalize recreational pot

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's lower chamber approved a marijuana legalization bill Wednesday, setting the country on the path to becoming one of the world's largest legal marijuana markets.

Deputies approved the legislation in general terms, but continued debating details late into the night. The approved legislation, which needs to return to the Senate, would permit recreational use of marijuana, but establish a system of licenses required for the entire chain of production, distribution, transformation and sales.

It would also require that individuals, and not just associations of users, have a permit to grow plants for personal use. Each individual would be allowed to have six plants with a maximum of eight per household.

Adults could use marijuana without affecting others or children, but if caught with more than one ounce (28 grams) they would be fined. They could face jail time if they had more than 12 pounds (5.6 kilograms).

Opposition parties did not support the legislation, which they say will lead to increased drug use.

In 2015, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled in favor of the recreational use marijuana. In 2019, the court ordered the government to create legislation, arguing that prohibiting its use was unconstitutional.

The court has given lawmakers until April 30 to pass a law.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has expressed support and his party, Morena, has a majority in the congress that is moving the legislation. Still, with campaigns underway for national legislative elections in June, the final form of the legislation is still evolving.

Critics fear some changes made by the lower chamber threaten the original intent.

For example, in the latest version, lawmakers did away with establishing a new government agency specifically for the regulation of marijuana. Instead, management of the new market will go to the existing National Commission Against Addictions, which experts say does not have the capacity to regulate something so complex.

"They're going to make the law inoperable," said Lisa Sánchez, director of Mexico United Against Crime, one of the nongovernmental organizations that has been pushing marijuana legalization for years.

Lawmakers favoring the bill say it will move the marijuana market out of the hands of Mexico's powerful drug cartels to the government.

But experts fear transnational corporations will be the primary beneficiaries rather than consumers or the farmers who have formed the lowest rung of the drug chain.

Medicinal marijuana use has been legal in Mexico since 2017 and is allowed in a number of other Latin American countries. But only Uruguay allows recreational use in the region.

Even if the Senate were to approve the lower chamber's bill without additional changes, it would take time for it to take effect. An entire regulatory framework would have to be developed. That has been the case of medicinal marijuana, which only began to function in January with the establishment of the necessary regulations.

## Congress OKs \$1.9T virus relief bill in win for Biden, Dems

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Congress riven along party lines approved the landmark \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill Wednesday, as President Joe Biden and Democrats claimed a major triumph on legislation marshaling the government's spending might against twin pandemic and economic crises that have upended

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a nation.

The House gave final congressional approval to the sweeping package by a near party line 220-211 vote precisely seven weeks after Biden entered the White House and four days after the Senate passed the bill. Republicans in both chambers opposed the legislation unanimously, characterizing it as bloated, crammed with liberal policies and heedless of signs the crises are easing.

"Help is here," Biden tweeted moments after the roll call, which ended with applause from Democratic lawmakers. Biden said he'd sign the measure Friday.

Most noticeable to many Americans are provisions providing up to \$1,400 direct payments this year to most people and extending \$300 weekly emergency unemployment benefits into early September. But the legislation goes far beyond that.

The measure addresses Democrats' campaign promises and Biden's top initial priority of easing a one-two punch that first hit the country a year ago. Since then, many Americans have been relegated to hermit-like lifestyles in their homes to avoid a disease that's killed over 525,000 people — about the population of Wichita, Kansas — and plunged the economy to its deepest depths since the Great Depression.

"Today we have a decision to make of tremendous consequence," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., "a decision that will make a difference for millions of Americans, saving lives and livelihoods."

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.

Republicans noted that they've overwhelmingly supported five previous relief bills that Congress has approved since the pandemic struck a year ago, when divided government under then-President Donald Trump forced the parties to negotiate. They said this one solely reflected Democratic goals by setting aside money for family planning programs and federal workers who take leave to cope with COVID-19 and failing to require that shuttered schools accepting aid reopen their doors.

"If you're a member of the swamp, you do pretty well under this bill. But for the American people, it means serious problems immediately on the horizon," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., referring to the added federal borrowing the measure will force.

Even so, Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., touted the bill's \$29 billion for the ailing restaurant industry, tweeting it would help them "survive the pandemic" without mentioning he had voted against the legislation. Democrats predicted this week that Republicans would do that, with Pelosi saying, "It's typical that they will vote no and take the dough."

Wicker told reporters, "I'm not going to vote for \$1.9 trillion just because it has a couple of good provisions."

A dominant feature of the 628-page bill is initiatives making it one of the biggest federal efforts 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 — some of them credits that Democrats have signaled they'd like to make permanent — plus spending for renters, feeding programs and people's utility bills.

Besides the direct payments and jobless-benefit extension, the measure has 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, pension systems and student borrowers, and subsidies for consumers buying health insurance and states expanding Medicaid coverage for lower earners.

"Who's going to help? Do we say this is all survival of the fittest? No," said House Budget Committee

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Chairman John Yarmuth, D-Ky. "We rise to the occasion. We deliver."

The legislation would reduce the number of people living in poverty this year by around one-third, from 44 million down to 28 million, the liberal-leaning Urban Institute estimated Wednesday. The poverty rate for children would be reduced by over half, said the institute, which examined the impact of the measure's stimulus checks, jobless benefits, food stamps and tax credits for children.

Rep. Jared Golden of Maine was the only Democrat to oppose the measure. He said some of the bill's spending wasn't urgent.

The measure was approved amid promising though mixed signs of recovery.

Americans are getting vaccinated at increasingly robust rates, though that is tempered by coronavirus variants and people's growing impatience with curbing social activities. The economy created an unexpectedly strong 379,000 jobs last month, but there remain 9.5 million fewer than before the pandemic struck.

Republicans said the country will pay a price for the extra spending.

"It's certainly good politics to say, 'Hey, we're going to hand you a check for \$1,400,'" said Rep. Tom Rice, R-S.C. "But what they don't talk about is what this bill costs."

An 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. According to a CNN poll released Wednesday, the relief bill is backed by 61% of Americans, including nearly all Democrats, 58% of independents and 26% of Republicans.

Yet until November 2022, when control of the Senate and House will be at stake, it will be uncertain whether voters will reward Democrats, punish them or make decisions on unforeseen issues.

The bill's pathway has underscored Democrats' challenges as they seek to build a legislative record to appeal to voters.

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 New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

On the relief bill, progressives had to swallow big concessions to solidify moderate support.

The most painful was eliminating the House-approved federal minimum-wage increase to \$15 hourly by 2025. Moderates also succeeded in trimming the emergency jobless benefits, which in an earlier version were \$400 weekly, and phasing out the \$1,400 stimulus checks completely for earners at lower levels than originally proposed.

At some point it seems likely that progressives will draw their own lines in the sand.

## Security camera hack exposes hospitals, workplaces, schools

By MATT O'BRIEN and FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

Hackers aiming to call attention to the dangers of mass surveillance say they were able to peer into hospitals, schools, factories, jails and corporate offices after they broke into the systems of a security-camera startup.

That California startup, Verkada, said Wednesday it is investigating the scope of the breach, first reported by Bloomberg News, and has notified law enforcement and its customers.

Swiss hacker Tillie Kottmann, a member of the group that calls itself APT-69420 Arson Cats, described it in an online chat with The Associated Press as a small collective of "primarily queer hackers, not backed by any nations or capital but instead backed by the desire for fun, being gay and a better world."

They were able to gain access to a Verkada "super" administrator account using valid credentials found online, Kottmann said. Verkada said in a statement that it has since disabled all internal administrator accounts to prevent any unauthorized access.

But for two days, the hackers said, they were able to peer unhindered into live feeds from potentially tens of thousands of cameras, including many that were watching sensitive locations such as hospitals and schools. Kottmann said that included outdoor and indoor cameras at Sandy Hook Elementary School in



Newtown, Connecticut, where 26 first-grade students and six educators were killed in 2012 by a gunman in one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history.

The school district's superintendent didn't return calls or emailed requests for comment Wednesday.

One of Verkada's affected customers, the San Francisco web infrastructure and security company Cloudflare, said the compromised Verkada cameras were watching entrances and main thoroughfares to some of its offices that have been closed for nearly a year due to the pandemic.

"As soon as we were notified of the breach, we proceeded to shut down the cameras in all our office locations to prevent further access," said John Graham-Cumming, the company's chief technology officer, in a blog post. "To be clear: this hack affected the cameras and nothing else."

Another San Francisco tech company, Okta, said five cameras it placed at office entrances were compromised, though there's no evidence anyone viewed the live streams. At Cloudflare, videos of an office lobby downloaded by the hackers actually date from last summer and had been saved for a theft investigation, Graham-Cumming said.

Twitter said it permanently suspended Kottmann's account, which posted materials gathered in the hack, for violating its rules against ban-evasion, which typically happens when users start a new account to circumvent an earlier suspension. Kottmann had earlier received a message from Twitter suspending the account for violating its rules against the distribution of hacked material, the hacker said.

The Verkada footage captured and shared by hackers appeared to include a Tesla facility in China and the Madison County Jail in Huntsville, Alabama. Madison County Sheriff Kevin Turner said in a statement Wednesday the jail has taken the cameras offline, adding "we are confident that this unauthorized release did not and will not impact the safety of staff or inmates." Tesla didn't respond to requests for comment.

Verkada, based in San Mateo, California, has pitched its cloud-based surveillance service as part of the next generation of workplace security. Its software detects when people are in the camera's view, and a "Person History" feature enables customers to recognize and track individual faces and other attributes, such as clothing color and likely gender. Not all customers use the facial recognition feature.

The company attracted negative attention last year when video surveillance industry news site IPVM reported that Verkada employees had passed around photos of female coworkers collected by the company's own in-office cameras and made sexually explicit comments about them.

Cybersecurity expert Elisa Costante said it's worrisome that this week's hack wasn't sophisticated and simply involved using valid credentials to access a huge trove of data stored on a cloud server.

"What is disturbing is to see how much real-life data can go into the wrong hands and how easy it can be," said Costante, vice president of research at Forescout. "It's a wake up call to make sure that whenever you are collecting this much data we need to have basic security hygiene."

Kottmann said the hacker collective, active since 2020, doesn't set out after specific targets. Instead, it scans organizations on the internet for known vulnerabilities and then works to "just narrow down and dig in on interesting targets."

## Attorneys in ex-cop's trial probe jurors' views about police

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Attorneys in the trial of a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death questioned potential jurors Wednesday about their attitudes toward police, trying to determine whether they're more inclined to believe testimony from law enforcement over evidence from other witnesses to the fatal confrontation.

Judge Peter Cahill seated two more jurors to go with the three picked Tuesday for Derek Chauvin's trial on second-degree murder and manslaughter charges. It's been a grinding process in which attorneys ask prospective jurors one by one whether they could keep an open mind, what they think of the criminal justice system and racial justice issues, how they resolve conflicts and more.

In a separate development, the Minnesota Supreme Court declined to hear Chauvin's appeal to block a third-degree murder charge from being reinstated. At issue is whether the conviction of another former

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Minneapolis police officer in the killing of an Australian woman established a precedent for prosecutors to restore a third-degree murder count that the trial judge dismissed earlier. The Minnesota Court of Appeals last week said it settled the law with its ruling last month affirming the conviction of Mohamed Noor in the 2017 shooting death of Justine Ruszczyk Damond.

The new decision from the state's highest court left open the possibility that Cahill could add the charge back. It also ended, at least for now, the prospect of a lengthy delay that could have resulted from it taking up the case. The state had asked the Court of Appeals to halt the trial pending resolution of the matter, and that court later Wednesday denied that request as moot.

Legal experts say giving the jury another option for convicting Chauvin of murder raises the chance of a conviction.

Cahill noted the ruling during a break and told the prosecution and defense that they'll discuss next steps Thursday morning before jury selection begins. He noted that there are still some legal issues to be decided before resolving that dispute.

The first juror picked Wednesday, a man who works in sales management and grew up in a mostly white part of central Minnesota, acknowledged saying on his written questionnaire that he had a "very favorable" opinion of the Black Lives Matter movement and a "somewhat unfavorable" impression of the Blue Lives Matter countermovement in favor of police, yet "somewhat agreed" that police don't get the respect they deserve. He said he agrees that there are bad police officers.

"Are there good ones? Yes. So I don't think it's right to completely blame the entire organization," he told the court under questioning from prosecutor Steve Schleicher.

He also said he would be more inclined to believe an officer, all things being equal, over the word of another witness. But he maintained he would be able to set aside any ideas about the inherent honesty of an officer and evaluate each witness on their own.

The second, a man who works in information technology security, marked "strongly agree" on a question about whether he believes police in his community make him feel safe. His community wasn't specified — jurors are being drawn from all over Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis and many of its suburbs.

"In my community, I think when there is suspicious activity the police will stop by, they will ask a question," he said. "I think that sense of community is all we want right? We want to live in a community where we feel safe regardless of race, color and gender."

Schleicher noted that the man also said in his questionnaire that he strongly disagreed with the concept of "defunding" the police, which has become a political flashpoint locally and across the country in the wake of Floyd's death.

"While I necessarily might not agree with the police action in some situation, I believe that in order for police to make my community safe they have to have the money," he replied.

The questionnaire explores potential jurors' familiarity with the case and their own contacts with police. Their answers have not been made public, and the jurors' identities are being kept secret. Their racial backgrounds often aren't disclosed in open court.

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 defense hasn't said whether Chauvin will testify in his own defense.

Schleicher used a peremptory challenge Wednesday to remove from the panel a woman who has a nephew who's a sheriff's deputy in western Minnesota. She said she was dismayed by the violence that followed Floyd's death.

"I personally didn't see any usefulness to it," she said. "I didn't see anything accomplished by it, except I suppose bring attention to the frustrations of the people involved. But did I see anything useful coming out of the burning of Lake Street and that sort of thing? I did not."

The first juror chosen for the panel on Wednesday said he had one potential problem — he's sched-

uled to get married May 1 in Florida but was prepared to change his plans if the trial continues that long. Opening statements are scheduled for no sooner than March 29 and testimony is expected to last about four weeks, so it could get tight.

"We'll do our best to get you to your wedding," Cahill said as he informed the man he was on the jury. "Go ahead and throw me under the bus with your fiancée."

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

## **Biden immediately begins selling virus aid plan to public**

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House began highlighting the \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill immediately after it gained final congressional approval on Wednesday, wasting no time in selling the public on President Joe Biden's first legislative victory.

The West Wing began an ambitious campaign to showcase the bill's contents while looking to build momentum for the next, perhaps thornier, parts of the president's sweeping agenda. Biden will sign the bill into law on Friday, but the White House didn't wait, turning the bill signing into a three-day event.

The president tweeted moments after the House of Representatives passed the bill that "Help is here — and brighter days lie ahead." He later told reporters that "This bill represents a historic victory for the American people," while the White House also released a slickly produced video touting the passage, and Democrats on Capitol Hill staged an elaborate signing ceremony.

Biden will make the first prime-time address of his presidency on Thursday to mark the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 lockdowns and will use the moment to pitch toward the future and how prospects will be improved by the nearly \$2 trillion aid package.

Animating the public relations outreach is a determination to avoid repeating the mistakes from more than a decade earlier, when President Barack Obama's administration did not fully educate the public about the benefits of its own economic recovery plan.

"Barack was so modest, he didn't want to take, as he said, a 'victory lap,'" Biden, who was Obama's vice president, said last week. "I kept saying, 'Tell people what we did.' He said, 'We don't have time. I'm not going to take a victory lap.' And we paid a price for it, ironically, for that humility."

As the White House works to get out its message, expect an uptick in travel by the president, first lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, as well as Cabinet secretaries and others, according to a memo by deputy chief of staff Jen O'Malley Dillon. The document was circulated among West Wing senior staff members on Wednesday and was obtained by The Associated Press.

"He will be hitting the road, the vice president will be hitting the road, the first lady will be hitting the road," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki, adding that the administration would also make officials available for local news interviews and other virtual events from Washington.

A blitz of interviews and events with more than 400 mayors and governors, including Republicans, will begin in earnest next week; the local officials will discuss what the plan means for their communities. There also will be an effort to plainly spell out the benefits of the plan and how it could affect each American.

O'Malley Dillon wrote that overall pitch is that the country "can be confident in knowing that the help they need will be there for them: to make it through financial difficulties, to get vaccinated so they can see their loved ones again, and to safely send their kids back to school and get back to work themselves."

There will also be an effort to produce a steady stream of vaccination headlines, with the nation's economic recovery intrinsically linked to inoculating Americans and getting them back to work.

Biden on Wednesday announced that his administration is aiming to secure an additional 100 million doses of the single-shot vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson. He appeared at an event with executives from Johnson & Johnson and Merck, rival companies both producing doses of the new vaccine.

Many of those working in Biden's West Wing are veterans of the Obama administration and they acknowledge that not enough was done to sell the 2009 recovery act — to the public or to Congress, with whom

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the White House had a shaky relationship — and highlight how it helped stabilize a battered economy during the Great Recession.

"I was here during that period of time," said Psaki, "and I would say that any of my colleagues at the time would say that we didn't do enough to explain to the American people what the benefits were of the rescue plan, and we didn't do enough to do it in terms that people would be talking about at their dinner tables."

The Obama bill faced headwinds because it followed the bailout of the banks, engineered under President George W. Bush, and came as the economy remained stagnant. This time, economic forecasts project a robust recovery by year's end, and Biden should be able to point to concrete job growth.

The administration is not shying away from the enormity of the bill, which some in the West Wing have jokingly called a "BFD," an echo of Biden's famed off-color description of the Obama-era health care law. Harris, appearing at an afternoon event to promote the plan, called it simply "a big deal."

The virus aid package is one of the largest enhancements to the social safety net in decades. Besides aiming to stop the pandemic and jump-starting hiring, money in the bill 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.

The White House has repeatedly pointed to polling that suggests that the relief bill enjoys broad support among Democratic and Republican voters, even though not one GOP lawmaker signed on to support it. Biden wooed GOP senators to no avail, but some Republicans feel the White House's lack of compromise could hurt the administration down the road.

"I just really think they made a mistake. It takes serious work to make COVID relief a partisan exercise," said Josh Holmes, a former aide to Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

Republicans, who have largely turned their attention to culture war issues, believe there will be opportunities to better push back when the White House moves on to more polarizing issues such as immigration, voting rights legislation and a potentially massive infrastructure and jobs bill that could also include climate change measures.

In Obama's first term, it was the rollout of the Affordable Care Act, which came after the economic rescue package, that truly galvanized Republican opposition. The Obama White House secured its passage, but then the Democratic Party took a big hit in the midterm elections.

President Donald Trump ran away from his signature first-year accomplishment, the 2017 tax cut, which was unpopular and nearly unmentioned before Republicans took losses in the following year's midterms.

The Biden White House believes that a Republican Party consumed with culture wars and in-fighting may not be able to organize opposition to other measures that poll well with the public, and it plans to stay on the offensive.

"You've got to create an echo chamber and amplify it," said Adrienne Elrod, a Democratic strategist close to the White House. "We know that this administration for the next two years is going to pass a lot of legislation they need to pass, even without Republicans. They need to portray the Republicans as being on the wrong side of things people want."

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Associated Press writers Zeke Miller, Josh Boak and Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

## **AP FACT CHECK: Biden admin wrong on vaccine pace, elderly**

By ZEKE MILLER and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For an administration that prides itself on talking straight about the pandemic, the self-congratulation Wednesday went too far.

President Joe Biden wrongly claimed the U.S. vaccinated a record 2.9 million people on Saturday while his special adviser on the pandemic exaggerated the share of older Americans who've been fully immunized.

A look at how their statements compare with the facts:

BIDEN: "On Saturday, we hit a record of 2.9 million vaccinations in one day in America."



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ANDY SLAVITT, special adviser to the White House virus task force: "On Saturday, we set an all-time, single-day record: nearly 3 million Americans vaccinated -- a pace seen nowhere else in the world." — leading off a task force briefing.

THE FACTS: The claim is off base.

The government's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 2.9 million doses were recorded Saturday but that total comes from multiple days of vaccinations. Only 1.56 million doses were administered Saturday, as currently reported by the CDC.

That's far from a one-day record. The most productive day for vaccinations was Feb. 26, when 2.8 million doses were administered.

Although vaccinations have greatly increased overall in recent weeks, Saturday's total is barely above the number of doses administered the day Biden took office.

SLAVITT: "In terms of protecting the most vulnerable — our core duty as a nation — when we came into office, 8% of people over 65 were vaccinated. Today, 60% are vaccinated. And according to the CDC's new guidance, vaccinated parents can now visit and hug their grandchildren — and, in most circumstances, without wearing a mask."

THE FACTS: This is wrong. He is counting people who have received only their first dose as immune and able to mingle. Public health officials stress that only fully vaccinated people can safely be around each other and low-risk people without the distancing and masking recommended for the population at large.

The CDC says 61% of people over 64 have received at least one dose but only 31% are fully vaccinated.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines each require two doses, spread several weeks apart. The newer Johnson & Johnson vaccine requires only one dose. In all cases, it takes two weeks to build immunity after being fully vaccinated.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

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## No evidence migrants at border significantly spreading virus

By PAUL J. WEBER and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — As he ended Texas' coronavirus restrictions Wednesday over the objections of public health officials, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has tried shifting concern about the virus' spread to migrants with COVID-19 crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, though without evidence they are a significant factor.

The focus by Abbott and other Republicans on migrant families has drawn criticism about invoking a long history in the U.S. of wrongly suggesting migrants spread diseases.

Twin pressures are bearing down on the Texas border as, beginning Wednesday, state residents no longer are required to wear face coverings after eight months under a mask mandate. Infection levels remain higher in the region than in most others, and rising numbers of immigrants are now overwhelming federal detention facilities.

Arriving migrants who test positive are being directed to local hotels for isolation, as Abbott and Democratic President Joe Biden fight over who is responsible for helping them.

Doctors on the border fear Abbott repealed coronavirus safeguards too soon and threatens a fragile decline in COVID-19 cases. The surge of immigration to the border is also worrying, they say, but far from the biggest factor in containing the virus' spread.

"It's not trivial," said Dr. James Castillo, the public health authority for Cameron County in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for migrant apprehensions along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Is it the biggest source of infection to our whole community?" he said, referring to migrants arriving

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with the virus. "No, it's maybe one source, and there's a lot of different sources. And it's a shame that we're going to create new sources by dropping the restrictions."

Abbott, under pressure from conservatives to end COVID restrictions, announced last week that Texas would fully reopen, allowing full capacity in restaurants and bars and large gatherings that had been considered dangerous. Biden criticized the decision as "Neanderthal thinking," and Abbott shot back by alleging Biden was "releasing COVID-positive illegal immigrants in our state" by easing some of former President Donald Trump's toughest border policies.

Abbott has rejected offers from the Biden administration for help with testing and quarantining migrants, saying that job belongs entirely to the federal government.

"The federal government has the responsibility to fund the testing of anybody coming here who does have COVID," Abbott said during a trip to the border Tuesday.

Asked whether the governor had numbers on migrants with COVID-19 who have entered the U.S., Abbott spokesman Renae Eze offered a statement Wednesday: "Because the Biden Administration has refused to step up and do their job, we may never know the true total of COVID-positive illegal immigrants and the impact on our state and our country."

The Department of Homeland Security said it would fully fund testing, isolation, and quarantine of migrants, but that Abbott needed to sign off.

"We hope that Governor Abbott will reconsider his decision to reject DHS's agreement with the Texas local authorities that would enable the very testing of migrant families that Governor Abbott says he wants," the agency said.

There are three types of immigrants entering in South Texas, according to border authorities: People who were in Trump's "Remain in Mexico" program who were waiting for immigration court dates and must test negative, children who are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian who are referred to U.S. Health and Human Services, and migrant parents with young children that the Border Patrol releases quickly. Some cities are getting hundreds of migrant families daily.

Two HHS contractors in Texas who were not authorized to speak to the media say the positivity rates for children are generally 8% or below, which is lower than the current statewide test rate. Children who test positive are isolated until they are clear of the virus.

The infection rates for all arriving immigrants are lower than for Texas as a whole, local officials and nonprofit groups serving those families say.

In the border city of Brownsville, Mayor Trey Mendez said last week that about 6% of immigrants tested positive at the local bus station. In McAllen, Sister Norma Pimentel of the local Catholic Charities chapter said around one family in a group of 100 people typically tests positive and is directed to isolate in a local hotel.

Both Cameron and Hidalgo counties — where Brownsville and McAllen are located — currently have test positivity rates of about 10%.

Many cities and local groups need more help as more immigrants arrive, hoping their chances of entry to the U.S. are better under the new administration.

In Del Rio, a nonprofit group called the Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition received nearly 200 people in the first few days of March alone, after receiving more than 460 people in all of February.

Dr. Ivan Melendez, the health authority in Hidalgo County, said now about 10 people a day are dying there instead of 50. He criticized Abbott for lifting the mask mandate but said the arrival of migrants is also a concern.

"The reality of it is you cannot have an influx of thousands of people in your community during a pandemic," he said.

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, a longtime border Democrat from Laredo, Texas, criticized the Biden administration for rolling back some Trump-era immigration policies too quickly and opening more holding facilities too slowly.

"Once you're the president, you own the failure or you own the success," he said.

But Cuellar also criticized people “who try to invoke fear” about immigrants, particularly children. “If you’re afraid of a little kid, a 7-year-old, then I think you fear your own shadow,” he said.

Merchant reported from Houston. Associated Press/Report for America writer Acacia Coronado contributed to this report.

## Journalist acquitted in Iowa case seen as attack on press

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — An Iowa jury on Wednesday acquitted a journalist who was pepper-sprayed and arrested by police while covering a protest, in a case that critics have derided as an attack on press freedoms and an abuse of prosecutorial discretion.

After deliberating for less than two hours, the jury found Des Moines Register reporter Andrea Sahouri and her ex-boyfriend Spenser Robnett not guilty on misdemeanor charges of failure to disperse and interference with official acts.

The Des Moines verdict is an embarrassing outcome for the office of Polk County Attorney John Sarcione, which pursued the charges despite widespread condemnation from advocates for a free press and human rights.

Those advocates, ranging from Sahouri’s bosses at the Register to Amnesty International, argued that Sahouri was wrongly arrested while doing her job covering racial injustice protests in Des Moines last May.

More than 100 groups called for the dismissal of charges last summer, but prosecutors aggressively pursued them, arguing that Sahouri and Robnett didn’t comply with police orders to leave the chaotic scene outside of a mall and interfered with the officer who arrested Sahouri.

Sahouri, 25, immediately identified herself as a reporter on assignment but was subjected to what she called “extremely painful” pepper spray blasts and jailed. Robnett, 24, said he was sprayed and handcuffed after telling the officer that Sahouri was a Register journalist.

Sahouri was the first working U.S. journalist to face a criminal trial since 2018, according to the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker. Although more than 125 U.S. journalists were arrested or detained last year, the vast majority were not charged or had their charges dismissed.

Sahouri told reporters she was relieved by the quick acquittal, which she called a victory for press freedom and democracy. She said the case had taken a toll on her personally and professionally, but that she would continue reporting the news.

“I have been dealing with a lot of pressure and anxiety and trauma from the assault and continuing to do my job has been difficult,” she said. “But it is important. That is why I am in this field.”

If convicted on either count, Sahouri and Robnett would have faced hundreds of dollars in fines and up to 30 days in jail.

The Register’s parent company, Gannett, funded their defense, and employees of the newspaper chain rallied behind Sahouri on social media. Columbia Journalism School, where Sahouri earned a master’s degree in 2019 before joining the Register, also expressed solidarity by promoting the hashtag #JournalismIsNotACrime.

Journalists celebrated the verdict, saying it supports their freedom to document newsworthy events. But they said it was disgraceful that authorities pressed forward with the charges for nine months at taxpayer expense.

“Grateful justice was done and @andreamsahouri was fully exonerated,” Gannett news president and USA Today Publisher Maribel Wadsworth tweeted. “But it should never have come to this. She was assaulted, arrested, charged and tried for doing her job. Today’s victory is as much a victory for the 1st Amendment as it is for Andrea.”

Prosecutor Bradley Kinkade told jurors during his closing argument that it didn’t matter Sahouri was a working journalist, saying her profession wasn’t a defense against the charges. In fact, he argued that the video and photos she reported live on Twitter of protesters breaking store windows and throwing rocks

was “convincing evidence” that she was near an unlawful assembly.

Kinkade, an assistant Polk County attorney, argued that Sahouri and Robnett were within hearing distance when police gave orders to disperse, but that they stayed with the crowd. He said they didn’t have to actually hear or understand the orders, which were given nearly 90 minutes before their arrests as police tried to unblock an intersection. The orders were barely audible on video played for jurors.

Kinkade urged jurors to accept the testimony of arresting officer Luke Wilson, who claimed that Robnett tried to pull Sahouri out of his custody and that Sahouri briefly resisted arrest. Wilson acknowledged that he had failed to record the arrest on his body camera and did not try to recover the video later, in violation of Des Moines Police Department policy.

Defense attorney Nicholas Klinefeldt said the case was about a reporter who was doing her job and a boyfriend who accompanied her for safety reasons. He said Sahouri was reporting on the “destruction of property so that the community could see what was going on.”

Klinefeldt said the defendants didn’t hear any dispersal orders and that Sahouri was trying to report only from places where she was allowed. He noted that they were running away from a tense location where riot police had deployed tear gas when Wilson arrested them.

Klinefeldt said that the officer’s claim that they interfered wasn’t credible. Sahouri testified that she put her hands up and repeatedly identified herself as a reporter but was nonetheless pepper-sprayed and cuffed with zip ties. Another Register reporter, Katie Akin, was near Sahouri and quickly informed police that they were journalists. Akin was told to leave but was not arrested.

Video captured by a responding officer showed Sahouri in pain, temporarily blinded by the pepper spray and repeatedly telling officers that she was a journalist doing her job. Nonetheless, authorities put her in a police van and took her to jail.

Follow Ryan J. Foley on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/rjfoley>

## Layoffs, upheaval at Zacharias ministry roiled by scandal

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

The global Christian ministry founded by the late Ravi Zacharias said Wednesday it will suspend fundraising, lay off 60% of its staff and overhaul its mission in the wake of revelations that he engaged in sexual misconduct with massage therapists and carried on many amorous extramarital relationships via texts and email.

Ravi Zacharias International Ministries CEO Sarah Davis announced the organization will shift away from its current mission as a global team of speakers making the case for Christianity. It will become a grant-making entity with funds directed to two areas: RZIM’s original mission of preaching the Gospel, and the prevention of sexual abuse and caring for its victims. Previously the organization had said it would change its name.

“RZIM cannot — indeed should not — continue to operate as an organization in its present form,” said Davis, the eldest daughter of the author and speaker who died last May before his misconduct came to light. “Nor do we believe we can merely rename the organization and move forward with ‘business as usual.’”

“We anticipate this transition to grant-making will be complete in four to six months, and when completed will be accompanied by leadership changes,” she added.

RZIM had experienced a steady decline in financial support in recent months, according to Davis, and had decided to stop soliciting or accepting contributions at least temporarily.

Citing “current economic realities,” she said the organization’s global staff — which included scores of traveling speakers — would be reduced by about 60% beginning Thursday. She said employees who are laid off will receive severance pay and will not be asked to sign nondisclosure agreements.

Allegations of sexual misconduct by Zacharias began to surface last fall in social media and news outlets, notably a Sept. 29 article in the evangelical publication Christianity Today. It asserted that over about five years, he sexually harassed three women who worked as massage therapists at two day spas he co-



owned in an Atlanta suburb.

RZIM's leadership initially challenged the claims, saying they "do not in any way comport with the man we knew for decades — we believe them to be false."

However, in October it hired an Atlanta law firm which in turn engaged the services of a private investigation company comprising former federal law enforcement officers. The law firm, Miller & Martin, issued a scathing report last month based on interviews with more than 50 people, including more than a dozen massage therapists.

Five of the therapists said Zacharias touched them inappropriately, and one said she was raped, according to the report. It said investigators searching Zacharias' mobile devices found more than 200 photographs of younger women, including nude images of a salon employee in Malaysia.

Zacharias, who died of cancer at the age of 74, was widely popular and counted many celebrities and prominent Christian leaders among his admirers. Then-Vice President Mike Pence spoke at his memorial service in May.

Zacharias founded his international ministry in 1984 with a mission to engage in "Christian apologetics" — defending Christianity through intellectual arguments. Based in suburban Atlanta, RZIM has operations in about 20 countries and scores of traveling speakers.

After release of the law firm's report, RZIM's board said it was hiring a consulting firm, Guidepost Solutions, to conduct an independent assessment of the organization. It also hired lawyer Rachael Denholander, a prominent advocate for survivors of sexual abuse, to serve as a confidential liaison with survivors of abuse related to RZIM.

RZIM also said it is removing Zacharias' publications and videos from its website and social media platforms,

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## **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.

On his 50th day in office, on Wednesday, his administration celebrated a milestone: 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 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

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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 ex-

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, won confirmation Wednesday.

## Invalidations of Meghan's claims of racism hurt Black women

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — As Prince Harry and Meghan's TV interview reverberates internationally, it's left the more than 50 million viewers grappling with the couple's claims of racism and lack of support that Meghan says drove her to thoughts of suicide.

But for many Black women worldwide, the headlines and social media discussions were painfully familiar. With social media conversations questioning whether racism affected Meghan's treatment by the British press and royal family, many Black women say it is yet another example of a Black woman's experiences with racism being disregarded and denied.

"White supremacy seeks to isolate you, make you feel like no one is listening and no one is supporting you. It uses that as a tool to keep in power," said Gaye Theresa Johnson, associate professor in the Department of African American Studies at UCLA. "And so when you aren't validated in your feelings or feel supported, that does real harm."

Meghan, the daughter of a white father and a Black mother, said that when she was pregnant with her son Archie, a member of the royal family expressed "concerns ... about how dark his skin might be." The former television star also said she sought mental health help through the palace's human resources department but was told there was nothing it could do.

Almost as soon as the interview with Oprah Winfrey aired, many were quick to deny Meghan's allegations of racism. The New York Post published a column titled, "Meghan Markle's interview was full of bull." British television host Piers Morgan quit his job on "Good Morning Britain" after facing backlash for saying on air that Meghan lied about suffering suicidal thoughts in what he called a "two-hour trash-a-thon of our royal family."

On Tuesday, Buckingham Palace released a statement saying the "whole family is saddened to learn the full extent of how challenging the last few years have been for Harry and Meghan" but that "some recollections may vary."

Johnson said the doubts and questioning cast against Meghan's claims were emotionally wrenching for many Black women, who may relate to the trauma of having their personal experiences with racism invalidated by others.

"It's an insult when people are incredulous about the racism people like Meghan Markle experienced because that incredulity speaks volumes about what people refuse to see, what is right in front of their eyes all the time and that some people have to navigate daily," she said.

"That takes a toll on a person and their mental health."

Dr. Anita Thomas, executive vice president and provost at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota,

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said watching Meghan's interview with Winfrey was emotional.

"It speaks to the burden that many African American women face," she said. "For Black women, it was upsetting to see that, even when she had the courage to speak out about her experiences with racism, that she didn't get the support that she needed and, in many ways, her experiences were invalidated."

Thomas said enduring such treatment requires "psychological and emotional energy" to navigate. "As a psychologist, I hope people talk about this effect of racism and sexism on psychological functioning," she said.

Sinai Fleary, founder of the UK-based Reggae and Rasta lifestyle publication Jus' Jah Magazine, said while she initially saw an outpouring of support for Meghan, she quickly saw that change on social media.

"They will dismiss, gaslight and ignore what we have been saying, and what Meghan and Harry have been saying," Fleary, who lives in London, wrote on Twitter. "This is how the media and certain parts of the public work. Same formula, every single time."

Fleary told The Associated Press that Meghan's interview brought back her own memories of being racially profiled in shops and seeing white women clutch their bags on public transit when they saw her.

"If racism as blatant as what Meghan spoke about is immediately denied, will people believe me when I tell them about these less overt, daily examples of racism I face every day?" she asked.

Fleary said the UK has a long history of dismissing Black women in conversations about racism. "They're never believed," she said. "It's always deny and dismiss. It can be so blatant and people will still say they don't see it."

Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, pointed to the racist attitudes of the British media as a reason for stepping away from royal duties and moving to North America last year, something Harry reiterated in the interview with Winfrey.

As Meghan and Harry began dating, many pointed to the relationship as evidence of Britain entering a "post-racial" era, but the racism Meghan faced from the British media told another story.

When the news first broke of their relationship, publications were quick to refer to Meghan in racist terms, with one tabloid columnist referring to her "exotic" DNA. A Mail Online headline stated Meghan was "(almost) straight outta Compton," and a Daily Star headline asked whether Harry would "marry into gangster royalty."

Then, when Meghan and Harry announced they would step away from official royal duties last year, people quickly began to question that racism was what drove Meghan away.

Heather McGhee, author of the book "The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together," said the immediate rush by some to deny Meghan's allegations were upsetting.

And that denial is something Black women face every day, she said.

"Very often, Black women in conference rooms and offices experience discrimination and have no recourse, in the same way that one of the more powerful Black women in the world had no recourse except to give it all up," McGhee said of Meghan.

"I hope we realize there's a much less powerful version of Meghan likely at your office or school who is being discriminated (against) and doesn't have champions. I hope this encourages more people to stand up for their Black co-workers, neighbors and friends."

Fernando is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/christinetfern>.

## Senate confirms Merrick Garland to be US attorney general

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate confirmed Merrick Garland on Wednesday to be the next U.S. attorney general with a strong bipartisan vote, placing the widely-respected, veteran judge in the post as President Joe Biden has vowed to restore the Justice Department's reputation for independence.

Democrats have praised Garland, a federal appeals court judge who was snubbed by Republicans for



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a seat on the Supreme Court in 2016, as a highly qualified and honorable jurist who is uniquely qualified to lead the department after a tumultuous four years under former President Donald Trump. Many Republicans praised him as well, saying he has the right record and temperament for the moment. He was confirmed 70-30.

Garland will now inherit a Justice Department embattled by a turbulent era under Trump, who insisted that the attorney general and the department must be loyal to him personally, battering the department's reputation. In the last month of Trump's presidency, Attorney General William Barr resigned after refuting Trump's false claims that widespread electoral fraud had led to his defeat.

Trump's pressure on officials, particularly on Barr and former Attorney General Jeff Sessions over the department's probe into his campaign's ties to Russia, prompted abundant criticism from Democrats over what they saw as the politicizing of the nation's top law enforcement agencies.

"After Donald Trump spent four years — four long years — subverting the powers of the Justice Department for his own political benefit, treating the attorney general like his own personal defense lawyer, America can breathe a sigh of relief that we're going to have someone like Merrick Garland leading the Justice Department," said Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., ahead of the vote. "Someone with integrity, independence, respect for the rule of law and credibility on both sides of the aisle."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell — who prevented Garland from becoming a Supreme Court Justice in 2016 when he blocked his nomination — said he was voting to confirm Garland because of "his long reputation as a straight shooter and a legal expert" and that his "left-of-center perspective" was still within the legal mainstream.

"Let's hope our incoming attorney general applies that no-nonsense approach to the serious challenges facing the Department of Justice and our nation," McConnell said.

Garland's nomination was widely seen as a redemption after McConnell had blocked his Supreme Court nomination, taking a huge political gamble after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia by saying that the next president should get the pick, not outgoing President Barack Obama. Trump was then down in the polls, but McConnell's bet paid off when the Republican won the presidency. Garland's nomination floundered for nine months, and he never got a hearing.

"We can never erase the sad memory of what happened to Judge Merrick Garland five years ago in the United States Senate, but we can give this remarkable man an opportunity to write a new chapter of public service in his life," said Senate Judiciary Chairman Dick Durbin, D-Ill., just before the vote.

As he finally sat before the Judiciary panel in February, Garland sought to assure lawmakers that the Justice Department would remain politically independent on his watch. He said his first priority would be to combat extremist violence with an initial focus on the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, promising lawmakers that he would provide prosecutors with whatever resources they need to bring charges over the attack.

Garland will also inherit immediate political challenges, including an ongoing criminal tax investigation into Biden's son, Hunter, and a federal probe into the overseas and business dealings of the former New York City mayor and Trump ally Rudy Giuliani, which stalled last year over a dispute about investigative tactics as Trump unsuccessfully sought reelection.

His confirmation also comes amid calls from many Democrats to pursue inquiries into Trump.

Separately, Garland will also be responsible for overseeing a special counsel investigation into the origins of the Russia probe, which shadowed Trump's presidency for more than two years. Garland will have to decide how to handle it and what to make public.

An experienced judge, Garland held senior positions at the Justice Department decades ago, including as a supervisor in the prosecution of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which led to the execution of Timothy McVeigh. His experience prosecuting domestic terrorism cases could prove exceptionally valuable as investigations into the Capitol insurrection progress.

The department's priorities and messaging are expected to shift drastically in the Biden administration, with a focus more on civil rights issues, criminal justice overhauls and policing policies in the wake of nationwide protests over the death of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement.

That expected shift prompted some Republicans to oppose Garland's nomination, including Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton, who said he believed the judge would be too soft on criminals and immigrants and "empower left wing radicals embedded inside the department."

At his confirmation hearing, Garland emphasized his commitment to combating racial discrimination in policing, telling senators that said America doesn't "yet have equal justice." He also said he'd prioritize confronting the rise in extremist violence and domestic terror threats.

At one point in the hearing, he held back tears when speaking about his grandparents, who fled Russia for the U.S. amid antisemitism and persecution.

"The country took us in, and protected us, and I feel an obligation to the country to pay back, and this is the highest, best use of my own set of skills to pay back," Garland said. "So I very much want to be the kind of attorney general that you're saying I could become, and I'll do my best to become that kind of attorney general."

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Associated Press writer Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

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

By MARTHA MENDOZA and JULIET LINDERMAN Associated Press

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

Law enforcement agents were "being pulled into the crowd and trampled, assaulted with scaffolding materials, and/or bear maced by protesters," wrote Arlington County firefighter Taylor Blunt in an after-action memo. Some couldn't walk, and had to be dragged to safety.

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

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

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

"We were among the first mutual aid teams to arrive and were critical to begin the process of driving protestors off the Capitol," wrote Blunt. Other emergency medical personnel also responded to incidents at the U.S. Capitol, including on the Capitol steps earlier in the day.

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

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

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

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

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

Two days later, it was 3:39 p.m. when Penn emailed county officials that he had "just been notified" that

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Arlington officers were responding to the Capitol attack and had been absorbed into the overall response led by Capitol Police.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Together we stand!" the officer signed off.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The hotels "reported some problems with crowds and disorderly conduct the past few nights," he said.

That evening, at 8:31 p.m., a Federal Protective Service memo alerted "there is a report of an armed militia group headed to dc from west Virginia. Query ongoing."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Contact AP's Global Investigations team at [investigative@ap.org](mailto:investigative@ap.org).

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This story has been corrected to show Terry Gainer is a former Capitol Police chief, not the current Capitol Police chief. It also clarifies that in addition to the Arlington County firefighters, other emergency medical personnel also responded to incidents at the U.S. Capitol, including on the Capitol steps earlier in the day.

## Lawsuit challenges new admissions policy at elite Va. school

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — A conservative legal group sued a northern Virginia school district Wednesday, alleging that its efforts to draw more Black and Hispanic students to a selective public high school end up discriminating against Asian Americans.

The Pacific Legal Foundation's lawsuit against the Fairfax County school board was prompted by the school system's decision to overhaul the admissions process at the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology.

Located in the suburbs of the nation's capital, the school is frequently ranked as the best in the country, and families plan for years to try to help their children gain admission.

The student body is 70% Asian American, with minuscule numbers of Black and Hispanic students.

The Fairfax County school board voted last year to revise the admissions process and eliminate a standardized test that had been a key part of the evaluation process. It also set aside a specific number of slots for students at each of the middle schools in the county.

Board members have said they hope the new process increases Black and Hispanic representation in the student body.

The lawsuit, though, alleges that the set-asides will end up hurting Asian American families that are clustered in a handful of middle schools that currently send large numbers of students to "TJ," as the school is known.

Erin Wilcox, a lawyer with the Pacific Legal Foundation, said at a press conference Wednesday that the policies themselves are discriminatory, but the intent is made even more clear by statements from board members who said they want the changes to result in a student body with a racial makeup that matches the county's demographics.

"The discriminatory intent they've shown is intertwined and an inseparable part of the policies they put in place," Wilcox said.

The school system has said its new process is still race neutral. In a statement, the system said it remains "committed to ensuring that all FCPS students have access and opportunities to reach their fullest potential. It is in that vein that the Board fervently supported removing the historical barriers and inequities faced by students from culturally and ethnically diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, while still ensuring that TJ maintains its high academic standards."

Filed in federal court in Alexandria, Wednesday's lawsuit is the second one to challenge the school system's new admissions policy. A lawsuit in Fairfax County court alleges that the new procedures violate state rules regulating gifted education.

Asra Nomani, a TJ parent who has led opposition to the changes, said the new policies are part of a "growing tide of racism against Asian Americans." She said many of the TJ families are recent immigrants who came to the U.S. for a chance at equal opportunity.

"These families never could have imagined they would face such injustice in America," she said.

Similar debates have occurred at other elite public schools, including in New York City and San Francisco.

The lawsuit comes as the U.S. Supreme Court is weighing whether to hear a long-running legal case against Harvard University over whether its admissions policies discriminate against Asian Americans.

Wilcox said that the rules governing K-12 schools are different than those governing colleges, but she acknowledged that a Supreme Court ruling on the Harvard case could affect the TJ lawsuit. As it stands now, lower courts have ruled in favor of Harvard.

## Beth Moore, famed Bible teacher quits Southern Baptists

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By BOB SMIETANA Religion News Service

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS) — For nearly three decades, Beth Moore has been the very model of a modern Southern Baptist.

She loves Jesus and the Bible and has dedicated her life to teaching others why they need both of them in their lives. Millions of evangelical Christian women have read her Bible studies and flocked to hear her speak at stadium-style events where Moore delves deeply into biblical passages.

Moore's outsize influence and role in teaching the Bible have always made some evangelical power brokers uneasy, because of their belief only men should be allowed to preach.

But Moore was above reproach, supporting Southern Baptist teaching that limits the office of pastor to men alone and cheerleading for the missions and evangelistic work that the denomination holds dear.

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"She has been a stalwart for the Word of God, never compromising," former Lifeway Christian Resources President Thom Rainer said in 2015, during a celebration at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center in Nashville that honored 20 years of partnership between the Southern Baptist publishing house and Moore. "And when all is said and done, the impact of Beth Moore can only be measured in eternity's grasp."

Then along came Donald Trump.

Moore's criticism of the 45th president's abusive behavior toward women and her advocacy for sexual abuse victims turned her from a beloved icon to a pariah in the denomination she loved all her life.

"Wake up, Sleepers, to what women have dealt with all along in environments of gross entitlement & power," Moore once wrote about Trump, riffing on a passage from the New Testament Book of Ephesians.

Because of her opposition to Trump and her outspokenness in confronting sexism and nationalism in the evangelical world, Moore has been labeled as "liberal" and "woke" and even as being a heretic for daring to give a message during a Sunday morning church service.

Finally, Moore had had enough. She told Religion News Service in an interview Friday (March 5) that she is "no longer a Southern Baptist."

"I am still a Baptist, but I can no longer identify with Southern Baptists," Moore said in the phone interview. "I love so many Southern Baptist people, so many Southern Baptist churches, but I don't identify with some of the things in our heritage that haven't remained in the past."

Moore told RNS that she recently ended her longtime publishing partnership with Nashville-based LifeWay Christian. While Lifeway will still distribute her books, it will no longer publish them or administer her live events. (Full disclosure: The author of this article is a former Lifeway employee.) Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Kate Bowler, a historian at Duke Divinity School who has studied evangelical women celebrities, said Moore's departure is a significant loss for the Southern Baptist Convention.

Moore, she said, is one of the denomination's few stand-alone women leaders, whose platform was based on her own "charisma, leadership and incredible work ethic" and not her marriage to a famed pastor. (Moore's husband is a plumber by trade.) She also appealed to a wide audience outside her denomination.

"Ms. Moore is a deeply trusted voice across the liberal-conservative divide, and has always been able to communicate a deep faithfulness to her tradition without having to follow the Southern Baptist's scramble to make Trump spiritually respectable," Bowler said. "The Southern Baptists have lost a powerful champion in a time in which their public witness has already been significantly weakened."

Moore may be one of the most unlikely celebrity Bible teachers in recent memory. In the 1980s, she began sharing devotionals during the aerobics classes she taught at First Baptist Church in Houston. She then began teaching a popular women's Bible study at the church, which eventually attracted thousands each week.

In the early 1990s, she wrote a Bible study manuscript and sent it to Lifeway, then known as the Baptist

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Sunday School Board, where it was rejected. However, after a Lifeway staffer saw Moore teach a class in person, the publisher changed its mind.

Moore's first study, "A Woman's Heart: God's Dwelling Place," was published in 1995 and was a hit, leading to dozens of additional studies, all backed up by hundreds of hours of research and reflecting Moore's relentless desire to know more about the Bible.

RELATED: Accusing SBC of 'caving,' John MacArthur says of Beth Moore: 'Go home'

From 2001 to 2016, Moore's Living Proof Ministries ran six-figure surpluses, building its assets from about a million dollars in 2001 to just under \$15 million by April 2016, according to reports filed with the Internal Revenue Service. Her work as a Bible teacher has permeated down to small church Bible study groups and sold-out stadiums with her Living Proof Live events.

For Moore, the Southern Baptist Convention was her family, her tribe, her heritage. Her Baptist church where she grew up in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, was a refuge from a troubled home where she experienced sexual abuse.

"My local church, growing up, saved my life," she told RNS. "So many times, my home was my unsafe place. My church was my safe place."

As an adult, she taught Sunday school and Bible study and then, with her Lifeway partnership, her life became deeply intertwined with the denomination. She believed in Jesus. And she also believed in the SBC.

In October 2016, Moore had what she called "the shock of my life," when reading the transcripts of the "Access Hollywood" tapes, where Trump boasted of his sexual exploits with women.

"This wasn't just immorality," she said. "This smacked of sexual assault."

She expected her fellow evangelicals, especially Southern Baptist leaders she trusted, to be outraged, especially given how they had reacted to Bill Clinton's conduct in the 1990s. Instead, she said, they rallied around Trump.

"The disorientation of this was staggering," she said. "Just staggering."

Moore, who described herself as "pro-life from conception to grave," said she had no illusions about why evangelicals supported Trump, who promised to deliver anti-abortion judges up and down the judicial system.

Still, she could not comprehend how he became a champion of the faith. "He became the banner, the poster child for the great white hope of evangelicalism, the salvation of the church in America," she said. "Nothing could have prepared me for that."

When Moore spoke out about Trump, the pushback was fierce. Book sales plummeted as did ticket sales to her events. Her criticism of Trump was seen as an act of betrayal. From fiscal 2017 to fiscal 2019, Living Proof lost more than \$1.8 million.

After allegations of abuse and misconduct began to surface among Southern Baptists in 2016, Moore also became increasingly concerned about her denomination's tolerance for leaders who treated women with disrespect.

In 2018, she wrote a "letter to my brothers" on her blog, outlining her concerns about the deference she was expected to show male leaders, going as far as wearing flats instead of heels when she was serving alongside a man who was shorter than she was.

She also began to speak out about her own experience of abuse, especially after a February 2019 report from the Houston Chronicle, her hometown newspaper, detailed more than 700 cases of sexual abuse among Southern Baptists over a 20-year period.

RELATED: Beth Moore's ministry reignites debate over whether women can preach

Her social media feeds, especially Twitter, where she has nearly a million followers, became filled with righteous anger and dismay over what she saw as a toxic mix of misogyny, nationalism and partisan politics taking over the evangelical world she loved — along with good-natured banter with friends and supporters to encourage them.

"I can get myself in so much trouble on Twitter because it's kind of my jam," she said. "My thing is to mess around with words and ideas."

Then, in May 2019, Moore said, she did something she now describes as "really dumb." A friend and fellow

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writer named Vicki Courtney mentioned on Twitter that she would be preaching in church on Mother's Day. "I'm doing Mother's Day too! Vicki, let's please don't tell anyone this," Moore replied.

The tweet immediately sparked a national debate among Southern Baptists and other evangelical leaders over whether women should be allowed to preach in church.

"There's just something about the order of creation that means that God intends for the preaching voice to be a male voice," Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said on his podcast.

Georgia Baptist pastor Josh Buice urged the SBC and Lifeway to cancel Moore, labeling her as a liberal threat to the denomination.

Controversial California megachurch pastor John MacArthur summed up his thoughts in two words, telling Moore, "Go home."

Moore, who said she would not become pastor of a Southern Baptist church "to save my life," watched in amazement as her tweet began to dominate the conversation in the denomination, drowning out the concerns about abuse.

"We were in the middle of the biggest sexual abuse scandal that has ever hit our denomination," she said. "And suddenly, the most important thing to talk about was whether or not a woman could stand at the pulpit and give a message."

When Moore attended the SBC's annual meeting in June 2019 and spoke on a panel about abuse, she felt she was no longer welcome.

Things have only gotten worse since then, said Moore. The SBC has been roiled by debates over critical race theory, causing a number of high-profile Black pastors to leave the denomination. Politics and Christian nationalism have crowded out the gospel, she said.

While all this was going on, Moore was working on a new Bible study with her daughter Melissa on the New Testament's letter to Galatians. As she studied that book, Moore was struck by a passage where the Apostle Paul, the letter's author, describes a confrontation with Peter, another apostle and early church leader, saying Peter's conduct was "not in step with the gospel."

That phrase, she said, resonated with her. It described what she and other concerned Southern Baptists were seeing as being wrong in their denomination.

"It was not in step with the gospel," she said. "It felt like we had landed on Mars."

RELATED: 'We out': Charlie Dates on why his church is leaving the SBC over rejection of critical race theory

Beth Allison Barr, a history professor and dean at Baylor University, said Moore's departure will be a shock for Southern Baptist women.

Barr, the author of "The Making of Biblical Womanhood," a forthcoming book on gender roles among evangelicals, grew up a Southern Baptist. Her mother was a huge fan of Moore, as were many women in her church.

"If she walks away, she's going to carry a lot of these women with her," said Barr.

Anthea Butler, associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania and author of a forthcoming book on evangelicals and racism, said Moore could become a more conservative version of the late Rachel Held Evans, who rallied progressive Christians tired of evangelicalism but not of Christianity.

Critics of Moore will find it easier to dismiss her as "woke" or "liberal" than to deal with the substance of her critique, said Butler. But Moore's concerns and the ongoing conflicts in the SBC about racism and sexism aren't going away, Butler said.

The religion professor believes Moore will be better off leaving the SBC, despite the pain of breaking away.

"I applaud this move and support her because I know how soul-crushing the SBC is for women," Butler said. "She will be far better off without them, doing the ministry God calls her to do."

Unwinding her life from the Southern Baptist Convention and from Lifeway was difficult. Moore and her husband have begun visiting a new church, one not tied as closely to the SBC but still "gospel-driven." She looked at joining another denomination, perhaps becoming a Lutheran or a Presbyterian, but in her heart, she remains Baptist.



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She still loves the things Southern Baptists believe, she said, and is determined to stay connected with a local church. Moore hopes at some point, the public witness of Southern Baptists will return to those core values and away from the nationalism, sexism and racial divides that seem to define its public witness.

So far that has not happened.

"At the end of the day, there comes a time when you have to say, this is not who I am," she said.

Moore had formed long-term friendships with her editing and marketing team at Lifeway and saying goodbye was painful, though amicable. She'd hoped to spend 2020 on a kind of farewell tour but most of her events last year were canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Lifeway does have a cruise featuring Moore still on its schedule.)

"These are people that I love so dearly and they are beloved forever," she said. "I just have not been able to regard many things in my adult ministry life as more of a manifestation of grace than that gift of partnership with Lifeway."

Becky Loyd, director of Lifeway Women, spoke fondly about Moore.

"Our relationship with Beth is not over, we will continue to love, pray and support Beth for years to come," she told RNS in an email. "Lifeway is so thankful to the Lord for allowing us to be a small part of how God has used Beth over many years to help women engage Scripture in deep and meaningful ways and help them grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ."

Lifeway will still carry Moore's books and promote some of her events.

Those events will likely be smaller, attracting a few hundred people rather than thousands, said Moore, at least in the beginning. And she is looking forward to beginning anew.

"I am going to serve whoever God puts in front of me," she said.

## Western Balkan countries to tighten virus rules amid surge

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Struggling with surging COVID-19 infections, several Balkan countries said on Wednesday that they would step up restrictions in hopes of easing the pressure on their overburdened health systems.

Doctors in Bosnia's capital of Sarajevo warned that infections have "exploded" in recent days and urged people to comply with pandemic regulations. Illustrating the rise in infections, long queues of people waiting to see doctors formed outside COVID-19 wards and outpatient clinics in the city.

On a positive note, the first AstraZeneca vaccine doses donated by neighboring Serbia, were administered in Sarajevo on Wednesday.

Bosnian authorities said that all bars, restaurants and non-essential shops in the Sarajevo canton will be shut during this weekend.

More than 1,000 new infections and 37 deaths over the past 24 hours were reported on Wednesday.

"These are hard days, and once again we appeal to citizens to be maximally vigilant and to take care so they can help us to keep the health system stable," said Ismet Gavrankapetanovic, head of the Sarajevo General Hospital.

In Serbia, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said the government-appointed virus crisis body most likely will meet on Thursday to decide on tighter measures for the upcoming weekend.

The country of 7 million has given more than 1.5 million people at least one dose from an array of vaccines including China's Sinopharm, Pfizer-BioNTech, Russia's Sputnik V, and Astra-Zeneca, placing Serbia among countries with the highest vaccination rates in Europe. Nonetheless, Serbia is reporting more than 4,000 new infections daily and doctors have described the situation as alarming.

The government has launched a campaign to encourage people who have not yet been inoculated to do so. Experts have blamed the recent surge on flouting of the rules, and the fact that ski resorts remained open throughout the winter season.

Brnabic also criticized the holding in the past days of two concerts by a popular band at a Belgrade hall, saying authorities will ban all concerts in the future. Brnabic insisted that "we will demand that the

organizers be punished.”

In neighboring Montenegro, health authorities said schools will shift to remote instruction, while daycare centers, bars and fitness centers will close as part additional measures imposed by the small nation of 620,000.

Montenegro has had among the highest infection and death rates in Europe with more than 80,000 infections and over 1,000 deaths. Authorities said on Wednesday that if the situation worsens they may ask the European Union to send in medical staff to help.

Montenegro’s health officials said that so far, approximately 70% of hospital beds in the small Adriatic state are occupied because of the virus outbreak.

In North Macedonia, a nationwide, two-week curfew will take effect on Wednesday from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Authorities in the Balkan country of 2.1 million recorded last week a 60% increase in infections over the previous week. Most of the newly-admitted patients carry the the U.K. variant.

Predrag Milic contributed from Montenegro and Eldar Emric from Bosnia.

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

## Royal response fails to end anger over Meghan racism claims

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Buckingham Palace’s response to Prince Harry and Meghan’s allegations of racism and mistreatment has failed to quiet the controversy, with some observers criticizing the royal family for not forcefully condemning racism and suggesting the couple’s version of events may not be accurate.

“Too little, too late” was the verdict of royal commentator Peter Hunt, who also criticized the palace’s 61-word statement for saying the issue would be dealt with privately as a family matter.

“This delayed, tame statement went for predictability when unpredictability — stepping out of the Windsor comfort zone — was what was needed,” Hunt wrote on the website of the influential British magazine *The Spectator*.

The statement, issued on behalf the queen, was released 36 hours after the interview of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex by Oprah Winfrey was broadcast in the United States.

“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 comments were the palace’s first word since the interview rocked the royal family — and touched off conversations around the world about racism, mental health and even the relationship between Britain and its former colonies.

Those tensions only built as the public waited to see how the royal family would respond.

The statement should lower the temperature of the debate, but media interest in the story isn’t going away and there will be pressure for the palace to publicly address Harry and Meghan’s concerns, said Ed Owens, a historian of British monarchy and author of “*The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public, 1932-53.*”

“There are big questions here that need to be answered, and I think the press, both in the U.K., Europe and in the USA, are going to continue to ask questions about the family relationship that exists between Harry and Meghan and the Windsors in the U.K.,” Owens said.

Meghan, who is biracial, said in the interview she was so isolated and miserable as a working member of 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 the color of her baby’s skin when she was pregnant with their son, Archie.

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The interview, seen by almost 50 million viewers worldwide, has divided opinions.

Many people have backed Meghan, saying the allegations demonstrate the need for change in an institution that hasn't kept pace with the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. Others stand behind the royal family, criticizing the couple for making their damning allegations at a time when Harry's 99-year-old grandfather, Prince Philip, remains hospitalized in London after a heart procedure.

Anna Whitelock, director of the Centre for the Study of Modern Monarchy at Royal Holloway, University of London, said the palace's brief message had "hardened the lines" between people who believe the monarchy is an outdated bastion of inherited white privilege and those who see it as cherished national institution.

Fallout from the interview is likely to fuel the debate over the future of the monarchy and its role both in Britain and the other countries for which the queen serves as head of state, Whitelock said. Besides the U.K., the queen remains the head of state for 15 countries, most of which were once part of the British Empire, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and island nations in the Caribbean.

"That's a debate that's been held in check, in large part, given the length of the queen's reign and in respect to her and the role that she's played," Whitelock said. "But it's going to happen, and it's just a question of when, not if."

The ongoing controversy has already cost a prominent British TV personality his job. Piers Morgan left ITV's morning news chat show amid a row over his on-air criticism of Meghan. More than 41,000 people complained to Britain's communications regulator about Monday's edition of the show, during which Morgan said he didn't believe anything Meghan had said. The duchess complained to the British TV channel about the comments, focusing on their impact on people dealing with mental health issues, ITV News reported.

The revelations by Harry and Meghan were a stark contrast to the image forged after their May 2018 wedding at Windsor Castle. At that time, the royal family seemed to welcome Meghan, a glamorous former TV star, and the couple were seen as providing a fresh young face for the monarchy of an increasingly multicultural nation.

It didn't take long for the fairy tale to unravel. The couple stepped away from royal duties last year and eventually settled in California, saying they wanted to escape racist coverage and unwanted intrusions on their privacy by the British media.

Many Black people have said Meghan's comments highlighted the reality of racism in Britain, where the issue is too often characterized as an American problem.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy, a Black member of Parliament from the opposition Labour Party, said she was disappointed the royal family planned to deal with Meghan's allegations privately.

She also criticized the Buckingham Palace statement because it didn't directly condemn racism. The failure to do so contrasts with the palace's reaction just last week when newspapers printed allegations that Meghan had bullied staff during her time as a working royal, Ribeiro-Addy said. In response to those charges, the palace quickly issued a statement saying it "does not and will not tolerate bullying or harassment."

"The monarchy is a public institution that receives public money and any criticism of the institution should really be met with a forceful response from the institution about what they are going to do," Ribeiro-Addy told the BBC. "We expect (that) of any institution. Why not the monarchy, why not the palace?"

## 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

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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.

Authorities have acknowledged there's no evidence Caldwell was a dues-paying member of the Oath Keepers but have described him as a supporter who appeared to play a "leadership role" within the group.

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 Tarrío, 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.

Tarrío 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 Tarrío's arrest, Nordean posted a link to a podcast in which he discussed baseless claims about fraud in the election.



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

Publicly, Tarrío 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.

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.

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 communica-

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tions 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.

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.

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.

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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.

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

## Russia slows down Twitter, part of social media clampdown

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian authorities said Wednesday they are slowing down the speed of uploading photos and videos to Twitter over its failure to remove banned content — part of growing efforts to curb social media platforms that have played a major role in amplifying dissent.

The state communications watchdog, Roskomnadzor, said it began the slowdown after it said Twitter failed to remove content encouraging suicide among children and containing information about drugs and child pornography.

Twitter responded by emphasizing its policy of zero tolerance for child sexual exploitation, promotion of suicide and drug sales.

The Russian watchdog warned that if Twitter refuses to abide by Russian law, it could be blocked entirely, but it voiced hope the platform would "take a constructive stance" and comply with removing the banned content. Vadim Subbotin, deputy chief of Roskomnadzor, said in televised remarks that Twitter is the only social platform that has "openly ignored the Russian authorities' demand to remove the banned content."

The watchdog said the slowdown would apply to all mobile devices and 50% of desktop users nationwide.

Roskomnadzor said in a statement that Twitter has failed to remove more than 3,000 posts with the banned content, including more than 2,500 posts encouraging suicide among minors.

Twitter said in a statement that "we have a zero-tolerance policy regarding child sexual exploitation, it is against the Twitter Rules to promote, glorify or encourage suicide and self harm, and we do not allow the use of Twitter for any unlawful behaviour or to further illegal activities, including the buying and selling of drugs."

"We remain committed to advocating for the Open Internet around the world and are deeply concerned by increased attempts to block and throttle online public conversation," the statement said.

Twitter is less popular in Russia than other social media services, with about 13 million users, or about a third of the number that Facebook has, according to data from web traffic research firm Similar Web.

But the attack on the platform could be "an artillery shot aimed, among other things, at scaring other major social media," said Artyom Kozlyuk, head of the internet rights group Roskomsvoboda.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday the government has "no desire to block anything," but added that it was necessary to enforce the law.

The action against Twitter comes as the authorities have criticized social media platforms that have been used to bring tens of thousands of people into the streets across Russia this year to demand the

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release of jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. The wave of demonstrations served as a major challenge to the Kremlin.

Russian authorities have assailed the platforms for failing to remove calls for children to join unsanctioned opposition protests.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged police to act more actively to monitor social platforms and to track down those who "draw the children into illegal and unsanctioned street actions."

The move against Twitter is part of continuing efforts by the government to tighten control of the internet and the social media dating back to 2012, when a law allowing authorities to blacklist and block certain online content was adopted.

"Dozens of laws have been adopted since then that expand the categories of prohibited information, introduce new restrictions (and) expand the list of government institutions that can carry out online censorship," Kozlyuk said.

In 2014, the authorities adopted a law requiring online services to store the personal data of Russian users on servers in Russia and have since tried to make Facebook and Twitter to comply with it. Both companies have been repeatedly fined, first small amounts of around \$50 and last year the equivalent of \$63,000 each, for not complying.

The government has stopped short of outright bans even though the law allows it, probably fearing the move would elicit too much public outrage. Only the social network LinkedIn, which wasn't very popular in Russia, has been banned by the authorities for the failure to store user data in Russia.

In recent months, Russian authorities have also increasingly bristled at Facebook and Twitter, blocking Russian accounts and content, as well as Twitter labeling of government and state-affiliated media accounts. Last fall, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused the two social media giants of "open censorship," saying that "Russian media, without trial or investigation, are being labeled as allegedly unreliable, excluded from the search, blocked, and accounts are deleted."

Two weeks ago, Roskomnadzor demanded Twitter to explain why it removed 100 accounts reportedly linked to Russia. Twitter said the accounts "amplified narratives that were aligned with the Russian government, "focused on undermining faith in the NATO alliance and its stability," and targeted the United States and the European Union.

Dmitry Medvedev, who was Russia's president in 2008-2012 when Putin had to step down because of term limits and currently is deputy head of Russia's Security Council, complained last month that Twitter labeled his account as a government one. He said the American platform only does that "to countries, relations with which are not very simple. And they did not do this to their own politicians."

The government's standoff with social media platforms has been a "long process in which the stakes are regularly raised," said Damir Gainutdinov, head of the Net Freedoms Project focusing on freedom of online speech in Russia. "The authorities show willingness to take more and more stringent measures: 'Initially we talked to you, then we fined you, and now we will slow you down'."

As the Russian authorities slowed down Twitter, some government websites suffered outages and access problems. It's not clear if the events were connected, and some experts suggested they could have been the result of unrelated cyberattacks. The Ministry of Digital Development acknowledged outages on some government websites but said they were linked to equipment problems at communications provider Rostelecom.

Some experts said, however, that a possible reason for the outages could be that internet oversight staff in Russia erroneously blocked access to a wide range of web addresses while moving to enforce Roskomnadzor's order to slow down Twitter.

In 2018, Roskomnadzor moved to block the popular messaging app Telegram over its refusal to hand over encryption keys used to scramble messages, but failed to fully block access to the app, disrupting hundreds of websites in Russia instead.

Last year, the watchdog officially withdrew the demands to restrict the app, which has been widely used by government institutions despite the ban. Experts said that while there wasn't enough data available



to definitively tie Wednesday's outages of websites to the Twitter clampdown, it wouldn't be surprising if the two were connected.

"I personally don't have any doubts, especially after the situation with Telegram, that in order to achieve their political goals, the Russian authorities won't hesitate to bring down half of the Russian internet," Gainutdinov said.

Associated Press writers Kelvin Chan in London and Frank Bajak in Boston contributed.

## FireEye CEO: Reckless Microsoft hack unusual for China

By FRANK BAJAK and NATHAN ELLGREN Associated Press

RESTON, Va. (AP) — Cyber sleuths have already blamed China for a hack that exposed tens of thousands of servers running Microsoft's Exchange email program to potential hacks. The CEO of a prominent cybersecurity firm says it now seems clear China also unleashed an indiscriminate, automated second wave of hacking that opened the way for ransomware and other cyberattacks.

The second wave, which began Feb. 26, is highly uncharacteristic of Beijing's elite cyber spies and far exceeds the norms of espionage, said Kevin Mandia of FireEye. In its massive scale it diverges radically from the highly targeted nature of the original hack, which was detected in January.

"You never want to see a modern nation like China that has an offense capability — that they usually control with discipline — suddenly hit potentially a hundred thousand systems," Mandia said Tuesday in an interview with The Associated Press.

Mandia said his company assesses based on the forensics that two groups of Chinese state-backed hackers — in an explosion of automated seeding — installed backdoors known as "web shells" on an as-yet undetermined number of systems. Experts fear a large number could easily be exploited for second-stage infections of ransomware by criminals, who also use automation to identify and infect targets.

Across the globe, cybersecurity teams are scrambling to identify and shore up hacked systems. The National Governors Association sent a rare alert to governors on Tuesday asking them amplify "both the severity of the threat and the next steps" local governments, businesses and operators of critical infrastructure should take.

David Kennedy, CEO of the cybersecurity firm TrustedSec, tweeted Tuesday that resource-demanding programs that "mine" cryptocurrencies were being installed on some compromised Exchange servers.

The White House has called the overall hack an "active threat," but so far has not urged tough action against China or differentiated between the two waves — at least not publicly. Neither the White House nor the Department of Homeland Security offered comment on whether they attribute the second wave to China.

The assessment of Mandia, who has been dealing with Chinese state-backed hackers since 1995 and has long had the ear of presidents and prime ministers, squares with that of Dmitri Alperovitch, former chief technical officer of CrowdStrike, the other cybersecurity powerhouse in the Washington, D.C., area. Alperovitch says China needs to be immediately put on notice: Shut down those web shell implants and limit collateral.

The explosion of automated backdoor-creating hacks began five days before Microsoft issued a patch for the vulnerabilities first detected in late January by the cybersecurity firm Volexity. It had found evidence of the vulnerabilities being used as far back as Jan. 3 by Chinese state-backed hackers, who researchers say targeted think tanks, universities, defense contractors, law firms and infectious-disease research centers.

Suddenly, all manner of organizations that run email servers were infected with web shells associated with known Chinese groups, who — knowing the patch was imminent — rushed to hit everything they could, said Mandia.

"They could sense it was going to end-of-life soon, so they just went wild. They machine gun-fired down the stretch," he said in an interview in FireEye's offices.

It's possible the second infection wave was not approved at the highest levels of China's government,"

Mandia said.

"This doesn't feel consistent with what they normally do," he said. "A lot of times there's a disconnect between senior leadership and front-line folks. All I can tell you is it was surprising to me to see four 'zero days' wantonly exploited," adding, "If you could be exploited by this act, for the most part, you were."

"Zero days" are vulnerabilities that hackers discover and use to pry open secret doors in software. Their name derives from the countdown to patching that begins after they are deployed. In this case, it took Microsoft 28 days to produce a patch once it was notified.

Mandia cautioned that the mass hack is not apt to trigger any critical infrastructure failures or cost lives. "It's not going to draw blood." But it highlights how there are no rules of engagement in cyberspace, something governments urgently need to address "before something catastrophic happens."

Asked for comment on Monday about allegations it was behind the hack, the Chinese Embassy in Washington pointed to remarks last week from Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin saying that China "firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms." He said attribution of cyberattacks should be based on evidence and not "groundless accusations."

Mandia compared the Exchange hack with the SolarWinds hacking campaign that Washington has blamed on elite Russian intelligence agents that his company discovered in December.

"The SolarWinds attack was very surreptitious, very stealthy, very focused. The operator showed restraint and they went deep not wide," said Mandia, who appeared in multiple Capitol Hill hearings on SolarWinds. "This attack (Exchange) feels very wide, but what I don't have an answer to yet is just how deep it is."

U.S. officials say at least nine federal agencies and over 100 private sector targets were affected by the SolarWinds campaign, named after the Texas company whose network management software was used to seed malware to more than 18,000 customers. Only a small number were hacked during the campaign, which went eight months without being detected.

Mandia said Russian intelligence operatives had manually penetrated the networks of between 60 and 100 different victims. Security researchers say telecommunications and software companies and think tanks were especially hard hit.

Bajak reported from Boston. AP writer Alan Suderman contributed to this report from Richmond, Virginia.

## **Clinics wait to vaccinate farmworkers: 'Our hands are tied'**

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

With Georgia's sweet onion harvest approaching and COVID-19 vaccine arriving in increasing quantities from the federal government, migrant health centers around the state want to start vaccinating farmworkers. But there's a catch.

In Georgia and many other places around the U.S., such efforts are blocked by state policies that give priority for shots to other groups.

"Our hands are tied," said East Georgia Healthcare Center CEO Jennie Wren Denmark, whose agency runs 13 clinics, including one in Vidalia, home of the celebrated Vidalia onion. Her clinics' vaccine will instead go to patients on the state eligibility list, which was expanded this week to teachers.

Public health authorities have said in their defense that drawing up the priority lists is a complex balancing act that requires them to take into account outbreak data, the risks to various categories of workers and vital industries, and the limited supply of vaccine.

Farmworkers and activists are upset.

"Waiting and waiting has some people angry and causes despair," said Edgar Franks, a 41-year-old leader of the agricultural union Familias Unidas por la Justicia, or Families United for Justice, who works in the blueberry fields on weekends in the Mount Vernon, Washington, area. "We're essential, but we are not really treated as essential."

Leticia Cuevas, 35, who works pruning wine grapes near Prosser, Washington, said: "I hope that everything could return to normal and that we would all be treated equally. We all deserve dignity."

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Farmworkers run an elevated risk of getting infected. They often live in crowded bunkhouses and eat together in dining halls. Those who toil outdoors often travel to the fields together in vans or buses. Others work in bustling packing houses.

An estimated 9,000 agricultural workers in the U.S. have died of COVID-19, said Jason Lusk, professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University. Nearly a half-million have been infected, according to a Purdue estimate, with the highest numbers in Texas, California, Iowa, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Missouri, Florida and Minnesota.

The concern extends well beyond those who labor in the fields and packing houses.

"Agricultural workers are important for the security of our food supply," Lusk said, noting that supermarket prices went up last year when COVID-19 outbreaks shut down meatpacking plants. "Making sure we have the people available to plant and harvest will make sure our grocery stores aren't empty or our food prices don't rise."

Cuevas, a member of the farmworker advocacy group UFW Foundation, agreed: "We are in the fields getting the work done to feed all the families."

Last week, more than 60 health centers that serve agricultural workers in 21 states began receiving COVID-19 vaccine directly from the federal government in a program created by the Biden administration. But in most of those states, including Texas, New York, Georgia and Florida, farmworkers are not yet in the priority groups authorized to receive the shots.

And the federal vaccine came with a restriction: The health centers must follow state priorities.

In Washington state, workers are beginning to arrive to toil on hops farms and in cherry and apple orchards.

"Quite frankly, as they arrive, once they test negative, we should vaccinate them," said Lori Kelley of Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic. "We want to vaccinate all of them." But they won't become eligible until March 22 unless they fall into Washington's priority groups — 65 and older, or 50 and older and living in a multigenerational home.

Across the U.S., health care workers and older Americans have been put at the front of the line for vaccinations because they have borne the brunt of the disease. In recent weeks, the line has been opened to various groups such as teachers, who are considered vital to reopening schools and letting parents get back to work. Those decisions have been left up to the states.

"All of these decisions are incredibly difficult and unfortunately driven by limited supply," said Michele Roberts, acting assistant health secretary in Washington state. She said the health department recognizes that agricultural work is "one of the highest risk occupations" and has put it in the next group for vaccinations.

In some California counties, vaccination drives are targeting farmworkers.

"I'm so happy. I'm feeling so good," farmworker Monica Gonzales said at a March 3 mobile vaccination clinic held at Monterey Mushrooms in Morgan Hill, California. She said getting vaccinated will allow her to see her granddaughter.

Florida, which grows half the nation's domestic tomatoes and 70% of its citrus fruit, hasn't specified farmworkers in its vaccine priority groups. What's more, Florida has a restrictive residency requirement for vaccination. People must show a state ID or documents such as a utility bill.

"The challenge for farmworkers is many don't have these documents," said Alexis Guild, director of health policy for Farmworker Justice, an advocacy group.

Sylvia Partida, CEO of the National Center for Farmworker Health, said states need to change their guidelines.

"It only makes sense. All these states benefit from economic contribution from farmworkers," Partida said. "Why would you not make that change in your plans in order to safeguard that workforce?"

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Associated Press writer Nicholas K. Geranios in Spokane, Washington, and AP video journalist Haven Daley in Morgan Hill, California, contributed to this report.

## **A homebound year has meant rethinking our rooms, belongings**

By MELISSA RAYWORTH Associated Press

In normal times, new trends in home design and home decorating bubble up simply because it's time for something different. A few years of bold color and homeowners start painting things gray. After enough minimalism, a hunger for plaids and florals comes roaring back.

But this time last year, a cultural experiment began that changed our relationships with houses and condos and apartments around the world.

Suddenly, constantly, we were inside them.

So much of public life – work, school, exercise, shopping, dining and (virtually) socializing – began happening entirely within the walls of home, at least for those able to do so.

Architects and interior designers say that after 12 months of varying degrees of lockdown, people are discovering what does and doesn't work in their homes, and becoming more confident about acting on it. They're realizing how familiar spaces can serve them better.

"Out of frustration comes brilliant ideas," says Lisa Cini, founder and president of Mosaic Design Studio.

Some trends:

### **REPURPOSING ROOMS**

Amhad Freeman, founder of the Nashville, Tennessee-based Amhad Freeman Interiors, says clients now have time to really think about what they need from a room.

He recently helped convert an upstairs room into a multipurpose space where kids are "not afraid to jump around on the furniture." The room has desks for schoolwork, but "it's more of a lounge now, so that they can do a lot of different things instead of just focusing on the computer," he says.

Another client hired Freeman to redesign an unused home office into an elegant, in-house cocktail bar.

Hafsa Burt, founder of hb+a Architects in California, has helped convert garages into gyms, and storage space into home offices or playrooms.

Cini recently helped a family in Florida transform their garage into a gaming room by adding LCD screens, track lighting, rugs and a row of gaming chairs spaced safely apart. With the garage door open and a screen door added, there's enough air circulation and space to safely invite friends over, she says.

### **SEEKING SEPARATE SPACE**

Homes with open plans and sprawling "great rooms" became popular in recent decades as welcome communal gathering spaces. But that preference for open layouts may be waning.

Now that whole families are working and schooling at home together (and might, to some degree, for years to come), "you have to have the kind of boundaries where you can step away," Cini says.

A home divided into separate spaces "helps a family to be able to decentralize and not be on top of each other," she says. This becomes even more important when elderly relatives join a household.

As an expert in multigenerational living, Cini has been "getting calls nonstop" from people wanting to safely welcome an elderly parent into their home.

One way that people are making this happen, Burt says: Rather than building an addition onto their home, they're getting a permit to build a backyard ADU (additional dwelling unit). These tiny houses give extended family members their own space and yet everyone has easy access to one another.

### **FRESH AIR, FRESH FOOD**

In commercial spaces, air quality has been a top priority since the pandemic began. It's also becoming important to people at home, Burt says, as is water quality: At this year's virtual Kitchen & Bath Industry Show, panelists spoke about the growing interest in built-in water purification systems for kitchens.

People are also cooking more than ever before, Freeman says, and many of his clients are using money they're not spending on travel and restaurant meals to invest in serious kitchen renovations.

"Budgets of kitchens for me have almost doubled," he says, with clients swapping out 30-inch cooking ranges for 60-inch models and adding luxuries like built-in coffee stations.

### **CONSUMING CONSCIOUSLY**

Those working and schooling at home on Wi-Fi-dependent devices are noticing that they're consuming



more energy, so energy efficiency is becoming a priority.

"People are driven by what they see on their energy bills," Burt says.

Adding insulation and swapping out inefficient appliances saves money, but it also has the added benefit of helping the environment, she says: "People are thinking about their habits and wondering how it's contributing to the greater good for the planet."

Beyond that, with plenty of time to sort through attics and closets, we're clearing out things we don't need, Cini says, and thinking more carefully about what we want to own.

We're consciously filling our homes with things that make us happy, Freeman says. Rather than hurrying to decorate a room, his clients "want to actually take time to buy things that are beautiful, that are well made."

They're going to be spending a lot of time looking at their surroundings, he says, so "they want to be able to appreciate that furniture."

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EDITOR'S NOTE — Melissa Rayworth writes lifestyles stories for The Associated Press. Follow her on Twitter at @mrayworth.

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More AP coverage of the pandemic's first year: [Pandemic: One Year](#)

## 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

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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.

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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 and 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](#)

## 'This is hell': UN food aid chief visits Yemen, fears famine

By MAGGIE HYDE Associated Press

The head of the U.N. food agency warned after a visit to Yemen that his underfunded organization may be forced to seek hundreds of millions of dollars in private donations in a desperate bid to stave off widespread famine in coming months, describing conditions in the war-stricken nation as "hell."

The World Food Program needs at least \$815 million in Yemen aid over the next six months, but has only \$300 million, the agency's executive director, David Beasley, told The Associated Press in an interview. He said the agency would need another \$1.9 billion to meet targets for the year.

Beasley visited Yemen earlier this week, including the capital of Sanaa which is under the control of Iran-backed Houthi rebels. He said that at a child malnutrition ward in a Sanaa hospital he saw children wasting away from lack of food. Many, he said, were on the brink of death from entirely preventable and treatable causes, and they were the lucky ones who were receiving medical care.

He said the world needs to wake up to how bad things have gotten in Yemen, particularly for the country's youngest, some of whom he had seen in hospital beds in the Sanaa hospital.

"In a children's wing or ward of a hospital, you know you normally hear crying, and laughter. There's no crying, there's no laughter, there's dead silence," he said late Tuesday, speaking to the AP by video conference from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where he had just landed from Yemen.

"I went from room to room, and literally, children that in any other place in the world would be fine, they'd might get a little sick but they'd get recovered, but not here."

"This is hell," he said. "It's the worst place on earth. And it's entirely man-made."

The U.N. has warned that 16 million people in Yemen — or about half the population — could face serious food insecurity. Tens of thousands of people already live in famine-like conditions, in what aid organizations have called the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Some 400,000 children are in need of immediate assistance to save their lives from deadly malnutrition. Worsening fuel shortages could throw millions more into deep poverty.

Since the outbreak of Yemen's civil war six years ago, U.N.-led aid efforts have been chronically underfunded. This year's global fundraising drive came up short as well — more so than in previous years — because aid dollars have been shrinking as a fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

A pledging conference last month raised a little more than half from the international community of what was needed to continue food aid services for the next year.

Yemen, already the Arab world's poorest country, has been caught in a grinding war since 2014 when the Houthis descended from their northern enclave and took over Sanaa, forcing the internationally recognized government to flee. In the spring of 2015, a U.S.-backed, Saudi-led coalition began a destructive air campaign to dislodge the Houthis while imposing a land, sea and air embargo on Yemen.

Throughout the conflict, humanitarian agencies have faced obstacles in getting aid to those who need it most, particularly in Houthi-controlled territories; obstruction, distrust and fighting have played a role.

Beasley said his organization has made gains on these fronts particularly in access and accountability with the Houthi authorities, and now the obstacle is simply a lack of funding.

"We've turned a corner with the Houthis... in terms of cooperation, collaboration," he said.

He touted a new program by which recipients of a cash aid program are verified via a biometric system to assure it goes to the right people. It's a scheme the organization plans to scale up, if they can get more funding.

It remains unclear where more money might come from. Beasley predicted more catastrophes in 2021 if world leaders do not prioritize helping the most vulnerable countries including Yemen, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria.

"About May, June, July, if we don't have massive amounts of monies put into these places, you're going to have mass starvation, mass destabilization and mass migration," he said.

One source of funding for Yemen could be a new anonymous aid fund. Beasley confirmed media reports



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of the Famine Relief Fund, created by wealthy private donors, and said some of the them could be from the United States and the Gulf. He said the WFP was already in talks with the fund. He would not elaborate.

Earlier this month, the aid industry-focused publication The New Humanitarian reported on the emergence of the Famine Relief Fund, created by anonymous benefactors to help address Yemen's crisis, and wrote that it was already in talks with UN agencies and other aid groups.

Beasley said he has already been reaching out to the world's billionaires to get them to contribute somehow. So far, the only stipulation that came with the money from the new anonymous fund would be that it go to those who are teetering on the edge of famine, he said.

"My God, I'm going to take any dollar I can get from anywhere in the world to save the life of a child right now," he said.

Beasley repeated calls that the war needs to be brought to a halt, though the situation on the ground in Yemen is poised for a new escalation, as Houthi and government forces battle for the oil-producing province of Marib. Fighting there has displaced 15,000 people in the last month, many of whom had already fled the conflict in other areas, according to the U.N. migration agency.

## 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

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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 in Cape Town.

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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## 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 of 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 Lebanon slides toward political and economic abyss. The country is mired in the worst economic crisis in its modern history, and the situation has been exacerbated by pandemic

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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 makeshift 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 on the black market at 11,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, down from the official 1,500 pounds for \$1 — 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 the Gaza Strip, young men formed "tire crews" that drove around the small coastal territory 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 fallen out of favor 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."

On Wednesday, Lebanese troops deployed to prevent protesters from setting up roadblocks, two days after the president, Michel Aoun, called for action to prevent them.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

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## Today in History

Today is Thursday, March 11, the 70th day of 2021. There are 295 days left in the year.

## Today's Highlight in History:

On March 11, 1918, what were believed to be the first confirmed U.S. cases of a deadly global flu pandemic were reported among U.S. Army soldiers stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas; 46 would die. (The worldwide outbreak of influenza claimed an estimated 20 to 40 million lives.)

## On this date:

In 1862, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln removed Gen. George B. McClellan as general-in-chief of the Union armies, leaving him in command of the Army of the Potomac, a post McClellan also ended up losing.

In 1935, the Bank of Canada began operations, issuing its first series of bank notes.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease Bill, providing war supplies to countries fighting the Axis.

In 1942, as Japanese forces continued to advance in the Pacific during World War II, U.S. Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur left the Philippines for Australia, where he vowed on March 20, "I shall return" — a promise he kept more than 2½ years later.

In 1954, the U.S. Army charged that Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., and his subcommittee's chief counsel, Roy Cohn, had exerted pressure to obtain favored treatment for Pvt. G. David Schine, a former consultant to the subcommittee. (The confrontation culminated in the famous Senate Army-McCarthy hearings.)

In 1955, Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin, died in London at age 73.

In 1959, the Lorraine Hansberry drama "A Raisin in the Sun" opened at New York's Ethel Barrymore Theater.

In 1977, more than 130 hostages held in Washington, D.C., by Hanafi Muslims were freed after ambassadors from three Islamic nations joined the negotiations.

In 1985, Mikhail S. Gorbachev was chosen to succeed the late Konstantin U. Chernenko as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

In 1986, the state of Georgia pardoned Leo Frank, a Jewish businessman lynched in 1915 for the murder of 13-year-old Mary Phagan.

In 2004, ten bombs exploded in quick succession across the commuter rail network in Madrid, Spain, killing 191 people in an attack linked to al-Qaida-inspired militants.

In 2006, former Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic (sloh-BOH'-dahn mee-LOH'-shuh-vich) was found dead of a heart attack in his prison cell in the Netherlands, abruptly ending his four-year U.N. war crimes trial; he was 64.

Ten years ago: A magnitude-9.0 earthquake and resulting tsunami struck Japan's northeastern coast, killing nearly 20,000 people and severely damaging the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power station. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker signed a measure to eliminate most union rights for public employees, a proposal that had provoked three weeks of loud, relentless protests. NFL owners and players broke off negotiations hours before their contract expired; the league imposed a lockout that lasted 4½ months. Songwriter Hugh Martin, whose works included "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" and "The Trolley Song," died in Encinitas, California, at age 96.

Five years ago: Nancy Reagan's life was celebrated by 1,000 invited guests gathered at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, to pay final tribute to the former first lady who had died five days earlier at the age of 94. Keith Emerson, 71, founder and keyboardist of the progressive-rock band Emerson, Lake and Palmer, took his own life in Santa Monica, California; he was 71.

One year ago: With infection clusters expanding in the United States and Europe, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. In an Oval Office address to the nation, President Donald Trump said he was sharply restricting travel from Europe to the U.S. The NBA suspended its season "until further notice" after a Utah Jazz player tested positive for the coronavirus. Actor



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Tom Hanks said that he and his wife, Rita Wilson, had tested positive in Australia; they were isolated in stable condition in a hospital. Former Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison for rape and sexual abuse after delivering a rambling plea for mercy in a New York courtroom. Russian lawmakers approved constitutional reforms that would let President Vladimir Putin stay in power until 2036. Three service members, including two Americans, were killed when a barrage of rockets was fired at a military base in Iraq.

Today's Birthdays: Media mogul Rupert Murdoch is 90. Former ABC News correspondent Sam Donaldson is 87. Musician Flaco Jimenez (FLAH'-koh hee-MEH'-nez) is 82. Actor Tricia O'Neil is 76. Actor Mark Metcalf is 75. Rock singer-musician Mark Stein (Vanilla Fudge) is 74. Singer Bobby McFerrin is 71. Movie director Jerry Zucker is 71. Singer Cheryl Lynn is 70. Actor Susan Richardson is 69. Recording executive Jimmy Iovine (eye-VEEN') is 68. Singer Nina Hagen is 66. Country singer Jimmy Fortune (The Statler Brothers) is 66. Actor Elias Koteas (ee-LY'-uhs koh-TAY'-uhs) is 60. Actor-director Peter Berg is 59. Singer Mary Gauthier (GOH'-shay) is 59. Actor Jeffrey Nordling is 59. Actor Alex Kingston is 58. Actor Wallace Langham is 56. Former U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-Ill., is 56. Actor John Barrowman is 54. Singer Lisa Loeb is 53. Neo-soul musician Al Gamble (St. Paul & the Broken Bones) is 52. Singer Pete Drogé is 52. Actor Terrence Howard is 52. Rock musician Rami Jaffee is 52. Actor Johnny Knoxville is 50. Rock singer-musicians Benji and Joel Madden (Good Charlotte; The Madden Brothers) are 42. Actor David Anders is 40. Singer LeToya Luckett is 40. Actor Thora Birch is 39. TV personality Melissa Rycroft is 38. Actor Rob Brown is 37. Actor Jodie Comer is 28.