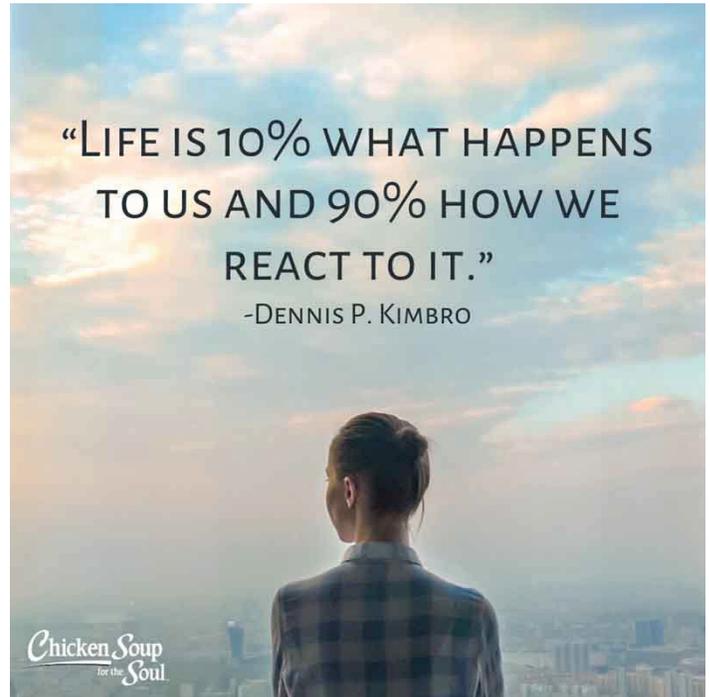


# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 1 of 88

- [1- Groton School COVID-19 Report](#)
- [2- Tower being sandblasted](#)
- [3- Drought Monitor](#)
- [4- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [5- Yesterday's COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [14- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [15- Weather Pages](#)
- [19- Daily Devotional](#)
- [20- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [21- News from the Associated Press](#)



Groton Area School District																
Active COVID-19 Cases																
Updated March 11, 2021; 2:08 PM																
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total	
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	

A positive case is considered active for a minimum of ten days after onset of symptoms. It is important to note that not all reported cases have been in school or school activities during their infectious periods (48 hours prior to onset of symptoms).



**OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton  
 The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 2 of 88

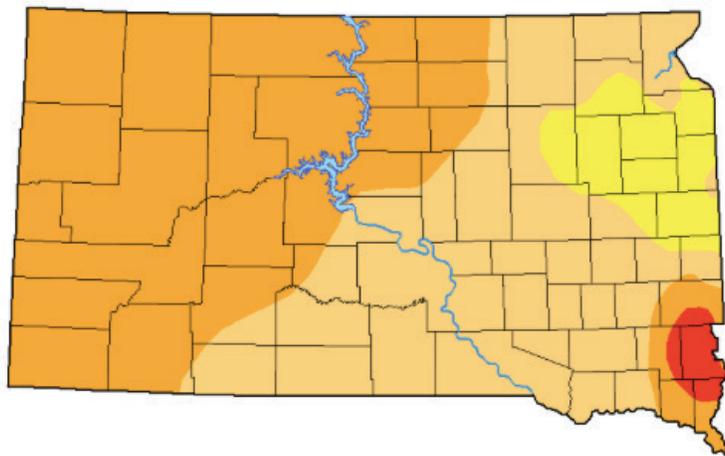


**Sandblasting of the new water tower started yesterday as the tower is being prepped for painting.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## Drought Monitor

Map released: Thurs. March 11, 2021

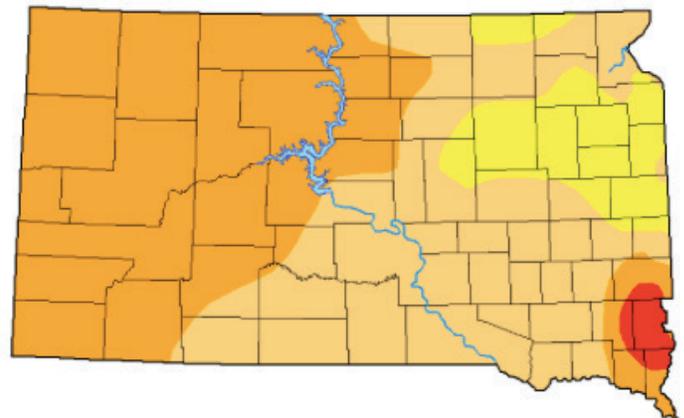
Data valid: March 9, 2021 at 7 a.m. EST



### Intensity:

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

Dry conditions dominated the region, outside of some showers that impacted eastern Colorado and western Kansas. Warmer than normal conditions were widespread, with the Dakotas into Nebraska recording temperatures that were 15-20 degrees above normal for the week. The Army Corps of Engineers are considering conservation measures on the Missouri River basin if dry conditions continue. The 2021 calendar year runoff in the basin is anticipated at 21.8 MAF, or 84% of average. This eliminated most remaining snow in the region and began the spring thaw of soils. Due to ongoing dryness in the Dakotas, severe drought was pushed eastward this week and moderate drought was expanded to the east as well into western Minnesota. Livestock producers in the Dakotas are already separating out their animals in anticipation of needing to sell some off due to drought in the region. Another aspect of a winter with very little snow is that fire danger has rapidly increased in North Dakota. The local National Weather Service offices have started making their fire weather products more than a month early in response to the drought conditions. So far, 33 fires have burned more than 20,000 acres in North Dakota. In Kansas, abnormally dry and moderate drought conditions were pushed to the east in response to the most recent dryness in the region and above-normal temperatures.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 4 of 88

**#382 in a series**

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

Worrying uptick two days in a row. I don't want to get too hung up on day-to-day fluctuations, but I don't like that. We are up to 29,307,000 total cases in this pandemic in the US, 0.2% more than yesterday. Test positivity is now at 4.2 percent; we went below 10 percent on January 22 and finally dropped below five percent a couple of weeks ago. Our peak at 14.9 percent was early in the year. There were 63,100 new cases reported today. Hospitalizations also took a slight upward move to 43,254, but we should put in perspective that just over a month ago we were at double this number. And we reported 1628 deaths today. That puts us at 530,320, which is 0.3% more than yesterday. I'm ready for things to take a steady downward trend again.

The CDC said in an e-mail to CNN today that their analysis shows 2020 was the "deadliest year in recorded history in terms of total number of deaths." There was a 15 percent increase in our death rate last year. A report to this effect is coming in their Morbidity and Mortality Weekly. Last year around one percent of our population died, which is 18 percent higher than expected; those are the excess deaths we've talked about at various times this past year. Although at this point the data are still preliminary, it does appear that Covid-19 is going to be the third leading cause of death in the US for 2020 after heart disease and cancer. We've already discussed that our life expectancy dropped in 2020; it is lower than it's been since 2006.

Starting a year ago today with my Update #14, I realized this was going to be a thing and decided to save these posts in a single document so that I could easily search it when I wanted to find something from a past post. This document has gotten quite long by now—should hit 1600 pages tonight. I also gave each update a title, and I built a table of contents to help with the searching as well. I mention this because the title in the table of contents for March 11, 2020, one year ago today, is one word, "Pandemic." That is because this was the day the WHO officially declared this thing we're all living through is a pandemic. We all know the declaration was coming, just didn't know when. I taught medical microbiology for many, many years, and this day took me back to all the times I taught the meaning of that word—back when I hadn't lived through one. I liked it better that way.

On this day, the WHO Director-General said the agency was "deeply concerned" about "the alarming levels of inaction" across the world. I was deeply concerned about that too. Worldwide, there were more than 115,000 reported cases and more than 4200 deaths. Italy was in deep trouble, having added 2313 new case reports in 24 hours, bringing them to 12,462. Iran had nearly 1000 new case reports in 24 hours, bringing them to over 9000. These were alarming numbers at that point—still are, even though things have gotten so much worse since.

The US had reported 1240 cases in 42 states and the District of Columbia, up from 973 the day before in 37 states and DC. Two-thirds of those cases were in just four states, Washington with 335, New York with 213, California with 197, and Massachusetts with 95. Most (around 70) of those Massachusetts cases were linked to the ill-fated Biogen conference whose tentacles spread widely before this was over. The only states left without reported cases were Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, Alabama, Maine, and West Virginia. There had been 37 deaths, 29 of them in Washington, 22 of those associated with one nursing home. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, testified to the US House Oversight Committee, saying in response to the question, "Is the worst yet to come?" "Yes it is. Things will get worse. The bottom line it's going to get worse." He was not wrong. He admitted as much today on NBC that he didn't expect anything like what we're seeing now.

The State Department advised us to reconsider travel abroad. My husband and I had already cancelled our domestic flights. The first reported case in a congressional staff member was announced on this day. Twitter began to require all employees to work from home. Travel from Europe to the US was suspended. The Mayor of New York City told CNN that it "could take at least six months to get back to some sense of normalcy;" I'll bet he wishes he could have those words back. Cancellations and closures: the NBA season, parades and public gatherings in Washington and San Francisco, church services in Kentucky, the White House reception for the Irish Prime Minister, St. Patrick's Day parades in New York City, Dallas, Pittsburgh,

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 5 of 88

and Chicago, the PaleyFest television festival, all travel to El Salvador, the GLAAD Media Awards, tours of the US Capitol, live audiences for TV morning and late night shows, all schools in Austria, Seattle, Poland, and Ukraine, the JFK Library, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, funerals in Italy.

Today, one of the country's preeminent experts on vaccines, Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a member of the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, is warning us not to get complacent at the declining numbers of cases. At a virtual briefing today, he said, "I think we are going to get fooled. I think what's going to happen is you're going to see that as we enter the summer months, numbers are going to go down, people will think great, we're good. They're going to be less interested in getting a vaccine because they think that we've conquered this pandemic. And then, if we don't get to what I think is going to be at least 80% population immunity from natural infection or immunization, when the winter comes, you're going to see a surge again." To which I reply, "Noooooo. Don't do that!" He pointed out that we must not abandon mitigation measures—mask-wearing, social distancing, avoiding crowds, and all of the rest. Let's listen to this guy; he knows things.

We have more information on the Novavax clinical trials for its vaccine candidate. This is a two-dose protein subunit vaccine. These trials were done in the UK and South Africa where some of the more worrisome of the new variants are prevalent, and the news is overall quite good. We will want to remember that these are not published or peer-reviewed data, but it is likely we have yet another excellent candidate on the horizon. The candidate showed 96 percent efficacy against our D614G variant on which the two mRNA vaccines were tested. Efficacy dropped to 86 percent against B.1.1.7, the variant first seen in the UK, and to 55 percent against B.1.351 in South Africa among people not infected with HIV. But the big news, as with the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine, is that the candidate showed 100 percent efficacy against severe disease irrespective of which variant was encountered.

Apparently, these vaccines, even while they show less ability to protect against any symptoms at all, are still highly effective against the worst outcomes. This is just excellent. It is important to note it was also seen in the placebo group in these trials that prior infection only seems to offer about 50 percent protection against B.1.351. That's not great at all. People who've been infected and opt not to be vaccinated will likely have a much higher risk of reinfection with this variant than with D614G. These data will be forwarded to the FDA, but we still await the completion of the phase 3 trials in the US and Mexico. Shouldn't be long now.

Moderna announced today that they expect to have data on their booster by May and possibly sooner. They have already administered this booster tailored to the new variants, so we'll see what they turn up. There have been some concerning reports of abnormal blood clotting associated with the Oxford/Astra-Zeneca vaccine. These have turned up in Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Austria, and several other countries. I don't think these cases—and there are only a few—have been definitively linked to the vaccine, but these sorts of things scare people. The EU has granted their version of emergency use authorization to the vaccine, but troubles seem to keep popping up. We'll see how this develops.

There is new data available from Israel on the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine this morning. As we've discussed, Israel has vaccinated a large proportion (55 percent to date) of its population, so it provides real-world evidence of effectiveness. These latest data show that in a country where B.1.1.7 (UK) is prevalent, the vaccine is at least 97 percent effective in preventing symptomatic disease, hospitalizations, and death and is 94 percent effective in preventing asymptomatic infection. This means it is preventing people from spreading the virus as well as preventing them from becoming ill. It appears to be 60 percent effective after just one dose.

If you're wondering whether one or another vaccine is really "better" than another, here's heartening news from the CEO of Pfizer, a vaccine certainly in the running for "best." Albert Bourla told CNBC, "I will tell you in full honesty what I tell to my relatives or my family if they're asking me what to do. And I tell them, if you get, if you try to get an appointment for a Pfizer vaccine and the center will give it to you in two months, and you can get an appointment for another vaccine, the J&J let's say, this week, I urge you to go and do the J&J vaccine, it's very important." I think it's safe to believe the guy who gets a raise if

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 6 of 88

you choose his company's vaccine.

In the US, we have now fully vaccinated close to 10 percent of our population and given at least one dose to some 65 million of us—that's right close to 20 percent. We gave 2.5 million doses yesterday, so the pace continues to pick up. Allowing for reporting delays, we're probably ahead of that by some margin. This needs to continue—no time to lose.

Be aware that the B.1.1.7 variant is now showing up in over half of the cases from Texas, Georgia, and Florida. In New York, B.1.1.7 and B.1.56 (first seen in New York) account for fully half of cases. In Houston, B.1.1.7 is also being found in half of the wastewater treatment plants. And we now have another entrant in the variant sweepstakes, this one first seen in the UK and apparently associated with travel from Antigua. It is being called B.1.324.1. It has not yet been identified as a variant of concern (VOC), but it does have the E484K (eek) mutation as well as another one, N501Y, which is also considered concerning. It lacks some deletions which would put it into the VOC category, but we'll see how it stacks up in the upcoming weeks. We really don't need another VOC to deal with.

I saw a story today on a Minneapolis NBC affiliate about an unusual family, the Riches from New London, Minnesota. The family has four sisters who all play basketball at the local high school—senior Mackenzie, junior Courtney, sophomore Avery, and eighth-grader Dakota. They play together on an undefeated team ranked number one in their state. There are times, although not all that many of them, that all four sisters are on the court at the same time. This is unusual, but not as unusual as the rest of their story.

Turns out their dad, Earl, is a guy who's seen hard times. He was in the second grade when his mom became too ill to care for him; his dad had never been in the picture. That means he went into foster care. He cycled through five foster homes in the next seven years, never landing anywhere for long until his sophomore year of high school when his latest foster family had to give him up. The guy who was there to pick up the pieces was someone who'd coached him in junior high football, Mike Dreier. Dreier was a young single guy at the time, but when he heard Rich's life was going to be disrupted again, he said, "Well he can come live with me." Just like that.

He kept the kid through the rest of his high school years. Rich told the news station, "I never spent three years at one place. He just gave me every aspect of a dad that I never had." That kid went on to college playing football and baseball before returning to his home town where he got into real estate. Now he has four daughters who play basketball at the local high school for—believe it or not—Coach Mike Dreier. Dreier, now 69, had planned to retire before now, but Rich persuaded him to hang in there for his daughters. He said he told them, "If there's any coach I want you to play for, it would be him." And things worked out just that way. I'm not sure how many more years Dreier has in him, but I'm guessing a man like that will leave a positive impact on the Rich girls—and anyone else lucky enough to play for him—well into the future.

For the record, the team is currently undefeated and number one in the state in their division. I hope they do great things this month. This is a coach who's earned a great season.

Take care. We'll talk tomorrow.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 7 of 88

County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
▲						
Aurora	455	432	874	15	Minimal	0.0%
Beadle	2819	2676	5931	39	Substantial	15.6%
Bennett	382	370	1181	9	None	0.0%
Bon Homme	1510	1477	2095	25	Minimal	3.8%
Brookings	3636	3534	12114	37	Moderate	2.6%
Brown	5186	5028	12832	89	Substantial	8.1%
Brule	697	681	1890	9	Minimal	8.6%
Buffalo	420	406	899	13	None	0.0%
Butte	989	955	3245	20	Moderate	9.0%
Campbell	131	126	258	4	Minimal	25.0%
Charles Mix	1316	1248	3957	21	Substantial	7.2%
Clark	377	361	956	5	Moderate	5.9%
Clay	1816	1774	5434	15	Substantial	3.0%
Codington	4060	3884	9740	77	Substantial	7.7%
Corson	473	457	1003	12	Minimal	14.8%
Custer	767	740	2742	12	Substantial	11.4%
Davison	2988	2885	6596	63	Moderate	6.3%
Day	674	632	1797	29	Substantial	6.5%
Deuel	476	462	1146	8	Minimal	0.0%
Dewey	1425	1384	3838	26	Substantial	4.7%
Douglas	435	421	920	9	Moderate	0.0%
Edmunds	486	466	1067	13	Moderate	5.0%
Fall River	550	516	2646	15	Substantial	9.8%
Faulk	362	347	703	13	Minimal	14.3%
Grant	983	923	2259	39	Substantial	6.8%
Gregory	551	503	1297	30	Moderate	11.9%
Haakon	257	242	542	10	Moderate	0.0%
Hamlin	726	667	1795	38	Substantial	21.9%
Hand	348	331	824	6	Moderate	5.3%
Hanson	369	355	728	4	Moderate	26.3%
Harding	92	90	183	1	Minimal	20.0%
Hughes	2329	2255	6635	36	Substantial	1.2%
Hutchinson	792	757	2396	26	Minimal	5.3%

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 8 of 88

Hyde	139	137	411	1	Minimal	5.3%
Jackson	281	264	917	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	275	252	559	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	86	86	223	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	651	625	1688	14	Moderate	5.6%
Lake	1230	1165	3369	18	Substantial	9.0%
Lawrence	2838	2772	8569	45	Moderate	3.4%
Lincoln	7905	7651	20441	77	Substantial	10.5%
Lyman	606	589	1884	10	Minimal	2.6%
Marshall	339	314	1207	5	Substantial	12.3%
McCook	757	715	1634	24	Moderate	12.1%
McPherson	241	232	555	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2636	2542	7744	31	Substantial	9.5%
Mellette	257	247	737	2	Moderate	8.8%
Miner	274	254	579	9	Minimal	18.2%
Minnehaha	28521	27631	78846	335	Substantial	8.7%
Moody	620	598	1761	17	Moderate	5.6%
Oglala Lakota	2071	1996	6659	49	Moderate	5.4%
Pennington	13036	12671	39676	189	Substantial	5.6%
Perkins	348	330	823	14	Minimal	2.8%
Potter	381	365	835	4	Moderate	0.0%
Roberts	1241	1155	4176	36	Substantial	19.4%
Sanborn	335	324	694	3	Minimal	5.2%
Spink	806	768	2147	26	Minimal	6.3%
Stanley	337	330	938	2	Moderate	2.9%
Sully	137	133	315	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1220	1188	4165	29	Minimal	0.0%
Tripp	719	676	1497	16	Substantial	20.0%
Turner	1084	1009	2741	53	Moderate	6.3%
Union	2015	1933	6309	39	Substantial	8.0%
Walworth	732	702	1834	15	Moderate	8.6%
Yankton	2832	2762	9385	28	Moderate	7.9%
Ziebach	336	326	868	9	Minimal	7.7%
Unassigned	0	0	1777	0		

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 9 of 88

## South Dakota



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

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4633	0
10-19 years	12946	0
20-29 years	20213	7
30-39 years	18769	18
40-49 years	16310	36
50-59 years	16096	114
60-69 years	13097	251
70-79 years	6963	436
80+ years	5136	1043

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	59407	897
Male	54756	1008

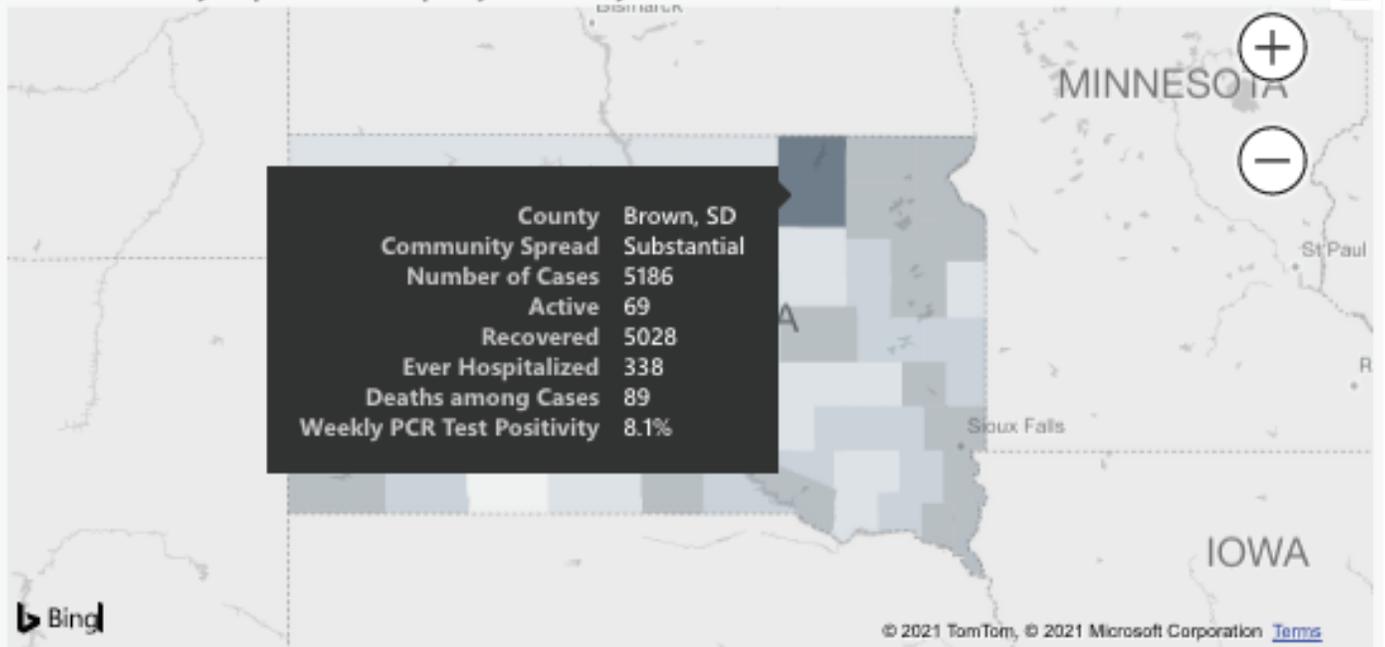
# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 10 of 88

## Brown County

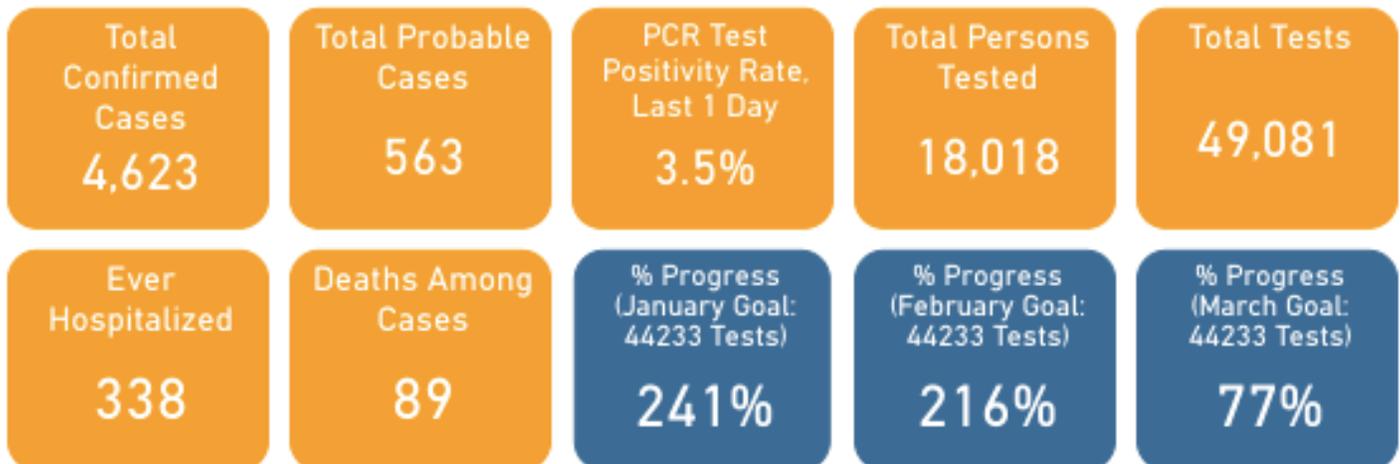


### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● None ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



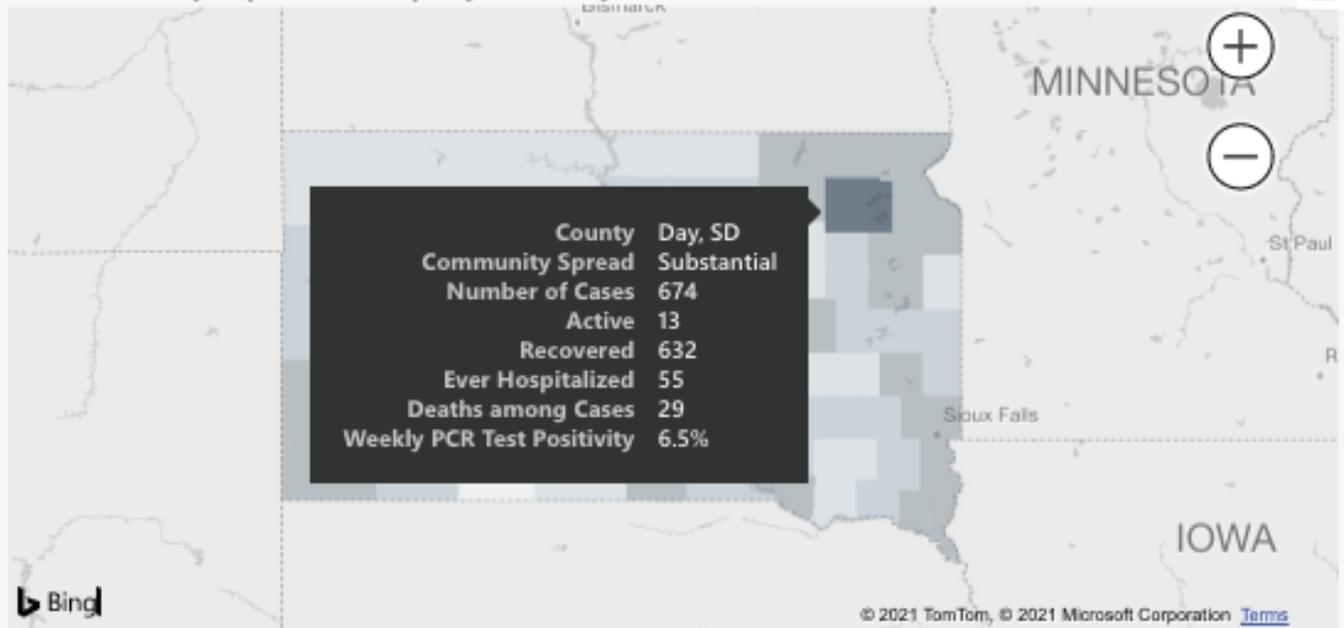
# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 11 of 88

## Day County

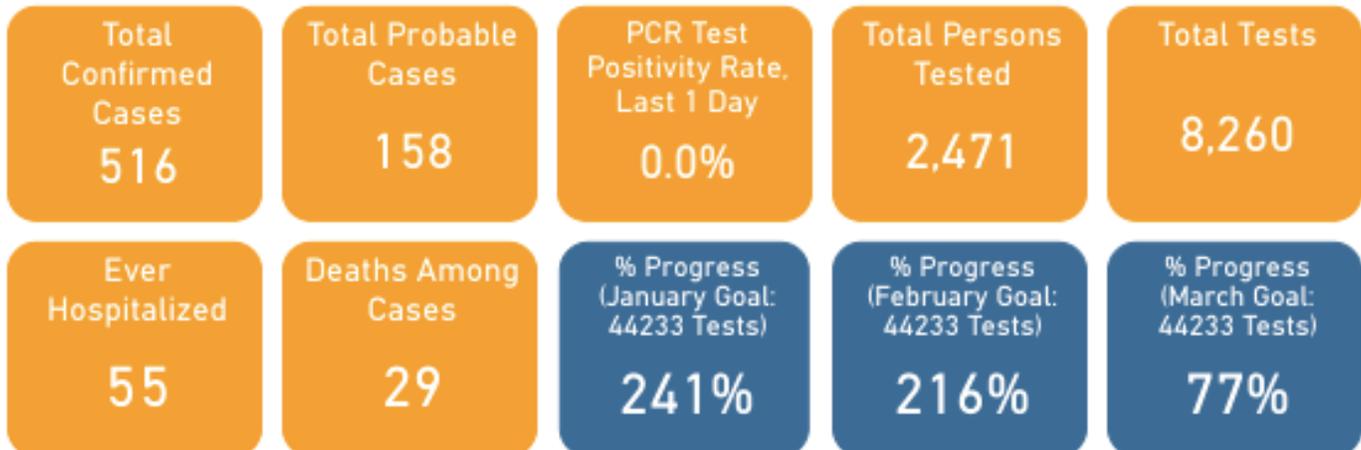


### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread None Minimal Moderate Substantial

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



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 12 of 88

## Vaccinations

**Total Doses Administered**

**276,107**

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	1,133
Moderna	135,632
Pfizer	139,342

**Total Persons Administered a Vaccine**

**178,093**

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	1,133
Moderna - 1 dose	42,060
Moderna - Series Complete	46,786
Pfizer - 1 dose	36,886
Pfizer - Series Complete	51,228

**Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose**

**31%**

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	30.96%
Series Complete	17.10%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	758	274	242	516
Beadle	5422	1,848	1,787	3,635
Bennett*	438	124	157	281
Bon Homme*	3000	1,264	868	2,132
Brookings	7939	2,743	2,598	5,341
Brown	13425	3,001	5,212	8,213
Brule*	1672	488	592	1,080
Buffalo*	124	78	23	101
Butte	1922	794	564	1,358
Campbell	883	299	292	591
Charles Mix*	2832	980	926	1,906
Clark	1034	370	332	702
Clay	4172	1,628	1,272	2,900
Codington*	8536	2,934	2,801	5,735
Corson*	269	103	83	186
Custer*	2470	896	787	1,683
Davison	6493	1,833	2,330	4,163
Day*	2190	802	694	1,496
Deuel	1286	480	403	883
Dewey*	345	69	138	207
Douglas*	1062	322	370	692
Edmunds	1194	408	393	801
Fall River*	2229	735	747	1,482
Faulk	969	281	344	625
Grant*	2491	1,059	716	1,775
Gregory*	1656	604	526	1,130
Haakon*	508	156	176	332

# Groton Daily Independent

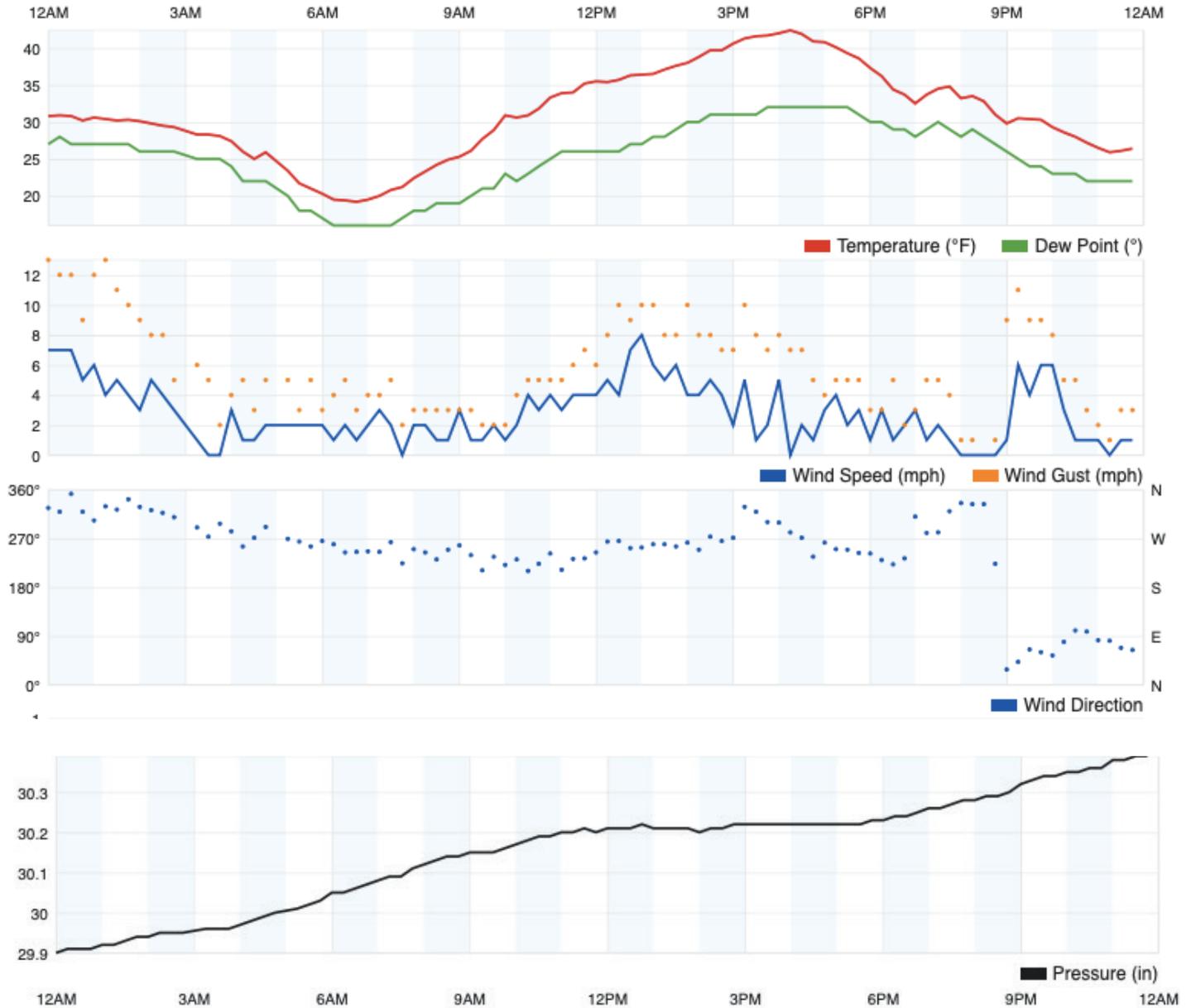
Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 13 of 88

Hamlin	1519	505	507	1,012
Hand	1309	443	433	876
Hanson	405	151	127	278
Harding	92	46	23	69
Hughes*	6768	1,598	2,585	4,183
Hutchinson*	3044	1,066	989	2,055
Hyde*	498	144	177	321
Jackson*	357	109	124	233
Jerauld	756	308	224	532
Jones*	568	162	203	365
Kingsbury	2029	801	614	1,415
Lake	3441	1,291	1,075	2,366
Lawrence	7129	2,719	2,205	4,924
Lincoln	23181	5,287	8,947	14,234
Lyman*	693	225	234	459
Marshall*	1414	482	466	948
McCook	1855	593	631	1,224
McPherson	225	71	77	148
Meade*	5444	1,716	1,864	3,580
Mellette*	38	18	10	28
Miner	725	243	241	484
Minnehaha*	71833	18,353	26,740	45,093
Moody*	1537	597	470	1,067
Oglala Lakota*	157	55	51	106
Pennington*	32542	8,472	12,035	20,507
Perkins*	623	309	157	466
Potter	738	348	195	543
Roberts*	3877	1,325	1,276	2,601
Sanborn	854	276	289	565
Spink	2590	850	870	1,720
Stanley*	1035	247	394	641
Sully	313	73	120	193
Todd*	147	47	50	97
Tripp*	1812	524	644	1,168
Turner	3092	956	1,068	2,024
Union	2685	1,061	812	1,873
Walworth*	1571	495	538	1,033
Yankton	8452	2,050	3,201	5,251
Ziebach*	52	16	18	34
Other	5388	1,474	1,957	3,431

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 14 of 88

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 15 of 88

Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Sunny	Mostly Clear then Patchy Fog	Patchy Fog then Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Breezy. Partly Sunny then Slight Chance Rain
<b>High: 46 °F</b>	<b>Low: 26 °F</b>	<b>High: 51 °F</b>	<b>Low: 29 °F</b>	<b>High: 47 °F</b>



NWS ABERDEEN

WEATHER.GOV/ABR

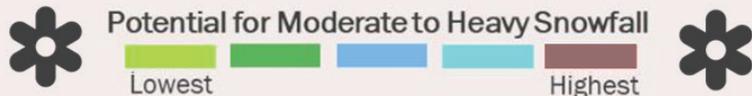
3/12/2021 3:33 AM

Today	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
40 to 57°	46 to 59°	44 to 54°	38 to 45°
			
Partly to Mostly Sunny	Partly to Mostly Sunny	Mix of Rain and Snow	Mix of Rain and Snow

**Uncertainty In Track/Intensity & Timing = Low Confidence In Storm Impacts**

Seasonally mild conditions are expected Today and Saturday before a system moves across the Central Plains. This system could have some impacts on central and northeast South Dakota, however there remains a degree of uncertainty on the intensity track and timing of the system which will make it difficult to judge the impacts of the system at this time.

## Late Weekend Winter Storm Potential



Updated: 3/11/2021 3:37 PM Central

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

### What We Know

There are signs pointing toward the potential for a significant winter storm with heavy snow and strong winds to impact portions of the northern and central plains heading into the beginning of next week.

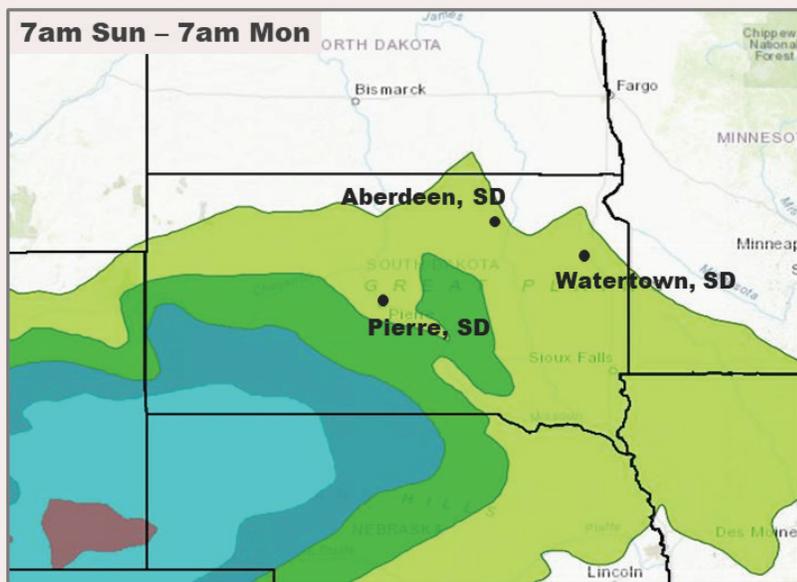
**Adverse travel conditions are possible.**

### What We Don't Know

The exact track and timing of this system are still unknown, as well as how much precipitation could fall as rain and how much could fall as snow. **Stay tuned!**

### What You Can Do

Continue to monitor the latest forecast from a reliable source, especially if you have travel plans. And as always, have a winter survival kit prepared.



A winter storm system looming on the horizon is being monitored closely. While still off the California Coast, this large area of low pressure is expected to move out onto the central plains by early next week. Still to be determined is the system's low track, timing, precipitation type and amounts and how strong the winds will be with it. So, basically everything. But, at the moment, some of the precipitation shield is projected to reach up into central South Dakota late in the weekend and early next week. Keep following the forecast for important updates as Monday approaches.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 17 of 88

## Today in Weather History

March 12, 1995: Rapid snowmelt, due to warm temperatures, caused widespread flooding of streams, low areas, and farmland. Many roads were covered with water, and some were washed out. Some utility poles and lines were damaged. High water levels destroyed some schools, houses, and other buildings. Day County was especially stricken, with damage to roads alone estimated at \$75,000. Ice jams exacerbated the flooding on some culverts and streams.

1928: The St. Frances dam near Santa Paula, California, burst before midnight, sending 138,000 acres of water rushing down the San Francisquito Canyon, killing 450 people. The dam was designed and built between 1924 and 1926 by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, then named the Bureau of Water Works and Supply.

1976: A massive tornado outbreak spawned tornadoes in the Great Lakes and Midwest, including 9 in northern Indiana and extreme southern Michigan. A tornado missed President Ford's motorcade by a quarter-mile near O'Hare. The next morning, he got out of his vehicle to view the damage.

1993: An incredible blizzard known as "The Superstorm" struck the eastern United States on this date through the 15th. The storm was described as the most costly non-tropical storm ever to hit the U.S., doing an estimated \$6 billion in damage. The storm was as strong as a hurricane regarding winds and low pressure. The pressure dropped to an incredible 28.35 inches of mercury or 960 millibars when then the storm was located over the Chesapeake Bay. Boston, Massachusetts, recorded a wind gust to 81 mph, the most substantial wind they had recorded since Hurricane Edna in 1954. Also, as the storm was intensifying over the Gulf of Mexico, a wind gust to 99 mph was recorded by an offshore oil rig. It dumped incredible amounts of snow from Alabama to New England. The snow amounts were significant everywhere, but for places like Birmingham, Alabama, the 17 inches recorded brought the city to a standstill for three days. Mount Leconte, North Carolina, recorded 60 inches of snow. Practically every weather station in West Virginia established a new 24-hour snowfall record during the event. Syracuse, New York was buried under 43 inches of snow. The storm killed 220 people, and another 48 lost at sea. The storm also brought a 12-foot storm surge and 15 tornadoes to Florida, where 51 people were killed. Air travel was brought to a halt as every major airport from Atlanta north was closed during the height of the storm. During the late evening into the early morning hours of the 13th, a vicious squall line swept through Florida and spawned 11 tornadoes resulting in five fatalities. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 110 mph at Alligator Point and 109 mph at Dry Tortugas. Exceptionally high tides occurred along the western Florida coast. A 13-foot storm surge occurred in Taylor County, Florida, resulting in 10 deaths with 57 residences destroyed. A 5 to 8-foot storm surge moved ashore in Dixie County. Over 500 homes were destroyed, with major damage to another 700 structures.

1888 - A blizzard paralyzed southeastern New York State and western New England. The storm produced 58 inches of snow at Saratoga NY, and 50 inches at Middletown CT. The blizzard was followed by record cold temperatures, and the cold and snow claimed 400 lives. New York City received 20.9 inches of snow, Albany NY reported 46.7 inches. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1954 - A blizzard raged from eastern Wyoming into the Black Hills of western South Dakota, while a severe ice storm was in progress from northeastern Nebraska to central Iowa. The ice storm isolated 153 towns in Iowa. Dust from the Great Plains caused brown snow, and hail and muddy rain over parts of Wisconsin and Michigan. (11th-13th) (The Weather Channel)

1967 - A tremendous four day storm raged across California. Winds of 90 mph closed mountain passes, heavy rains flooded the lowlands, and in sixty hours Squaw Valley CA was buried under 96 inches (eight feet) of snow. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., with gale force winds along the Middle Atlantic Coast. A storm in the Pacific Northwest produced rain and gale force winds. Crescent City CA received 2.27 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A powerful storm produced high winds and heavy snow in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Winds gusting to 70 mph produced snow drifts six feet high in Minnesota, and sent twelve foot waves on Lake Superior over the breakwalls of the ship canal at Duluth MN. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 18 of 88

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 43 °F at 4:10 PM**

**Low Temp: 19 °F at 6:37 AM**

**Wind: 13 mph at 1:04 AM**

**Precip: .35**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 72° in 1934, 2016**

**Record Low: -20° in 1897**

**Average High: 38°F**

**Average Low: 18°F**

**Average Precip in Mar.: 0.33**

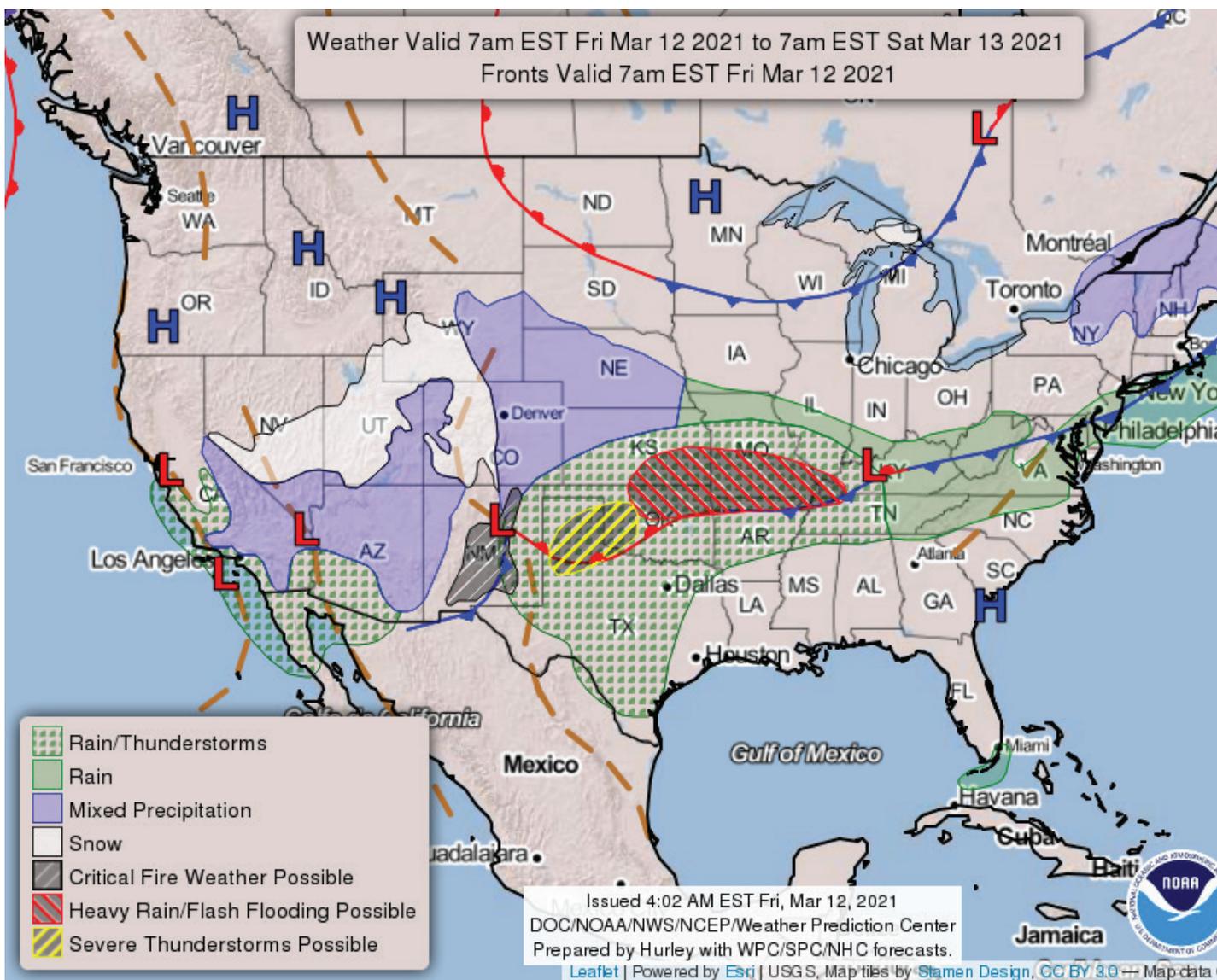
**Precip to date in Mar.: 0.35**

**Average Precip to date: 1.35**

**Precip Year to Date: 0.53**

**Sunset Tonight: 6:36 p.m.**

**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:49 a.m.**



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 19 of 88



## THE OBJECT OF OUR DESIRES

We often hear phrases such as "I just didn't have enough time," or "I ran out of time," or "If I only had more time." Time seems to elude all of us. Yet all of us try to regulate our lives by time. We wear watches, have clocks, and are time sensitive.

One of the most interesting facts about time, however, is that it reveals our priorities. If we say that we love our wife and children yet have little time for them or to be with them, our words are meaningless. If we say that we love our Lord and Savior yet have no time for church or take no time to serve Him, our behavior mocks us and cancels our words. Our priorities are what matter. Our priorities are known to us and visible to others by the time we spend on "things."

Psalm 24 makes a bold statement: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." It reflects the words that introduce us to God: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth!" This verse states that God was the Creator. Furthermore, this psalm states that the earth and everything in it belongs to Him. If so, He is to be the priority of our lives and everything we do is to be an act of worship – honoring Him in all that we do. And when we do what is right and just and fair, we reflect His priorities.

This psalm clearly announces the Kingship of God. We are quick to recognize God as Creator but that is not enough for Him. As our Creator-King, He has every right to expect us, His subjects, to place Him first and foremost in our lives. We know He is our priority when we honor Him by what we do with our time.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to make You the priority of our lives by being obedient to Your Word and serving You. May our deeds reflect Your desires. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. Psalm 24:1

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 20 of 88

## 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

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 21 of 88

## News from the Associated Press

### Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

GIRLS BASKETBALL=

First Round=

State Quarterfinal=

Class AA=

Brandon Valley 33, Aberdeen Central 30

Rapid City Stevens 39, Harrisburg 27

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 69, Mitchell 42

Sioux Falls Washington 53, Rapid City Central 27

Class A=

Aberdeen Roncalli 45, Sioux Falls Christian 34

Hamlin 53, Belle Fourche 36

St. Thomas More 66, McCook Central/Montrose 29

Winner 59, Dakota Valley 48

Class B=

Castlewood 61, Waverly-South Shore 55

Corsica/Stickney 47, Herreid/Selby Area 45

Ethan 52, Hanson 49

White River 65, Viborg-Hurley 53

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

### Lawmakers cap session with \$5.1 billion budget approval

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers put a cap on the state budget Thursday by boosting pay for teachers, state employees and community support providers, as well as sending millions of dollars to infrastructure projects and a college scholarship fund.

In one of their final acts of this year's legislative session, lawmakers passed a \$5.1 billion budget that will take effect beginning in July. It included a 2.4% increase in salary funding for "the big three" — the nickname lawmakers have for teachers, state employees and employees of health care programs that depend on government funding.

House Republican leader Kent Peterson said lawmakers recognized they had an opportunity to address what he called a staffing "crisis" for government-funded programs for the elderly and people with disabilities. Employees of those programs currently get paid an average of \$13 an hour, according to Rep. Chris Karr, who helped oversee the budget-making process. He said that pay should increase by \$2.94 an hour with an additional boost in funding.

Sen. Jean Hunhoff, the Republican who co-chaired the committee that ironed out the budget, said lawmakers were focused on employees this year.

"It's people that are important to South Dakota," she said.

But lawmakers have also sent hundreds of millions of dollars to projects. They spent \$100 million on expanding broadband internet access, \$20 million to repair a railroad line from Fort Pierre to Rapid City, \$12 million to build an events center at the state fairgrounds and \$20 million for a new facility at South Dakota State University that would research how to turn crops into new products.

"We've probably done more big things this year than maybe ever in the history of South Dakota," said Senate Republican leader Gary Cammack.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 22 of 88

How did Republicans who normally pride themselves on thriftiness become big spenders this year? Billions of dollars have flowed into the state from the federal government, creating a boost in sales tax and giving the state the ability to offset expenses with federal relief funds sent directly to the state government.

With more federal money on the way, some Democrats argued the state should have been even more aggressive in spending money. Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba said that Republicans were being too cautious in adopting a revenue projection that was \$52 million lower than what the Legislature's nonpartisan economic analysts recommended.

He also pointed out that an additional \$15 million dollars was set aside from ongoing expenses by Republican leadership after they met with Gov. Kristi Noem's office. This would allow the governor "to have first dibs on the millions of one-time funds" created if tax revenue is better than projected, Nesiba said.

"Some of the most important decisions continue to be made on the budget behind closed doors," he said.

Noem has preached caution to lawmakers this year, warning that she thinks the state's economy faces uncertainty under President Joe Biden.

"I was proud of the Legislature, that they're willing to put more money into trust funds, and that they recognize the need to put money into reserves as well, not really knowing what the economy will look like in the next two or three years," she said.

Some lawmakers had also questioned what kind of airplane the Department of Transportation will be purchasing with the \$5 million the governor requested, but they granted that request as well.

However, as lawmakers made farewell speeches, politics were briefly put aside in the spirit of bipartisanship. Several legislative leaders pointed to the \$50 million they will send towards an endowment for need-based college scholarships — dubbed the Freedom Scholarship — as something that nearly everyone agreed would benefit the state for many years to come.

"We invested in our kids," Noem said. "Getting that Freedom Scholarship set up was a big deal."

## Noem weighing girls' transgender sports ban amid protests

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Thursday said she is still weighing whether to sign a bill that would ban transgender girls and women from female sports leagues, as transgender advocates rallied at the Capitol and college athletes pressured the NCAA to punish states that pass such laws.

Shortly after the Legislature passed the bill on Monday, the Republican governor said she was "excited to sign" the bill. But at a Thursday news conference, she struck a more cautious tone while defending the proposed ban.

"We are still examining the bill, getting ready to make decisions on it," Noem said, adding that was a process her office takes with every piece of legislation.

While Noem argued the bill is about "protecting women's sports," and does not single out transgender people, her decision to sign it into law could have far-reaching effects. More than 500 college athletes are asking the NCAA Board of Governors to refuse to schedule championships in states that have banned transgender participation in sports. Opponents have warned the law could drag the state into costly litigation and would saddle schools with having to gather proof of every athlete's sex at birth.

The NCAA has said it is monitoring similar legislation in about two dozen states. The organization has had policies in place since 2011 that allow for transgender people to participate in sports.

Dave Zimbeck, a lawyer for the organization that hosts NCAA tournaments in Sioux Falls, warned lawmakers that the ban would jeopardize the city's chances of hosting future competitions. He said NCAA tournaments rake in millions of dollars for the city and that losing them could lead to the departure of up to 100 full- and part-time jobs.

North Carolina, which passed a bill discriminating against transgender people in 2016, lost out on billions of dollars after sporting events and businesses shied away from the state.

That same year, the South Dakota legislature passed a similar bill, which would have banned transgender people from using bathrooms and locker rooms that matched their gender identity. But former Gov. Dennis

Daugaard, a Republican, vetoed the bill after meeting with transgender people, who he said helped him see the issue "through their eyes."

Transgender advocates who demonstrated outside the governor's mansion in Pierre on Thursday said they have been trying to get Noem's attention, but so far have been unsuccessful. A group of about a dozen people marched from the governor's mansion to the Capitol, chanting "Transphobia has got to go," and "Let kids play." Several people driving by honked and waved in support, but slurs and insults were hurled from another car.

"We tried virtually every day to get something on her desk," said Stephanie Marty, a transgender woman from Sioux Falls who works with the Transformation Project. "She hasn't responded at all."

While the bill would specifically target transgender women and girl athletes, Marty worried that it would affect the mental health of many transgender people, not just those who want to play in sports leagues that match their gender identity. She also said the debate has been filled with misinformation on transgender children, pointing out that they undergo a range of hormone treatments that ensure they do not have a competitive advantage in sports.

Advocates for the ban have often pointed to a lawsuit in Connecticut in which high school track athletes sued the state high school athletic association, arguing they lost out on championships and scholarship opportunities after transgender girl athletes beat them. But the South Dakota High School Activities Association, which evaluates applications from transgender athletes on a case-by-case basis, says only one transgender girl has competed in a girls' league, and she did not have a competitive advantage. She has since graduated.

The governor said she didn't have any meetings with transgender people scheduled as she considers the bill, but she was also not aware of requests for a meeting.

"We certainly are open to listening to everybody," she said.

Louise Snodgrass, a nonbinary transgender person who helped organize the demonstration, hoped Noem would change her mind and veto the bill, describing that as "the dream." They hoped Noem would at least talk with them before signing it, noting they both hearken from the same area of the state and worked in agriculture.

Snodgrass said, "We probably have a lot in common and she just doesn't know it."

## Noem's medical marijuana plan scuttled by Senate

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 24 of 88

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. Greg 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.

This story was first published on March 10. It was updated March 11 to correct Rep. Greg Jamison's name. He had been erroneously referred to as "Craig" Jamison.

## UK COVID-19 variant discovered in South Dakota for 1st time

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — State Department of Health officials said Thursday that the variant strain of the coronavirus first detected in the United Kingdom has now been confirmed in South Dakota.

Health officials said two cases have been reported and both of the patients recovered at home. State Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said in a release that her department has been "closely monitoring" the progression of the new variant.

This variant strain of the virus was first detected in the United Kingdom in September 2020 and has been found in numerous countries around the world. It is thought to be more contagious than other previously identified strains.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tally as of Tuesday showed that only South Dakota and Oklahoma had yet to report a case of the UK variant. Neighboring states North Dakota had four cases, Minnesota had 78, Montana had three, Nebraska had seven, Iowa had 20 and Wyoming had nine.

South Dakota health officials on Thursday reported 203 new virus cases, increasing the total number of positive tests to 114,163 since the start of the pandemic. The death toll increased by one, to 1,905.

## South Dakota agritourism connects tourists with agriculture

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Tourism and State University Extension are working together to create opportunities with the two largest industries in the state — agriculture and tourism.

They've created an 'agritourism' program for farm, ranch owners and others who want to connect tourists with agriculture and help them see where local food and beverages come from.

"People don't have that connection to agriculture anymore. It used to be, everybody had grandpa and grandma at home on a farm or ranch and they could go visit grandpa and grandma and learn about animals and where their food comes from and where their fiber comes from, in reality, that doesn't exist anymore," Peggy Schlechter, a field specialist with SDSU Extension tells KOTA-TV.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 25 of 88

Bear Butte Gardens is an organic, small family farm near Sturgis.

"For us, it's providing a location where customers that have an interest in small-scale farming can stop and actually have a conversation with the farmers themselves, the owners, and a lot of opportunities for education," said Michelle Grosek, co-owner of the business.

The Belle Joli Winery near Deadwood is another enterprise that invites tourists to visit and learn about the wine-making process.

AgritourismSD is a two-year program focused on providing the tools and skills needed to develop a successful agritourism enterprise. Applications are due by April 1.

## The Latest: Serbia closes bars, shops to fight virus surge

By The Associated Press undefined

BELGRADE, Serbia — Serbia will close down all nonessential shops, bars and restaurants this weekend as the Balkan country faces a surge in coronavirus infections.

The government-appointed crisis body said Friday said the measures will take effect on Friday evening and last until Monday. Authorities will decide on Monday how to proceed, officials said.

The decision is expected to be formally endorsed by the government later Friday.

Serbia has recorded more than 4,000 new infections daily in the past week as doctors have warned that hospitals are rapidly filling up and that medical staff are exhausted after a year of the pandemic.

Senior health official Zoran Gojkovic says the government hopes that its vaccination program will also get infections under control in the coming weeks. He says new measures also include children in higher primary school grades switching to remote classes next week.

A wave of new infections is sweeping across the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, driven mainly by new virus variants that are more contagious.

Serbia has vaccinated more than 1.5 million of its 7 million people with at least one shot from China's Sinopharm, Pfizer-BioNTech, Russia's Sputnik V or AstraZeneca, which is among the highest rates of inoculations in Europe.

### THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— The pandemic has taken a huge toll on children's mental health, with doctors saying virus-related phobias, tics and eating disorders rising along with attempted suicides.

— President Joe Biden aims for quicker shots, 'independence from this virus'

—

— AP-NORC poll: 1 in 5 in US lost someone close in pandemic

— The European Medicines Agency has given Johnson & Johnson's one-dose coronavirus vaccine the green light, giving the European Union's 27 nations a fourth vaccine to use

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

### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

BERLIN — The German government said it was in contact with U.S. officials about the question of vaccine supplies, but stressed that the European Commission had the lead when it came to procuring shots for member states.

Government spokesman Steffen Seibert told reporters in Berlin on Friday that the "this topic is raised again and again by the chancellor and other members of the federal government" in talks with non-EU countries.

Seibert added that the EU "has funded to a large degree the research development and production of vaccines" and that the 27-nation bloc is an important production site.

"This benefits not just people in Europe, but the whole world," he said, adding that the EU has said the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 26 of 88

bloc has approved the export of more than 34 million doses of vaccines to over 30 countries in the past six weeks.

"We support this. On the other hand we note that while we have exported to many countries around the world, nothing or almost nothing has been exported from the U.S. or Great Britain."

"And this is of course a topic that the European Commission, representing its member states, takes up with the companies concerned but also with the governments of other countries."

**BERLIN** — Germany's top health official expressed regret Friday that some neighboring countries have paused their use of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine following reports of blood clots in some people, despite the lack of any evidence the shot was responsible.

Health Minister Jens Spahn said while Germany takes reports of possible side effects from vaccines "very, very seriously," both the European Medicines Agency and Germany's own vaccine oversight body have said they have no evidence of an increase in dangerous blood clots in connection with the shots.

"I regret that on the basis of the knowledge of Friday morning some countries in the European Union have suspended vaccinations with AstraZeneca," Spahn told reporters in Berlin.

Denmark was the first to temporarily suspended use of the AstraZeneca vaccine Thursday after reports of blood clots in some people. The Nordic nation's health authority said the decision was "based on a precautionary principle" and that one person who developed a blood clot after vaccination had died.

**SOFIA, Bulgaria** - Bulgaria has temporarily suspended inoculations with the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine and demanded safety guarantees from the European Union.

Prime Minister Boyko Borissov told a cabinet meeting that the immunization with this vaccine will be suspended, until the European Medicines Agency issues a written statement that it is safe.

"Until all doubts are dispelled and experts guarantee that it holds no risk for people, we are stopping immunization using that vaccine," Borissov said.

Bulgaria becomes the latest European country to suspend vaccination using the AstraZeneca-Oxford jab following reports of blood clots in some people.

Bulgaria has so far administered some 320,000 doses of the EU's three allowed vaccines. Due to a shortage of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, most people have received an AstraZeneca-Oxford jab.

The nation of 7 million has seen a surge in COVID-19 cases in the past weeks. Bulgaria on Tuesday reported 3,121 new confirmed cases, bringing their total number to 272,700 with 11,094 deaths.

**HONG KONG** — Hong Kong on Friday reported 60 new coronavirus infections, the highest number of infections in the city since late January, prompting fears of a fifth wave of the virus.

Of the new infections, 47 were linked to an outbreak at a gym in the Sai Ying Pun neighborhood that is popular among expatriates. Health authorities have ordered all employees of gyms in Hong Kong to be screened for the virus. The gym cluster has so far infected 64 people

Authorities have also ordered gyms to step up safety measures, including requiring members to wear masks while working out.

The city has so far reported 11,211 cases of the coronavirus, with 203 deaths.

As of Thursday, 145,800 people in Hong Kong have received the first COVID-19 vaccine dose.

Since the vaccination program began, four people have died days after receiving a Sinovac shot, although experts have concluded that the first two cases had no direct links to the vaccine. Experts are still investigating the other cases.

**BERLIN** — Germany's health minister says the country should prepare for "several very challenging weeks" amid a rise in coronavirus cases.

Health Minister Jens Spahn told reporters in Berlin on Friday that "the situation remains tense," as the country's disease control center reported 12,834 newly confirmed cases in the past day, and 252 new COVID-related deaths.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 27 of 88

The head of the agency, Lothar Wieler, said Germany is "at the beginning of the third wave" of infections following surges in cases last spring and in the fall.

Spahn noted there has been a drop in serious illnesses and deaths among the elderly, as most people over 80 in Germany have now received a virus vaccine.

He said Germany has managed to administer more than 200,000 first shots daily this week. As more supplies arrive, shots will be administered not just in special vaccine centers but, from mid-April, also in doctors' practices, said Spahn.

**GÈNEVA** — The World Health Organization says it's assessing reports of rare blood coagulation problems faced by some people in the European Union who received doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine against COVID-19.

The U.N. health agency noted the decision of a few European Union countries to suspend use of the vaccine based on reports of the rare disorder in people who received the vaccines from a particular batch.

It noted that the European Medicines Agency has determined that the vaccine's benefits outweigh the risks, and said that no cases of death have been found to be caused by any COVID-19 vaccines so far.

A WHO advisory committee on vaccine safety is "carefully assessing" the reports and will communicate its findings and any changes in its recommendations to the public.

"Deaths from other causes will continue to occur, including after vaccination, but causally unrelated," WHO said.

**BÀNGKOK** — Thailand delayed use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Friday after several European countries temporarily suspended the jabs following reports of blood clots in some people.

A publicity event with Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha receiving his first shot was canceled with dozens of media attending, less than an hour before the scheduled start. Instead, health officials held a news conference to explain the delay was based on the decision made by Denmark, Austria and others as a precaution. The Danish health authority said Thursday it has no evidence the vaccine was responsible for blood clots.

Other experts pointed out that of the millions of AstraZeneca vaccine shots administered elsewhere, including in Britain, there have been no reported cases of the vaccine causing blood clots or related problems.

Yong Poovorawan, an advisor to Thailand's vaccination program, said the delay, pending an investigation into the cause of the reported side effect, will not have a big impact on the rollout.

Thailand started its vaccination drive last month with an initial 200,000 doses of China's Sinovac and 117,000 doses of AstraZeneca, which is also being manufactured locally. The country aims to inject 10 million doses a month from June.

**LJUBLJANA**, Slovenia — A school in Slovenia cancelled classes on Friday after 26 teachers called in sick due to vaccine side effects.

Slovenian media say the staff at the school in the northwestern town of Velenje received AstraZeneca jabs on Wednesday and later reported side effects to the jabs including strong headaches, dizziness, high fever and nausea.

The head of Slovenia's National Public Health Institute Milan Krek told public broadcaster RTV Slovenia reactions such as increased body temperature and fever are among the listed side effects for the vaccine. The reactions are being registered and will be reviewed before further decisions are made, said Krek.

The school has informed the parents that they do not have the capacity to hold classes and that the school will shut down on Friday except for day care for smaller children.

**NEW DELHI** — India has registered its worst single-day jump in coronavirus cases since late December with 23,285.

The sharp spike is being attributed to the western state of Maharashtra.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 28 of 88

India has so far reported more than 11.3 million cases, the world's second-highest after the United States. Infections have been falling steadily since a peak in late September, but experts say increased public gatherings and laxity is leading to the latest surge.

The increase is being reported in six states, including Maharashtra where authorities have announced a weeklong lockdown in the densely populated Nagpur city next week. The vaccinations there will continue.

India is in its second phase of the COVID-19 inoculation campaign and plans to vaccinate 300 million people by August. The vaccination drive that began in January is still running way below capacity.

More than 26 million people have gotten a shot, though only 4.72 million are fully vaccinated with both doses.

TOKYO — Transportation Minister Kazuyoshi Akaba says Japan will tighten border controls and limit the number of entrants to up to 2,000 per day to guard against the more contagious variants of the coronavirus.

Japan has confirmed 345 cases of the more contagious new variants, mostly the kind first found in Britain, the Health Ministry said.

The health authorities have found the cases of the new variants to have quadrupled over the past month. They said the cases have been found in about half of Japan's 47 prefectures but need to be closely watched and precautions should be increased.

Tokyo and its three neighboring prefectures are under a non-binding state of emergency since Jan. 7. The measure, which was to end on March 7 in those areas, has been extended for two weeks as the infections have not slowed enough.

Japan had about 444,300 cases and 8,451 deaths as of Thursday.

MANILA, Philippines — Mayors have decided to reimpose a 7-hour night-time curfew in the Philippine capital region of more than 12 million people amid a spike in coronavirus infections, which forced dozens of villages to be placed back under police-enforced lockdowns.

Authorities would enforce the 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew for two weeks starting Monday in metropolitan Manila, where most cases in a new surge of infections have been reported this week, said Benhur Abalos, who heads the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

The Philippines has reported the highest number of confirmed infections at more than 600,000 and more than 12,500 deaths among 24 pandemic-hit countries in the Western Pacific region, the World Health Organization said.

President Rodrigo Duterte said Thursday he did not know how he could considerably ease quarantine restrictions when cases continue to surge. He said he may be able to further reopen the economy when millions of Filipinos have been vaccinated. But the government's vaccination campaign has faced supply problems and public reluctance.

"We cannot forever be in the strict protocols because we have to open the economy. People are hungry ... they have to work, to eat, to survive," Duterte said. "I am, I said, in a quandary of what to do."

SEOUL, South Korea -- South Korea is extending its current measures on social distancing for at least another two weeks as it struggles to slow coronavirus infections in the greater capital area.

The measures include clamping down on private social gatherings of five or more people nationwide and prohibiting indoor dining at restaurants and bars in the Seoul metropolitan area after 10 p.m.

Senior Health Ministry official Yoon Taeho said during a briefing Friday that health authorities will inspect shopping malls, restaurants, public baths and private tutoring academies in the capital area over the next two weeks and have employees tested if their working conditions are seen as highly vulnerable to infections.

While South Korea has wiggled out of its worst wave of the virus that saw its daily jump in infections reach 1,241 on Christmas Day, it has still been seeing 300 to 400 new cases a day since mid-January. Around 75% of them reported from the Seoul metropolitan area, which is home to half of the country's 51 million people.

The country reported another new 488 cases of the coronavirus on Friday, bringing its caseload to

94,686, including 1,662 deaths.

## Case of UK woman who vanished on way home stirs grief, anger

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The suspected abduction and murder of a young London woman as she walked home has dismayed Britain and revived a painful question: Why are women too often not safe on the streets?

The fate of Sarah Everard is all the more shocking because the suspect arrested on suspicion of killing her is a U.K. police officer whose job was protecting top politicians and diplomats.

Everard, a 33-year-old marketing executive, set out on the 50-minute walk home from a friend's house in south London at about 9 p.m. on March 3. She has not been seen since.

On Tuesday, police arrested a member of the force's Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command. The officer in his 40s, whose name has not been released, is being held on suspicion of kidnapping and murder but has not yet been charged.

On Wednesday, a grim-faced Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick said officers had found human remains in woodland southeast of London. They have not yet been formally identified, but Everard's family issued a statement Thursday saying "our beautiful daughter Sarah was taken from us and we are appealing for any information that will help to solve this terrible crime."

Everard's disappearance has caused a nationwide outcry, with thousands appealing for information to help find her. Women also then began sharing experiences of being threatened or attacked — or simply facing the everyday fear of violence when walking alone.

"When she went missing, any woman who has ever walked home alone at night felt that grim, instinctive sense of recognition," columnist Gaby Hinsliff wrote in *The Guardian*. "Footsteps on a dark street. Keys gripped between your fingers. There but for the grace of God."

Organizers of a planned vigil in Everard's memory are going to court Friday after police said they could not gather because of coronavirus restrictions. Britain is now in lockdown and all mass assemblies are banned.

The Reclaim These Streets organizers want to hold a socially distanced gathering Saturday on Clapham Common, an open space on the route of Everard's walk home. Anna Birley, one of the organizers, said "safety has been a priority from the get-go."

"It would be ironic to organize a vigil to think about women's safety in public spaces without also thinking about the health and safety aspects," she said.

The case has also raised tough questions for the police. Britain's police watchdog is investigating how the force handled a complaint of indecent exposure against the same man three days before Everard disappeared.

The Independent Office of Police Conduct is also investigating how the suspect sustained a head injury while he was in custody. The police force says he was found injured in his cell and taken to a hospital for treatment before being returned to a police station.

## Myanmar court extends detention of AP journalist

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — A court in Myanmar on Friday extended the pre-trial detention period for an Associated Press journalist arrested while covering demonstrations against the military's seizure of power last month. He is facing a charge that could send him to prison for three years.

Thein Zaw, 32, was one of nine media workers taken into custody during a street protest on Feb. 27 in Yangon, the country's largest city, and has been held without bail. His next hearing at the Kamayut Township court will be on March 24.

The hearing Friday, which Thein Zaw attended via a video teleconference, came at the end of his initial remand period.

Thein Zaw and at least six other members of the media have been charged with violating a public order law, according to his lawyer, Tin Zar Oo, and the independent Assistance Association for Political Prison-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 30 of 88

ers. Separate hearings were held Friday for the other detained journalists.

Tin Zar Oo and one of Thein Zaw's brothers were allowed into the courtroom to take part in the 10-minute videoconference. Tin Zar Oo said she was able to submit documents giving her power of attorney for the case, but only at the next hearing might be allowed to submit a bail application.

Reporters and a U.S. Embassy official were not allowed into the hearing.

Thein Zaw had not been seen by his lawyer or any of his family members since his arrest. Tin Zar Oo said visits at Insein Prison, where he is being held, are not allowed because of coronavirus concerns, so his family has been dropping off food and supplies for him at the gate.

Tin Zar Oo told The Associated Press that her client looked healthy at Friday's hearing, but he suffers from asthma at night. She said Thein Zaw's brother commented that he had lost weight.

Thein Zaw was arrested as he was photographing police, some of them armed, charging down a street at anti-coup protesters. A video shows that although he stepped to the side of the street to get out of their way, several police rushed over and surrounded him. One put him in a chokehold as he was handcuffed and then taken away.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, 38 journalists have been detained since the military ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1. Nineteen are still incarcerated.

The group says it has verified the detentions of more than 2,000 people as well as 69 deaths.

In another move against the media, authorities this week canceled the licenses of five local outlets that had extensively covered the protests. Mizzima, Democratic Voice of Burma, Khit Thit Media, Myanmar Now and 7Day News have continued operating despite being barred from broadcasting or publishing on any media platform.

The Associated Press and many press freedom organizations have called for the release of Thein Zaw and the other detained journalists.

"Independent journalists must be allowed to freely and safely report the news without fear of retribution," Ian Phillips, AP vice president for international news, said after the arrest. "AP decries in the strongest terms the arbitrary detention of Thein Zaw."

The deputy director of the International Press Institute, Scott Griffen, previously called the charges an "a obvious effort to intimidate Myanmar's journalists into silence and prevent them from reporting on the junta's increasingly violent crackdown on the protests against its illegitimate rule."

The U.S. government, in addition to criticizing the coup and the violence of Myanmar's security forces, has shown support for the cause of press freedom in the Southeast Asian nation.

"We condemn the attempted media blackout and efforts to silence the voices of the people by revoking the licenses of several local media organizations," U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters in Washington on Thursday. "We are deeply concerned about the increasing attacks on the freedom of expression, including for members of the press. We call for the release of journalists and for all others who have been unjustly detained."

Even during Suu Kyi's time in office, journalists were often sued for their reporting.

In the highest-profile case, two journalists working for the Reuters news agency were arrested in 2017 while working on a story about military violence directed at Myanmar's Rohingya minority. They were accused of illegally possessing official documents and sentenced to seven years behind bars before being freed in 2019 in a mass presidential pardon.

## Defying rules, anti-vaccine accounts thrive on social media

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and AMANDA SEITZ The Associated Press

With vaccination against COVID-19 in full swing, social platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter say they've stepped up their fight against misinformation that aims to undermine trust in the vaccines. But problems abound.

For years, the same platforms have allowed anti-vaccination propaganda to flourish, making it difficult to stamp out such sentiments now. And their efforts to weed out other types of COVID-19 misinformation

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 31 of 88

— often with fact-checks, informational labels and other restrained measures, has been woefully slow.

Twitter, for instance, announced this month that it will remove dangerous falsehoods about vaccines, much the same way it's done for other COVID-related conspiracy theories and misinformation. But since April 2020, it has removed a grand total of 8,400 tweets spreading COVID-related misinformation — a tiny fraction of the avalanche of pandemic-related falsehoods tweeted out daily by popular users with millions of followers, critics say.

"While they fail to take action, lives are being lost," said Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, a watchdog group. In December, the nonprofit found that 59 million accounts across social platforms follow peddlers of anti-vax propaganda — many of whom are immensely popular superspreaders of misinformation.

Efforts to crack down on vaccine misinformation now, though, are generating cries of censorship and prompting some posters to adopt sneaky tactics to avoid the axe.

"It's a hard situation because we have let this go for so long," said Jeanine Guidry, an assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University who studies social media and health information. "People using social media have really been able to share what they want for nearly a decade."

The Associated Press identified more than a dozen Facebook pages and Instagram accounts, collectively boasting millions of followers, that have made false claims about the COVID-19 vaccine or discouraged people from taking it. Some of these pages have existed for years.

Of more than 15 pages identified by NewsGuard, a technology company that analyzes the credibility of websites, roughly half remain active on Facebook, the AP found.

One such page, The Truth About Cancer, has more than a million Facebook followers after years of posting baseless suggestions that vaccines could cause autism or damage children's brains. The page was identified in November as a "COVID-19 vaccine misinformation super spreader" by NewsGuard.

Recently, the page stopped posting about vaccines and the coronavirus. It now directs people to sign up for its newsletter and visit its website as a way to avoid alleged "censorship."

Facebook said it is taking "aggressive steps to fight misinformation across our apps by removing millions of pieces of COVID-19 and vaccine content on Facebook and Instagram during the pandemic."

"Research shows one of the best ways to promote vaccine acceptance is by showing people accurate, trusted information, which is why we've connected 2 billion people to resources from health authorities and launched a global information campaign," the company said in a statement.

Facebook also banned ads that discourage vaccines and said it has added warning labels to more than 167 million pieces of additional COVID-19 content thanks to our network of fact-checking partners. (The Associated Press is one of Facebook's fact-checking partners).

YouTube, which has generally avoided the same type scrutiny as its social media peers despite being a source of misinformation, said it has removed more than 30,000 videos since October, when it started banning false claims about COVID-19 vaccinations. Since February 2020, it has removed over 800,000 videos related to dangerous or misleading coronavirus information, said YouTube spokeswoman Elena Hernandez.

Prior to the pandemic, however, social media platforms had done little to stamp out misinformation, said Andy Pattison, manager of digital solutions for the World Health Organization. In 2019, as a measles outbreak slammed the Pacific Northwest and left dozens dead in American Samoa, Pattison pleaded with big tech companies to take a closer look at tightening rules around vaccine misinformation that he feared might make the outbreak worse — to no avail.

It wasn't until COVID-19 struck with a vengeance that many of those tech companies started listening. Now he meets weekly with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to discuss trends on their platforms and policies to consider.

"When it comes to vaccine misinformation, the really frustrating thing is that this has been around for years," Pattison said.

The targets of such crackdowns are often quick to adapt. Some accounts use intentionally misspelled words — like "vackseen" or "v@x" — to avoid bans. (Social platforms say they're wise to this.) Other pages

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 32 of 88

use more subtle messaging, images or memes to suggest that vaccines are unsafe or even deadly.

"When you die after the vaccine, you die of everything but the vaccine," read one meme on an Instagram account with more than 65,000 followers. The post suggested that the government is concealing deaths from the COVID-19 vaccine.

"It's a very fine line between freedom of speech and eroding science," Pattison said. Purveyors of misinformation, he said, "learn the rules, and they dance right on the edge, all the time."

Twitter said it is continuously reviewing its rules in the context of COVID-19 and changes them based on guidance from experts. Earlier this month, it added a strikes policy that threatens repeat spreaders of coronavirus and vaccine misinformation with bans.

But blatantly false COVID-19 information continues to pop up. Earlier this month, several articles circulating online claimed that more elderly Israelis who took the Pfizer vaccine were "killed" by the shot than those who died from COVID-19 itself. One such article from an anti-vaccination website was shared nearly 12,000 times on Facebook, leading earlier this month to a spike of nearly 40,000 mentions of "vaccine deaths" across social platforms and the internet, according to an analysis by media intelligence firm Signal Labs.

Medical experts point to a real-world study showing a strong correlation between vaccination and decreases in severe COVID-19 disease in Israel. The nation's health ministry said in a Thursday statement that the COVID-19 vaccine has "profoundly" reduced the rate of deaths and hospitalizations.

As U.S. vaccine supplies continue to increase, immunization efforts will soon shift from targeting a limited supply to the most vulnerable populations to getting as many shots into as many arms as possible. That means tackling the third of the country's population who say they will not or probably won't get it, as measured by a February AP-NORC poll.

"Vaccine hesitancy and misinformation could be a big barrier to getting enough of the population vaccinated to end the crisis," said Lisa Fazio, a professor of psychology at Vanderbilt University.

Some health officials and academics generally believe that the social-platform efforts are helpful, at least on the margins. What's not clear is how big of a dent they can put in the problem.

"If someone truly believes that the COVID vaccine is harmful and they feel a responsibility to share that with friends and family ... they will find a way," Guidry said.

And some still blame business models that they say encouraged the platforms to serve up engaging, if false, coronavirus misinformation in order to profit from advertising.

When the Center for Countering Digital Hate recently studied the crossover between different types of disinformation and hate speech, it found that Instagram tended to cross-pollinate misinformation via its algorithm. Instagram might feed an account that followed a QAnon conspiracy site further posts from, say, white nationalists or anti-vaxxers.

"You continue to allow things to disintegrate because of the seamless intermingling of misinformation and information on your platforms," Ahmed, the center's CEO, said.

## Merkel's party faces tough election-year test in state polls

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Two German states choose new legislatures on Sunday, the first major political test of a year in which a national election will determine who succeeds Chancellor Angela Merkel. The weekend votes come at a challenging time for the longtime leader's party.

They also are expected to highlight the increased popularity of the environmentalist Green party, which could hold the key to forming Germany's next government and is expected to make its own first bid for the chancellery.

Amid discontent over a sluggish start to Germany's vaccination drive, and as a long lockdown only gradually loosens, Merkel's center-right Union bloc faces blowback over allegations that two lawmakers profited from deals to procure masks early in the coronavirus pandemic.

That complicates an already demanding battle to dislodge two popular governors — among them Winfried Kretschmann, Germany's only Green governor. He has firmly cemented his appeal to centrist voters over

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 33 of 88

a decade leading Baden-Wuerttemberg, an economic powerhouse that is home to automakers Daimler and Porsche.

The votes should help determine who gains political momentum for the months ahead. And they come as the center-right approaches a decision on a candidate to succeed Merkel when Germany elects a new parliament on Sept. 26.

It's an unpromising moment for the new leader of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, Armin Laschet, to face his first big political test. The centrist Laschet won the party leadership in January.

"The ratings for the CDU were going down anyway and now the so-called 'mask affair' is coming on top of that," said Thorsten Faas, a political science professor at Berlin's Free University. "The signs for the CDU and Armin Laschet aren't good — very weak results should be expected for the party."

Baden-Wuerttemberg in southwestern Germany, where some 7.7 million people are eligible to vote, was dominated by the CDU for decades until Kretschmann won power a decade ago. That stunning result for the Greens came as the Fukushima reactor disaster in Japan accelerated the end of nuclear power in Germany.

Kretschmann, now 72, a popular, fatherly and even conservative figure with a strong regional accent, has dug in since then. In the last election five years ago, the Greens overtook the CDU to become the strongest party in the state.

Polls suggest they can hope to widen their lead on Sunday. That could provide a bounce at the national level for the traditionally left-leaning party, which has become increasingly open to alliances with conservatives.

This time, Green election posters in a campaign that has involved little traditional campaigning because of the pandemic feature a photo of Kretschmann with the slogan "You know me." Merkel, who isn't seeking a fifth term after nearly 16 years in power, once used that phrase in a debate to underline her own largely ideology-free appeal.

Kretschmann has run Baden-Wuerttemberg with the CDU as his junior coalition partner since 2016 — and a coalition between the two parties is widely viewed as a strong possibility at the national level after the September election. His CDU challenger, Susanne Eisenmann, doesn't come close to matching Kretschmann's personal popularity.

Also voting Sunday is Baden-Wuerttemberg's neighbor, the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Some 3.1 million people are eligible to vote there.

The center-left Social Democrats have led the once solidly conservative region for 30 years — currently under governor Malu Dreyer, whose personal popularity has kept her party's support above its dismal national ratings. She faces a close race against CDU challenger Christian Baldauf, a longtime regional lawmaker who is far less familiar to voters.

Many people had already voted by mail, so it's unclear to what extent the scandal over lawmakers in the CDU and its Bavaria-only sister party, the Christian Social Union, allegedly enriching themselves through mask deals will impact on Sunday's vote. Nikolas Loebel, a CDU lawmaker from Baden-Wuerttemberg, and the CSU's Georg Nuesslein both quit their parties on Monday and say they won't run for parliament again.

The Union bloc of CDU and CSU benefited from Merkel's perceived good management of the pandemic over the past year and still leads national polls by a distance, but this year has started badly. Germany's vaccination campaign has been significantly slower than those of Israel, Britain and even the United States.

Laschet says that he and Markus Soeder, the CSU leader and Bavarian governor who is the other serious contender to run for chancellor, will decide on the CDU candidate in April or May. Soeder, an advocate of tough action to beat back the virus, has gained in stature during the pandemic.

If Sunday's elections go badly for the CDU, that will be "tailwind" for Soeder, said Faas, the political science professor. "But overall, it turns out that the Union isn't really prepared for the post-Angela Merkel era."

Whoever takes on the task will face the Greens' candidate, who has yet to be chosen, and current Finance Minister Olaf Scholz in September.

National polls show that the Greens' support has roughly doubled since the last German election, while

that of Scholz's Social Democrats — traditionally Germany's biggest center-left party and now the junior partner in Merkel's national government — has dwindled.

Kerstin Sopke in Berlin contributed to this report.

## Amid pandemic, 'an international epidemic' of childhood pain

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — By the time his parents rushed him to the hospital, 11-year-old Pablo was barely eating and had stopped drinking entirely. Weakened by months of self-privation, his heart had slowed to a crawl and his kidneys were faltering. Medics injected him with fluids and fed him through a tube — first steps toward stitching together yet another child coming apart amid the tumult of the coronavirus crisis.

For doctors who treat them, the pandemic's impact on the mental health of children is increasingly alarming. The Paris pediatric hospital caring for Pablo has seen a doubling in the number of children and young teenagers requiring treatment after attempted suicides since September.

Doctors elsewhere report similar surges, with children — some as young as 8 — deliberately running into traffic, overdosing on pills and otherwise self-harming. In Japan, child and adolescent suicides hit record levels in 2020, according to the Education Ministry.

Pediatric psychiatrists say they're also seeing children with coronavirus-related phobias, tics and eating disorders, obsessing about infection, scrubbing their hands raw, covering their bodies with disinfectant gel and terrified of getting sick from food.

Also increasingly common, doctors say, are children suffering panic attacks, heart palpitations and other symptoms of mental anguish, as well as chronic addictions to mobile devices and computer screens that have become their sitters, teachers and entertainers during lockdowns, curfews and school closures.

"There is no prototype for the child experiencing difficulties," said Dr. Richard Delorme, who heads the psychiatric unit treating Pablo at the giant Robert Debré pediatric hospital, the busiest in France. "This concerns all of us."

Pablo's father, Jerome, is still trying to understand why his son gradually fell sick with a chronic eating disorder as the pandemic took hold, slowly starving himself until the only foods he would eat were small quantities of rice, tuna and cherry tomatoes.

Jerome suspects that disruptions last year to Pablo's routines may have contributed to his illness. Because France was locked down, the boy had no in-school classes for months and couldn't say goodbye to his friends and teacher at the end of the school year.

"It was very tough," Jerome said. "This is a generation that has taken a beating."

Sometimes, other factors pile on misery beyond the burden of the 2.6 million COVID-19 victims who have died in the world's worst health crisis in a century.

Islamic State extremists who killed 130 people in gun and bomb attacks across Paris in 2015, including at a cafe on Pablo's walk to school, also left a searing mark on his childhood. Pablo used to believe that the cafe's dead customers were buried under the sidewalk where he trod.

When he was hospitalized at the end of February, Pablo had lost a third of his previous weight. His heart rate was so slow that medics struggled to find a pulse, and one of his kidneys was failing, said his father, who agreed to talk about his son's illness on condition they not be identified by their surname.

"It is a real nightmare to have a child who is destroying himself," the father said.

Pablo's psychiatrist at the hospital, Dr. Coline Stordeur, says some of her other young patients with eating disorders, mostly aged 8 to 12, told her they began obsessing in lockdown about gaining weight because they couldn't stay active. One boy compensated by running laps in his parents' basement for hours each day, losing weight so precipitously that he had to be hospitalized.

Others told her they gradually restricted their diet: "No more sugar, then no more fat, and eventually no more of anything," she said.

Some children try to keep their mental anguish to themselves, not wanting to further burden the adults

in their lives who are perhaps mourning loved ones or jobs lost to the coronavirus. They “try to be children who are forgotten about, who don’t add to their parents’ problems,” Stordeur said.

Children also may lack the vocabulary of mental illness to voice their need for help and to make a connection between their difficulties and the pandemic.

“They don’t say, ‘Yes, I ended up here because of the coronavirus,’” Delorme said. “But what they tell you about is a chaotic world, of ‘Yes, I’m not doing my activities any more,’ ‘I’m no longer doing my music,’ ‘Going to school is hard in the mornings,’ ‘I am having difficulty waking up,’ ‘I am fed up with the mask.’”

Dr. David Greenhorn said the emergency department at the Bradford Royal Infirmary where he works in northern England used to treat one or two children per week for mental health emergencies, including suicide attempts. The average now is closer to one or two per day, sometimes involving children as young as 8, he said.

“This is an international epidemic, and we are not recognizing it,” Greenhorn said in a telephone interview. “In an 8-year-old’s life, a year is a really, really, really long time. They are fed up. They can’t see an end to it.”

At Robert Debré, the psychiatric unit typically used to see about 20 attempted suicide cases per month involving children aged 15 and under. Not only has that number now doubled in some months since September, but some children also seem ever-more determined to end their lives, Delorme said.

“We are very surprised by the intensity of the desire to die among children who may be 12 or 13 years old,” he said. “We sometimes have children of 9 who already want to die. And it’s not simply a provocation or a blackmail via suicide. It is a genuine wish to end their lives.”

“The levels of stress among children are truly massive,” he said. “The crisis affects all of us, from age 2 to 99.”

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AP writer Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed.

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## Federal look into Breonna Taylor’s death casts a wider net

DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Their numbers have dwindled since protesters first flooded Louisville’s streets after police fatally shot Breonna Taylor in her home a year ago, but their push for justice has never waned.

A federal investigation of the shooting that has been quietly proceeding could be their last chance.

“We can’t expect people to continue to emotionally and mentally keep moving forward when there hasn’t been any justice yet for Breonna Taylor,” said Rep. Attica Scott, a state lawmaker who was tear-gassed and arrested during summer protests in the city. “We’ve been failed every single time from every level of government, and we need a freaking break.”

That could come in the form of the ongoing inquiry by the U.S. Department of Justice, which appears to have expanded well beyond the actions of the three police officers who fired their guns into Taylor’s home on March 13, 2020. Last year, a grand jury formed by state Attorney General Daniel Cameron charged one officer with putting Taylor’s neighbors in danger but issued no charges related to her death.

The warrant that sent the police to Taylor’s home was not part of Cameron’s criminal investigation, but that document and how it was obtained are under review by federal investigators. And there are signs the investigation could range into the Louisville police response to protests after the shooting.

Taylor’s death initially flew under the media radar, as the COVID-19 crisis shut down society, but George Floyd’s death in Minnesota and the release of a chilling 911 call from Taylor’s boyfriend in late May sparked interest in the case.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 36 of 88

Months of protests, police reforms and investigations followed. The city banned controversial "no-knock" warrants, hired a new police chief and paid a \$12 million settlement to Taylor's mother. Two of the officers who fired shots were dismissed from the department, along with a detective who sought the warrant.

Through it all, protesters continued to chant, "Arrest the Cops!" But that hasn't happened.

The federal investigation into her death will be "slow and methodical," experts said, examining everything from what the officers may have been thinking that night to how they were trained leading up to the shooting.

"The civil rights investigation will turn the whole situation upside-down," said Cynthia Deitl, the former head of the FBI's civil rights unit who has overseen similar police shooting probes. "You look at everything — everything the officers ever learned."

"It takes time to build a case against police officers," Deitl said.

She said a change in administrations in Washington wouldn't have an effect on the officials who are leading the case.

After Taylor's front door was breached by officers, her boyfriend fired his gun once, saying later that he feared an intruder was entering the apartment. One officer was struck, and he and two other officers fired 32 shots into the apartment, striking Taylor five times.

The FBI has declined to comment on specifics of the investigation, but there are signs that other actions by the Louisville Metro Police Department have drawn their attention. That includes the response to citizen protests, especially in late May and early June when the city was under a curfew and officers patrolled the streets in force.

FBI agents have interviewed a local TV reporter who was struck with pepper balls fired by Louisville police during Taylor demonstrations in early summer.

They also have interviewed witnesses to the shooting death of West Louisville eatery owner David McAtee, who was killed by a National Guard member after Louisville police sprayed his customers with pepper balls during a curfew prompted by protests. McAtee fired two shots from his gun before he was shot dead.

Steve Romines, a lawyer who is suing Louisville police on behalf of McAtee's family, said he didn't know if federal investigators' witness interviews were part of a larger investigation tied to Taylor or a separate probe.

Despite disappointment with the grand jury outcome, there is "cautious and guarded hope" that the federal investigation could bring some measure of justice, community activist Christopher 2X said.

The FBI's Louisville office has declined to provide details of the federal investigation into the Taylor shooting while it is ongoing.

But on a July conference call with an AP reporter and others organized by 2X, Robert Brown, Louisville FBI's special agent in charge, said investigators would look "at all aspects of it, where the facts that led up to this, the actual incident and things that might have occurred afterwards." Civil rights violations by individuals acting in an official capacity, like police officers, can bring up to a life sentence in prison upon conviction, according to the Justice Department.

Cameron, the Kentucky attorney general, has confirmed that federal investigators were looking at how the warrant was obtained.

Two of the Louisville officers, Myles Cosgrove and Brett Hankison, who fired guns during the March 13 raid have been dismissed, along with Joshua Jaynes, the detective who sought the warrant and later acknowledged that it contained false information. The third officer, Jonathan Mattingly, who was shot in the leg by Taylor's boyfriend during the raid, remains with the department.

Jaynes may face scrutiny for a false line in the warrant that he wrote for Taylor's apartment. The detective said he confirmed with a U.S. postal inspector that a suspected drug dealer was receiving packages at Taylor's home. He later admitted he didn't contact the postal service.

In a response to a civil lawsuit filed by Taylor's boyfriend, Jaynes said he made an "honest mistake" and did not knowingly break the law.

A recent internal investigation of the Louisville Police Department by a consulting firm found numerous

problems with Louisville's warrant process. It said supervisors generally approved probable cause statements in search warrants "without performing an in-depth review" of the content.

Proving that Jaynes and other officers were aware they were violating Taylor's or others' civil rights will be key to a conviction in a federal case, Deitl said.

It's a high standard.

"The feds have to prove that the officer knew what he was doing, knew it was wrong and did it anyway," Deitl said.

That can lead to long-term investigations that sometime last years.

"It's frustrating for the public, but what I always try to tell the victim's family is: I know you're antsy; I know you want an answer from us today," Deitl said. "But what you really want is an honest and truthful and very thorough investigation, and that's going to take time."

## **Iraqi woman who met the pope sees little chance for change**

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — The story of Doha Sabah Abdallah's personal tragedy and loss deeply resonated with Pope Francis during his historic visit last weekend to the northern Iraqi town of Qaraqosh, once devastated by Islamic State group militants.

Back in 2014, her son's death alerted the town's Christian community to the impending IS onslaught. A mortar shell fired by the militants as they approached Qaraqosh struck outside Abdallah's house, killing her son and two cousins playing in the front yard.

The pope heard Abdallah's testimony at a church ceremony in Qaraqosh last Sunday.

But just days after the pontiff's visit — meant to give hope to Iraq's dwindling Christian community and encourage its members to stay — Abdallah doubts the realities of life in Iraq will change.

She said she would also leave if given a chance.

"The pope doesn't have Moses' staff, he can't part the seas and solve our very difficult problems," she told The Associated Press over the phone on Thursday. "If I had the resources or if someone gave me the chance to leave this country, I would never come back."

Years after Iraqi forces declared victory over IS and drove militants from the area, Abdallah's disabled daughter still cannot attend proper schools, homes are still shattered and in ruins. Jobs are hard to come by, and none of Abdallah's relatives abroad plan to return.

Iraq's Christian population, which has existed since the time of Christ, has dwindled from around 1.5 million before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion to just a few hundred thousand today. Estimates put the current population between 250,000-500,000.

As churches and Christian communities were increasingly targeted by extremist groups at the height of Iraq's sectarian war that followed the invasion, the country saw an exodus of Christians. Even more fled after the brutal 2014 IS onslaught that emptied out entire Christian villages across the northern plains of Ninevah.

Francis's four-day visit to Iraq, including Qaraqosh, aimed to encourage Christians to stay, rebuild and restore what he called Iraq's "intricately designed carpet" of faiths and ethnic groups.

Qaraqosh, a majority Christian town in Ninevah, is just one of many that was attacked by IS seven years ago. The militants overran the town, damaged its church and scrawled the proclamation "Islamic State will remain" on town walls.

The few Christians who returned after the liberation of Qaraqosh in 2016 found bullet-riddled mannequins and other signs that the militants had used the church premises as a firing range for target practice.

Many homes were leveled in the battles to oust the group and basic services have yet to be restored. Most of the town's Christians remain scattered elsewhere in Iraq or abroad.

Abdallah remembers vividly that August 2014, when IS militants rampaged through Christian communities across Ninevah. She remembers her son and his two cousins.

"Their souls saved the whole city," she recounted to the pontiff on Sunday.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 38 of 88

On the plane back to Rome, the pope singled her testimony and told reporters it had "touched me most." "She said one word: forgiveness. I was moved," Francis said.

At every turn of his historic trip as he crisscrossed Iraq, Francis urged Iraqis to embrace diversity — from Najaf in the south, where he held a historic face-to-face meeting with powerful Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to Nineveh to the north, where he met with Christian victims like Abdallah.

But after the pontiff's departure, Abdallah said, reality has set in.

"Our situation is difficult because there is no internal agreement within the government," she said. "How could anyone come back? There are no basic services."

Bahnam Yussef, another resident of Qaraqosh, echoed her concerns. "The pope's visit drew the world's attention to Iraq," he said, but Christians need more assurances before returning.

"They must get help, some of them have houses destroyed and burned, all this loss has to be compensated," he added.

Marking the pope's visit, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi declared March 6 a national day for tolerance and co-existence. But such gestures have not been accompanied by practical steps. So far, Iraq has not passed any legislation or enacted policies to entice Christians to return.

Abdallah said her wish is to live in an Iraq where Christians and other minorities are afforded equal rights — not today's Iraq where the sectarian power-sharing system often marginalizes minorities.

"It was incredible to see the pope, I never dreamed I would be so close to him" she said. "But it hasn't changed anything."

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Associated Press writer Nicole Winfield in Rome contributed to this report.

## **For Syrians, a decade of displacement with no end in sight**

By FAY ABUELGASIM Associated Press

BAR ELIAS, Lebanon (AP) — Mohammed Zakaria has lived in a plastic tent in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley for almost as long as war has raged in his native Syria.

He and his family fled bombings in 2012, thinking it would be a short, temporary stay. His hometown of Homs was under siege, and subject to a ferocious Syrian military campaign. He didn't even bring his ID with him.

Almost 10 years later, the family still hasn't gone back. The 53-year-old Zakaria is among millions of Syrians unlikely to return in the foreseeable future, even as they face deteriorating living conditions abroad. On top of his displacement, Zakaria now struggles to survive Lebanon's financial meltdown and social implosion.

"We came on the assumption that we would come in and out," said Zakaria, sitting outside his tent on a cold day recently as his children walked around in worn-out slippers.

Syria has been mired in civil war since 2011, when Syrians revolted against President Bashar Assad amid a wave of Arab Spring uprisings. The protests in Syria, which began in March that year, quickly turned into insurgency — and eventually a full-blown civil war — in response to a brutal military crackdown by Assad's security apparatus.

Nearly half a million people have been killed, and about 12,000 children have died or were injured in the conflict in the past decade, according to the U.N. children's agency, UNICEF. The conflict also resulted in the largest displacement crisis since World War II.

The Norwegian Refugee Council this week said that since the war began in 2011, an estimated 2.4 million people were displaced every year in and outside Syria. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians face continued displacement with each year that the conflict continues and economic conditions deteriorate.

The war has left Syria divided and in ruins. Nearly a million children have been born in exile.

Of the country's pre-war population of 23 million, nearly 5.6 million are refugees living in neighboring countries and Europe. Some 6.5 million are displaced within Syria, most of them for longer than five years.

Lebanon, a small Mediterranean country with a population of about 5 million, hosts the highest concentration of refugees per capita, estimated at around 1 million. Most of them live in informal makeshift tent

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 39 of 88

settlements spread out across Lebanon's Bekaa, not far from the Syrian border.

A former porter for a Homs construction company, Zakaria has struggled to provide for his family, even as it continues to grow in Lebanon. He has two wives and eight children, including two who were born in Lebanon. One of his children was only a year old when the family escaped Syria.

In Lebanon, jobs are hard to come by as an economic and financial crisis roils the country. Financial assistance is scarce and irregular. A currency crash sent inflation and prices soaring. Zakaria now tries to make ends meet by selling gas bottles used for heaters to other refugees in his settlement.

He makes 1,000 Lebanese pounds (about 10 cents) from each gas canister he sells. But this winter, his neighbors in the settlement, which houses around 200 Syrian refugee families, could hardly afford to buy enough gas to heat their tents.

Through the unprecedented economic crisis, Lebanon's currency has so far lost over 80% of its value. "Life is expensive here," he said. "It is so expensive even for medicine or doctors."

When his wife needed urgent eye surgery, Zakaria arranged for her to be smuggled briefly back into Syria to do the surgery there. The surgery was going to cost 22 million Lebanese pounds — about \$2,200 at the current market rate. They managed to get it done in Syria for 85,000 Lebanese pounds (\$850).

Zakaria said he feels great sadness for his younger three children who have no memories of Syria and their home in Homs. They have also not been to school, and don't know how to read and write.

According to UNICEF, nearly 750,000 Syrian children in neighboring countries, including Lebanon, are out of school.

"All of our memories are gone now," said Zakaria, watching his children run around, playing hopscotch. Two dirty street cats serve as their playmates.

"Now we have a generation — 10-year-olds are a new generation," he said. "I have young kids and ... they don't even know our neighbors" back home.

Many Syrians are unable to return because their homes were destroyed in the fighting, or because they fear military conscription or retribution from government forces.

Zakaria clings to the hope that he would one day go back to his home.

"God willing we will die in our country," he said. "Everyone should die in their own country."

## **Biden aims for quicker shots, 'independence from this virus'**

By ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One year after the nation was brought to a near-standstill by the coronavirus, President Joe Biden pledged in his first prime-time address to make all adults eligible for vaccines by May 1 and raised the possibility of beginning to "mark our independence from this virus" by the Fourth of July. He offered Americans fresh hope and appealed anew for their help.

Speaking in the White House East Room Thursday night, Biden honored the "collective suffering" of Americans over the past year in his 24-minute address and then offered them a vision for a return to a modicum of normalcy this summer.

"We are bound together by the loss and the pain of the days that have gone by," he said. "We are also bound together by the hope and the possibilities in the days in front of us."

He predicted Americans could safely gather at least in small groups for July Fourth to "make this Independence Day truly special."

But he also cautioned that this was a "goal" and attaining it depends on people's cooperation in following public health guidelines and rolling up their sleeves to get vaccinated as soon as eligible. Only that, he said, can bring about an end to a pandemic that has killed more than 530,000 Americans and disrupted the lives of countless more.

"While it was different for everyone, we all lost something," Biden said of the sacrifices of the yearlong-and-counting pandemic.

The speech came just hours after Biden signed into law a \$1.9 trillion relief package that he said will help defeat the virus, nurse the economy back to health and deliver direct aid to Americans struggling to

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 40 of 88

make ends meet.

Some cash distributions could begin arriving in the bank accounts of Americans this weekend.

"This historic legislation is about rebuilding the backbone of this country," Biden said as he signed the bill in the Oval Office.

Most noticeable to many Americans are provisions providing up to \$1,400 in direct payments and extending \$300 weekly emergency unemployment benefits into early September. Also 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, food programs and people's utility bills.

In his Thursday night address, Biden said that as vaccine supplies continue to increase, he will direct states and territories to make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1. The U.S. is expecting to have enough doses for those 255 million adults by the end of that month, but Biden warned the process of actually administering those doses would take time, even as his administration looks to instill confidence in the safety of the vaccines to overcome hesitance.

"Let me be clear, that doesn't mean everyone's going to have that shot immediately, but it means you'll be able to get in line beginning May 1," he said.

Biden announced an expansion of other efforts to speed vaccinations, including deploying an additional 4,000 active-duty troops to support vaccination efforts and allowing more people — such as medical students, veterinarians and dentists — to deliver shots. He is also directing more doses toward some 950 community health centers and up to 20,000 retail pharmacies, to make it easier for people to get vaccinated closer to their homes.

Biden added that his administration is planning to launch a nationwide website to help people find doses, saying it would address frustrations so that there would be "no more searching day and night for an appointment."

Even as he offered optimism, Biden made clear that the July 4 timetable applied only to smaller gatherings, not larger ones, and requires cooperation from Americans to continue to wear face coverings, maintain social distancing and follow federal guidelines meant to slow the spread of the virus in the near term. He also called on them roll up their sleeves to get vaccinated as soon as they're eligible.

This is "not the time to not stick with the rules," Biden said, warning of the potential for backsliding just as the nation is on the cusp of defeating the virus. "I need you, the American people," he added. "I need you. I need every American to do their part."

The House gave final congressional approval to the sweeping package by a near party line 220-211 vote on Wednesday, 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.

Biden had originally planned to sign the bill on Friday, but it arrived at the White House more quickly than anticipated.

"We want to move as fast as possible," tweeted chief of staff Ron Klain.

Biden's initial prime-time speech was "a big moment," said presidential historian and Rice University professor Douglas Brinkley. "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 were 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.

Almost exactly one year ago, President Donald Trump addressed the nation to mark the WHO's declaration

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 41 of 88

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.

Biden implicitly criticized his predecessor, opening his remarks by referring to “denials for days, weeks, then months that led to more deaths, more infections, more stress, and more loneliness.”

## **Bangladesh TV hires country’s 1st transgender news anchor**

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — A Bangladeshi satellite television station has hired the country’s first transgender news anchor, saying it hopes the appointment will help change society.

Tashnuva Anan Shishir, who previously worked as a rights activist and actress, debuted on Dhaka-based Boishakhi TV on Monday, International Women’s Day. She read a three-minute news bulletin, and after finishing cried as her colleagues applauded and cheered.

“I was very nervous, I was feeling so much emotional, but I had in my mind that I must overcome this ordeal, this final test,” Shishir, 29, said in an interview Tuesday.

In her early teens, she began to live publicly her female identity. She said family members, relatives and neighbors started teasing her and she was bullied and sexually exploited.

She started feeling that it was impossible to continue living and attempted suicide, she said.

The worst thing that happened was that her father stopped talking to her, saying she was the reason that her family was losing face, Shishir said.

“I left home,” she said.

She moved from her family’s house in a southern coastal district to live a solitary life in the capital, where she underwent hormone therapy, worked for charities and acted with a local theater group. In January, she began studying public health at a Dhaka university, which she is continuing alongside her job at the TV station.

Bangladesh officially has more than 10,000 transgender people, but activists say the actual number is much higher in the nation of more than 160 million people. The LGBT community faces social isolation, sexual abuse and other forms of harassment. Finding employment is very difficult, and many live by begging or selling sex.

Since 2013, the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has allowed transgender people to identify themselves as a separate gender. They were given voting rights in 2018.

Some changes are already visible.

In November, a charity group opened Bangladesh’s first Islamic school for the transgender community.

Boishakhi TV said it wanted to be part of the changes and has hired a second transgender person in its drama department.

“Our prime minister has taken many steps for the transgender people. Encouraged by such steps, we have appointed two transgender people. We want the attitude of society to change through these appointments,” said Tipu Alam Milon, the station’s deputy managing director.

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This story was first published on March 10, 2021. It was updated on March 12, 2021, to correct by removing the anchor’s former name and conforming to AP style.

## **COVID relief bill could permanently alter social safety net**

By ASHRAF KHALIL and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package is being hailed by Democrats and progressive policy advocates as a generational expansion of the social safety net, providing food and housing assistance, greater access to health care and direct aid to families in what amounts to a broad-based attack on the cycle of poverty.

With more than \$6 billion for food security-related programs, more than \$25 billion in emergency rental

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 42 of 88

assistance, nearly \$10 billion in emergency mortgage aid for homeowners, and extensions of already-expanded unemployment payments through early September, the package is full of provisions designed to help families and individuals survive and recover from pandemic-induced economic hardships.

"When you stand back and look at it, that's when you really can appreciate the sheer scope of it," said Ellen Vollinger, legal director for the Food Research & Action Center, a food-security advocacy group. "The scope is both impressive and much needed."

Several aspects seem targeted at restructuring the country's social safety net and actually lifting people out of poverty. It's the kind of ambition and somewhat old school Democratic Party ideal that has observers referencing former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal.

"We haven't seen a shift like this seen since FDR. It's saying families are too big to fail, children are too big to fail, the elderly are too big to fail," said Andre Perry, senior fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution. "It's a recognition that the social safety net is not working and was not working prior to the pandemic."

Biden himself, when signing the package into law Thursday, referenced it as an overt attempt to redraw the country's economic fault lines in a way that's bigger than the pandemic. "This historic legislation is about rebuilding the backbone of this country and giving people in this nation, working people and middle-class folks, the people who built the country -- a fighting chance," Biden said.

And House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called it "one of the most transformative and historic bills any of us will ever have the opportunity to support."

Perry in particular pointed to the expansion of the child tax credit system as a potentially foundational change. The legislation provides families with up to \$3,600 this year for each child and also expands the credit to millions of families currently making too little to qualify for the full benefits.

"That is really going to put a dent in child poverty," Perry said.

In promoting the child tax credit expansion, Democrats rallied around an analysis that predicted it would cut nationwide child poverty by 45%.

The legislation extends through September last year's 15% increase in benefits offered by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program, commonly known as food stamps. It also provides extra funds to administer the expanded SNAP program and to expand access to SNAP online purchasing.

The package also includes what amounts to the biggest expansion of federal help for health insurance since the Obama-era Affordable Care Act more than 10 years ago. Several million people could see their health insurance costs reduced, and there's also an incentive for states to expand Medicaid coverage, if they haven't already done so.

Those changes, however, won't be as immediate as the direct cash injections in other areas.

Housing advocates give generally positive reviews, saying the massive relief packages for both renters and home owners should be enough to stave off the debts incurred so far. "This is an appropriate response for an unprecedented time. Clearly there's a tremendous need to avoid an eviction tsunami," said Diane Yentel, president of the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

But she also warned that the economic hardships, and need for assistance, will extend past the end of the pandemic.

"Many of the jobs that low-income workers have lost won't come back right away," she said.

Yentel called on Biden to extend the national moratorium on evictions via executive order. The current moratorium, imposed by the Centers for Disease Control as part of the national health emergency, is being challenged in multiple court cases and expires at the end of March.

Many of the legislation's changes are temporary, but advocates and Democratic legislators are talking openly about making some of them permanent.

"Getting something out of the code is often times harder than getting something into the code," House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., told reporters Tuesday, referring to the relief bill's expansion of the child tax credit.

He added, "What we did is unlikely to go away."

At this point, the child tax credit expansion would expire at the end of the year without some sort of

congressional intervention. But permanently enshrining those changes into law could be a battle. Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation has estimated the child tax credit's cost at \$110 billion, making it one of the single most expensive items in the whole package. Extending that over multiple years would be extremely costly, and would likely draw serious opposition, especially from Republicans.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, called Democrats' expansion of those credits "sweeping new government benefits with no work requirements whatsoever," suggesting the shape of the GOP opposition strategy ahead. But the provision is projected to lift millions of families out of poverty, and progressives believe there will be tremendous pressure on Republicans to allow the change.

Many also want to preserve the bill's temporarily beefed up earned income tax credit, and its improved tax breaks for caring for children and dependents and for paid sick and family leave.

A study by the Tax Policy Center concluded that the relief package would reduce federal taxes in 2021 by an average of \$3,000 per household. Low- and moderate-income households (making \$91,000 or less) would receive nearly 70 percent of the tax benefits, the study concluded.

"The question will be do they want child poverty to go back up again" by letting that credit expire, said Steve Wamhoff, director of federal tax policy for the liberal Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

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Associated Press writer Josh Boak contributed to this report.

## Faith leaders' year of pandemic: grief, solace, resilience

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO, DAVID CRARY and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

In a pandemic-wracked year, religious leaders and spiritual counselors across the U.S. ministered to the ill, fed the hungry, consoled the bereaved. Some did so while recovering from COVID-19 themselves or mourning the loss of their own family members and friends.

At times, they despaired. So many people got sick, so many died, and these faith leaders couldn't hug the ailing and the grieving, or hold their hands.

For safety's sake, their congregations were kept away from in-person services for months, but the need to minister to them only intensified.

Amid the grief and anxiety, these faith leaders showed resilience and found reasons for hope as they re-imagined their mission. Here are some of their reflections on a trying year.

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### LOSSES

In the early weeks of the pandemic, the Rev. Joseph Dutan lost his father to the coronavirus. Days earlier Dutan's mentor and friend, 49-year-old Jorge Ortiz-Garay, had become the first Roman Catholic priest in the U.S. to die from COVID-19.

Dutan felt grief, fear, even doubt. He mourned his father while consoling the community of St. Brigid, a Catholic church in an area straddling Brooklyn and Queens that had among the highest infection rates in New York City. His grief, he said, made him better able to help others enduring similar pain.

"When they come in for a funeral Mass of a loved one ... I feel I can relate to them, I can cry with them," Dutan said. "I comfort them and tell them: 'Things are going to be all right. We're not alone; we're in this together.'"

In the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles, Rabbi Noah Farkas said the pandemic's toll has been particularly severe among the many older adults in his Valley Beth Shalom congregation.

He estimated that 25 to 50 of its roughly 5,000 members lost their lives to COVID-19 — and even more died, predominantly older congregants, "because COVID created a life situation that was untenable."

Many were isolated in their rooms at assisted-care facilities, he said. "There was suicide, drug addiction, exhaustion — all the things you can think of when mental health deteriorates."

Farkas conducted 20 funerals in January alone, as California was hit by a wave of infections, always wearing a mask and sometimes a face shield. He was saddened by the inability to hug mourners.

Among the hardest-hit churches has been Saint Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City. Its leaders

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 44 of 88

say more than 60 members of the congregation of about 800 have died of COVID-19. Almost all were part of the community of some 400 who attended services in Spanish.

Bishop Paul Egensteiner, who oversees Saint Peter's and other New York City-area congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said the emotional toll on pastors has been heavy.

"They couldn't go anywhere, couldn't take vacation," he said. "It's been a great strain — trying to figure out how we're going to keep people connected, how we're going to do worship and hospital visits."

Imam Ahmed Ali of IQRA Masjid Community & Tradition, a mosque and community center in Brooklyn, sprang into action in late March after a funeral home called asking for his help to retrieve from hospitals the bodies of people who died of COVID-19 and give them burial rites. Ali was scared of the fast-spreading virus, like others, but he felt a calling to serve God and his religious duty.

He began putting in volunteer shifts of up to 20 hours transporting bodies, putting them in freezers in the funeral home, washing and enshrouding them in white cloth and taking them to cemeteries for burial.

Typically he performs the janazah, or funeral, prayer only a few times a year. At the height of the crisis in New York City, he was doing as many as 20 in a single day, and over about three months, he oversaw or took part in nearly 300 burials in all.

"It was a really challenging time, and it was a great loss for every community," Ali said. "I pray that we don't have to see that kind of pandemic again."

Friendswood United Methodist Church, in the suburbs of Houston, has been spared a heavy death toll.

But one active member of the 900-strong congregation who did die of COVID-19 was "a pillar of the church" who served on many of its boards and committees and won friends for his good humor and generosity, said Jim Bass, the pastor.

"He was 74 but no underlying health conditions that we knew of," Bass said. "When he became sick, for us in the congregation it really hit home."

## ADJUSTMENTS

Like thousands of houses of worship nationwide, Valley Beth Shalom shifted swiftly to online services.

Farkas and his team also launched what they called a "war on isolation," including a new over-the-phone buddy system to connect isolated people starved of human contact. Volunteers selected congregation members whom they called at least once a week, and friendships sprang up between 20-somethings and octogenarians.

With no in-person worship, Farkas encouraged community events respecting health guidelines. For the recent Purim holiday, the congregation staged a drive-through carnival in the parking lot with about 160 families taking part.

"We've learned a bunch," Farkas said, "but if I had to pick one thing, it's that we didn't give up."

Friendswood Methodist spent more than \$20,000 on video equipment last year to provide online worship. In-person services have now resumed, with a quarter of pre-pandemic attendance. Bass said there's enough room in the 1,100-seat sanctuary for adequate social distancing; he encourages worshippers to sing hymns quietly to themselves through their masks.

For Esther Roman, a chaplain at New York's Mount Sinai Morningside hospital, the pandemic has entailed ministering to one grieving family after another.

She recalled sitting 6 feet from one devastated woman, tears rolling down her masked face as she posed an anguished question to Roman: Why did God let her otherwise healthy, vibrant mother die? The chaplain couldn't comfort the woman as she would have done pre-pandemic: by holding and squeezing her hand.

"It was one of those moments that I resent the inability to offer support in the many ways that I used to be able to," Roman said. "I had to try to have my words do the embracing."

She and others have had to learn to transmit love or support via digital screens and through face shields and masks.

"We all rose to the challenge," Roman said. "We were drafted into this war."

## SILVER LININGS

Even as the pandemic was subsiding in New York City in January, Saint Peter's suffered a new trauma: Severe flood damage from a ruptured municipal water main.

The Midtown Manhattan parish is known for its Jazz Vespers program, and the badly damaged items included treasured musical instruments and archives of several jazz greats. It further complicated plans to resume in-person worship, for which there is still no date set.

Yet the congregation's president, Christopher Vergara, said the community has grown closer with increased attendance to online services.

"We created a community network so people could check in with others to see how they're doing," Vergara said. "We've created a lot of small online groups — knitting, history, the arts."

"The flood was a bad thing, but we've really clung to each other," he added. "We've gone from surviving to thriving."

Friendwood Methodist also was badly damaged by flooding — in its case, when multiple pipes froze and then burst amid the recent severe storm in Texas.

Bass was astounded when more than 50 congregants responded to his emergency appeal for help, hurrying to the unlit church with push brooms and squeegees and working to clear the water.

"We say the church isn't the building, it's people. And it is true," Bass said. "This has really reminded people of the importance of community."

Christopher Johnson, an assistant pastor of Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church, said his Houston congregation was already suffering from lost social interaction, vanished jobs and food insecurity when it was dealt a new blow in May by the death of his boyhood friend George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis.

Johnson remembered Floyd as a respected community member who helped host a party at the church with free AIDS testing when Houston hosted the Super Bowl in 2017.

Johnson said Floyd's death, which sparked nationwide protests and awakening on racial injustice, had a special impact in part because it occurred amid a pandemic wreaking a disproportionate toll on African Americans.

"People had to take a pause, and it is in that pause that we realized that the world had changed," Johnson said.

Johnson said his church responded to the pandemic by working with local leaders to provide personal protective equipment and COVID-19 testing for the community. They used radio shows to discuss health disparities, vaccinations and the recent lifting of a statewide mask mandate.

The pandemic, Johnson said, "has called us to rethink and re-imagine what our philosophy of ministering really is in the age of COVID."

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

## 6 chosen for Chauvin trial jury so far; murder charge added

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A man who said he has a "very negative" impression of Derek Chauvin nevertheless became the sixth juror selected for the former Minneapolis police officer's trial in George Floyd's death.

The man, who told attorneys he could set that aside and consider the evidence in the case, was the only juror chosen Thursday in a day most notable for the judge restoring a third-degree murder charge against Chauvin.

When jury selection resumes Friday for a fourth day, the panel seated so far will include five men and one woman. Three of those seated are white, one is multiracial, one is Hispanic, and one is Black, according to Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill.

Cahill's restoration of the third-degree murder charge came at the start of Thursday's proceedings, handing prosecutors one more option for a conviction if they choose. Chauvin, failed to get appellate courts to block the charge. Cahill had earlier rejected it as not warranted by the circumstances of Floyd's death,

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 46 of 88

but an appellate court ruling in an unrelated case established new grounds.

Cahill told potential jurors after the ruling that he still expects opening statements on March 29.

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.

The sole juror picked Thursday described himself as an outgoing, family-oriented soccer fan for whom the prospect of the trial is "kind of exciting."

The man said he's also a fan of true crime podcasts and TV shows. He acknowledged under questioning from defense attorney Eric Nelson that he had a "very negative" impression of Chauvin. The man wrote on his questionnaire that he had seen the widely viewed bystander video of Floyd "desperately screaming that he couldn't breathe" even as other officers stood by and bystanders shouted that Chauvin was killing him.

Yet asked whether he could set his opinions aside and stick to the evidence presented in court, he replied: "I'm willing to see all the evidence and everything, hear witnesses."

Several other candidates were dismissed, including a woman who said she "can't unsee the video" of Chauvin pinning Floyd, and a man who said he has doubts about Black Lives Matter and the way the group pursues its goals.

Nelson pressed the woman hard on her ability to be fair despite her strong opinions.

Asked how the events of last summer had affected the community, she replied: "Negatively affected because a life was taken. Positively because a movement has come from it and the whole world knows." Asked about the property damage during the unrest, she said, "I felt that was what needed to happen to bring this to the world's attention."

"Looking in your heart and looking in your mind can you assure us you can set all of that aside, all of that, and focus only on the evidence that is presented in this courtroom?" Nelson asked.

"I can assure you, but like you mentioned earlier, the video is going to be a big part of the evidence and there's no changing my mind about that," she replied.

At least three weeks have been set aside to complete a jury of 12 plus two alternates. Potential jurors' identities are being protected and they are not shown on livestreamed video of the proceedings.

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.

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

## **Biden aims for quicker shots, 'independence from this virus'**

By ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One year after the nation was brought to a near-standstill by the coronavirus, President Joe Biden pledged in his first prime-time address Thursday night to make all adults eligible for vaccines by May 1 and raised the possibility of beginning to "mark our independence from this virus" by the Fourth of July. He offered Americans fresh hope and appealed anew for their help.

Speaking in the White House East Room, Biden honored the "collective suffering" of Americans over the past year in his 24-minute address and then offered them a vision for a return to a modicum of normalcy this summer.

"We are bound together by the loss and the pain of the days that have gone by," he said. "We are also bound together by the hope and the possibilities in the days in front of us."

He predicted Americans could safely gather at least in small groups for July Fourth to "make this Independence Day truly special."

But he also cautioned that this was a "goal" and attaining it depends on people's cooperation in following public health guidelines and rolling up their sleeves to get vaccinated as soon as eligible. Only that, he said, can bring about an end to a pandemic that has killed more than 530,000 Americans and disrupted the lives of countless more.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 47 of 88

"While it was different for everyone, we all lost something," Biden said of the sacrifices of the yearlong-and-counting pandemic.

The speech came just hours after Biden signed into law a \$1.9 trillion relief package that he said will help defeat the virus, nurse the economy back to health and deliver direct aid to Americans struggling to make ends meet.

Some cash distributions could begin arriving in the bank accounts of Americans this weekend.

"This historic legislation is about rebuilding the backbone of this country," Biden said as he signed the bill in the Oval Office.

Most noticeable to many Americans are provisions providing up to \$1,400 in direct payments and extending \$300 weekly emergency unemployment benefits into early September. Also 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, food programs and people's utility bills.

In his Thursday night address, Biden said that as vaccine supplies continue to increase, he will direct states and territories to make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1. The U.S. is expecting to have enough doses for those 255 million adults by the end of that month, but Biden warned the process of actually administering those doses would take time, even as his administration looks to instill confidence in the safety of the vaccines to overcome hesitance.

"Let me be clear, that doesn't mean everyone's going to have that shot immediately, but it means you'll be able to get in line beginning May 1," he said.

Biden announced an expansion of other efforts to speed vaccinations, including deploying an additional 4,000 active-duty troops to support vaccination efforts and allowing more people — such as medical students, veterinarians and dentists — to deliver shots. He is also directing more doses toward some 950 community health centers and up to 20,000 retail pharmacies, to make it easier for people to get vaccinated closer to their homes.

Biden added that his administration is planning to launch a nationwide website to help people find doses, saying it would address frustrations so that there would be "no more searching day and night for an appointment."

Even as he offered optimism, Biden made clear that the July 4 timetable applied only to smaller gatherings, not larger ones, and requires cooperation from Americans to continue to wear face coverings, maintain social distancing and follow federal guidelines meant to slow the spread of the virus in the near term. He also called on them roll up their sleeves to get vaccinated as soon as they're eligible.

This is "not the time to not stick with the rules," Biden said, warning of the potential for backsliding just as the nation is on the cusp of defeating the virus. "I need you, the American people," he added. "I need you. I need every American to do their part."

The House gave final congressional approval to the sweeping package by a near party line 220-211 vote on Wednesday, 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.

Biden had originally planned to sign the bill on Friday, but it arrived at the White House more quickly than anticipated.

"We want to move as fast as possible," tweeted chief of staff Ron Klain.

Biden's initial prime-time speech was "a big moment," said presidential historian and Rice University professor Douglas Brinkley. "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 were 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.

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.

Biden implicitly criticized his predecessor, opening his remarks by referring to "denials for days, weeks, then months that led to more deaths, more infections, more stress, and more loneliness."

## Myanmar junta kills more protesters, adds Suu Kyi accusation

MANDALAY, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's security forces shot to death at least 10 people protesting the military's coup Thursday, spurning a U.N. Security Council appeal to stop using lethal force and as an independent U.N. expert cited growing evidence of crimes against humanity.

The military also lodged a new allegation against the deposed government leader Aung San Suu Kyi, alleging that in 2017-18 she was illegally given \$600,000 and gold bars worth slightly less by a political ally. She and President Win Myint have been detained on less serious allegations and the new accusation was clearly aimed at discrediting Suu Kyi and perhaps charging her with a serious crime.

Military spokesman Brig. Gen. Zaw Min Tun said at a news conference in the capital that former Yangon Division Chief Minister Phyo Min Thein had admitted giving the money and gold to Suu Kyi, but presented no evidence.

Myanmar has been roiled by protests, strikes and other acts of civil disobedience since the coup toppled Suu Kyi's government Feb. 1 just as it was to start its second term. The takeover reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in the Southeast Asian nation after five decades of military rule.

Local press reports and posts on social media on Thursday said there were six deaths in Myaing, a town in the central Magway Region, and one each in Yangon, Mandalay, Bago and Taungoo. In many cases, photos of what were said to be the bodies of the dead were posted online.

Security forces have attacked previous protests with live ammunition as well, leading to the deaths of at least 60 people. They have also employed tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons and stun grenades. Many demonstrators have been brutally beaten.

On Wednesday, the U.N. Security Council unanimously called for reversing the coup and strongly condemned the violence against peaceful protesters. It also called for "utmost restraint" by the military.

An independent U.N. rights expert focusing on Myanmar told the the U.N.-backed Human Rights Council on Thursday that violence against protesters and even "people sitting peacefully in their homes" was rising. He said the junta was detaining dozens, sometimes hundreds, of people every day.

Thomas Andrews, a former U.S. lawmaker, also pointed to growing evidence of crimes against humanity being committed by security forces, citing murder, enforced disappearance, persecution, torture and imprisonment against basic rules of international law. He acknowledged a formal determination requires a full investigation and trial. He is working under a mandate from the council and does not speak for the U.N.

The human rights group Amnesty International on Thursday issued a report saying Myanmar's military "is using increasingly lethal tactics and weapons normally seen on the battlefield against peaceful protesters and bystanders across the country."

The London-based group said its examination of more than 50 videos from the crackdown confirmed that "security forces appear to be implementing planned, systematic strategies including the ramped-up use of lethal force. Many of the killings documented amount to extrajudicial executions."

"These are not the actions of overwhelmed, individual officers making poor decisions. These are unrepentant commanders already implicated in crimes against humanity, deploying their troops and murderous methods in the open," Joanne Mariner, its director of crisis response, said in a statement.

As widespread street protests against the coup continue, the junta is facing a new challenge from the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 49 of 88

country's ethnic guerrilla forces, which until recently had limited themselves to verbal denunciations of last month's coup.

Reports from Kachin, the northernmost state, said guerrilla forces from the Kachin ethnic minority attacked a government base on Thursday and were in turn attacked. The armed wing of the Kachin political movement is the Kachin Independence Army, or KIA.

"This morning in Hpakant township, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO/KIA) attacked a military council battalion based in Sezin village, and the KIO/KIA's Hpakant-based 9th Brigade and 26 battalions were attacked by helicopter. Both sides are still investigating," The 74 Media reported on Twitter.

A Facebook page for the Kachin Liberation Media said the KIA had overrun the government outpost and seized ammunition. It warned the government against using lethal force to break up anti-coup protests in the Kachin capital, Myitkyina, where two demonstrators were killed this week.

The reports could not be independently confirmed, and ethnic guerrilla armies as well as the government often release exaggerated information. However, even making such an announcement amounts to a sharp warning to the government.

The Kachin actions come a few days after another ethnic guerrilla force belonging to the Karen minority announced it would protect demonstrators in territory it controlled. The Karen National Union deployed armed combatants to guard a protest in Myanmar's southeastern Tanintharyi Region.

Myanmar has more than a dozen ethnic guerrilla armies, mostly in border areas, a legacy of decades-old struggles for greater autonomy from the central government. Many have formal or informal cease-fire agreements with the government, but armed clashes still occur.

There has been speculation that some ethnic groups could form a de facto alliance with the protest movement to pressure the government.

## **N Korean defectors struggle to send money home amid pandemic**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

ANSAN, South Korea (AP) — For the first time in years, Choi Bok-hwa didn't get her annual birthday call from her mother in North Korea. Each January, Choi's mother had climbed a mountain and used a broker's smuggled Chinese cellphone to call South Korea to wish her happy birthday and arrange a badly needed money transfer.

Choi, who hasn't sent money or talked to her 75-year-old mother since May, believes the silence is linked to the pandemic, which led North Korea to shut its borders tighter than ever and impose some of the world's toughest restrictions on movement.

Other defectors in the South have also lost contact with their loved ones in North Korea amid the turmoil of COVID-19 — and the trouble is not just on the North Korean side. The disconnection between defectors and their families in the North is shutting down an important emotional and financial link between the rival Koreas, whose citizens are banned from contacting each other.

Defectors in the South have long shared part of their income with parents, children and siblings in North Korea. But these defectors, who face chronic discrimination and poverty in the South, now say they've stopped or sharply reduced the remittances because of plunging incomes. Others are postponing them because they can't contact the brokers who act as middlemen or because the brokers are demanding extremely high fees.

Choi, a singer in a North Korean-themed art troupe, last year earned only about 10-20% of what she usually gets because of canceled performances.

"I'm waiting for her call more than ever these days," said Choi, 47, who lives in Ansan, just south of Seoul.

About 33,000 North Koreans have escaped to South Korea since North Korea suffered a famine in the mid-1990s. Last year, during the pandemic, only 229 came to South Korea, down from 1,047 in 2019.

Many defectors use brokers to stay in touch with their families in the North, but that process is complex, expensive and risky.

Brokers in North Korea often use smuggled mobile phones to call the South from mountains near the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 50 of 88

border with China, where they can get better reception and avoid official detection.

The calls are often followed by money transfers, which require defectors to send money to the bank accounts of other brokers on the Chinese side of the border. The brokers in China and in North Korea are often separately smuggling goods in and out of North Korea. This means that money transfers don't need to be sent across the border immediately; instead, brokers in North Korea can give the cash to defectors' relatives and get paid back by their smuggling partners in China later.

But North Korea's year-long border closure has battered the smuggling business, leaving brokers with little money to use for defectors' remittances, observers say.

Gen. Robert Abrams, the chief of U.S. troops in South Korea, said last year that North Korea had sent special forces along its border with China to keep smugglers out and had "shoot-to-kill orders in place."

Lee Sang Yong, managing editor at Daily NK in Seoul, an online media organization with sources in North Korea, said Pyongyang has tried to jam mobile signals and enforced severe restrictions along the border.

Brokers in North Korea and China have long taken 30% of the money being transferred as commission. But during the pandemic some brokers have taken a 40-50% slice, according to defectors and activists.

There are no official, extensive studies on how the pandemic has affected money transfers. But separate surveys of several hundred defectors by civic groups showed 18-26% of respondents sent money to North Korea last year, down from about 50% in a similar-sized poll in 2014.

Shin Mi-nyeo, head of the Saejowi civic group that conducted one of the recent surveys, said that money transfers were down even before the pandemic because many defectors had cut contact with their families in the North for financial reasons.

"They are initially eager to support their families in the North because they know what their lives are like there," Shin said. After a while, though, it becomes "out of sight, out of mind."

Each time Choi's mother called her, she often gave the phone numbers of neighbors who had fled to South Korea who weren't answering calls from their families back home.

When Choi reached some of them, she said they told her that illness or financial difficulties meant they couldn't afford the regular requests for money from their families in the North, where the estimated gross national income per capita in 2019 was one-27th of South Korea's.

It's not clear how much worse this will make the North's already moribund economy. South Korea's spy agency last year reported a four-fold price increase of imported foods like sugar and seasoning in the North, while Chinese data show its official trade volume with North Korea plunged by 80% last year.

"The money we send is a lifeline," said Cho Chung Hui, 57, who transferred the equivalent of \$890 to each of his two siblings every year before the pandemic. "It's such big money. If someone works really diligently in North Korea's markets, they make only \$30-40 per month."

Cho said his siblings used to travel for hours to the border to meet brokers and call him for money. But he hasn't heard from his siblings since November 2019.

Cho said some "robber-like brokers" now ask for a huge cut of the transferred money and that many of his defector friends are waiting for commissions to stabilize before resuming remittances.

Kim Hyeong Soo, 57, said North Koreans with family members in South Korea used to be called "traitors' families." But the sneer turned to envy when they began receiving money. Kim, co-head of a human rights group called the Stepping Stones, said he stopped sending remittances last year because his income plummeted.

South Korean law bans its citizens from unauthorized contact with North Koreans, but authorities don't strictly apply the regulations to defectors because of humanitarian reasons. North Korean officials often overlook money transfers because they get bribes from those receiving money.

"North Korean police officers are poor, too," Cho said.

Cho, head of the Seoul-based NGO Good Farmers, said it's "very burdensome" to send money to his siblings, but he'd do it again if his family called. "I feel sorry for them because we couldn't come here together."

## The Latest: Biden urges Americans to 'stick with the rules'

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Latest on President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package (all times local):

8:30 p.m.

President Joe Biden is urging Americans to "stick with the rules" as he wraps up his address to the nation on the one-year anniversary of the beginning of coronavirus pandemic.

He is voicing optimism that the United States will edge toward a semblance of normalcy in the coming months, noting "there is hope and light of better days ahead if we all do our part."

But the president is also warning that "we may have to reinstate restrictions" if Americans fail to stay vigilant about social distancing and other precautions to help stem the virus.

Biden says, "Please, we don't want to do that again, we've made so much progress," adding, "This is not the time to let up."

Biden spoke for 24 minutes from the East Room of the White House.

8:15 p.m.

President Joe Biden is condemning the violence Asian Americans have endured since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, saying "it is wrong, it is un-American and it must stop."

Biden is lamenting an uptick of reports of "vicious" attacks and harassment against Asian Americans that's been reported since the start of the pandemic one year ago.

Former President Donald Trump has repeatedly used xenophobic terms to refer to the virus that originated in China's Wuhan province. Some critics say the former president's language has stoked the violence against Asian Americans.

Biden is addressing the nation on the one-year anniversary of the pandemic.

8:05 p.m.

President Joe Biden is delivering a somber but optimistic message on the one-year anniversary of the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking from a lectern in a flag-draped backdrop in the East Room of the White House, Biden is reflecting on the worst public health crisis in more than a century. It has killed nearly 530,000 Americans, sickened millions more and ravaged the global economy.

Biden says, "We all lost something, a collective suffering, a collective sacrifice."

6:40 p.m.

President Joe Biden is planning to announce during his prime-time address Thursday night that he'll deploy 4,000 additional U.S. troops to support coronavirus vaccination efforts. He's also vastly expanding the pool of people who are eligible to serve as vaccinators.

That's according to a senior administration official who briefed reporters ahead of Biden's address to the nation. The official says the president will also announce plans to double the number of pharmacies participating in the vaccination program, expand mobile operations to vaccinate people in communities that have been hard-hit by the virus, and double the number of federally run mass vaccination centers.

There are currently 2,000 active-duty troops supporting vaccination efforts around the country.

The official says the White House plans to detail plans on Friday to expand who can administer shots. Dentists, paramedics, physician assistants, veterinarians and medical students will become eligible to administer vaccinations under the new guidance.

6:30 p.m.

President Joe Biden will use his first prime-time address on Thursday night to announce that he is directing states to make all American adults eligible for a coronavirus vaccine no later than May 1.

That's according to two senior administration officials who briefed reporters ahead of Biden's evening

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 52 of 88

address on the one year anniversary of the pandemic. The officials say the president will also say that there is a good chance Americans will be able to safely gather in small groups by July 4.

Biden is also expected to stress that the "fight is far from over." But he'll say the nation will be in a "far better place" by the Independence Day holiday if Americans wear masks, follow public health guidelines and get vaccinated when it is their turn. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to keep the focus on the president's address.

## UN chief blasts vaccine nationalism, hoarding, side deals

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United Nations chief criticized the "many examples of vaccine nationalism and vaccine hoarding" as well as side deals with COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers that undermine access to all people in the world.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement marking one year since the U.N. World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic that "the global vaccination campaign represents the greatest moral test of our times."

Ensuring that all people are vaccinated -- and "many low-income countries have not yet received a single dose" -- is essential to restart the global economy "and help the world move from locking down societies to locking down the virus," he said.

Guterres reiterated his call for COVID-19 vaccines to be seen as "a global public good."

"The world needs to unite to produce and distribute sufficient vaccines for all, which means at least doubling manufacturing capacity around the world," he said. "That effort must start now."

The secretary-general paid tribute to health workers and other essential workers who have kept societies running.

"I salute all those who have stood up to the deniers and disinformation, and have followed science and safety protocols," he said. "You have helped save lives."

Guterres also commended "women, men and young people everywhere for adapting to work, learn and live in new ways."

"So many lives have been lost," he said. "Economies have been upended and societies left reeling. The most vulnerable have suffered the most. Those left behind are being left even further behind."

Some 117 million people are confirmed to have been infected by the coronavirus, and according to Johns Hopkins, more than 2.6 million people have died.

Guterres said the United Nations will keep pressing for affordable vaccines available for everyone and a recovery that improves the economy.

## Resignation demands grow as police get Cuomo groping report

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's grip on power appeared increasingly threatened Thursday as a majority of state legislators called for his resignation, Democrats launched an impeachment investigation and police in the state capital said they stood ready to investigate a groping allegation.

The firestorm around the Democrat grew a day after the Times Union of Albany reported that an unidentified aide had claimed Cuomo reached under her shirt and fondled her at his official residence late last year.

The woman hasn't filed a criminal complaint, but a lawyer for the governor said Thursday that the state had reported the allegation to the Albany Police Department after the woman involved declined to do so herself.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," said Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel.

An Albany Police Department spokesperson, Steve Smith, didn't immediately return a message from The Associated Press, but told The New York Times police had reached out to a representative for the woman.

The possible involvement of police comes as more lawmakers called on Cuomo to resign over alleged

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 53 of 88

misconduct with women and allegations that his administration concealed how many nursing home residents died of COVID-19.

At least 121 members of the state Assembly and Senate have said publicly they believe Cuomo should quit office now, according to a tally by The Associated Press. The count includes 65 Democrats and 56 Republicans.

The top Democrat in the state Assembly, Speaker Carl Heastie, on Thursday backed a plan for its judiciary committee to launch an impeachment investigation.

The committee can interview witnesses and subpoena documents and its inquiry could be wide-ranging: from alleged sexual misconduct to COVID-19 outbreaks at nursing homes. It won't interfere with a separate inquiry of sexual harassment allegations being conducted by state Attorney General Letitia James, according to Heastie and James.

"The legislature needs to determine for itself what the facts are," a member of the committee, Assemblyman Tom Abinanti, said. "For the people who want immediate impeachment, I think we say please be patient. The process is slow. This could be the next step."

In New York, the Assembly is the legislative house that could move to impeach Cuomo, who faces multiple allegations that he made the workplace an uncomfortable place for young women with sexually suggestive remarks and behavior, including unwanted touching and a kiss. One aide claimed the governor's aides publicly smeared her after she accused him of sexual harassment.

"All of us are extremely disappointed," Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, a Democrat representing Orange and Sullivan counties, told The Associated Press. "I think there's no room in the world right now for that kind of behavior. He should have known better."

Gunther on Thursday became the ninth Assembly Democrat saying they'd vote for impeachment, alongside at least 37 Republicans.

Cuomo's support in the state Senate was especially thin. Roughly two-thirds of its members have called for the Democrat's resignation, including Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

A group of 59 Democrats, including 19 senators and 40 Assembly members said in a letter Thursday that it's time for Cuomo to go.

"In light of the governor's admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths he has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need," the letter said. "It is time for Gov. Cuomo to resign."

Cuomo has repeatedly said he won't resign and urged the public to await the outcome of the attorney general's investigation.

Asked for comment Thursday, Cuomo's office referred reporters to previous statements in which the governor denied inappropriately touching anyone, but apologized for some comments he made to female staffers. He's said he was trying to engage in playful banter and didn't intend to make people uncomfortable.

In the newest allegation against Cuomo, the Times Union of Albany reported that the governor had summoned the aide to his Albany mansion, saying he needed help with his cellphone. After she arrived, Cuomo closed the door, reached under her shirt and fondled her, the newspaper reported.

The newspaper's reporting was based on an unidentified source with knowledge of the woman's accusation, who said she first told the story to someone on Cuomo's staff in recent days. The newspaper hadn't spoken to the woman and didn't identify her.

"I have never done anything like this," Cuomo said through a spokesperson Wednesday evening.

According to the Times Union account, one of the woman's supervisors told an attorney in the governor's office about her account Monday. The report to Albany police was made Wednesday, after the newspaper had posted its story.

Federal investigators are also scrutinizing how the Cuomo administration has handled data about how many nursing home residents have died of COVID-19. The governor and his aides argued for months that it couldn't release full figures on deaths because it had yet to verify the data.

The state Assembly has 150 members. It could convene an impeachment trial against Cuomo with a

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 54 of 88

simple majority vote. The state Senate, which would join with members of the state's top appeals court to hold an impeachment trial, has 63 members.

Associated Press writers Mike Hill in Albany, Mike Catalini in Trenton, New Jersey, and David Klepper in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed reporting.

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

By 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 strongest 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.

"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. Some anti-nuclear groups also held a protest in Tokyo.

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 55 of 88

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>

## Carlson, Times tussle over online harassment of journalist

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tucker Carlson's belittling of a reporter for The New York Times this week for publicly discussing how she had been harassed reveals both a toxic online culture and bad blood between the newspaper and Fox News Channel and its most popular personality.

The targeting of reporter Taylor Lorenz started a day after the International Women's Media Foundation announced that it was starting a new resource center for journalists subject to online abuse.

Lorenz, a technology reporter who covers internet culture for the Times, on Tuesday had tweeted her followers to consider supporting women who were enduring online harassment.

"It's not an exaggeration to say that the harassment and smear campaign I've had to endure over the past year has destroyed my life," she tweeted. "No one should have to go through this. The scope of attack has been unimaginable. It has taken everything from me."

Carlson pointed out the tweet that night on his show, which usually reaches between 3 million to 4 million viewers each weeknight. He cited her as a privileged person claiming victimhood.

"Destroyed her life?" he said. "Really? By most people's standards Taylor Lorenz would seem to have a

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 56 of 88

pretty good life, one of the best lives in the country, in fact.”

Carlson was supported by journalist Glenn Greenwald, an occasional guest on his show. Greenwald wrote that someone involved in polarizing debates should expect pushback. “It’s still just online insults,” he tweeted. “That’s not persecution.”

Carlson and the Times have a history. Last summer, he said on the air that the Times was working on a story about his house in Maine. He broadcast the names of the journalists supposedly working on the story, and they later said they had been subject to online abuse and, in one case, an attempted break-in. No Times story was written about Carlson’s Maine house.

The Times, in a statement Wednesday, said Carlson’s attack on Lorenz “was a calculated and cruel tactic, which he regularly deploys to unleash a wave of harassment and vitriol at his intended target.”

Fox backed up its star with its own response: “No public figure or journalist is immune from legitimate criticism of their reporting, claims or journalistic tactics. Carlson, on his show, revisited his own anger about the idea that where his family lived in Maine would become more widely known.

He said there is real harassment in the world, but an online attack against Lorenz “is not it.”

The International Women’s Media Foundation said that in a survey conducted in 2018, 63% of female journalists said they’d been threatened or harassed online. Of those who said they’d been harassed, 40% said they avoided reporting certain stories because of it.

Lorenz has visibility online since she reports on the rough-and-tumble world of social media for the nation’s leading newspaper. She noted, in an interview for The.Ink newsletter last summer with journalist Anand Giridharadas, that leaders in that industry don’t take online harassment seriously.

She told Giridharadas that she’s had a difficult time with strangers finding out about her personal life and background.

“That’s been really, really, really horrible,” she said. “I mean, I’ve gone into kind of a deep depression over it. I’ve thought about quitting my job over it. I hate it.”

On Twitter this week, she posted a copy of one message she had received online from someone who said “I hope you cry yourself to sleep every night. I hope you take your own life. I hope you live all your days in fear. You are the scum of the Earth. Why are you still breathing?” The person repeated “kill yourself” 11 times.

A spokeswoman for the Times said it has “dedicated staff and robust measures in place to protect journalists” against the overall backdrop of threats and online attacks. The newspaper would not discuss details.

One potential piece of advice for Lorenz — stay off the internet — doesn’t apply. Her job depends upon it.

Elisa Lees Munoz, executive director of the women’s media foundation, offered support on Thursday.

“Lorenz is a legitimate journalist whose work should be applauded, not attacked,” Munoz said. “Women journalists must be able to do their jobs without fear for their lives.”

## **Pace of spending for pandemic aid? Try \$43,000 every second**

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — To pay out his coronavirus relief package, President Joe Biden must spend an average of \$3.7 billion every day for the rest of this year. That’s \$43,000 every second of every day until midnight chimes on 2022.

For the amount of time that readers took to reach this sentence, Biden needs to disburse nearly \$800,000 to stay on track.

That’s according to Congressional Budget Office estimates, and even then, the Biden administration would still have plenty of the \$1.9 trillion to spend in later years as a vaccinated country battles back to economic health.

The president signed the aid package into law Thursday without a comprehensive plan in place to distribute all of the funds, which will be a core focus of the administration in coming weeks.

The level of spending is a testament to the complexity of addressing a disease that seeped so widely across the nation in less than a year, and the economic pain that it has wrought.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 57 of 88

"It's taxpayer money that you want to put out fairly, but you also want to put out fast," said Jack Smalligan, a senior policy fellow at the Urban Institute and a former White House budget official.

Some spending, such as cash transfers, can occur at speed.

The Biden administration already announced that it will send the \$1,400 in direct checks -- a total of about \$400 billion--starting this weekend. The administration also will continue the enhanced jobless aid for the 20.1 million Americans who are collecting some form of the benefits. Both the direct checks and jobless aid were part of past COVID aid packages that totaled roughly \$4 trillion, meaning the government has systems in place to distribute the money.

But other elements are trickier.

There is \$130 billion for K-12 schools to hire teachers, upgrade ventilation systems and make other improvements so that in-person classes can resume. Universities are eligible for \$40 billion. Separately, \$30 billion in housing aid is available. And there is about \$120 billion for vaccine distribution and coronavirus testing, among other public health expenses.

The White House said the billions for schools would "begin" to be distributed this month by the Education Department.

But some funds could take time to distribute, since government agencies with their normal spending can take six to nine months to release funds through competitive grants or an application process. Schools and state and local governments also might spread out spending to well after most of the country is vaccinated.

"A fair process can inherently take longer because of the checks and balances and the internal reviews," Smalligan said. "Having the money flow out quickly and then having state and local government spend the money over the next two fiscal years is probably responsible on their part. You want to be hiring a teacher not for a month but for years."

The Treasury Department is planning how to best distribute roughly \$350 billion in state and local aid. But it hasn't finalized a plan and is consulting with governors, mayors and other officials.

"Our Treasury team is going to work to get this aid out as in the quickest way possible -- and the one that produces the greatest impact," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said at a Tuesday speech for the National League of Cities. "To do that, we're going to need your input and advice."

The Biden package also introduces about \$140 billion in temporary tax credits. This includes an expanded child tax credit that would pay out monthly, rather than once a year. Parents with incomes below \$150,000 could receive at least \$250 a month per child beginning in July.

"The real troubles are going to show up in these new tax credit programs: Can the IRS administer this new monthly payment to tens of millions of American families?" said Douglas Holtz-Eakin, president of the center-right American Action Forum and a former director of the Congressional Budget Office.

Holtz-Eakin said the error rates on these tax credit programs tend to be high, since people move to new addresses, earnings change and the IRS might not have the correct ages for children. He noted that about a quarter of payments for the existing earned income tax credit that go to working parents are in error.

However, he also noted that there are few economic risks to Biden in terms of how the money gets released, since the economy was already poised to expand swiftly at the strongest rate in at least two decades.

Holtz-Eakin said the successful distribution of the funds would really influence two goals that he views as tangential to pandemic relief. First is the reduction in child poverty promoted by the Biden team through the tax credits and other aid. But secondly, the assorted child tax credits will expire and that puts pressure on Republican lawmakers to not block their extension before the 2022 elections.

That pressure could help Democrats in their push to expand narrow majorities in the House and Senate.

"It's a clear political trap that they're trying to set up," Holtz-Eakin said.

But the spending in the Biden package also reflects how much has changed after the nation went into lockdown a year ago. Back then, the rapid aid was needed because of the mass layoffs as businesses shuttered. Now, money is needed to accelerate the recovery because vaccines are available.

"There is a light at the end of the tunnel," said Kathleen McKiernan, an economics professor at Vanderbilt University. "Biden's plan targets areas of need, including vaccine distribution and state and local government aid, which will take time but will help the economy bounce back after the virus is controlled."

## Judge OKs 3rd-degree murder charge for ex-cop in Floyd death

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A judge on Thursday granted prosecutors' request to add a third-degree murder count against a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death, offering jurors an additional option for conviction and resolving an issue that might have delayed his trial for months.

Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill reinstated the charge after the former officer, Derek Chauvin, failed to get appellate courts to block it. Cahill had earlier rejected the charge as not warranted by the circumstances of Floyd's death, but an appellate court ruling in an unrelated case established new grounds.

Chauvin already faced second-degree murder and manslaughter charges. Legal experts say the additional charge helps prosecutors by giving jurors another option to find Chauvin guilty of murder. Cahill told potential jurors after the ruling that he still expects opening statements on March 29.

The dispute over the third-degree murder charge revolved around wording in the law that references an act "eminently dangerous to others." Cahill's initial decision to dismiss the charge noted that Chauvin's conduct might be construed as not dangerous to anyone but Floyd.

But prosecutors sought to revive the charge after the state's Court of Appeals recently upheld the third-degree murder conviction of another former Minneapolis police officer in the 2017 killing of an Australian woman. They argued that the ruling established precedent that the charge could be brought even in a case where only a single person is endangered.

Arguments over when the precedent from former officer Mohamed Noor's case took effect went swiftly to the state's Supreme Court, which on Wednesday said it would not consider Chauvin's appeal. Cahill said Thursday that he accepts that precedent has been clearly established.

"I feel bound by that and I feel it would be an abuse of discretion not to grant the motion," he said.

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.

Jury selection resumed Thursday for the third day as attorneys grappled further with the challenges of seating an impartial and diverse jury in such a high-profile case. By day's end, the jury included five men and one woman. Cahill said three are white, one is multiracial, one is Hispanic and one is Black.

The sole juror picked Thursday described himself as an outgoing, family-oriented soccer fan for whom the prospect of the trial was "kind of exciting."

The man, who said his favorite team is the Spanish powerhouse Real Madrid, said he's also a fan of true crime podcasts and TV shows. He acknowledged under questioning from defense attorney Eric Nelson that he had a "very negative" impression of Chauvin. The man wrote on his questionnaire that he had seen the widely viewed bystander video of Floyd "desperately screaming that he couldn't breathe" even as other officers stood by and bystanders shouted that Chauvin was killing Floyd.

Yet asked whether he could set his opinions aside and stick to the evidence presented in court, he replied: "I'm willing to see all the evidence and everything, hear witnesses."

Several other candidates were dismissed, including a woman who said she "can't unsee the video" of Chauvin pinning Floyd, and a man who said he has doubts about Black Lives Matter and the way the group pursues its goals.

Nelson pressed the woman hard on her ability to be fair despite her strong opinions.

Asked how the events of last summer had affected the community, she replied: "Negatively affected because a life was taken. Positively because a movement has come from it and the whole world knows." Asked about the property damage during the unrest, she said, "I felt that was what needed to happen to bring this to the world's attention."

"Looking in your heart and looking in your mind can you assure us you can set all of that aside, all of that, and focus only on the evidence that is presented in this courtroom?" Nelson asked.

"I can assure you, but like you mentioned earlier, the video is going to be a big part of the evidence and

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 59 of 88

there's no changing my mind about that," she replied.

Cahill dismissed her for cause, sparing Nelson from having to use one of his peremptory strikes. Prosecutor Steve Schleicher objected, saying she might have been subjected to harder questioning than other potential jurors.

At least three weeks have been set aside to complete a jury of 12 plus two alternates. Potential jurors' identities are being protected and they are not shown on livestreamed video of the proceedings.

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.

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

## At Air Force One base, intruder given up by 'mouse ears'

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a highly unusual breach of security last month at the air base that operates the Air Force One presidential aircraft, an apparently aimless intruder went undetected for several hours and walked on and off an airplane on the flight line before his quirky headgear gave him away.

He was wearing what an Air Force investigative report released Thursday described as "a bright red or pink cap that partially covered his ears and had distinctive balls on top that looked a little like mouse ears."

An airman in the operations office at Joint Base Andrews, located in Maryland just outside Washington, saw the man on the flight line and became suspicious, partly because of the headgear, and called security. Officials said he never got close to Air Force One.

"To be frank, I'm just being honest, we had no idea we had an unauthorized civilian on the base. He could have roamed around for a lot longer had it not been for that particular airman that figured out he doesn't quite fit," said Sami Said, the Air Force inspector general who briefed reporters on his findings.

The Feb. 4 intrusion was reported the same day by the Air Force, which opened an internal investigation to determine how it happened and what could be done to minimize chances of a repeat. The probe found three main security failings, starting with "human error" by a gate security guard who allowed the man to drive onto the base even though he had no credentials that authorized his access. Hours later, the man walked undetected onto the flight line by slipping through a fence designed to restrict entry. And, finally, he walked onto and off a parked airplane without being challenged, even though he was not wearing a required badge authorizing access to the restricted area.

The day of the incident, the officials said the intruder was turned over to local law enforcement because there was at least one outstanding warrant for his arrest. His name has not been released. The inspector general's report said he had "an extensive arrest record," but further details were blacked out.

"Security forces actually never saw him transition from the open gate to the aircraft," said Said, the inspector general. Aside from his odd hat, the intruder's clothing — dark pants and jacket and black high-top sneakers — could have made him appear to be a contractor, Said said, although he should have been challenged anyway, not least because he had no visible badge authorizing his presence.

"The good news is, once alerted, security forces apprehended him pretty darned quickly — the minute he came off the plane," he said.

Said said the modified Boeing 747 that serves as Air Force One for presidential travel was never at risk and that it is kept behind more layers of protection at Andrews. "That area is exceptionally secure," he said.

Unimpeded, the unarmed intruder got aboard a C-40, a transport jet primarily used by members of the Cabinet, Congress and military combatant commanders. He did no harm and the Air Force investigation report, which was heavily censored by the Air Force before it was released Thursday, concluded that he had no plan to cause harm to Air Force personnel or equipment. His purpose could not be definitively determined.

"The evidence supports the conclusion that (blank) was simply wandering around the base and did not enter the base to meet anyone," the report said. "During questioning, (blank) said he came on base be-

cause he wanted to see airplanes.”

After driving through the Virginia Gate at Andrews, the man drove to the base exchange, where surveillance camera footage later showed he spent about an hour before returning to his car. His whereabouts for the next four hours could not be determined. Personnel at the 89th Air Wing passenger terminal recalled him entering the terminal, and he then slipped unnoticed onto the flight line through an 18-inch gap in a security fence gate that was not fully closed because of a “malfunction.”

He walked onto the C-40 aircraft, which was open to facilitate a communications training session. Two aircrew members were aboard. The intruder walked to the back of the plane and left unchallenged after a few minutes. As he walked back toward the security gate on the flight line he was stopped and arrested.

Said said that to his knowledge Andrews had never before experienced such a lapse in security.

## **EXPLAINER: Ex-cop trial to include ‘spark of life’ on Floyd**

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Prosecutors trying a white former Minneapolis police officer in George Floyd’s death plan to use a legal doctrine called “spark of life” to humanize Floyd in front of jurors.

It’s a doctrine with roots in a 1985 state Supreme Court case, and one that several legal experts said makes Minnesota a rarity in explicitly permitting such testimony ahead of a verdict.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew Frank told Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill on Wednesday that he plans to invoke the doctrine during Derek Chauvin’s trial. It allows prosecutors to call witnesses to testify about crime victims’ lives, ostensibly to portray them as more than a statistic. Defense attorneys complain the doctrine allows prosecutors to play on jurors’ emotions and has nothing to do with evidence. If Cahill allows prosecutors to go too far, he could hand Chauvin grounds for an appeal.

Here’s a look at the doctrine and the potential ramifications of it coming into play during Chauvin’s trial.

### **WHAT IS THE “SPARK OF LIFE” DOCTRINE?**

The doctrine emerged in 1985 when a defendant accused of killing a police officer argued to the Minnesota Supreme Court that the prosecutor prejudiced the jury with a speech about the officer’s childhood, his parents and his marriage. The prosecutor became so emotional the trial court had to take a recess.

The Supreme Court ruled that prosecutors could present evidence that a murder victim was “not just bones and sinews covered with flesh, but was imbued with the spark of life. The prosecution has some leeway to show that spark and present the victim as a human being as long as it is not an “attempt to invoke any undue sympathy or inflame the jury’s passions.”

### **HOW IS SPARK-OF-LIFE TESTIMONY RELEVANT?**

Victim statements about the impact a crime has had on their lives are common during the sentencing portion of trials across the country. But allowing the introduction of deep biographical information about a victim ahead of a verdict is rarer.

The idea is to use witnesses to present a victim as a human being, essentially allowing the victim to speak from beyond the grave, legal observers say.

“This puts some personal nature back into the case for somebody who’s treated so impersonally in an unfortunately biased system,” Frank told Cahill.

Defense attorneys counter that the doctrine allows prosecutors to play on jurors’ emotions and contributes nothing to jurors’ understanding of the crime.

“I’ve never encountered this before,” said John Gross, an associate law professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who has worked as a public defender in New York City and taught criminal defense strategies at Syracuse University and the University of Alabama. “It’s pretty obvious how much potential prejudice that could have on the jury. It’s a little surprising to me this is potentially fair game in Minnesota. If it isn’t evidence of guilt, why is it there?”

### **HOW FAR CAN THE PROSECUTOR GO?**

The doctrine gives judges tremendous discretion on what to allow during spark-of-life testimony.

Frank told Cahill he plans to bring in photographs of Floyd at various stages of his life and present at

least two witnesses. He described one as a family member who will speak about Floyd's family, his childhood, how Floyd's mother was important to him and how Floyd was "a brother to this witness," Frank said.

The other witness will testify about Floyd's life since he moved to Minnesota from Houston in 2014, Frank said, as well as his drug use in an attempt to head off Chauvin's attorneys. The defense is expected to argue that Floyd's drug use killed him, not Chauvin's decision to press his knee into Floyd's neck for around nine minutes.

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson noted such testimony should be limited and they will face cross-examination if the testimony becomes too fawning. Cahill said he won't allow cross-examination about Floyd's drug use but testimony about whether Floyd was a peaceful person or prone to violence could open the door to the defense introducing evidence of his criminal record.

"It can't go on for too long because it distracts from the merits," the judge said.

**COULD THE STRATEGY BACKFIRE ON PROSECUTORS?**

Yes. If defense attorneys are allowed on cross-examination to introduce Floyd's criminal record and drug problems they could raise doubts about what killed him in jurors' minds. If the state's witnesses offer too much information Chauvin could argue on appeal that Cahill let too much spark-of-life testimony in.

"It puts a judge in a precarious position," said David Schultz, a law professor at the University of Minnesota. "If too much is brought in, does it set up the possibility of an appeal, that the judge erred and allowed too much emotion? The smart defense attorneys will figure out how to use this."

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

## **Biden's \$1.9T rescue signed, agenda now a slog in Congress**

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tough as it was for Democrats, passing President Joe Biden's sweeping \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue package into law was the easy part.

Now, they are hunkering down to push the next priorities in Biden's agenda forward past what, so far, has been a wall of entrenched Republican opposition in the so-very-split Congress. It's likely to be a long slog.

Popular legislation to expand voting rights, raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and develop the president's "Build Back Better" infrastructure package are all on deck this spring and into summer. But unlike the relatively quick passage of the American Rescue Plan, halfway through the president's first 100 days, sending the next measures to Biden's desk is expected to take many months. Democrats are even considering changing historic filibuster rules to overcome opponents and speed the bills along.

"It will take time to put all the pieces together," said Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., a member of party leadership.

Biden's signing of the American Rescue Plan on Thursday marks a milestone for his administration and for Democrats who have command of the House, Senate and White House for the first time in a decade. From party leaders to rank-and-file lawmakers, the Democrats are buoyed by what they can accomplish when they hold together, as a united front, against the GOP opposition to Biden's agenda. But the weeks and months ahead will prove more politically challenging.

Democrats face mounting pressure from within their centrist ranks to try harder to win support from Republicans, especially on the coming infrastructure bill — a multitrillion-dollar investment in roads, bridges, ports and broadband that could be even bigger than the just-signed coronavirus rescue package.

At the same time, the progressive flank is eager to waste no time and take more dramatic steps, including changing the Senate's 60-vote margin required by filibuster rules, if needed, to leave Biden's opponents behind.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said all options remain on the table.

"We need a big bold agenda, just like we passed," Schumer said this week, vowing to "do everything we can to get that bold agenda done."

If Republicans "won't join us in that," he said, "our Congress is going to come together and figure out

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 62 of 88

next steps.”

The next big test will come quickly, even before the big infrastructure bill is fully formed.

The House is rapidly sending the 50-50 split Senate a series of bills that many Americans support — to expand voting rights, raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour and expand background checks for gun purchases.

Democrats are set to use those bills as test drives to assess Republican attitudes. If Senate Republicans start blocking the legislation, Democrats are prepared to force them into long days and nights of dramatic floor filibusters, like the movie version in “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.”

Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia opened the door to forcing opponents to stand and make their case in the so-called “talking filibuster” — to feel some pain, as he put it — if they want to block a bill.

Manchin has been among the most outspoken Democratic opponents of doing away with the filibuster, but he is not alone. While it takes 60 votes to overcome a filibuster on legislation, a tall order in the evenly split Senate that would require at least 10 votes from Republicans, it also takes 50 votes to change the Senate’s rules. As many as 10 other Democrats are also hesitant to eliminate the tool.

The filibuster gives the minority enormous ability to halt action, and Senate Democrats used it plenty of times when they were out of power. But filibuster opponents say it has been abused over the years, particularly as a mid-century tool to delay civil rights legislation, and call it a historically racist tool that affords the minority too much power over the majority.

“There’s lots of ways we can test that the next couple of months,” said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn.

The House bills headed to the Senate are largely do-overs that stalled in the last session of Congress. At the time, Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell, then the majority leader, relished his role as the “grim reaper” presiding over the Senate’s “graveyard” of House Democratic bills.

In the weeks and months ahead, some Republicans will likely happily seize the opportunity to give lengthy floor speeches against bills they oppose — as Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, once did, reading Dr. Seuss’ “Green Eggs and Ham” to his then-young daughters who were watching on television from home.

Many lawmakers fundraise off such efforts, raising vast small-dollar donations.

“If in a 50-50 Senate, we’re stumped on basic legislation by the filibuster, it’s just a reminder that McConnell’s approach of legislative graveyard is going to prevail,” Sen. Dick Durbin, the majority whip, told reporters on the Hill. “And I think members are fed up with it.”

The outcome of the debates ahead will set the stage for Biden’s next big effort, the sweeping “Build Back Better” infrastructure plan that’s already taking shape in public committee hearings and private conversations on and off Capitol Hill. Along with the infrastructure investment, it could include vast new policy changes — on green energy and immigration — and even make some of the just-passed COVID assistance like child tax credits permanent.

House Budget Committee Chairman John Yarmuth, D-Ky., said he expects it to roll out by the end of summer or possibly in the fall.

Still, Biden’s infrastructure package may be one bill that could win over Republican support. Road- and bridge-building legislation has a long history of bipartisan support from lawmakers who need to deliver investments back home. If the House and Senate allow lawmakers to request earmarked funds for specific needs, a topic also under discussion, that could also boost backing.

But the bill is likely to be vast, and the other provisions on climate change or immigration may drive Republicans away. McConnell has warned Democrats off the go-it-alone strategy.

Doubting bipartisanship will emerge, there is growing support among Democratic senators to do away with the filibuster if Republicans use it to block Biden’s bills.

“If Mitch McConnell continues to be totally an obstructionist, and he wants to use the 60 votes to stymie everything that President Biden wants to do and that the Democrats want to do, that will actually help people” by making it clear that Democrats will need to get rid of the filibuster, said Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii.

“We may not be quite there yet,” said the senator, whose own views have shifted to now favoring eliminating the tool. “I am.”

## **VIRUS TODAY: Biden signs aid bill; ex-presidents get shots**

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THE NUMBERS:

**VACCINES:** More than 64.0 million people, or 19.3% of the U.S. population, have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some 33.8 million people have completed their vaccination, or 10.2% of the population.

**CASES:** The seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. decreased over the past two weeks from 68,370 on Feb. 24 to 56,239 on Wednesday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

**DEATHS:** The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths in the U.S. decreased over the past two weeks from 2,096 on Feb. 24 to 1,436 on Wednesday, according to Johns Hopkins University.

**STATE VACCINATION RATES:** The percentage of population that received at least one dose of vaccine, according to the CDC: New Mexico (26.9%); Connecticut (26.6%); Alaska (26.1%). States with the lowest rates: Alabama (16.1%); District of Columbia (15.4%); Georgia (13.9%).

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— President Joe Biden signed into law the \$1.9 trillion relief package he says will help the U.S. defeat the coronavirus and nurse the economy back to health.

— Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter rolled up their sleeves to get shots for public service announcements urging Americans to get vaccinated. Obama says he's looking forward to hugging his mother-in-law Marian Robinson on her birthday in July.

— State governments are drawing up big plans for their share of COVID-19 relief bill. The package includes \$195 billion for states. Democratic and Republican governors suddenly have a way to pay for big, expensive undertakings that have long languished on their to-do lists.

**QUOTABLE:** "Fans, due to unforeseen circumstances, the game tonight has been postponed." — Mario Nanni, Oklahoma City Thunder public-address announcer on March 11, 2020, when the NBA was the first major sports league to stop play because of the coronavirus.

**ICYMI:** Research shows women can die from pregnancy-related conditions up to a year after giving birth and 3 in 5 deaths are preventable. The COVID-19 relief plan gives states the option of extending Medicaid coverage to women with low to modest incomes for a full year after childbirth.

**ON THE HORIZON:** Will the coronavirus ever go away? It may linger but pose less of a threat over time. Smallpox was eradicated because people developed lasting immunity after getting sick or vaccinated.

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

## **Digital art by Beeple sells for \$69.4 million amid NFT boom**

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Christie's says it has auctioned off a digital collage by an artist named Beeple for nearly \$70 million, in an unprecedented sale of a digital artwork that fetched more money than physical works by many better known artists.

The piece, titled "Everydays: The First 5,000 Days," sold for \$69.4 million in an online auction, "positioning him among the top three most valuable living artists," Christie's said via Twitter on Thursday.

Christie's said it also marks the first time a major auction house has offered a digital-only artwork with a non-fungible token as a guarantee of its authenticity, as well as the first time cryptocurrency has been used to pay for an artwork at auction.

Beeple, whose real name is Mike Winkelmann, responded to the sale result with an expletive on Twitter.

"Artists have been using hardware and software to create artwork and distribute it on the internet for the last 20+ years but there was never a real way to truly own and collect it," Beeple said in a statement

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 64 of 88

released by Christie's. "With NFT's that has now changed. I believe we are witnessing the beginning of the next chapter in art history, digital art."

Christie's did not identify the buyer of the artwork, which consists of 5,000 individual digital pictures stitched together that Beeple created - one each day - since May 2007.

Non-fungible tokens, known as NFTs, are electronic identifiers confirming a digital collectible is real by recording the details on a digital ledger known as a blockchain. The tokens have swept the online collecting world recently, an offshoot of the boom in cryptocurrencies. They're used to prove that an item is one of a kind and are aimed at solving a problem central to digital collectibles: how to claim ownership of something that can be easily and endlessly duplicated.

Christie's said the artwork fetched the highest price in an online-only auction and the highest price for any winning bid placed online.

Some 22 million people tuned in on the Christie's website for the final moments of bidding, with bidders from 11 countries taking part.

Others have also joined the craze for NFTs. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey put his first ever tweet - "just setting up my twttr" - up for online auction as an NFT, with bids reaching as high as \$2.5 million, and he promised to donate the proceeds to charity. Rock band Kings of Leon is offering a version of their latest album with the tokens that come with extras. A blockchain company bought a piece of work by British artist Banksy, burned it and then put a digital version on sale through a non-fungible token. The National Basketball Association is teaming up in a venture to sell virtual sports cards backed by the tokens. And the Associated Press is offering NFT digital artwork - a depiction of the U.S. presidential election's electoral college map as viewed from space.

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For all of AP's tech coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/apf-technology>

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Follow Kelvin Chan at [www.twitter.com/chanman](http://www.twitter.com/chanman)

## States drawing up big wish lists for the COVID relief money

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

State governments will get a big influx of federal money from the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package that could suddenly enable them to undertake large, expensive projects that have long been on their to-do lists, including high-speed internet for rural areas and drinking water improvements.

The aid plan, approved by Congress in close party-line votes and signed by President Joe Biden on Thursday, includes \$195 billion for states, plus separate funds for local governments and schools.

While the package contains considerable short-term financial relief for businesses and individuals who have suffered from the outbreak, its Democratic supporters also see it as a rich opportunity to help states attack poverty more broadly and accomplish the kind of big things government used to do.

Since most state budgets are not in the tailspins that many feared last spring, states can use their share of the money to go way beyond balancing the books and dealing with the direct costs of the coronavirus pandemic.

"There are no words to describe the impact that has on a state that has long had extreme and persistent poverty," said New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat. "This is exactly the investment that we have always deserved and that we need now more than ever."

Even Republican governors who have argued against the plan are drawing up ambitious plans similar to what's on the wish lists of Democratic lawmakers and governors.

In Democrat-controlled California, GOP-held Idaho, and Vermont, with a Republican governor and Democratic legislative majority, priorities include drinking water and rural broadband projects.

In New Mexico, officials expect to use \$600 million to pay off debts to the state's unemployment fund — a move that would prevent a spike in payroll taxes for businesses — and still have more than \$1 billion for projects such as economic development grants, road improvements and others still to be determined.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 65 of 88

While the behemoth CARES Act adopted last March included \$150 billion for state, local and tribal governments, that help was restricted mostly to direct pandemic-related costs. The new package gives states much more flexibility.

Republican governors are arguing that the economy is already in recovery and that all the spending will eventually need to be repaid by the taxpayers. They also object to a formula that distributes more money per capita to states with higher unemployment rates, which they see as penalizing them for keeping more of their economies open through the pandemic.

"Instead of using the bipartisan blueprint of previous federal coronavirus relief bills, this legislation is literally a wish list for California and New York," said Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp. "It's a slap in the face for my fellow Georgians."

The Republicans who control state government in Georgia are working on plans to cut taxes — something being pursued in other GOP-run states, including Arizona and Iowa. But that might run afoul of a provision in the relief package that bars the money from being used to pay for tax cuts.

Around the country, it turns out that the state budget picture generally isn't as bleak as it was expected to be. Last year's relief spending helped by sending money directly to governments, businesses and individuals. It helped keep workers on the payroll and paying taxes.

Further, investors who supply much of the tax revenue in states like New York and California, which announced a \$15 billion surplus in January, had a good year because of the soaring stock market. And the job losses from the pandemic were deepest among lower-wage workers, who account for a smaller portion of tax revenue.

An analysis by the Tax Foundation, a nonprofit that promotes "pro-growth" policies, found that 28 states brought in less revenue in 2020 than 2019. The hardest-hit states included Florida, Hawaii, Nevada and Texas, which rely heavily on tourism and sales taxes.

The amounts states are in line to receive from the COVID-19 relief package exceed the revenue declines in every state, though, and amount to more than 100 times the combined revenue loss, the group found.

Even while objecting to the Democratic measure in general, Idaho Gov. Brad Little outlined some of the same priorities as his Democratic counterparts.

"We know the debt is mortgaged from our grandkids," he said, "and I will push to use those funds to directly support them through long-range investments in education, broadband and water infrastructure."

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Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Follow him at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>

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Associated Press reporters Jeff Amy in Atlanta; Adam Beam in Sacramento, California; Susan Montoya Bryan in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; Keith Ridler in Boise, Idaho; and Wilson Ring in Montpelier, Vermont, contributed to this story.

## **Study: Lack of diversity in Hollywood costs industry \$10B**

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For years, researchers have said a lack of diversity in Hollywood films doesn't just poorly reflect demographics, it's bad business. A new study by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company estimates just how much Hollywood is leaving on the table: \$10 billion.

The McKinsey report, released Thursday, analyzes how inequality shapes the industry and how much it ultimately costs its bottom line. The consulting firm deduced that the \$148 billion film and TV industry loses \$10 billion, or 7%, every year by undervaluing Black films, filmmakers and executives.

"Fewer Black-led stories get told, and when they are, these projects have been consistently underfunded and undervalued, despite often earning higher relative returns than other properties," wrote the study's authors: Jonathan Dunn, Sheldon Lyn, Nony Onyeador and Ammanuel Zegeye.

The study, spanning the years 2015-2019, was conducted over the last six months and drew on earlier research by the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of Southern California and Nielsen. The BlackLight Collective, a coalition of Black executives and talent in the industry, collaborate with McKinsey

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 66 of 88

researchers. The company also interviewed more than 50 executives, producers, agents, actors, directors and writers anonymously.

McKinsey attributed at least some of Hollywood's slow progress to its complex and multi-layered business — an ecosystem of production companies, networks, distributors, talent agencies and other separate but intertwined realms.

But the lack of Black representation in top positions of power plays a prominent role. The study found that 92% of film executives are white and 87% are in television. Agents and executives at the top three talent agencies are approximately 90% white — and a striking 97% among partners.

Researchers found that films with a Black lead or co-lead are budgeted 24% less than movies that don't — a disparity that nearly doubles when there are two or more Black people working as director, producer or writer.

Among other measures, McKinsey recommends that a "well-funded, third-party organization" be created for a more comprehensive approach to racial equality. The film business, it said, is less diverse than industries such as energy, finance and transport.

Following the Black Lives Matter protests last year, McKinsey said it would dedicate \$200 million to pro-bono work to advance racial equality.

## As GOP makes it harder to vote, few Republicans dissent

By STEVE PEOPLES, JONATHAN J. COOPER and BEN NADLER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — In Arizona, a Republican state senator worried aloud that his party's proposed voter identification requirements might be too "cumbersome." But he voted for the bill anyway.

In Iowa, the state's Republican elections chief put out a carefully worded statement that didn't say whether he backs his own party's legislation making it more difficult to vote early.

And in Georgia, Republican Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan left the room as Senate Republicans approved a bill to block early voting for all but the GOP's most reliable voting bloc. Duncan instead watched Monday's proceedings from a television in his office to protest.

This is what amounts to dissent as Republican lawmakers push a wave of legislation through statehouses across the nation to make voting more difficult. The bills are fueled by former President Donald Trump's false claims of widespread voter fraud and many are sponsored by his most loyal allies. But support for the effort is much broader than just Trump's hard-right base, and objections from GOP policymakers are so quiet they can be easy to miss.

"It's appalling what's happening," said former Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele, who condemned the silence of the GOP's elected officials. "There have been no provable, obvious, systemwide failures or fraud that would require the kind of 'legislative remedies' that Republican legislatures are embarking on. What the hell are you so afraid of? Black people voting?"

Experts note that most changes up for debate would disproportionately affect voters of color, younger people and the poor — all groups that historically vote for Democrats. But Republicans are also pushing restrictions with the potential to place new burdens on GOP-leaning groups.

It's a startling shift for a party whose voters in some states, such as Florida and Arizona, had embraced absentee and mail voting. Several Republican strategists note the party may be passing laws that only box out their own voters.

"There are multiple states and in multiple demographics where Republicans consistently outperform Democrats in early voting and absentee voting, and they need to be very careful because they could be shooting themselves in the foot to restrict that and make it more difficult," said Terry Sullivan, a Republican strategist.

If elected Republicans share these concerns, they have done little so far to slow the momentum of major legislation in competitive states like Georgia, Arizona, Florida and Texas, where Republicans control the state legislature and the governor's office.

Democratic officials, civil rights leaders and voting advocates are horrified.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 67 of 88

Martin Luther King III said he spent last weekend in Selma, Alabama, celebrating the 56th anniversary of his father's bloody march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Instead of being a day of celebration, he said, there was a sense that the civil rights movement was sliding backward because of the Republican voting proposals.

"There's no question about this being a higher level of Jim Crow," King said in an interview. He said he's worried that little can be done to stop the Republican effort in the short-term.

"I'm not sure what would make Republicans change other than they lose (in upcoming elections," King added. "There has to be a maximum effort so that does happen. They're going to get very few votes from community of color."

Republicans championing the changes insist they're simply trying to help restore public confidence to the U.S. election system. There was no evidence of widespread voter fraud in 2020, but polls suggest that many Republicans doubted the outcome of the election after Trump repeatedly declared, falsely, that he was the victim of illegal voting.

In an interview, Trump ally Ken Cuccinelli used an expletive to describe King's suggestion that the new laws are designed to disenfranchise African Americans.

"I take great offense to the idea that I'm trying to keep anybody from voting," Cuccinelli said. "There's no reason anybody, no matter what color they are, can't access this system if they're a legal and appropriate voter."

In Georgia, the state Senate has voted to limit access to absentee mail ballots to people 65 and over, those with a physical disability and people out of town on Election Day. Legislation passed by the state House would also dramatically reduce early voting hours, limit the use of early-voting drop boxes, and make it a crime to give food or water to voters standing in line.

During Monday's Senate vote, several Republicans who represent competitive metro Atlanta districts didn't vote, including Sen. Brian Strickland. He had tried to amend the bill in committee to remove provisions scrapping no-excuse absentee voting but was unable to muster enough support.

Strickland said he didn't vote against the bill because he agrees with much of it, except the provision to end no-excuse absentee voting.

"The idea of going backward on that now and requiring excuses, I think it sends the wrong message," Strickland said.

If ultimately approved by both chambers of the legislature, the change would end broad no-excuse absentee voting put in place in 2005 by a Republican-led legislature, after more than 1.3 million people voted absentee by mail in November.

In Iowa, Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, on Monday signed a GOP-backed bill that requires voting sites to close an hour earlier and shortens the early-voting period to 20 days from the current 29. Voters will be also removed from active voting lists if they miss a single general election and don't report a change in address or re-register.

Republican Secretary of State Paul Pate, who contradicted Trump's references to widespread voter fraud last fall and expanded mail-in voting during the pandemic, did not oppose the new law, but he offered no ringing endorsement either after a Latino advocacy group sued Tuesday to stop it from taking effect.

"My office will continue providing resources to help every eligible Iowan be a voter and understand any changes in election law," Pate said. "Our goal has always been to make it easy to vote, but hard to cheat."

And in Arizona, Republicans introduced dozens of bills to impose new restrictions on voting, many of them targeting the vote-by-mail system that accounts for about 80 percent of Arizona's ballots.

Some of the most aggressive proposals have died unceremoniously. House Speaker Rusty Bowers, a Republican, quietly buried a bill that would have allowed the Legislature to overturn presidential election results and appoint its own Electoral College representatives. But other measures are advancing, some with the support of Republicans who acknowledge discomfort.

The Arizona Senate this week voted to require identification such as a driver's license number or a copy of a utility bill to be included with mail ballots. Republican Sen. Tyler Pace said he worried it would reduce ballot secrecy and pose a serious barrier to the many voters who don't have a printer at home.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 68 of 88

"The problem is every single way you look at that it gets cumbersome," Pace said during the bill debate. Meanwhile, Steele warned Republican officials that they would face a fierce political backlash in next year's midterm elections and beyond if they continue to make it harder for some voters to participate in elections.

"If you're silent, you're complicit. You're complicit in disenfranchising African American voters in key jurisdictions across the country," Steele said. "They will rue upcoming elections if they stay on this course."

Peoples reported from New York and Cooper reported from Phoenix. Associated Press writer Thomas Beaumont in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

## 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 nonessential 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.

Piaui 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, Sao Paulo, at least 30 patients died this month while waiting for ICU beds, according to a tally published Wednesday by the news site G1. Occupancy of ICUs is above 90% in 15 of 27 capitals, according to the state-run Fiocruz institute. In southern Santa Catarina state, 419 people were waiting for transfer to ICU beds. Neighboring Rio Grande do Sul's capacity was at 106%. Alexandre Zavascki, a doctor in its capital, described a constant arrival of hospital patients struggling 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 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 any such moves, saying the economy needed to keep churning and that isolation would cause depression.

The most recent surge is driven by the P1 variant that first became dominant in the Amazonian city Manaus.

Brazil's failure to arrest the virus' spread since then is increasingly 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."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 69 of 88

Last week's tally of more than 10,000 deaths was Brazil's highest since the pandemic began, and this week is on track to be even worse after the country posted nearly 2,300 deaths Wednesday — blowing away the prior day's total that was also a record. At the Vila Formosa cemetery in Sao Paulo, burials are being done one after another, with mourners and cars lined up awaiting their turn.

Brazil has decades of experience with mass immunization campaigns, but rollout has been hobbled by delays, some self-inflicted; 5.5% of its population has been vaccinated.

"Governors, like a lot of the population, are getting fed up with all this inaction," said Margareth Dalcolmo, a prominent pulmonologist at Fiocruz. She added that their proposed pact will remain symbolic unless it is 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."

Meanwhile, the city of Araraquara, in Sao Paulo's interior, has seen new cases turn downward weeks after declaring lockdown amid a crippling surge dominated by the P1 variant. Mayor Edinho Silva told the AP in a message that, without mass vaccination, there was no alternative.

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.

## Meghan and Harry spark anger, soul-searching in UK media

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's royal family is smarting from its depiction in Meghan and Harry's explosive TV interview as aloof, uncaring and tinged with racism. But the couple identified an even bigger villain: the British media, which they accused of racist bullying and personal attacks.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 70 of 88

Many in the media argue that although some tabloids occasionally go too far, journalists play a vital role holding Britain's taxpayer-funded royal family to account. But some British journalists, especially those from minority backgrounds, hope the interview will trigger a long-overdue reckoning with media misbehavior and lack of diversity.

Marcus Ryder, professor of media diversity at Birmingham City University, said it was too glib to speak of "watershed moments."

"But I would suggest that this is a moment which will help shape the industry," he said.

In the couple's interview with Oprah Winfrey, Meghan accused British tabloids of "attacking and inciting so much racism" against her. Harry depicted a toxic relationship between monarchy and media, saying the royal family was "scared" of the tabloid press.

The allegations stirred a passionate response that has toppled two senior British media figures.

Talk show host Piers Morgan, a familiar TV face on both sides of the Atlantic, quit "Good Morning Britain" amid an outcry over his comments about Meghan, particularly her description of mental health struggles and suicidal thoughts.

Morgan told viewers on Monday that "I don't believe a word she says." His comments drew more than 41,000 complaints to Britain's media regulator. Morgan walked off the "Good Morning Britain" set on Tuesday when another presenter challenged him, and quit the show later the same day.

The furor has also claimed the job of Ian Murray, executive director of the Society of Editors. The new media umbrella group released a strongly worded defense of the press after Harry and Meghan's 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."

That prompted a backlash. Top editors of The Guardian, the Financial Times and HuffPost UK took issue with the statement, while 160 reporters and editors signed a letter saying the Society of Editors was "in denial" about racism.

ITV News anchor Charlene White, the first Black woman to present the network's main evening news program, pulled out of hosting the society's annual Press Awards, saying the organization asked her to get involved to improve its diversity but failed to live up to its words.

"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," White told the society in a statement. "But for some unknown reason, you feel as though the U.K. press is exempt in that discussion."

On Wednesday, Murray stepped down, acknowledging his statement "could have been much clearer in its condemnation of bigotry and has clearly caused upset."

Britain's media, while diverse in its political and social views, is not representative of the population in terms of race, gender or class. Non-white Britons and women are underrepresented, while graduates of private schools hold a disproportionate share of the jobs.

Journalists who are working to change the situation say it is not easy.

Marverine Duffy, a former news anchor who directs the journalism program at Birmingham City University, says "improving the numbers of ethnically and socially diverse qualified journalists into newsrooms is paramount," but is not enough.

"Systems need to be put in place to shake up group-think, anti-Blackness and the unwillingness to see racism and xenophobia for what it actually is, instead of turning a blind eye," she said.

As well as sparking a debate about diversity, Meghan and Harry's interview highlighted the media's complex, uneasy relationship with the monarchy.

For decades, Britain's royal dramas played out largely in private as a deferential media protected the secrets of the monarchy. In the 1930s, the romance between King Edward VIII and divorced American Wallis Simpson was headline news in the U.S., but barely mentioned in Britain until the king abdicated to marry the woman he loved.

That deference was evaporating by the time Prince Charles married 20-year-old Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. British media charted every twist of their increasingly unhappy marriage. Glamorous Diana became

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 71 of 88

the world's most famous woman, trailed by paparazzi up to the moment of her death in a Paris car crash in 1997 while being pursued by photographers.

Diana's death prompted soul-searching for both palace and press. But it did not heal their troubled relationship.

Harry has spoken of his fear that history will repeat itself and his wife will suffer the same fate as his mother. When he and Meghan quit royal duties last year and moved to North America, they cited what they said were the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media. The couple are suing several U.K. newspapers for invasion of privacy.

Ryder said the challenge for the media was differentiating legitimate stories about royalty that are in the public interest from intrusive gossip.

"It is a subjective call, and that subjective call is why we need our gatekeepers, the people who are making that call — the people who are the head of newspapers, the people who are the head of news broadcast bulletins — to have true diversity," he said.

"Because if the only people that are making that call are white people from a certain background and are predominantly male, they will make different subjective calls than if we have more diversity."

Others point out that despite their hostility to the British press, Harry and Meghan are deft media manipulators themselves.

Ed Owens, a historian who has studied the relationship between the media and royalty, said the couple is "utilizing the new channels of media — things like social media, the Oprah interview — to try and reach out and connect with new audiences."

"This is nothing new," he said. "The royals have always sought out new forms of media in order to connect with the public. Another thing that's not new is the way that they used, if you like, a language of suffering and hardship in order to evoke an emotional response from media audiences around the world."

"And I think to a large part, they succeeded," he said.

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AP writer Danica Kirka contributed to this report.

## Uber, Lyft team up on database to expose abusive drivers

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Business Writer

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — Uber and Lyft have teamed up to create a database of drivers ousted from their ride-hailing services for complaints about sexual assault and other crimes that have raised passenger-safety concerns for years.

The clearinghouse unveiled Thursday will initially list drivers expelled by the ride-hailing rivals in the U.S. But it will also be open to other companies that deploy workers to perform services such as delivering groceries or take-out orders from restaurants

The new safeguard, dubbed the "sharing safety program," will be overseen by HireRight, a specialist in background checks. The use of a third party is aimed at addressing potential legal concerns about companies, including competitors such as Uber and Lyft, having access to information to each other's personnel matters.

"Lyft and Uber are competitors in a whole lot of ways, but on this issue of safety, we completely agree that folks should be safe no matter what platform they choose," Tony West, Uber's chief legal officer, told The Associated Press. He spoke in an interview that also included Jennifer Brandenburger, Lyft's head of policy development.

The safety program follows through on a promise that Uber made 15 months ago when it revealed that more than 3,000 sexual assaults had been reported on its service in the U.S. during 2018.

Since that revelation, San Francisco-based Uber and Lyft have been working to navigate through anti-trust and privacy concerns to create a way to flag drivers who have engaged in violent or other abhorrent behavior that culminated in them being booted off their services.

Sharing the information about reported sexual assaults is considered especially important because

victims of such crimes frequently don't file formal complaints with police. That gap has opened a crack for potentially dangerous drivers to slip through routine background checks drawing upon legal records, Brandenburger said.

To protect privacy, no passenger information will be shared in the database and the incidents that resulted in a driver's dismissal will be listed in six broad categories: attempted non-consensual sexual penetration; non-consensual touching of a sexual body part; non-consensual kissing of a sexual body part; non-consensual kissing of a non-sexual body part; non-consensual sexual penetration; and fatal physical assaults.

Only "fraction of a fraction" of drivers have engaged in behavior that fall into those categories, West said. Any company with access to the clearinghouse of information could still decide to allow a driver on its service after its own investigation, West said.

Michael Wolfe, a Uber driver who also leads a Washington state group representing about 2,000 other drivers, praised both ride-hailing services for trying to weed out the abuses in the industry.

"The few bad apples give all us drivers a bad name," said Wolfe, executive director for Drive Forward.

The added layer of protection was hailed by the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, a victims' rights group that has criticized the ride-hailing services for not doing more rigorous screening of their drivers.

"Sexual violence thrives in secrecy," said Scott Berkowitz, the network's president. "Thanks to this initiative, perpetrators will no longer be able to hide or escape accountability by simply switching ridesharing platforms."

It could also help appease U.S. lawmakers, who have criticized Uber and Lyft in the past for inadequate safety protections for their riders.

Lyft hasn't delivered on its promise to release a report about past problems on its service because the company is waiting for Uber to resolve a privacy dispute with California regulators, according to Brandenburger.

After Uber detailed past abuses on its service in its December 2019 report, California's Public Utilities Commission sought the victims' names and contact numbers. After Uber rebuffed the request to protect the victims' privacy, the agency slapped the company with a \$59 million fine. The dispute is now in the appeals process.

The safety feature is rolling out at a time when both ride-hailing services are still trying to rebound from the pandemic-driven lockdowns that have prevented people from traveling and curtailed demand for rides, especially from strangers.

## 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, 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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 73 of 88

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" Poprakov 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.

"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

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 74 of 88

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.

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

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

## Prince William defends UK monarchy against racism accusation

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince William insisted Thursday that his family is not racist as he became the first British royal to speak out about accusations of bigotry made by Prince Harry and Meghan, his brother and sister-in-law.

William made the comments in response to questions shouted at him by reporters during a visit to an East London school. While members of the royal family often ignore such queries, William used the opportunity to address the explosive allegations that have rocked the monarchy.

"We're very much not a racist family," William, 38, said as his wife, Kate, walked by his side.

Buckingham Palace is struggling to quiet criticism after Harry and Meghan alleged that the duchess was the victim of racism and callous treatment during her time as a working member of the royal family. The palace tried to respond to the charges, made during an interview with U.S. TV host Oprah Winfrey, with a 61-word statement that critics called "too little, too late."

William, second in line to the throne after his father, Prince Charles, made the comments during a visit to School21 to mark students' return to classrooms following a national lockdown.

Harry, 36, and Meghan, 39, walked away from royal duties last year and moved to California, saying they wanted to escape the intrusive British media and live a normal life.

Meghan, who is biracial, said in the interview that 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 that member of the royal family had expressed "concerns" about the color of her baby's skin before the birth of their son, Archie.

Thirty-six hours after the comments were first aired Sunday, the palace issued a written statement in the name of Queen Elizabeth II, Harry's grandmother.

"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 allegations — and the palace's response — have touched off conversations around the world about racism, mental health and even the relationship between Britain and its former colonies. The revelations stood in stark contrast to the hopes many had when Harry and Meghan wed that the glamorous former actress would help the monarchy relate to young people in an increasingly multicultural nation.

And William's brief remarks further disappointed commentators like Nikesh Shukla, author of "Brown Baby: A Memoir of Race, Family and Home." Shukla said William's comments offer "a defensive bulletproof shield rather than a discussion about racism."

"Having something that you've said be pointed out as racist is really uncomfortable, but it's what you do next that counts," he told The Associated Press. "And what I've seen the royal family has done ... is instead of interrogate that racism, they've said, 'We are not a racist family,' which is a very hard thing to move forward from."

Others have criticized the palace for trying to handle the issue privately, saying the monarchy is supported by taxpayer money and such an important issue should be dealt with in public.

Britain is a constitutional monarchy, and the royal family is legally barred from trying to influence public policy. But the monarchy continues to be a symbol of national unity, especially under the leadership of the queen, who has reigned since 1952.

The interview also revealed tensions between Harry and William, who had long been seen as close and who supported each other after the death of their mother, Princess Diana.

When asked about his relationship with William, Harry said: "Time heals all things, hopefully."

William said Thursday that he hadn't yet spoken to his younger brother since the interview, "but I will do."

Follow AP's coverage of Prince Harry and Meghan's interview at <https://apnews.com/PrinceHarry>

## AP-NORC poll: 1 in 5 in US lost someone close in pandemic

By LAURAN NEERGAARD, HANNAH FINGERHUT and MARION RENAULT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — About 1 in 5 Americans say they lost a relative or close friend to the coronavirus, highlighting the division between heartache and hope as the country itches to get back to normal a year into the pandemic.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research illustrates how the stage is set for a two-tiered recovery. The public's worry about the virus has dropped to its lowest point since the fall, before the holidays brought skyrocketing cases into the new year.

But people still in mourning express frustration at the continued struggle to stay safe.

"We didn't have a chance to grieve. It's almost like it happened yesterday for us. It's still fresh," said Nettie Parks of Volusia County, Florida, whose only brother died of COVID-19 last April. Because of travel restrictions, Parks and her five sisters have yet to hold a memorial.

Parks, 60, said she retired from her customer service job last year in part because of worry about workplace exposure, and now she is watching with dread as more states and cities relax health rules.

Only about 3 in 10 Americans are very worried about themselves or a family member being infected with the virus, down from about 4 in 10 in recent months. Still, a majority are at least somewhat worried.

"They're letting their guard down and they shouldn't," Parks said. "People are going to have to realize this thing is not going anywhere. It's not over."

COVID-19's toll is staggering, more than 527,000 dead in the U.S. alone, and counting.

But "it's hard to conceptualize the true danger if you don't know it personally," said Dr. K. Luan Phan, psychiatry chief at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center.

For those who lost a loved one, "that fear is most salient in them. They're going to be a lot more cautious as businesses reopen and as schools start back," Phan said.

And without that first-hand experience, even people who heeded health officials' pleas to stay masked and keep their distance are succumbing to pandemic fatigue because "fears tend to habituate," he said.

Communities of color were hardest hit by the coronavirus. The AP-NORC poll found about 30% of African Americans, like Parks, and Hispanics know a relative or close friend who died from the virus, compared with 15% of white people.

That translates into differences in how worried people are about a virus that remains a serious threat until most of the country -- and the world -- gets vaccinated. Despite recent drops in cases, 43% of Black Americans and 39% of Hispanics are very or extremely worried about themselves or a loved one getting COVID-19, compared to just 25% of white people. (For other racial and ethnic groups, sample sizes are too small to analyze.)

While vaccines offer real hope for ending the scourge, the poll also found about 1 in 3 Americans don't intend to get their shot. The most reluctant: Younger adults, people without college degrees, and Republicans.

The hardest-hit are also having the hardest time getting vaccinated: 16% of Black Americans and 15% of Hispanics say they already have received at least one shot, compared to 26% of white people. But majorities in each group want to get vaccinated.

Currently demand for vaccines still outstrips supply, and about 4 in 10 Americans, especially older adults, say the sign-up process has been poor.

John Perez, a retired teacher and school administrator in Los Angeles, spent hours trying to sign up online before giving up. Then a friend found a drive-thru vaccination site with openings.

"When I was driving there for the first shot, I was going through a tunnel of emotions," the 68-year-old said. "I knew what a special moment it was."

Overall, confidence in the vaccines is slowly strengthening. The poll found 25% of Americans aren't confident the shots were properly tested, down somewhat from 32% who expected they wouldn't be in

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 77 of 88

December, just before the first ones were cleared.

"We were a little skeptical when it was first coming out because it was so politicized," said Bob Richard, 50, of Smithfield, Rhode Island. But now, he said his family is inclined to get the shots -- if they can sort through the appointment system when it's their turn.

The poll found two-thirds of Americans say their fellow citizens nationwide haven't taken the pandemic seriously enough.

"The conflict with people who don't take it serious as I do, it's disappointing," said Wayne Denley, 73, of Alexandria, Louisiana.

Early on, he and his wife started keeping a list of people they knew who'd gotten sick. By November, they'd counted nine deaths and dozens of infections. He'd share the sobering list with people doubtful of the pandemic's toll, yet still would see unmasked acquaintances while running errands.

"I'm glad I wrote them down -- it helped make it real for me," Denley said. "You sort of become numb to it."

There are exceptionally wide partisan differences. Most Democrats, 60%, say their local communities failed to take the threat seriously enough and even more, 83%, say the country as a whole didn't either.

Among Republicans, 31% say their localities didn't take the pandemic seriously enough, and 44% said that of the country. But another third of Republicans say the U.S. overreacted.

The differences translate into behavior: More than three-quarters of Democrats say they always wear a mask around others compared to about half of Republicans.

And the divisions have Phan, the psychiatrist, worried.

"We've survived something that we should be grateful for having survived it. How do we repay or reciprocate that good fortune? The only way to do it is to be stronger in the year after the epidemic than before," he said.

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Neergaard reported from Alexandria, Virginia, and Renault reported from New York. Associated Press journalist John Seewer contributed to this report.

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The AP-NORC poll of 1,434 adults was conducted Feb. 25-March 1 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points.

## March 11, 2020: The night sports, as we knew them, ended

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Nobody knew exactly what to say in Oklahoma City around 7:10 p.m. local time on March 11, 2020. That was an issue for Mario Nanni, whose job as the Oklahoma City Thunder public-address announcer is to tell fans exactly what's happening.

He had just introduced the starting lineups. The Thunder and Utah Jazz were about to play. And then someone ran onto the court from the back of the arena with one mandate: Make sure that game doesn't start. The referees were hastily gathered, then coaches were brought together to hear the news: Jazz center Rudy Gobert had tested positive, and NBA Commissioner Adam Silver decided to cancel the game.

Nanni took a deep breath. "Fans, due to unforeseen circumstances, the game tonight has been postponed," he began, as those inside the arena somehow made their reactions of shock audible.

With that, everything in the world of sports officially changed.

Everything.

"We were in uncharted territory," Nanni said.

In many respects, we still are. The NBA was the first major league to stop play. A day later, so did the NHL, Major League Baseball and Major League Soccer. College basketball did as well, and the trickle-down continued. High school tournaments. AAU seasons. Spring sports. Summer camps. Fall sports in high schools and colleges. The pro leagues and most college ones have come back; some at the high school

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 78 of 88

and youth levels haven't resumed yet. Careers ended, without warning, without proper farewells.

Sports was bracing for change on March 11, 2020. Locker rooms had been closed to outsiders, hand sanitizer was everywhere, and the NBA was among the leagues strongly considering playing games in empty arenas.

The shutdown didn't seem as likely. That is, until it happened.

"We had discussed as a crew at lunch that day the possibility of this thing spreading," said NBA referee Pat Fraher, who was on the officiating team for that Oklahoma City-Utah game and was the one who delivered the word to the coaches. "But we didn't really know what we were a part of that night. We had no idea the true impact of what happened."

The global fight against COVID-19 didn't begin that night in Oklahoma City, of course. It started at least two months earlier in China, where the virus originated, but that was the day where the global health crisis was declared — and within hours, a global sports crisis was happening as well.

Things are, obviously, improving. Vaccines are getting into arms, health workers have devised plans to keep everyone as safe as can be, and more and more games are getting played. But a half-million Americans have died, 2.5 million around the world have died, more than 100 million globally have been infected.

Those are the stats that matter most from the past year.

"We see some light at the end of the tunnel, with the COVID-19 vaccine being accessible on a widespread basis over the coming weeks and months," PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan said.

Sports are games, and games are charted with numbers, and the numbers from the past year are incalculable. Billions of dollars were lost by the shutdown of sports; how much, we'll never know for certain. Same goes with the jobs lost; thousands, but nobody knows exactitudes. And how many games were never played? Globally, at all levels, that number hits the millions with ease.

For months, every game clock was stuck at 0:00.

Nobody won.

Everybody lost.

"It hit everybody in the face and COVID showed how it disproportionately affects so many others," San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said. "And it took something like that to make everybody step up and say, 'Whoa,' and see what was going on. And like I said, in many, many aspects of our lives, that made that possible."

And now, the comeback story is already being told. The NFL made it through a season without any games being canceled and even had some fans at the Super Bowl. Small numbers of fans are welcome at golf and tennis events again. Some NBA and NHL teams have a few people in the seats. March Madness is here. Baseball is looming. A delayed Tokyo Olympics seem like they'll happen, albeit without international fans welcome to attend.

"The question is not whether," International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said. "The question is how these Olympic Games will take place."

Things are not normal and may not be again for some time. The definition of normal has surely changed as well. But the games came back, providing what sports always does — a break from reality, a diversion from problems, an escape from the real world.

That's been needed now, perhaps more than ever.

"Anything you go through in life, it either makes you or breaks you," Gobert said. "If you can handle it and grow from it, that's what life's about."

The last year proved that sports are about that as well.

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

## **From job cuts to online commerce, virus reshaped US economy**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — At first, it was expected to be brief. At least that was the hope.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 79 of 88

Instead, a once-in-a-century pandemic has ground on for a year, throwing millions out of work and upending wide swathes of the American economy. Delivery services thrived while restaurants suffered. Home offices replaced downtown offices. Travel and entertainment spending dried up.

The job losses were swift and harsh. But they hardly fell equally across the economy. Black and Hispanic workers fared worse than others. And many women, mostly mothers, felt compelled to quit the workforce to care for children being schooled online from home. Despite the job cuts, Americans as a whole socked away a record level of savings, buoyed by government aid to the unemployed and income that higher-paid workers, hunkered down at home, managed to squirrel away.

After a year of ghostly airports, empty sports stadiums and constant Zoom meetings, growing signs suggest that the economy is strengthening. Hiring picked up in February. Business restrictions have eased as the pace of viral infections has ebbed. Yet the economy remains far from normal.

Here's where things stand at the one-year mark:

## JOB MARKET RESHAPED

After a flood of layoffs last spring when the economy shut down, more than half the job losses have been regained. Yet hiring since the summer has slowed. The economy still has 9.5 million fewer jobs than before the pandemic — more than were lost in the entire 2008-2009 Great Recession.

Nearly every industry has been hurt but some far more than others. Restaurants, airlines and hotels have been devastated. The music industry, too, has taken a beating, with concert halls closed from New York to Nashville. The film industry has shed a huge proportion of jobs. Salons and dry cleaners have had to lay off many.

As more Americans have ordered dinners, groceries and household goods online, delivery drivers have emerged as the biggest source of job growth in the pandemic. Online retail has also created more work, mostly by boosting warehouse jobs.

## FOR SMALL BUSINESSES, A FIGHT TO SURVIVE

The "For Rent" signs on storefronts and offices around the world provided a sad illustration of COVID's ruinous effect on small businesses. With government restrictions and fear of infection keeping consumers out of stores and restaurants, businesses that operate on narrow revenue streams struggled over the past year. Or they vanished altogether, putting millions out of work.

It's not known how many U.S. businesses have permanently closed, but estimates from economists and the online review site Yelp suggest hundreds of thousands. Many more may still fail. Womply, a provider of financial and other services to businesses, estimates that one-third to one-half of all bars remain closed in many states, along with at least a quarter of restaurants and a third of health and beauty businesses.

## TRAVEL INDUSTRIES HAMMERED

Most travel-related industries suffered a horrendous 2020. Planes and airports were left all but empty. On April 14, the Transportation Security Administration screened just 87,000 passengers at U.S. airports — down a stunning 96% from the same day in 2019. Even early this month, screened passengers were still down 43% from a year earlier.

It's not clear when — or whether — travel will fully recover. Southwest Airlines CEO Gary Kelly said in December that business travel, a major source of airline revenue, was still down 90%. Far fewer people need hotel rooms, too. In late February, U.S. hotel occupancy was just 48%, down one-quarter from a year earlier, according to the market data company STR.

## MARKETS DEFY PANDEMIC WOES

Wall Street soared through much of the pandemic after righting itself from its initial terrifying plunge. Now, nearly a year after its rocket ride began in late March 2020, many fear that stock market gains might have gone too far, too fast.

Give much of the credit — or blame — for the market's rally to the Federal Reserve, which slashed interest

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 80 of 88

rates to record lows to help support the economy and financial markets. Ultra-low bond yields lifted hopes for corporate profits and fueled interest in stocks, especially the shares of the largest tech companies.

Some have dubbed the stampede into stocks the "There Is No Alternative," or TINA, trade, whereby investors felt that with bond yields so low, they had no choice but to load up on stocks. Surging enthusiasm for stocks among a new generation of investors, some of whom were stuck at home with time to fill and free trading apps on their phones, played a role, too.

Critics warned that stocks have become too expensive, particularly when measured against the quarterly profits that companies have managed to produce. Those fears have been magnified by a recent surge in longer-term interest rates, which could erase support for stock prices.

## ENTERTAINMENT SHRIVELS

Movie theaters, concert halls, and sports stadiums stood largely empty last spring and summer in an initial attempt to help quell the pandemic. The absence of paying attendees cost the jobs of ticket-takers, concession-stand workers and lighting and sound technicians.

Performers were hurt in other ways, too: For musicians who made money performing at weddings or other private events, those side gigs also dried up.

Even as movie theaters have slowly reopened, often at limited capacity, their revenue remains deeply depressed, with many Americans still reluctant to spend two hours indoors with strangers.

## ONLINE FOOD DELIVERY, RETAIL SAVE CONSUMERS

The pandemic emptied malls and restaurants and accelerated a trend toward online ordering and delivery. It's far from clear that shoppers and diners will ever fully return to their old habits.

U.S. e-commerce sales have grown 22.5% faster than overall retail sales since the pandemic, according to Retail Metrics Inc. That's up from 6% in the decade before the coronavirus.

Online services like curbside pickup, already embraced by discounters like Target and Walmart, were adopted by more stores, including Macy's and Kohl's. At the same time, U.S. demand for restaurant meal delivery jumped 137% last year, according to NPD Group. JustEatTakeaway.com, a leading platform in Europe, said its delivery orders more than doubled last year.

Experts say traffic to stores and restaurants won't likely fully return — a trend that could have dire consequences for workers in those industries. Despite surging sales, for example, Best Buy last month laid off 5,000 full-time store workers as it focuses more on its online sales.

## GOVERNMENT OPENS MONEY SPIGOT

With jobs decimated and many households' incomes plunging, the federal government has stepped in with a flood of financial relief. That assistance has included over \$1 trillion in direct checks and stepped-up unemployment aid, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

In a series of legislative packages that have doled out just over \$4 trillion, the government has also provided forgivable loans to small business, rental assistance and support for health care providers. An additional \$1.9 trillion is on the way with President Joe Biden's economic rescue bill having just won congressional approval.

About \$550 billion was spent in support of those out of work in 2020, more than triple the total spent in 2010, when the unemployment rate topped 9% for the entire year. (By contrast, unemployment has stayed below 7% for the past five months.)

Some economists fear that as the virus recedes and consumers ramp up spending, the gusher of cash will accelerate inflation, potentially forcing the Fed to raise interest rates and limit the economic recovery. But Fed Chair Jerome Powell has suggested that any significant rise in prices would likely prove temporary.

## SAVINGS SOAR

Much of the financial aid from the government has ended up not as consumer spending but as savings

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 81 of 88

in Americans' bank accounts, setting up a potential spending boom that could, in turn, speed economic growth.

The distribution of \$600 stimulus checks in January, along with \$300 in supplemental unemployment benefit aid, helped balloon Americans' stockpile of cash saved to \$3.9 trillion in January. That's triple the pre-pandemic level.

Poorer households have been spending more of their aid. When \$1,200 checks were distributed last spring, along with \$600 in weekly federal jobless aid, Americans in the poorest one-quarter of households initially saved a portion of it. But by October, these households had spent most of it, according to research by the JPMorgan Chase Institute, suggesting that they needed the money for rent, food and other necessities.

Higher-earning families, by contrast, cut back spending on travel, entertainment, gym memberships and other services, leaving their level of savings consistently higher last year.

## WORKING FROM HOME

For years, experts predicted that faster broadband internet connections, video conferencing software and cloud computing would free many employees from the confines of an office and enable them to work from anywhere. It took a pandemic for that vision to become reality.

Before the pandemic, just 7% of Americans were doing their jobs from home, according a Labor Department survey. By last month, about 23% of employees were working remotely because of the pandemic, the government found. (That figure excluded people who had been telecommuting before.)

Remote work seems sure to become more common after the pandemic. Many companies, mostly tech firms like Salesforce and Spotify, have said they will continue to allow remote work. Others, such as Goldman Sachs, expect a full return to the office.

A report by PwC found that while most employers have found remote work to be productive, nearly nine in 10 expect at least half their workers to be back in the office by October. That's a faster return than employees expect.

## PANDEMIC WORSENS INEQUALITY

Job losses during the pandemic recession have fallen heavily on Black and Hispanic workers as well as on low-income Americans. The proportion of white Americans, ages 25 through 54, with jobs declined to 77% in January from 81% in February 2020, before the pandemic erupted. (Economists often focus on the 25-to-54 group because it isn't much affected by young people returning to school or older workers retiring.)

For Black Americans, the drop was slightly larger, to 71% from 76%. And for Hispanics, the decline was even worse, to 71%, from 78%.

The differences reflect inequalities that pre-date the pandemic: Black and Hispanic workers are more likely to work at restaurants, hotels, bars, casinos and other industries that were hardest hit by the recession.

Job losses have also been far worse for the poorest one-quarter of workers, whose unemployment rate has topped 20%. For the wealthiest one-fifth, the jobless rate has barely risen and is at just 5%.

AP Business Writers Stan Choe, Joyce M. Rosenberg and Anne D'Innocenzio in New York, Dee-Ann Durbin in Detroit and David Koenig in Dallas contributed to this report.

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

## EU regulator recommends using J&J's one-shot vaccine

By MARIA CHENG Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The European Medicines Agency on Thursday gave the green light to Johnson & Johnson's one-dose coronavirus vaccine, handing the European Union's 27 nations a fourth vaccine to try to speed up the bloc's much-criticized vaccination rollout.

The EU medicines regulator advised that the vaccine be cleared for use in all adults over 18 "after a

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 82 of 88

thorough evaluation" of J&J's data found the vaccine met the criteria for efficacy, safety and quality.

"With this latest positive opinion, authorities across the European Union will have another option to combat the pandemic and protect the lives and health of their citizens," said Emer Cooke, EMA's executive director.

The EMA has already recommended COVID-19 vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca — but all of those vaccines require two doses, several weeks apart. Production delays have also plagued all three vaccine manufacturers.

In its statement Thursday, the EMA said the J&J vaccine was about 67% effective. The most common side effects were pain at the injection site, headache, tiredness, muscle pain and nausea.

The European Commission quickly granted a conditional marketing authorization to the vaccine.

"The entry on the market of the (J&J) vaccine ensures that we have access to a total of up to 1.8 billion doses of approved vaccines from different technology platforms," Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave an emergency authorization to the J&J shot in late February. Health experts hope that having a one-dose vaccine will speed efforts to immunize the world against COVID-19, especially given the recent infection spikes in Europe driven by worrying new variants.

The EU has struggled to quickly roll out shots and immunize its most vulnerable citizens. It ranks far behind countries including Israel, Britain, Chile and the U.S.

J&J said it has committed to providing the EU with its pre-ordered 200 million doses starting in the second quarter.

"The greatest barrier to rolling out the vaccines so far has been the availability of vaccines," said Dr. Peter English, who previously chaired the British Medical Association's Public Health Medicine Committee. "This new addition can only add to the quantity of vaccine available in the EU, as well as providing another alternative if there are hitches with the supply or use of other products."

Europe recorded 1 million new COVID-19 cases last week, an increase of 9% from the previous week and a reversal that ended a six-week decline in new infections. The World Health Organization's European office blamed that surge partly on virus variants, including one first identified in Britain that is thought to be 50% more transmissible.

A massive study that spanned three continents found the J&J vaccine was 85% effective in protecting against severe illness, hospitalizations and death. That protection remained strong even in countries like South Africa, where variants have been identified that appear to be less susceptible to other vaccines, including the one made by AstraZeneca.

The J&J vaccine can be stored at normal refrigerator temperatures, similar to the AstraZeneca vaccine, which should make rolling out its use easier than vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna, which require colder storage.

J&J's shot uses a cold virus like a Trojan horse to carry the spike gene of the coronavirus into the body, where cells make harmless copies of the protein to prime the immune system in case the real virus comes along. It's similar to COVID-19 shots made by AstraZeneca and China's CanSino Biologics.

J&J is also seeking emergency authorization of its vaccine in Britain and by the World Health Organization. It has already been approved for use in Bahrain and Canada.

Thomas Mertens, the head of Germany's independent vaccine advisory panel, said he expected the shot's use to be recommended in Germany.

However, Mertens wouldn't rule out that the panel might recommend using the vaccine only for certain groups within the population, as it initially did by limiting the AstraZeneca shot to under 65s - a restriction it later lifted after receiving more data.

J&J has faced production delays in the U.S. and Europe but has recently signed agreements with rival pharmaceuticals who will help make their vaccine. In February, Sanofi Pasteur said it would be able to make about 12 million doses of the J&J vaccine at one of its French production sites once the shot is cleared by the EMA. It is aiming to make 1 billion doses this year.

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Mike Corder in The Hague, Frank Jordans in Berlin and Lorne Cook in Brussels contributed to this report.

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

## US jobless claims fall to 712,000 as pace of layoffs eases

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell last week to 712,000, the lowest total since early November, evidence that fewer employers are cutting jobs amid a decline in confirmed coronavirus cases and signs of an improving economy.

The Labor Department said Thursday that applications for unemployment aid dropped by 42,000 from 754,000 the week before. Though the job market has been slowly strengthening, many businesses remain under pressure, and 9.6 million jobs remain lost to the pandemic that flattened the economy 12 months ago.

In February, U.S. employers added a robust 379,000 jobs, the most since October, reflecting an economy in which consumers are spending more and states and cities are easing business restrictions. Thursday's figure, though the lowest weekly figure in four months, showed that weekly applications for jobless benefits still remain high by historical standards: Before the viral outbreak, they had never topped 700,000, even during the Great Recession.

All told, 4.1 million Americans are receiving traditional state unemployment benefits. Counting supplemental federal unemployment programs that were established to soften the economic damage from the virus, an estimated 20.1 million people are collecting some form of jobless aid.

The continuing job cuts reflect the extent to which the pandemic disrupted normal economic activity and kept consumers hunkered down at home rather than out traveling, shopping, dining out and attending entertainment venues. Cities and states restricted the hours and capacity of restaurants, bars and other businesses. Even where restrictions didn't exist, many Americans for months chose to stay home to avoid the risk of infection.

Now, though, as vaccinations are increasingly administered around the country, business limitations are gradually eased and consumers grow more comfortable engaging face to face with others, optimism about the economy is rising. Last month, consumers bounced back from months of retrenchment to step up their spending by 2.4% — the sharpest increase in seven months and a sign that the economy may be poised to sustain a recovery.

In the meantime, the number of confirmed new COVID-19 cases has dropped to an average of around 50,000 a day from nearly 250,000 in early January.

A brightening outlook for the economy was reinforced Wednesday, when Congress gave final approval to a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill that will provide \$1,400 payments to most adults and extend \$300 weekly unemployment benefits into early September. The legislation will also provide money for viral vaccines and treatments, school re-openings, state and local governments and ailing industries ranging from airlines to concert halls.

Many economists suggest that the combination of substantial federal aid, a rising pace of vaccinations, continually low borrowing rates and the increased willingness of consumers to spend will unleash a robust economic recovery later this year. Still, defeating the coronavirus remains vital to achieving a full recovery of the economy and the job market.

"These are welcome policies, but they are still temporary relief," said AnnElizabeth Konkel, economist at the Indeed Hiring Lab. "To fully heal the labor market, the public health situation must be under control. Coronavirus started this mess and continues to cause massive economic damage on a daily basis."

Despite signs of improvement in the economy, business is far from normal. The data firm Womply reports that 63% of movie theaters, live music venues and other entertainment establishments remain closed, along with 38% of bars and 35% of hair salons and other beauty businesses.

## Former presidents, first ladies urge Americans to get shots

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 84 of 88

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four former presidents are urging Americans to get vaccinated as soon as COVID-19 doses are available to them, as part of a campaign to overcome hesitancy about the shots.

Two public service announcements from the Ad Council and the business-supported COVID Collaborative feature Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter as well as first ladies Michelle Obama, Laura Bush, Hillary Clinton, and Rosalynn Carter. All of them have received doses of the COVID-19 vaccines.

In a 60-second spot, the former presidents say what they're most looking forward to once the pandemic ends.

Clinton, 74, says he wants to "go back to work and I want to be able to move around." Obama, 59, says he wants to be able to visit with his mother-in-law, "to hug her, and see her on her birthday." Bush, 74, talks about "going to opening day in Texas Rangers stadium with a full stadium."

Carter, 96, says he got vaccinated to help end the pandemic "as soon as possible."

The video features photos of the former presidents and their spouses with syringes in their upper arms as they urge Americans to "roll up your sleeve and do your part" by getting vaccinated.

A separate 30-second ad was filmed hours after President Joe Biden's inauguration at Arlington National Cemetery. It features Bush, Obama and Clinton encouraging vaccinations.

"The science is clear," Bush says. "These vaccines will protect you and those you love from this dangerous and deadly disease." Obama calls them, the "first step to ending the pandemic and moving our country forward."

Former President Donald Trump and his wife, Melania, do not appear in the campaign. Trump was still in office when the ex-presidents' project began in December, according to the Ad Council, and he did not attend President Joe Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20, when Obama, Bush and Clinton gathered together in person to film. A Trump adviser revealed last week that the Trumps were vaccinated in private before leaving the White House on Inauguration Day.

The ad campaign comes as U.S. supply of the coronavirus vaccines continues to ramp up and as public health experts worry that some Americans may choose not to get vaccinated, which would slow the country's path toward "herd immunity" to the virus.

The "It's Up to You" campaign encourages Americans to visit [www.GetVaccineAnswers.org](http://www.GetVaccineAnswers.org) to get the facts about the vaccines.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is also involved in the education initiative.

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Associated Press writer Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

## Job openings rise, layoffs fall as pandemic economy mends

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Companies posted more open jobs in January while layoffs decreased as the economy heals slowly from the pandemic.

There were 6.9 million jobs available on the last day in January, up from 6.7 million in December, the Labor Department said Thursday. That suggests employers are getting ready to hire in the coming months.

Hiring actually began to pick up in February, according to last Friday's jobs report, which showed that employers added 379,000 jobs, the most since October, while the unemployment rate fell to 6.2%, from 6.3%. While the economy still has 9.5 million fewer jobs than before the pandemic, February's job gain was much higher than January's and came after a sharp job loss in December, suggesting the economy, after stalling out late last year, is mending.

Thursday's report tracks gross job gains and losses, while last week's figure is a net change in total jobs. The data released Thursday also showed that layoffs fell to just under 1.7 million in January, the same pace of job cuts that was occurring before the pandemic.

Those data contrast with the number of people seeking unemployment benefits, which fell last week

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 85 of 88

but remain at a very elevated level of 712,000, according to a separate report Thursday. That suggests an unusually high number of Americans are still losing jobs. The figures may vary for several reasons. The government has broadened the eligibility for unemployment benefits during the pandemic, for example by allowing those who have refused to take jobs they felt were unsafe to claim aid.

Many recipients of unemployment aid also report having to apply multiple times to get through overwhelmed state systems, potentially lifting the number of jobless claims.

Other measures of the job market also show that employers are increasingly looking to hire.

According to a survey by ManpowerGroup, an employment agency, nearly one-quarter of companies surveyed said they plan to add workers in the April-June quarter. That's the most since the pandemic began. And one-third expect to return to their pre-pandemic hiring levels by July, while more than half expect to do so by the end of the year.

Hiring in the second quarter will be led by leisure and hospitality companies, ManpowerGroup's survey found. That category includes restaurants, bars, hotels, and entertainment venues, the same industries that have suffered some of the worst job losses.

About 37% of companies in leisure and hospitality expect to add jobs in the next three months, the highest among the 12 large industries that ManpowerGroup surveyed. Next was transportation and utilities, which includes delivery drivers and warehouses, where 26% of companies plan to add workers. And third was professional and business services, which includes high-paying sectors such as architecture and engineering, with 25% of firms in that industry expecting to hire.

## **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 Korean Peninsula. The troops serve

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 86 of 88

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 consequential 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.

## 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 Jashari — 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 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 Associ-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 87 of 88

ated 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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Llazar 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>

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This story has been corrected to show that the father’s last name is Jashari, not Bashari.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 12, the 71st day of 2021. There are 294 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlights in History:

On March 12, 2020, the stock market had its biggest drop since the Black Monday crash of 1987 as fears of economic fallout from the coronavirus crisis deepened; the Dow industrials plunged more than 2,300 points, or 10%.

On this date:

In 1664, England’s King Charles II granted an area of land on the East Coast of present-day North America known as New Netherland to his brother James, the Duke of York.

In 1864, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant assumed command as General-in-Chief of the Union armies in the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, March 12, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 249 ~ 88 of 88

Civil War.

In 1912, the Girl Scouts of the USA had its beginnings as Juliette Gordon Low of Savannah, Georgia, founded the first American troop of the Girl Guides.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered the first of his 30 radio addresses that came to be known as "fireside chats," telling Americans what was being done to deal with the nation's economic crisis.

In 1943, Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" had its world premiere with Eugene Goossens conducting the Cincinnati Symphony.

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman announced what became known as the "Truman Doctrine" to help Greece and Turkey resist Communism.

In 1955, legendary jazz musician Charlie "Bird" Parker died in New York at age 34.

In 1980, a Chicago jury found John Wayne Gacy Jr. guilty of the murders of 33 men and boys. (The next day, Gacy was sentenced to death; he was executed in May 1994.)

In 1994, the Church of England ordained its first women priests.

In 2003, Elizabeth Smart, the 15-year-old girl who vanished from her bedroom nine months earlier, was found alive in a Salt Lake City suburb with two drifters, Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee. (Mitchell is serving a life sentence; Barzee was released from prison in September 2018.)

In 2008, New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer resigned two days after reports had surfaced that he was a client of a prostitution ring (Spitzer was succeeded as governor by fellow Democrat David Paterson).

In 2009, disgraced financier Bernard Madoff pleaded guilty in New York to pulling off perhaps the biggest swindle in Wall Street history; he would be sentenced to 150 years behind bars.

Ten years ago: Fifteen passengers were killed when a tour bus returning from a Connecticut casino scraped along a guard rail on the outskirts of New York City, tipped on its side and slammed into a pole that sheared it nearly end to end. (Driver Ophadell Williams was later acquitted of manslaughter and negligent homicide.) A Cuban court found U.S. contractor Alan Gross guilty of bringing satellite phones and other communication equipment to Cuba illegally while working on a USAID-funded democracy-building program and sentenced him to 15 years in prison. (Cuba released Gross in December 2014).

Five years ago: Ted Cruz won most of the delegates at stake in Republican county conventions in Wyoming; Marco Rubio won the GOP presidential caucuses in Washington, D.C.

One year ago: The White House said President Donald Trump had no plans to be tested for the coronavirus or go into quarantine, even though a Brazilian official who attended weekend events with Trump in Florida had tested positive. Trump said he was temporarily halting his campaign rallies. The NCAA canceled its basketball tournaments after earlier planning to play in empty arenas. The NHL joined the NBA in suspending play. Major League Baseball delayed the start of its season by at least two weeks. (An abbreviated 60-game season would begin in July.) New York's governor ordered Broadway theaters to shut down for a month; all gatherings of more than 500 people were temporarily banned. (The theaters remain closed.) Disneyland in California said it would close for the rest of March. (The park has yet to reopen.) Studios announced that the release of major films, including "Mulan," would be delayed because of the virus.

Today's Birthdays: Politician, diplomat and civil rights activist Andrew Young is 89. Actor Barbara Feldon is 88. Former broadcast journalist Lloyd Dobyns is 85. Actor-singer Liza Minnelli is 75. Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, is 74. Singer-songwriter James Taylor is 73. Former Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., is 73. Rock singer-musician Bill Payne (Little Feat) is 72. Actor Jon Provost (TV: "Lassie") is 71. Author Carl Hiaasen (HY'-ah-sihn) is 68. Rock musician Steve Harris (Iron Maiden) is 65. Actor Lesley Manville is 65. Actor Jerry Levine is 64. Singer Marlon Jackson (The Jackson Five) is 64. Actor Jason Beghe is 61. Actor Courtney B. Vance is 61. Actor Titus Welliver is 59. Former MLB All-Star Darryl Strawberry is 59. Actor Julia Campbell is 58. Actor Jake Weber is 58. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., is 53. Actor Aaron Eckhart is 53. CNN reporter Jake Tapper is 52. Rock musician Graham Coxon is 52. Country musician Tommy Bales (Flynnville Train) is 48. Actor Rhys Coiro is 42. Country singer Holly Williams is 40. Actor Samm (cq) Levine is 39. Actor Jaimie Alexander is 37. Actor Tyler Patrick Jones is 27. Actor Kendall Applegate is 22.