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Silver Skates Notice

Several board members have indicated this upcoming year will be their final year on the board, so we need some new parents and/or community members who are willing to do their part! If you would be willing to help in any way, please mark your calendar for our next meeting...tentatively set for June 1. We would love to see some new members serve in assistant positions; this way they would have an opportunity to learn about the position from the experienced members this year for a smooth transition the next year! Please consider giving some of your time and talents, and join in the fun! If you have any questions, check with any current board members!



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

After taking a look at the Minnesota Vikings' pending free agents on offense, we turn our attention to the defensive side of the ball. There's no sugar coating it, the Vikings' defense was atrocious in 2020. With a non-existent pass rush and an incredibly young secondary, opposing teams were able to move the ball against the Vikings in whichever manner they wanted. The reduced salary cap in 2021 makes it hard for teams to keep their players, and virtually impossible for teams to get better than they were last season. Luckily for the Vikings, several key defensive pieces are coming back from either injury or the Covid-19 opt-out list.

Before we get into the defensive free agents, we have to pause and talk about the Vikings releasing starting left tackle Riley Reiff. While he was never great, Reiff has been good for many years and was the second-best offensive lineman the Vikings had. It's hard to figure out how the team will get better along the offensive line, but there are three possible options. If Mike Zimmer thinks Ezra Cleveland (or even Brian O'Neill) will be able to slide over to left tackle, that is the best option – even though the Vikings would need to fill two spots along the line, it is much easier to find competent guards than it is to find a new left tackle. The second option would be for the Vikings to draft a lineman who can start immediately – the problem with this option is there is no guarantee the lineman they covet will still be available with the 14th pick, or that whoever they choose will be able to play right away. The third option would be for the team to bring in a new offensive lineman either through free agency or a trade. Cutting Reiff presents a whole new challenge for the team to figure out, but the team now has an additional \$11.75 million cap space they can use.

Ok, now back to the defense (and special teams)!

The following players that were on the Vikings' roster last season are now free agents:

Dan Bailey (K), Todd Davis (ILB), Anthony Harris (FS), Tae Hayes (CB), George Iloka (FS), Jaleel Johnson (DT), Chris Jones (CB), Ifeadi Odenigbo (DE), Cordrea Tankersley (CB), Eric Wilson (OLB)

Out of those 10 players, three were starters (Bailey, Harris, Wilson) and two more saw plenty of playing time as a rotational player (Johnson, Odenigbo). There are four areas of concern that the Vikings must address before the 2021 season begins: defensive tackle, safety, linebacker, and kicker.

Even though the Vikings will hopefully be getting Danielle Hunter and Michael Pierce back, there is still some work that needs to be done on the defensive line. The defensive end spot across from Hunter is still a question mark, but it is far down the list of priorities because a rotation of DJ Wonnum, Stephen Weatherly, and Kenny Willekes would be serviceable. Instead, the Vikings should make finding a starting defensive tackle a huge priority. The Vikings already have a run-stuffing DT with Pierce coming back, but the team still needs to find a player who can rush the passer up the middle. The team will likely be outbid on the big-name defensive tackles like Kawann Short or Ndamukong Sue, so they'll need to look at the draft or a lower-priced free agent to fill that spot. Sheldon Rankins is a name to keep an eye on, as he might come cheap after dealing with an injury last season. If the team decides to use the draft, Christian Barmore would be the best option in the first round. Some later-round players to keep an eye on are Levi Onwuzurike from Washington and Osa Odighizuwa from UCLA.

With Anthony Harris likely headed to another team this offseason, the Vikings will need to find a running mate for Harrison Smith at safety. If the Vikings spend big on a safety, it will be to bring back Harris, so we can rule out the top safety free agents. However, there are some intriguing players who should come much cheaper, like Malik Hooker, Keanu Neal, and Karl Joseph. In the draft, Trevon Moehrig from TCU should go in the first round, while players like Richie Grant from UCF or Javon Holland from Oregon could be drafted in the middle rounds.

The Vikings will also need to find another linebacker with Eric Wilson likely leaving in free agency. The third linebacker spot isn't on the field the whole game, which is why this position is a lower priority, yet the Vikings will still need to bring in a couple of players to compete. Luckily the Vikings should be able to find a decent linebacker without having to shell out a bunch of money. Players like Kwon Alexander, Lavonte David, and Haason Reddick are available in free agency, and if the team chooses to fill the spot through the draft, Micah Parson from Penn State or Jeremiah Owusu-Koramoah from Notre Dame would be difference-makers in the Vikings' defense.

The final spot that needs to be addressed is the kicker position. The Vikings cut Dan Bailey because they needed salary cap space, so will look to bring in a cheaper replacement. Unfortunately, we all know how poorly the Vikings evaluate kickers, so who knows what is going to happen. Skol!

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No. 2 Northern State Advances to Title Game with Win over MSUM

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 2 and first seeded Northern State University men's basketball team topped MSU Moorhead for the third time this season. The 12-point victory propels the Wolves into the NCAA Central Region Championship game on Tuesday evening.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 77, MSUM 65

Records: NSU 19-1, MSUM 11-5

Attendance: 1700

HOW IT HAPPENED

- It was a physical game from the start and MSU Moorhead held a 35-33 lead at the half
- The Wolves however came out with a fire in the second, scoring 44 points and shooting 56.0% from the floor
- Northern shot 51.8% from the floor and 81.8% from the foul line, however struggled from beyond the arc hitting just 1-of-15
- Defensively, they held the Dragons to 33.8% from the floor, 17.4% from the 3-point line, and 68.4% from the foul line
- MSUM edged out the Wolves on the glass 39-34, while NSU forced 13 turnovers to their nine given up
- The Wolves tallied 12 blocks, 11 assists, and six steals in the win
- Four of the five Northern State starters scored in double figures, led by Parker Fox with a double-double
- Northern tallied 50 points in the paint, 20 points off turnovers, 15 fast break points, and seven second chance scores
- The NSU men advance to the NCAA Central Region Championship, looking to make their third NCAA Elite Eight appearance

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

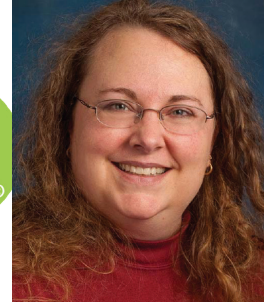
- Parker Fox: 21 points, 69.2 FG%, 12 rebounds, 8 blocks, 2 assists
- Mason Stark: 18 points, 7 rebounds, 3 assists
- Tommy Chatman: 16 points, 53.8 FG%, 3 rebounds, 2 assists
- Andrew Kallman: 15 points, 55.6 FG%, 5 rebounds, 4 assists, 2 blocks, 2 steals

UP NEXT

Northern State will face off against No. 4 and second seeded Northwest Missouri State in the title match-up. Live video, stat, and audio links are available on the men's basketball schedule on nsuwolves.com.

With A Little Help

As a primary care physician, I walk with my patients as they face many of life's challenges. Facing the diagnosis of dementia may be one of the hardest. Any chronic illness involves loss, but dementia threatens the loss of not only ability and independence, but of the very self.



By Debra Johnston, M.D ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

It is important to realize that people with dementia can have

rich and rewarding lives. For most patients there is an initial period where their losses are mild. There is likely time to work on that bucket list, to enjoy hobbies new and old, and laugh with loved ones, even if you are eventually playing Hearts instead of Bridge. While we grieve the loss of what was and of what we expected for the future, we can lose sight of what remains. It is a very human and very understandable response, but it can also waste precious time.

The early stages of dementia provide an important opportunity for patients and the people who love them to consider the future. People with dementia face the near certainty that they will eventually be unable to make decisions for themselves, decisions in keeping with values and preferences they have held all their lives. Developing an advance directive is something many of us put off for some nebulous "later". Doing it now can ensure that our wishes are known and honored when we can no longer express them. It is also an incredible gift to give our loved ones. I've lost count of the number of times I have watched a grieving family clutch that piece of paper to remind themselves that "this is what mom wanted" as they make difficult decisions.

Early on after the diagnosis is also a time to nurture relationships that will provide support for the person diagnosed with dementia and their care partner going forward. Professional help is available and sometimes the best option, but community support is invaluable, and irreplaceable. Family and friends can offer support and social contact, be it a cup of coffee and a listening ear, or a friendly round of golf, just like the old days. As the disease progresses, the support might be more substantial, such as a ride to the grocery store for someone who can no longer safely drive or keeping an old friend company so their spouse can go to the doctor, or get a haircut, or just take break.

As we have seen during the pandemic, suffering from any disease in isolation is lonely and frightening. Regardless of the diagnosis we might face, we can take the time now to make our wishes known and build up our community of family and friends. Ask for, and offer, support. As the old Beatles' song suggests, we get by with a little help from our friends.

Debra Johnston, MD is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook, featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streamed most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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#385 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're holding pretty steady again this week. We dropped below 50,000 new cases a couple of times this week and today dropped below 40,000 for the first time since October 8. We are now at 29,460,900 cases in the US, 0.1% more than yesterday. There were just 39,100 new case reports today; it's Sunday, but that's still something of a breakthrough. Hospitalizations have been a little above our low and not dropping; we have 43,254 people hospitalized with this virus today, more than last Sunday.

We're down from eight to four states and territories in the red zone, at 40 in orange, and have 10 in yellow (up from seven). One-week increase in total cases was 413,300 last week and is up to 427,300 this week, another worrying uptick. Two-week increase was 885,800 last week and is down to 840,600 this week. I have us at a one-week daily average new-case number of 61,042.9, which is also higher than last week.

I track 54 states and US territories, including the District of Columbia; and we have two over 10 percent, Missouri at 11.16 percent and Vermont at 11.13 percent. Only one other state is above five percent. Highest per capita rates of increase are in New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, the District of Columbia, and South Carolina; all but one of these were among the leaders a week ago.

There have been 534,460 deaths in the US in this pandemic, 0.1% more than we had yesterday. There were 691 deaths reported today. This is the first week we've had fewer than 10,000 deaths since November 15, four months ago. States with the most per capita deaths this week were New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Massachusetts.

I don't generally do a lot with world Covid-19 news here simply because it's difficult enough to keep up with US news; but I did want to note the death from this virus of Aruka Juma, the last male member of the Juma tribe in Brazil. With that, an entire people is gone, and that is a very sad thing.

March 14, 2020, one year ago today, was the first time the US had over 500 new cases in a day, the first of many such horrid milestones. There were 2759 reported cases in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. West Virginia was still not reporting any cases. This was a Saturday, and I noted that we had added over 2400 cases in the current week. Still, over half of these cases were in just three states, Washington, New York, and California. Those three plus Massachusetts and Colorado were over 100 cases each. I did note that we were about two weeks behind Italy in the trajectory of this pandemic; this was not a good place to be, although it turns out it was a whole lot better place than we were in later when we passed Italy like they were standing still. There had been 50 deaths with many more states reporting deaths; New York had its first death on this day. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said in a White House briefing, that we had "not reached our peak" for cases. Not wrong. I cautioned readers, "We're a long way from out of the woods on this one."

I did note that the bars were filling up for St. Patrick's Day; I may have also mentioned this was "not so smart." This was also the day I first heard an expert opine that this was going to turn out to be a primarily airborne infection, not just one spread by droplets—which would have been a lot easier to control. The expert was Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, and as with much over the past year, the guy was on target. It took the WHO and CDC months to come around to his way of thinking. I will say he did have a miss that day when he said it would likely take two years to get a working vaccine on the market. Who knew?

States started issuing temporary licenses to out-of-state medical professionals. The White House began doing temperature checks on individuals who would come in contact with Mr. Trump and Mr. Pence. At least 21 million children were out of school in the US. Experts were warning that our hospitals were going to be overwhelmed over the next two months. Church services were on the radar as transmission risks. Cancellations and closures: large gatherings in Austin, Texas, Berlin and Cologne, Germany, and Switzerland; the primary election in Georgia; the Baseball Hall of Fame; schools in North Carolina, Alaska, Delaware, and the District of Columbia; residential evictions in Seattle; all restaurants, cafes, theaters, and clubs in France; all Royal Caribbean cruises; all Catholic Masses in the Archdiocese of New York; Kennedy Space Center; the Seville Easter procession; restaurants, pubs, and most stores in the Czech Republic; all Apple

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stores outside China; Netflix production in North America.

There were 142,320 cases and 5388 deaths in 129 countries worldwide. China still had the most cases by quite a lot with nearly 81,000, but their new case numbers were remaining quite small, and other countries were catching up. Italy reported 2795 cases and 175 deaths in a single day, bringing their totals to 20,455 and 1441. Iran was over 11,000. New Zealand, with just four cases and getting out ahead of this thing, mandated a 14-day quarantine for all travelers entering the country. If you're looking for a model of how to respond to a pandemic, you could do worse than look at this one.

I read in the New York Times about a new joint effort underway in the US to promote vaccination among people of faith. It is focused on addressing misinformation, addressing doubts based on misinformation, and pointing out a person's ethical obligation to care for others, as well as address questions people of faith might have about vaccination. A Baptist pastor taught the parable of the good Samaritan about the importance of aiding the stranger. He preached, "In getting yourself vaccinated, you are helping your neighbor. God wants you to be whole so you can care for your community. So think of vaccines as part of God's plan." Churches are offering their premises as vaccination clinics.

There have been false stories promulgated of pork by-products in vaccines, which has caused Jewish and Muslim people to question them. Ultra-Orthodox rabbinical scholars are citing religious texts as they endorse vaccines. There are, indeed, pork products in some vaccines (mostly gelatin to stabilize vaccines to be heated or freeze-dried), although there are none in the current crop of Covid-19 vaccines. Nonetheless, even if the vaccines did contain pork, they would be, according to Jewish scholars, "a total non-issue" because Jewish dietary laws only regulate what is ingested by mouth. They do not apply to injected substances; it is permissible for observant Jews to receive insulin derived from pigs and have pig valves placed in their hearts. Some rabbis have gone a step further and declared mandatory vaccination justified citing the principle that to save a life, any transgression against Jewish law except for idolatry, incest, or murder is permitted. One rabbi explained, "It's a Jewish mandate to take whatever lifesaving measures are necessary, even in the case of potential risk." The same issues have arisen for Muslims who are also forbidden to ingest pork. But back in 1995, a meeting of 112 leading Muslim scholars approved the use of porcine gelatin in medicines. The ruling is based on an analysis that considers the formation of gelatin from bones and skin of "a judicially impure animal" to have been purified by the transformation, according to the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences.

To repeat, there are no pork products in the current vaccines, but even if there were, neither Jewish nor Muslim law would forbid the faithful from taking those vaccines. So if a future vaccine does, indeed, contain pork gelatin, for example (and I have no idea whether any of those in testing do contain it), there would be no reason not to receive it. Imams are teaching the responsibility to lead by example and to preserve life. One explained, "As Muslims, it is our responsibility to do what we need to do to relieve humanity of this pandemic." There is apparently a narration about the Prophet who was asked whether taking medicine is permitted. The reply was, "Yes, O you servants of Allah, take medicine, as Allah has not created a disease without creating a cure, except for one." When asked, "Which one?" he replied, "Old age."

Another sticky wicket with vaccines is that of abortion, a procedure viewed as immoral by a number of faiths. It is true that many vaccines, including all three Covid-19 vaccines currently authorized in the US, were tested and/or produced using cell lines derived from the tissues of an aborted fetus. There is a reason such cells are used; it's a pretty complicated one having to do with the need for cells never exposed to pathogens, free of cancerous mutations, and "immortal," that is they don't die off after a certain number of generations. The best way to meet those exacting requirements is to use fetal cell lines that are a known quantity like those used here. We'd have had vaccines a whole lot later, if we ever had them, without the use of these cell lines. The cell lines in question here are derived from a fetus aborted in the mid-'80s. These cell lines were used in testing the two mRNA vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech) and in production of the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

One of the prominent spiritual authorities who has spoken out on the use of these cells in vaccines is the Pope of the Catholic Church. The Vatican ruling on such vaccines is that when there is no alternative, when the disease being vaccinated against has serious consequences, and because the connection between the

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vaccine and the abortion in question is remote, the vaccines are "morally justified" because of the need to protect human life. Both Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict were vaccinated in January, and Pope Francis has said on more than one occasion that people have an "ethical duty" to receive the vaccine. In a January 10 interview on Italy's Canale 5 TV channel he said, "I believe that ethically everyone should take the vaccine. It is not an option, it is an ethical choice because you are gambling with your health, with your life, but you are also gambling with the lives of others."

The Reverend Gabriel Salguero of an evangelical church in Florida that has a largely LatinX congregation is a man who understands the medical abuses of LatinX people in the past, and he has been patiently educating his people, citing Scripture. He explains the vaccine is not the mark of the Beast, a concern from the Book of Revelation I've seen expressed. Among Buddhists, the Dalai Lama has been vaccinated, which should help to settle questions in members of this faith. A former doctor who is now a Swami is using the Hindu principle of ahimsa, to do no harm and to revere life, as support for his encouragement to be vaccinated.

Black churches have also been active in promoting vaccination. Once again, this is a community with a long history of medical abuses and the resulting suspicion of medical advances. But the Black Coalition Against Covid-19 has put out guidelines for leaders. One pastor confronts skeptics with this argument: "The ultimate conspiracy could just be, 'Wait until there's a global pandemic that's disproportionately affecting African-Americans and then convince them not to take the one medical intervention that's proven to save lives.'" Solid reasoning.

I know I've said this before, but I'm going to take another shot at it: This is not the time to travel. It could be soon, but not right now, please. Even if your risk is low, there is a chance you can carry virus from where you live to the place you visit and then another chance you can bring something back home with you. Both of those are a problem with these highly contagious variants taking off. Of the 4858 cases of variants spotted in the US, 4690 are B.1.1.7, the very transmissible variant first seen in the UK. This variant doesn't need help making its way across the country; it's doing very well by itself. So don't help it by traveling.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, said, "What we have seen is that we have surges after people start traveling. We saw it after July 4, we saw it after Labor Day, we saw it after the Christmas holiday." And we didn't need to see it any of those times; every one of them resulted in disaster.

The latest threat is spring break. Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, told CNN, "Spring break in Florida could spell disaster for the country." This is a particular problem because the state of Florida prohibits cities from fining people for violating mask orders; in other words, mask-wearing is optional, despite local ordinances.

Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health told MSNBC, "If there ever was a time to put on the mask, this is it. Every bit of data proves that mask wearing reduces infections, reduces deaths."

There is a social media group called Sparks of Kindness. The group administrator says, "I started this group with a belief that if we all did our small part, we could light a wildfire with our Sparks. . . . [W]e have so many opportunities to make a difference for people as everyone we meet everywhere we go, is struggling somehow." It is filled with stories of small kindnesses. For example, there is a person who packaged up chocolate candies with encouraging notes: "Love one another," "Know you are important," "Be true to yourself," and then handed them out to folks they encountered. Small thing, but a spark.

Or this one: A woman in Hillsborough, North Carolina, received a warning ticket for having a headlight out. She bought a bulb, but couldn't figure out how to put it in and couldn't find anyone to do it for her. She came to the police department to ask what she should do, and an officer decided to take matters into his own hands. He first figured out she had the wrong bulb and exchanged it for the right one, and then he installed it himself. Turns out this guy has plenty of experience with cars, so it was a breeze for him. Clearly, he takes his role as a public servant seriously.

A young girl in Minnesota named Jade, started a non-profit called Books for Better, MN, to provide books to children in need. She has collected and distributed thousands of books so that every kid can have a bedtime story.

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A New Brunswick couple was driving home when they saw debris on the road, but when they got close, they got a better look. It was a person wrapped in a blanket walking home from a long distance. They picked him up and fed him, then took him home. Turns out he was living in the deep woods in a shack with his cat, Skipper. He had a generator for the times when he had gas to run it. They posted on social media about the experience; the husband said, "I stopped today. What I stopped was complaining about wanting a better house, better truck, more money. This guy had nothing, and yet he was happy. He never asked us for a nickel." The man is a veteran, so the veteran's community has reached out to him to try to get him into a better living situation.

There is a young girl who raises money to buy stuffed monkeys to give to children who are in the hospital. She got the idea after she was hospitalized and was comforted by a stuffed monkey her grandfather bought her. She has bought and donated over 200 monkeys so far.

And a principal at North Charleston High School has a lot of children in pretty bad straits—living under a bridge or in a car, really bad situations. There are kids without heat or electricity, who can't afford school supplies. He went out and got an overnight job three nights a week at a local Walmart, using the entire paycheck from that job to help his students. He had planned to keep the second job and the donations a secret, but students found out. One of the outcomes of the revelation is that Walmart handed over \$50,000 to help his kids. He says the greatest thing we can do as human beings is to help one another. He's right.

Take care. We'll talk again.

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	454	432	881	15	Minimal	0.0%
Beadle	2825	2689	5965	39	Substantial	15.6%
Bennett	383	371	1185	9	None	0.0%
Bon Homme	1510	1479	2102	26	Minimal	3.8%
Brookings	3662	3547	12185	37	Moderate	2.6%
Brown	5206	5045	12868	89	Substantial	8.1%
Brule	697	682	1893	9	Minimal	8.6%
Buffalo	421	406	901	13	None	0.0%
Butte	990	956	3256	20	Moderate	9.0%
Campbell	131	127	259	4	Minimal	25.0%
Charles Mix	1319	1254	3978	21	Substantial	7.2%
Clark	377	364	960	5	Moderate	5.9%
Clay	1823	1782	5458	15	Substantial	3.0%
Codington	4093	3900	9761	77	Substantial	7.7%
Corson	473	458	1004	12	Minimal	14.8%
Custer	768	742	2750	12	Substantial	11.4%
Davison	3000	2892	6646	64	Moderate	6.3%
Day	675	636	1801	29	Substantial	6.5%
Deuel	479	463	1150	8	Minimal	0.0%
Dewey	1435	1391	3874	26	Substantial	4.7%
Douglas	437	422	925	9	Moderate	0.0%
Edmunds	488	467	1071	13	Moderate	5.0%
Fall River	553	523	2659	15	Substantial	9.8%
Faulk	362	348	704	13	Minimal	14.3%
Grant	988	927	2269	39	Substantial	6.8%
Gregory	555	510	1309	30	Moderate	11.9%
Haakon	258	243	543	10	Moderate	0.0%
Hamlin	729	671	1801	38	Substantial	21.9%
Hand	350	332	830	6	Moderate	5.3%
Hanson	370	360	734	4	Moderate	26.3%
Harding	92	90	186	1	Minimal	20.0%
Hughes	2333	2270	6668	36	Substantial	1.2%
Hutchinson	796	757	2408	26	Minimal	5.3%

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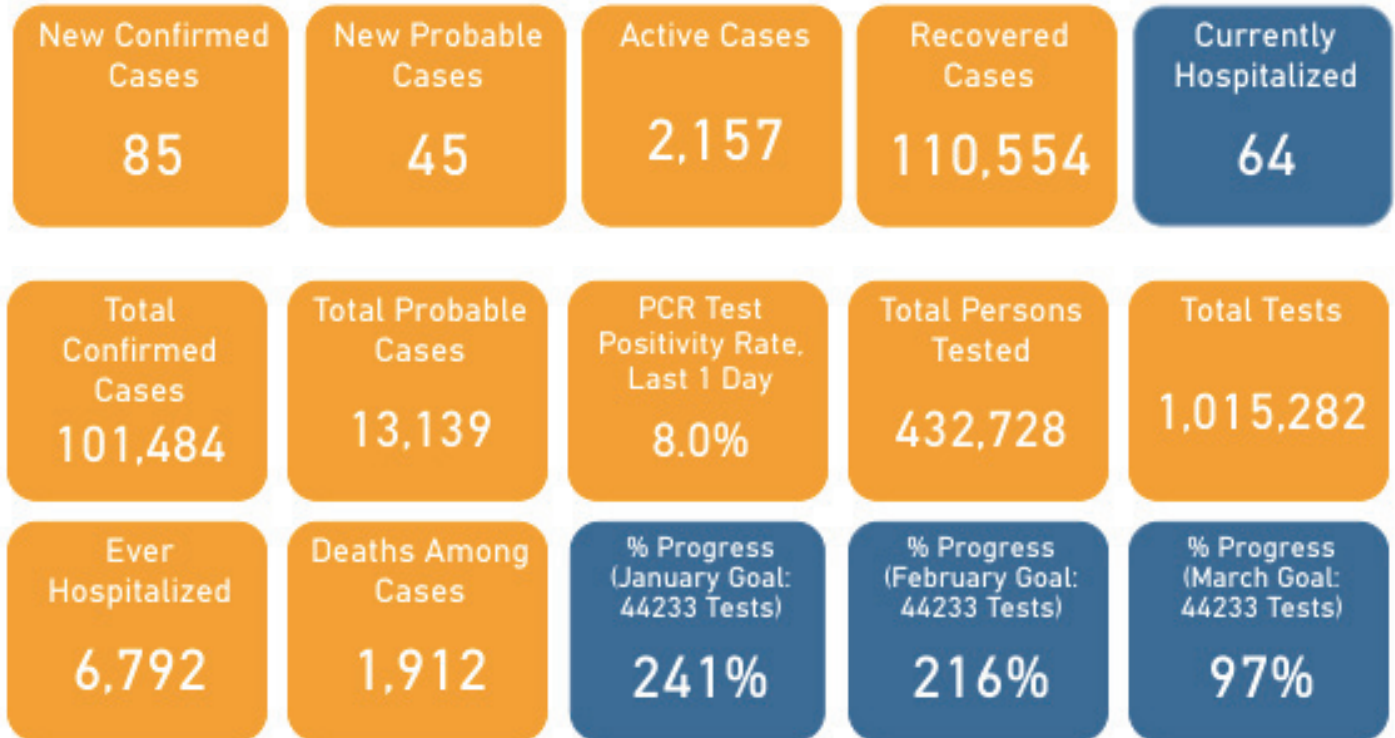
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Hyde	139	138	412	1	Minimal	5.3%
Jackson	281	264	918	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	275	252	560	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	86	86	228	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	653	627	1696	14	Moderate	5.6%
Lake	1237	1173	3401	18	Substantial	9.0%
Lawrence	2840	2773	8606	45	Moderate	3.4%
Lincoln	7941	7692	20569	77	Substantial	10.5%
Lyman	607	589	1882	10	Minimal	2.6%
Marshall	349	321	1206	6	Substantial	12.3%
McCook	766	717	1647	24	Moderate	12.1%
McPherson	240	233	561	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2642	2555	7788	31	Substantial	9.5%
Mellette	256	248	742	2	Moderate	8.8%
Miner	276	254	583	9	Minimal	18.2%
Minnehaha	28649	27738	79331	337	Substantial	8.7%
Moody	621	599	1776	17	Moderate	5.6%
Oglala Lakota	2074	1999	6673	49	Moderate	5.4%
Pennington	13070	12708	39855	190	Substantial	5.6%
Perkins	348	331	826	14	Minimal	2.8%
Potter	384	367	839	4	Moderate	0.0%
Roberts	1260	1169	4201	36	Substantial	19.4%
Sanborn	335	324	698	3	Minimal	5.2%
Spink	813	770	2153	26	Minimal	6.3%
Stanley	338	333	945	2	Moderate	2.9%
Sully	137	133	316	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1220	1188	4172	29	Minimal	0.0%
Tripp	720	681	1504	16	Substantial	20.0%
Turner	1091	1015	2748	53	Moderate	6.3%
Union	2034	1940	6367	40	Substantial	8.0%
Walworth	733	705	1837	15	Moderate	8.6%
Yankton	2839	2770	9422	28	Moderate	7.9%
Ziebach	337	326	872	9	Minimal	7.7%
Unassigned	0	0	1787	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4670	0
10-19 years	13028	0
20-29 years	20266	7
30-39 years	18863	18
40-49 years	16382	37
50-59 years	16149	114
60-69 years	13147	253
70-79 years	6976	437
80+ years	5142	1046

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	59639	900
Male	54984	1012

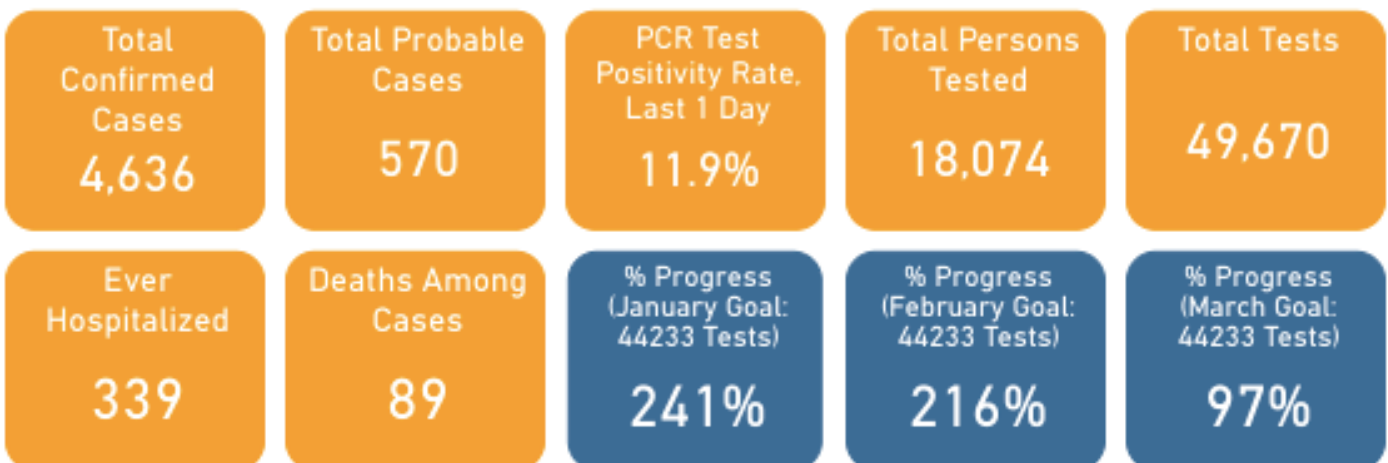
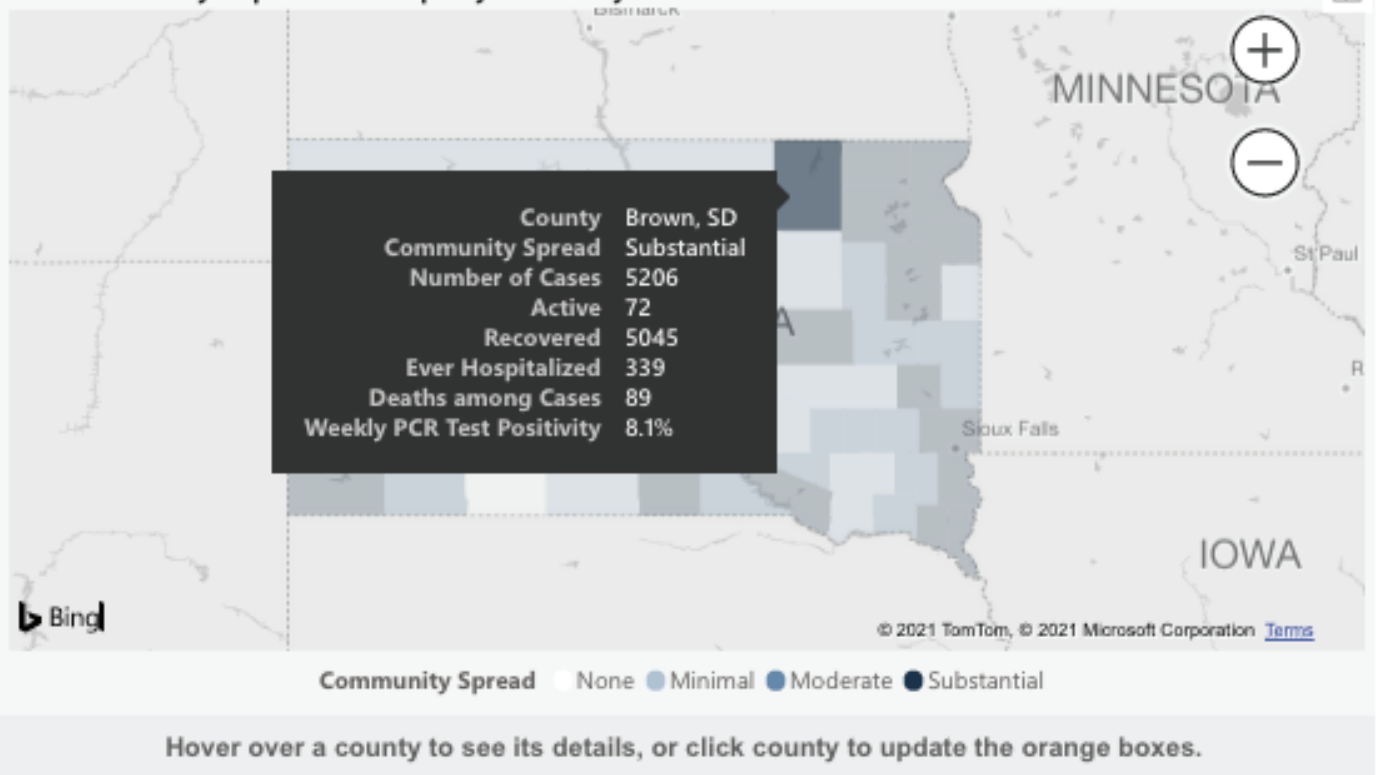
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



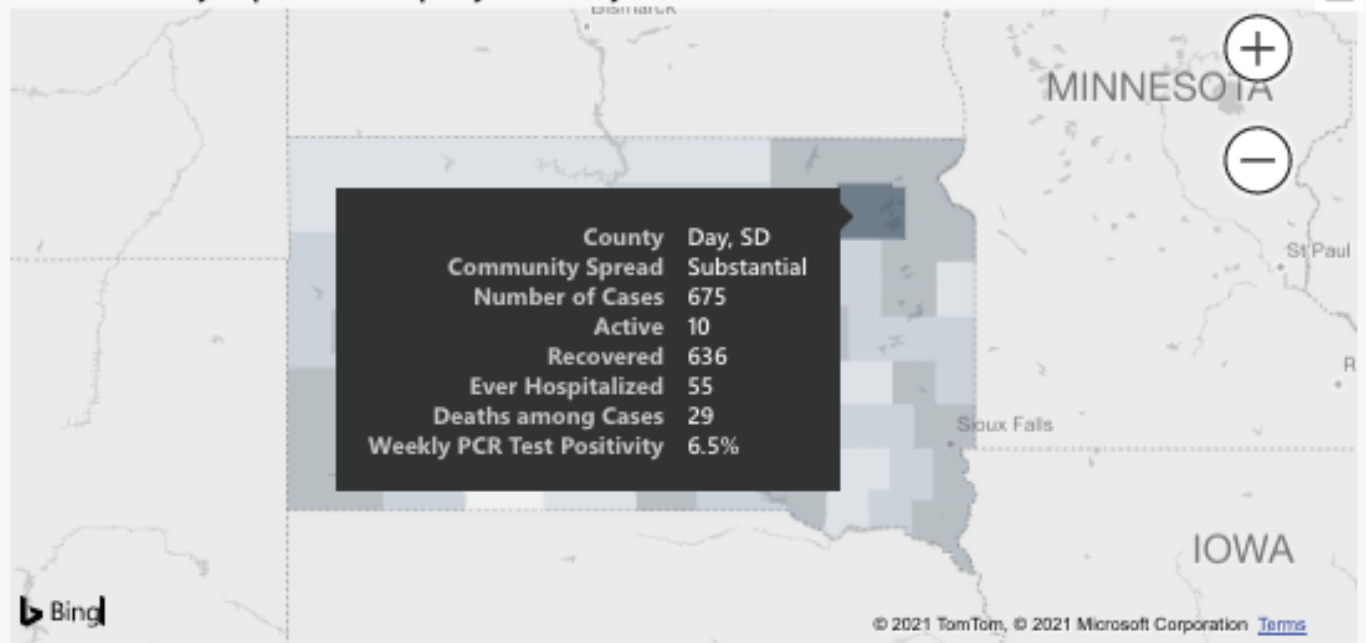
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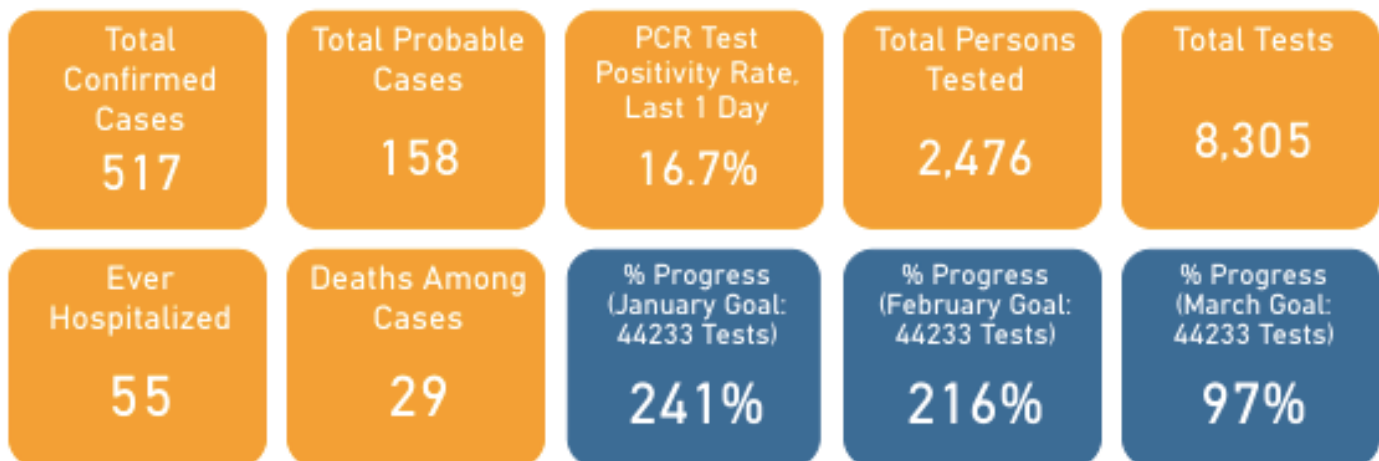
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

304,475

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	3,120
Moderna	149,338
Pfizer	152,017

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

196,283

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	3,120
Moderna - 1 dose	44,612
Moderna - Series Complete	52,363
Pfizer - 1 dose	40,376
Pfizer - Series Complete	55,820

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

34%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	33.77%
Series Complete	19.14%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	872	314	279	593
Beadle	6110	2,043	2,033	4,076
Bennett*	473	129	172	301
Bon Homme*	3524	1,126	1,199	2,325
Brookings	9685	4,075	2,805	6,880
Brown	14727	4,149	5,289	9,438
Brule*	1816	538	639	1,177
Buffalo*	126	80	23	103
Butte	2109	873	618	1,491
Campbell	964	270	347	617
Charles Mix*	3164	1,146	1,009	2,155
Clark	1211	403	404	807
Clay	4917	1,735	1,591	3,326
Codington*	9471	3,237	3,117	6,354
Corson*	293	89	102	191
Custer*	2755	891	932	1,823
Davison	7371	2,189	2,591	4,780
Day*	2485	887	799	1,686
Deuel	1457	545	456	1,001
Dewey*	369	73	148	221
Douglas*	1167	369	399	768
Edmunds	1362	458	452	910
Fall River*	2484	778	853	1,631
Faulk	1006	296	355	651
Grant*	2695	1,203	746	1,949
Gregory*	1717	611	553	1,164
Haakon*	530	156	187	343

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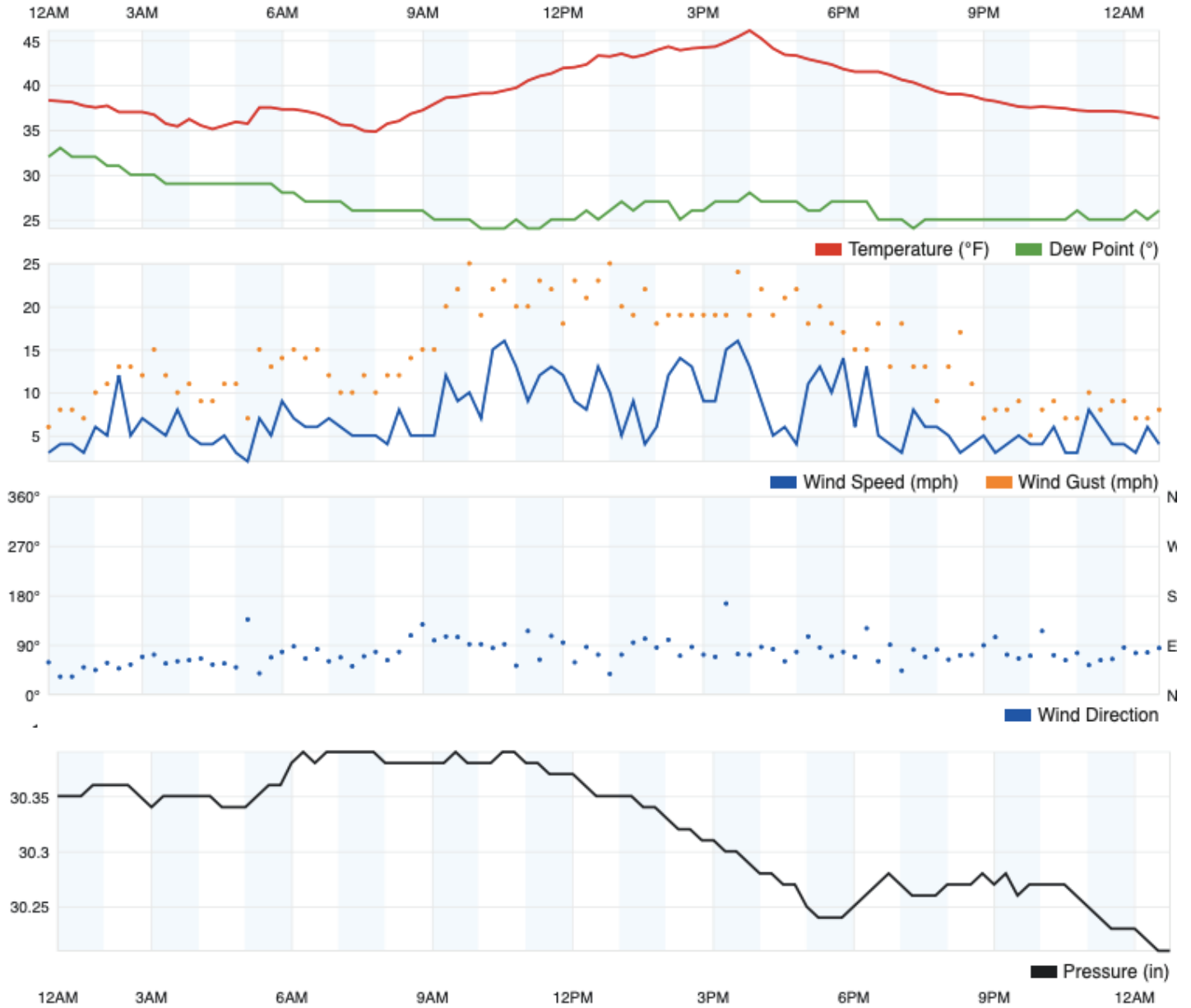
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Hamlin	1659	539	560	1,099
Hand	1341	447	447	894
Hanson	479	171	154	325
Harding	100	52	24	76
Hughes*	7629	1,599	3,015	4,614
Hutchinson*	3275	1,072	1,101	2,173
Hyde*	525	141	192	333
Jackson*	381	113	134	247
Jerauld	818	340	239	579
Jones*	616	156	230	386
Kingsbury	2361	933	714	1,647
Lake	3905	1,519	1,193	2,712
Lawrence	7896	3,020	2,438	5,458
Lincoln	24863	5,784	9,539	15,323
Lyman*	781	267	257	524
Marshall*	1720	554	583	1,137
McCook	2172	640	766	1,406
McPherson	240	78	81	159
Meade*	6127	1,923	2,102	4,025
Mellette*	42	18	12	30
Miner	856	252	302	554
Minnehaha*	77620	19,381	29,117	48,498
Moody*	1738	649	544	1,193
Oglala Lakota*	170	54	58	112
Pennington*	35681	9,065	13,308	22,373
Perkins*	660	300	180	480
Potter	849	303	273	576
Roberts*	4266	1,192	1,537	2,729
Sanborn	951	303	324	627
Spink	2794	886	954	1,840
Stanley*	1170	236	467	703
Sully	357	73	142	215
Todd*	156	48	54	102
Tripp*	1940	574	683	1,257
Turner	3332	962	1,185	2,147
Union	2802	1,112	845	1,957
Walworth*	1840	518	661	1,179
Yankton	9711	2,561	3,575	6,136
Ziebach*	55	15	20	35
Other	5737	1,587	2,075	3,662

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Wintry Mix then Cloudy	Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny
High: 36 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 39 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 44 °F

Today:



Snow ending this morning, drizzle and freezing drizzle possible throughout day.

Highs in the 30s.

- Several inches of snow accumulation possible this morning

Tuesday:



Partly to mostly cloudy. Chance of snow south.

Highs 34 to 43°F

- Light accumulation possible south.



****Warming Up Again****

The mid to latter part of the week will see a return to above normal temperatures.

Visit www.weather.gov/abr for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 3/15/2021 3:06 AM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Snow will continue across the region through the early morning hours before gradually coming to an end. Several inches of snow are possible before it ends. Patchy drizzle and freezing drizzle is also possible once the snow ends. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

March 15, 1941: Beware the Ides of March. The most severe blizzard in modern history strikes North Dakota and Minnesota. The blizzard began on a Saturday night while many are traveling, and thus claims 71 lives. Winds gust to 75 mph at Duluth, Minnesota, and reach 85 mph at Grand Forks, North Dakota. Snow drifts twelve feet high were reported in north-central Minnesota. A cold front traveling 30 mph crosses Minnesota in just seven hours.

March 15, 2010: Snowmelt runoff from an extensive snow cover flooded many creeks, roads, along with thousands of acres of pasture and cropland throughout northeast South Dakota. There were numerous road closures. The flooding lasted through the end of the month and for many locations in April. The counties mainly affected were Brown, Marshall, Day, Spink, and Roberts. Numerous communities were affected, including Aberdeen, Claremont, Waubay, Amherst, Kidder, and the Richmond Lake area. The Claremont, Amherst, and Britton areas were the hardest hit with flooded land and roads. Several farms were surrounded by water, with some people stranded. Between Aberdeen and Britton, sixty percent of the area was underwater. Thousands of acres of cropland will not be planted due to too much water, with estimates that 20 to 25 percent of Brown county cropland would not be planted. Many people in northeast South Dakota have had too much water for many years. The road damage was extensive, and repairs will be in the millions of dollars. Many roads across the area will also have to be raised. Many people had extra-long commutes due to flooded streets, with some people having to move out of their homes. Across Day and Marshall Counties, rising lakes threatened many homes and cabins with sandbagging taking place. Most lakes and rivers across northeast South Dakota were at or near record levels. Click [HERE](#) for pictures around northeastern South Dakota.

1938: A tornado hit McPaul, Iowa, while moving from southeast to northwest. Another tornado raced through Batesville, Illinois, at 60 to 65 mph. Another tornado causing F4 damage killed 10 and injured 12 in St. Clair County, Missouri. This tornado was part of an outbreak that produced four different tornadoes and was responsible for 11 deaths and 42 injuries.

1952: On Reunion Island, some 400 miles east of Madagascar 127.56 inches of rain fell in three days in the spring of 1952. This set a world record for the most rainfall in 72 hours. Also, from the 15th to the 16th, 73.62 inches of rain fell in the 24 hours at Cilaos, La Reunion Island in the South Indian Ocean to set a world record.

2004: Brownsville, Texas, breaks a century-old record for the most significant daily rainfall accumulation for March with 3.23 inches.

1941 - The most severe blizzard in modern history struck North Dakota and Minnesota. The blizzard hit on a Saturday night while many are traveling, and thus claimed 71 lives. Winds gusted to 75 mph at Duluth MN, and reached 85 mph at Grand Forks ND. Snow drifts twelve feet high were reported in north central Minnesota. A cold front traveling 30 mph crossed Minnesota in just seven hours. (15th-16th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm in the western U.S. produced heavy snow in central Nevada, with 23 inches reported at Austin. High winds raked the desert areas of southern California and southern Arizona. Winds gusted to 59 mph at Douglas AZ. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - More than one hundred hours of continuous snow finally came to an end at Marquette MI, during which time the city was buried under 43 inches of snow. Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., with forty-one cities reporting record low temperatures for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from Alabama to the Middle Atlantic Coast. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 at Virginia Beach VA. Low pressure in southeastern Ontario produced high winds in the northeastern U.S. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Saint Albans VT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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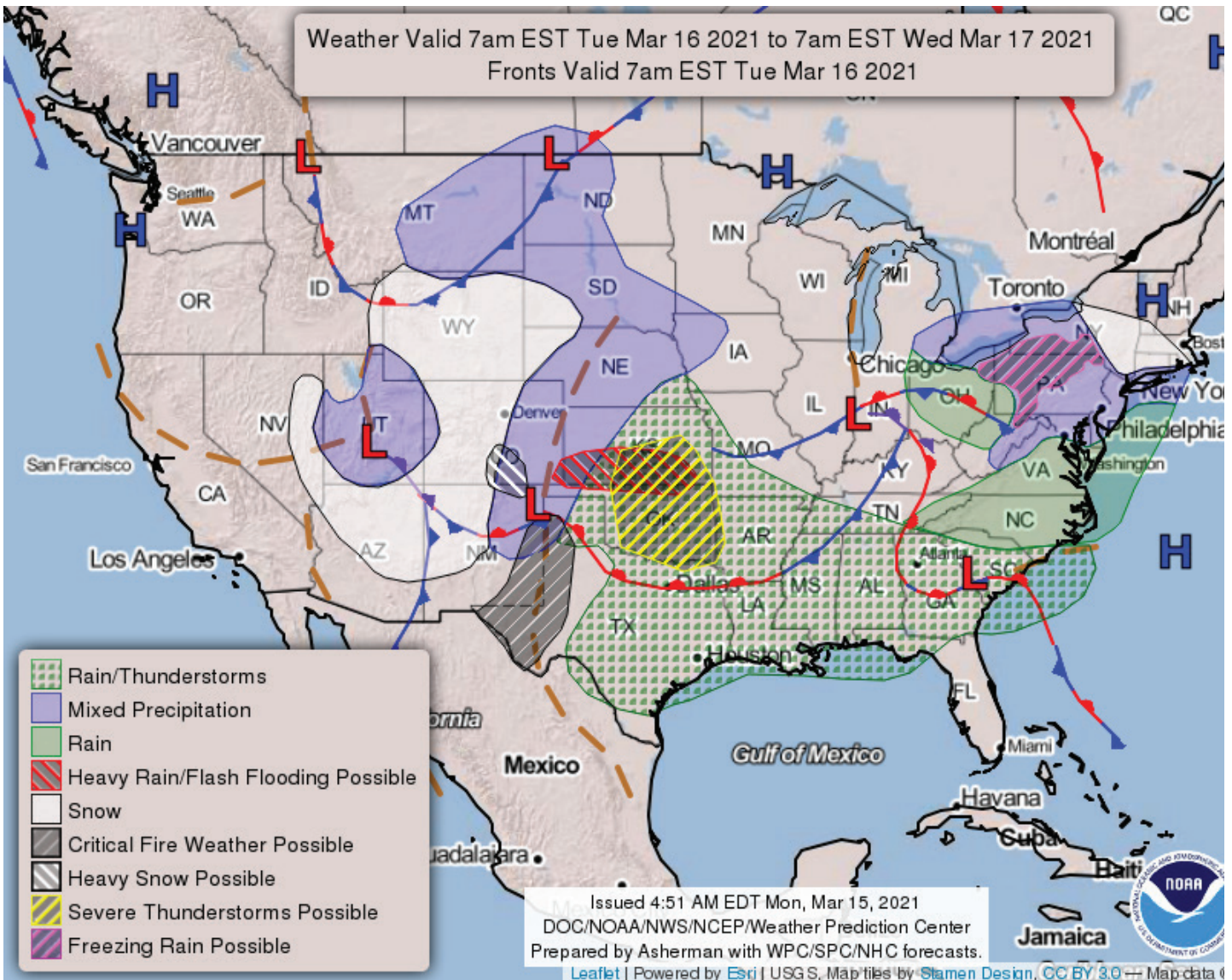
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 3:55 PM
Low Temp: 35 °F at 7:50 AM
Wind: 25 mph at 9:59 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 79° in 2015
Record Low: -29° in 1897
Average High: 39°F
Average Low: 20°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.44
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.35
Average Precip to date: 1.46
Precip Year to Date: 0.53
Sunset Tonight: 7:40 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44 a.m.



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CALLING FOR GOD IN A CRISIS

There are some psychologists who believe that our need for safety, structure and stability are more important than nearly anything else. Perhaps they are right.

When we look around and feel threatened and insecure, we become frightened and build what we think are protective walls to make us safe and secure. Yet often the protective walls we have wrapped around us are suddenly removed, and we become frightened and afraid facing a hostile world.

Could it be that God is offering us an unplanned opportunity to grow closer to Him? Disaster strikes and we immediately grasp for His hand, wanting His protection. We suddenly realize we desperately need Him and since there is no one else to turn to we call on Him for help. We need a "miracle working God" and want Him to do something special for us. NOW! So, we call on Him in desperation because we need help and believe that only He can rescue us.

David did not have an easy life. From infancy to old age he knew and experienced the stress and strain and storms of life. We find many examples of this in his writings. One is when he cried, "I give my soul to You, O Lord. All of me – body, mind and spirit – Lord, is now Yours!" Save me he cried and "Let me not be ashamed" for doubting You. David's army and armor could not help. At times, neither can ours.

Overwhelmed with fear, he called upon God. He knew that he needed a power beyond himself and knew Who and where that power was. And when he called, God answered.

Prayer: May we, Lord, come to realize that in and of ourselves we are nothing and need Your protection. May we, like David, know what to do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: O Lord, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God! Psalm 25:1-2

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2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
06/19/2021 Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

News from the Associated Press

Questions remain after tough year in North Dakota oil patch

By AMY R. SISK The Bismarck Tribune

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Kyle Ostrand found himself looking up townhouses in Williston, trying to talk his workers into becoming roommates after the oil price collapsed last year.

Some of them without families in town agreed to live together, and although they don't necessarily work long hours anymore to bring in big paychecks like when oil was booming at the start of 2020, they're still employed by 3 Forks Services. The company provides transportation, logistics and crane services across the Bakken oil patch.

"It's made it a whole lot more affordable for them to share housing like that," Ostrand said. "We're trying to do what we can to help lessen the expenses for these guys in any given month and hope they can continue to help ride it out with me. We're in it together trying to help make ends meet."

Hundreds of businesses like 3 Forks do the boots-on-the-ground work in western North Dakota to help big-name companies drill and produce oil. They have endured a year of hardship as the coronavirus pandemic decimated the demand for oil and, thus, for their services, The Bismarck Tribune reported.

The oil industry's recovery has been slow. Job Service data show that North Dakota's biggest oil-producing counties lost well over 10,000 jobs last year. Their unemployment rate at the end of 2020 was 7.9%, up from 1.8% a year earlier and higher than the current statewide average of 4.1%.

Pets are also putting on pounds during the pandemic

On top of that, a cloud of uncertainty hangs over the Bakken as Congress turns blue and a new presidential administration takes over that appears poised to crack down on the fossil fuel industry in an effort to curb climate change.

Activity across the Bakken hinges largely on the price of oil, which determines whether pumping up crude and drilling new wells is profitable.

Oil was trading above \$60 per barrel when 2020 began, but by the start of March the looming coronavirus pandemic threatened to sink demand. Russia and Saudi Arabia played a game of chicken with their nations' oil outputs, resulting in the first major price collapse.

Then, the spread of the virus prompted world leaders to enact travel restrictions. Many people across the planet began to work from home and stopped visiting others, causing demand for gasoline and jet fuel to tank dramatically.

"It was like going full steam ahead in a steady oil market to slamming on the brakes as hard as you can and screeching to a stop," said Lucas Dunlap, head of LDI Energy Services in Tioga.

One tumultuous day in April 2020, the price of West Texas Intermediate, the U.S. crude benchmark, turned negative as space to store crude filled up.

That was a telling moment for Alma Cook, who runs Williston-based Cook Compliance Solutions. She spent that morning with a colleague who works as an oil and gas business consultant.

"She turned on the TV and was like, 'Alma, something's going on.' Over the course of the day, we just watched that price plummet," Cook recalled. "It was scary, and I didn't know what that would mean for the next year."

Cook's company, like so many in the oil patch, took a hit.

She said her business "stands in the gap" between oil field service providers and major producers, helping the smaller businesses obtain the right safety certifications, insurance and other measures needed to work under bigger companies.

"A handful of our clients went out of business altogether," she said. "Others put their operations on pause and had to cut our services because there just wasn't work coming down the pipe that they had to get compliant for."

During the downturn, her company formed a new partnership with an insurance provider and focused

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more on helping oil field service companies save money.

For example, Cook Compliance Solutions created free pandemic preparedness and drivers safety programs. Many service providers need to have programs like that in place to get hired by producers, and Cook's company enabled them to customize its templates and download them online.

"The response to those freebies has been overwhelmingly positive," she said. "It's led to new connections from all over the country."

Her company tracks the hours her clients work in the oil fields and noticed a dramatic decline after the price collapse last spring. But their hours improved substantially in the last quarter of 2020, possibly due to federal coronavirus stimulus money the state designated for the oil industry, she said. Tens of millions of dollars went toward plugging abandoned wells and providing grants to reimburse the cost of acquiring water to use in fracking new wells.

Slowly over the past year, the price of oil has climbed back to \$60 per barrel. That's not quite high enough to usher in a lot of drilling that would boost North Dakota's oil output, but it's been enough to prompt some producers to bring new wells online to maintain production. The amount of oil a single well produces falls over time, which is why a company must drill new wells if it's to maintain or grow its output.

Dunlap said his employees aren't working 80-hour weeks like before the pandemic, but there's work to go around these days at LDI, which does maintenance, construction and trucking work, among other services in the Bakken.

The company dropped from 30 workers before the pandemic to just six at one point last year. It's since been able to hire back some and pick up new employees for a workforce of 19 today.

"Things seem to be slowly coming back," Dunlap said. "Having staff back and getting trucks and equipment up and running is great."

To survive the past year, the company began to look outside the oil industry. It picked up general contracting work for residential facilities, which helped bring in some revenue but "never really took off," Dunlap said.

Ostrand with 3 Forks took a similar strategy with promising results.

"I just looked at the equipment we had in our yard and our employees in the shop," he said. "I was trying to find something by looking at the other industries outside the oil field that hadn't really been crippled by the COVID situation."

He settled on civil construction, and 3 Forks began putting up cellphone and utility towers.

"We found some companies that gave us a chance to get our feet wet," he said.

3 Forks installed towers in the North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado and Montana. That work "carried us through the second half of 2020" and will help the company survive in 2021, Ostrand said.

"Once the weather breaks and things start to thaw out this year, we're planning to hit the ground running," he said. "That will be a huge part of our workload and what keeps our guys busy."

Jobs in the oil patch are still volatile. The company will be "scrambling to get enough guys to get enough trucks for what is needed one day, and then everybody is standing around the next day," Ostrand said.

3 Forks, LDI and Cook Compliance Solutions are hopeful for a better year, but their owners acknowledge challenges ahead even as the oil price recovers.

Some producers have indicated to them that they aren't planning much activity in the Bakken this year, whereas others have been busier as they frack new wells. The latter scenario gives business owners such as Ostrand a touch of hope.

"It's kind of all over the board," he said.

Recent activity across western North Dakota has been a positive sign for Dunlap as well. Last week, his company on Facebook asked for experienced workers to send in resumes, as its workload "is steadily beginning to turn around."

But Dunlap, too, is cautious.

"Where it's not looking so good is the administration in D.C.," he said.

President Joe Biden has taken a number of steps his first weeks in office that target the oil industry. He withdrew a permit for the Keystone XL pipeline slated to run from Canada into the Midwest. He's ex-

pected to crack down on emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that can leak from oil facilities and contribute to climate change.

Biden also has paused oil and gas leasing on federal land.

It's unclear if he'll wade into the fight over the Dakota Access Pipeline, which is responsible for moving half of North Dakota's oil output of 1.2 million barrels per day to market. But past presidents have inserted themselves into the dispute between the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps last month asked for more time to address whether it will require the pipeline to shut down in light of a judge revoking a key permit, while it briefs Biden officials on the case.

Cook, like so many others in the Bakken, is watching those developments closely.

"Pricewise, if they leave us alone from Washington, I expect that it's going to be a good year," she said. "But there are just so many question marks."

Aberdeen mother works to bring attention to rare disorder

By TRENT ABREGO Aberdeen American News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — An Aberdeen mother is working to bring awareness to a relatively rare condition that's struck her family twice.

Marfan syndrome is a genetic disorder that affects connective tissue, the heart, eyes, blood vessels, bones and more.

With those symptoms, people with the condition oftentimes are tall with legs, fingers and toes that are thin and long, according to the Mayo Clinic. It's estimated that there are fewer than 200,000 Marfan syndrome cases in the U.S. That averages out to about one in 5,000 people, according to Jessica Sumption.

Jessica's husband Derek, 40, and their daughter Lilly, 12, have both been diagnosed with Marfan syndrome.

Jessica first noticed signs of Marfan syndrome after Lilly's eyesight started deteriorating.

When Lilly was little, she would read books close to her face and stand in front of the television due to her eyesight. That's when Jessica searched for answers.

After going to doctor appointments, it was confirmed that the lenses in Lilly's eyes were dislocated.

"They told us they wouldn't recommend inserting new lenses because their connective tissue is not strong enough and they more than likely would dislocate," Jessica said. "But, in a year's time maybe, the science would be better and maybe they could do something."

For Derek and Lilly, it's brought a sense of bonding between the two.

"I do feel like dad and I have a bond because if there is something I don't know, I can always ask him," Lilly said.

Derek and Lilly have been affected in ways beyond their eyesight.

Marfan syndrome, if not found and diagnosed, can be life-threatening.

"People who have it are at a higher risk for things like aortic dissections and aortic aneurysms," Jessica said. "So if you're a person who has that syndrome, a lot of the time doctors are saying you shouldn't be doing things like playing competitive sports."

Both Derek and Lilly take medication to slow their heart rate down and lower their blood pressure in order to decrease chances of aortic dissection, according to Jessica.

Along with medication that the two take, they have also had surgery done. Derek has had reconstructive surgery on his chest, open heart surgery and a bilateral lensectomy. Lilly has also had bilateral lensectomy and additional surgeries due to retinal tears.

"Having a daughter with Marfan syndrome makes me worry that she has to go through surgeries," Derek said.

There is no known cure for Marfan syndrome. But there are resources.

The Northern Plains Marfan Group includes residents from the Dakotas and is a chapter of the national organization, The Marfan Foundation. Before COVID-19 changed things, the Northern Plains Marfan Group would frequently host meet-ups.

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"To be honest, my husband didn't know anybody else who had Marfan syndrome until a few years ago when we went to that conference. And so, that was really nice because you get to meet other people who have been diagnosed with it," Jessica said.

Statistically, approximately 1 in 5,000 people have Marfan syndrome – with roughly 75% of those being inherited from a parent, Jessica said.

Gov. Kristi Noem signed an executive proclamation on Jan. 26, which declared February as Marfan Syndrome Awareness Month. With the proclamation, Jessica hopes that more parents become aware of the syndrome and can catch symptoms early.

"If you think there's something that your child is dealing with, get answers, seek answers. If you think, 'Oh, boy, my child is having a hard time with their vision,' don't stop at the first doctor if they say, 'Oh, no, it's just behavior,'" Jessica said. "As a parent, you know your child better than anybody."

Man raising money for LGBTQ counseling center in Black Hills

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A man who found solace in the Black Hills of South Dakota when he came out as gay while in college plans to move back to the region to open a counseling and retreat center for other LGBTQ families.

Joe Barb is the founder and executive director of the nonprofit LGBTQ+ Family Connections Center, which he hopes to locate near Custer or Keystone. He's currently trying to raise money for the center.

"It's a beautiful area. ... I want a retreat-like lodge environment, a place where families can let their guard down," he said.

Barb's desire to aid other families stems partly from his experiences with his son, Jaden, 12, and husband, Lambert Miller. Barb was a single father for eight years before marrying Miller, who has two adult daughters and five grandchildren, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"I got married and there were things for my son to adjust to. He was in a two-parent household with two dads. He didn't know how to respond to a society that wasn't (inclusive)," he said.

Counseling sessions helped equip Jaden to handle questions and people's views about his family, which was his biggest struggle, Barb said.

Barb lived in Rapid City, Custer and Keystone for about 30 years before moving to West Virginia to be near family.

South Dakota records 130 new COVID-19 cases, 3 new deaths

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Sunday reported 130 new COVID-19 cases and three new deaths due to complications from the coronavirus.

The update increased the number of positive tests to 114,623 and the number of fatalities to 1,912 since the start of the pandemic. The death count is the eighth highest per capita in the country at about 216 deaths per 100,000 people, according to Johns Hopkins University researchers.

Hospitalizations remained unchanged in the last day at 64. Of those patients, ten were being treated in intensive care units.

Researchers said there were about 249 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks 18th in the country for new cases per capita. One in every 791 people in the state tested positive in the past week.

State Department of Health figures show that 304,475 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered and 111,303 people have completed their treatment.

South emerges as flashpoint of brewing redistricting battle

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

The partisan showdown over redistricting has hardly begun, but already both sides agree on one thing: It largely comes down to the South.

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The states from North Carolina to Texas are set to be premier battlegrounds for the once-a-decade fight over redrawing political boundaries. That's thanks to a population boom, mostly one-party rule and a new legal landscape that removes federal oversight and delays civil rights challenges.

It's a collision of factors likely to tilt the scales in the GOP's favor with dramatic impact: Experts note the new maps in the South alone could knock Democrats out of power in the U.S. House next year -- and perhaps well beyond.

"The South is really going to stand out," said Ryan Weichelt, a geography professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire who tracks redistricting.

Of the 10 new congressional seats expected this year, six are likely to be in Southern states, with one new one expected in North Carolina, two in Florida and three in Texas.

Republicans control the legislatures in those states, leaving them with near total say over what those new districts will look like — a sharp contrast to other parts of the country where state governments are either divided or where nonpartisan commissions are tasked with redrawing congressional and state legislative lines.

Finally, this will be the first time in more than 50 years the Justice Department will not automatically review new legislative maps in nine mostly Southern states to ensure they do not discriminate.

"It is a very different landscape from the one that it's been for 50-plus years," said Deuel Ross, senior counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Republicans are under added pressure to bolster their political standing in the region as its population has grown, largely due to an influx of Democratic-leaning newcomers. That's weakened the GOP's grip, highlighted most dramatically in Georgia, where Democrats just won a presidential race and two Senate races.

The party is already eyeing targets. In Georgia, they can choose whether to target Democratic Reps. Lucy McBath or Carolyn Boudreaux or both by adding more conservative voters from far north of Atlanta to the two lawmakers' districts.

In Florida, they could try to swamp Democratic Rep. Stephanie Murphy's district with new GOP voters as they carve out a new seat in the Orlando area, one of the two the state is expected to add.

And in Texas, which is expected to gain a whopping three congressional seats, the most of any state, the GOP may try to carve out more seats in the center of their state's boom — Democratic-leaning Houston — that could still elect Republicans.

Currently, a gain of five seats would hand control the House to the GOP. That number may rise or fall before November 2020 depending on the outcome of special elections for several vacant seats.

To be sure, there will be limits — both legal and practical — on how much power Republicans can win with a new map. While they control the process, the demographic trends in Southern states are working against them. Many of the new residents are college-educated, racially diverse and young — all groups Republicans have struggled to win over.

That means the party can only draw so many "safe" districts. And, because these states are seeing explosive growth, efforts to perfectly divvy up major cities like Houston and Atlanta may collapse over time as tens of thousands of new residents continue to move in.

"You've got all these countervailing things," said Steve Schale, a Florida-based Democratic strategist. "Democrats doing better in suburban areas, states getting more diverse, coupled with Republicans being in control of all the levers of government."

Control in the South has a history of leading to rigging the democratic process — from voting rules to district maps — to disempower Black voters. In Georgia, the state's GOP-controlled legislature is responding to Democrats' recent surge and former President Donald Trump's false claim of voter fraud with a raft of proposals that would make it harder to vote — including one to end Sunday early voting, popular among Black churchgoers.

Such restrictions wouldn't have been possible eight years ago, when the Justice Department was required to approve any changes ahead of time in states with a history of voting rights violations. But, in

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2013, the conservative majority on the Supreme Court struck down federal requirements that Georgia and eight other states “preclear” voting and redistricting changes. It ruled the federal formula based on the states’ previous violations was outdated.

Several states — including Texas and North and South Carolina — quickly responded with new voter identification laws. Some civil rights advocates fear the party will take advantage of the lack of oversight in redistricting as well.

“If they’re using what was obviously a lie about voter fraud in 2020 to pass new restrictions on voting in Georgia and Texas, then I think the same will apply when the Census data comes out” to kick off the redistricting process, Ross said.

Redistricting on the basis of race remains illegal under the Voting Rights Act. But proving a violation can take years in court, allowing multiple elections to go forward with maps that may later be found illegal. For example, in North Carolina — the Republican legislature alone has redistricting power, without input from the state’s Democratic governor — the legislature drew maps in 2010 that were eventually found to be racially gerrymandered. But those maps remained in place for two House elections before being redrawn to cost the GOP two seats.

“It means a state can engage in midnight gerrymandering and essentially evade court review, run elections with those gerrymandered maps and get away with it until the next election,” said Kathay Feng, Common Cause’s redistricting director.

Jason Torchinsky, general counsel of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said there’s significant limits on what Republican legislatures could accomplish even if they went down the road of racial gerrymandering — which, he noted, could still result in damaging lawsuits and injunctions against maps from federal judges.

“This notion that, somehow, the lack of preclearance is going to leave minorities unprotected is false,” Torchinsky said.

Some Republicans note the party should be careful not to let its power over the rules and the boundaries replace persuasion. It must still try to win over new arrivals in the South with ideas.

“We need to remind these new residents that they’re moving to these states, ideally, based on policies Republicans have put in place,” said Hoeff Cooksey, a Virginia-based GOP strategist.

Virginia looms as a warning to the GOP — a once solidly Republican state that became a solidly Democratic one as the growing, educated population in the Washington, D.C., suburbs turned against the party. A federal court redrew the state’s maps in 2016 because it found the legislature — split between both parties — and a Republican governor had improperly used racial criteria in redistricting.

Democrats won the statehouse in 2019, and Virginia now uses a nonpartisan commission to draw its legislative maps.

Biden, Harris and others to promote relief plan’s benefits

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Let the sales push begin.

President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and their spouses are opening an ambitious, cross-country tour this week to highlight the benefits of his \$1.9 trillion plan to defeat the coronavirus and boost the economy.

The road show — dubbed the “Help is Here” tour by the White House — begins Monday with Harris heading to a COVID-19 vaccination site and a culinary academy in Las Vegas and first lady Jill Biden touring a New Jersey elementary school.

The president will have more to say about the plan Monday at the White House, and he plans to visit a small business in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, on Tuesday. He and Harris are slated to appear together in Atlanta on Friday.

Harris will meet with small-business owners in Denver on Tuesday. Wednesday sees Jill Biden in Concord, New Hampshire, and Harris’ husband, Doug Emhoff, in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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The stops at vaccination sites, businesses, schools and more are meant to educate the public about different aspects of the giant American Rescue Plan and how it will help people get to the other side of the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden has said President Barack Obama's administration, in which Biden was vice president, failed to adequately educate the public about the benefits of its economic recovery plan. He said he wants to do a better sales job this time around on the details of his first big legislative victory.

One of the plan's key features is direct payments of \$1,400 for a single taxpayer, or \$2,800 for a married couple filing their taxes jointly, plus \$1,400 per dependent — for a total of \$5,600 for a married couple with two children. The payments phase out for those with higher incomes.

An extension of federal unemployment benefits will continue through Sept. 6 at \$300 a week. There's \$350 billion for state, local and tribal governments, \$130 billion for K-12 schools and about \$50 billion to expand COVID-19 testing, among other measures.

Restaurants and bars that were forced to close or limit service will take advantage of a new multibillion-dollar grant program, and the plan also has tens of billions of dollars to help people who have fallen behind on their rent and mortgage payments.

The bill cleared Congress without any backing from Republicans, despite polling that found broad public support for the plan. Republicans argued the bill was too expensive. Democrats provided the votes and Biden signed it into law last week.

The "Help is Here" tour is taking Harris on her first domestic trip as vice president. She'll be accompanied by her husband, the nation's first "second gentleman," who plans to break off for separate events in Las Vegas on Monday and New Mexico on Wednesday.

Since taking office, Harris has presided over swearing-in ceremonies for members of Biden's Cabinet. She has stood with the president at his speeches, delivered remarks of her own, spoken by telephone with assorted world leaders and made appearances in the Washington area, including at funeral services for Washington power broker Vernon Jordan.

Harris also cast three tie-breaking votes in the 50-50 Senate in her role as president of the Senate.

Jill Biden will be joined by New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy on a tour Monday of Samuel Smith Elementary School in Burlington, where she is expected to talk about how the plan will help families and communities, and highlight steps the school took to reopen.

The first lady has kept a robust schedule focused on education, military families and cancer research since stepping into her new role. Earlier this month, she and Education Secretary Miguel Cardona visited Connecticut and Pennsylvania public schools that reopened during the pandemic.

Emhoff, an entertainment lawyer, also has made a few appearances in the Washington area in between his stint teaching at Georgetown Law. He plans to visit a food relief organization Monday in Las Vegas and participate in a listening session with the organization's partners.

In addition to the president, vice president and their spouses, Cabinet secretaries will also be out on the tour. Hundreds of mayors and governors, including Republicans, are being lined up to give interviews to discuss what the plan means for their communities.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg was set Monday to tour a UPS distribution center in Landover, Maryland, that also delivers vaccines in the Washington area.

Associated Press writer Hope Yen contributed to this report.

Chicago parish fiercely backs priest after sex abuse claims

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — When her teenage son was murdered outside a church in 2006, Pam Bosley contacted ministers around Chicago, hoping someone would help make sense of it.

Only one wrote back.

Michael Pflieger, a charismatic priest of a thriving Black Catholic parish, inspired her to become an activist

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and recruited her to run his South Side church's violence prevention office.

Stories like Bosley's are recurrent at St. Sabina Church, a close-knit community that's been a social activism hub for 40 years under Pflieger. But the white priest's job, his reputation in a Black community that's long respected him, and the parish's future are in jeopardy because three men — two who are Black and the third whose race hasn't been made public — have accused him of sexually abusing them decades ago.

After the first allegations surfaced in January, the Archdiocese of Chicago temporarily removed the 71-year-old priest to investigate, leading to fierce backlash from parishioners trying to clear his name. They've flooded the archdiocese's phone lines, staged rallies, threatened to withhold \$100,000 in monthly dues and sent 1,300 letters. They've also challenged the accusers' accounts.

"Father Pflieger is our family," Bosley said. "We are not going to stop. We need him back."

The accusations sent shockwaves through the church in the largely Black and low-income Auburn Gresham neighborhood and beyond. Often clashing with archdiocese leaders, Pflieger has made a name for himself by using unconventional tactics such as paying prostitutes to counsel them and defacing alcohol and cigarette billboards. He also boosted neighborhood development by opening an employment center and senior housing near his Gothic-style church. He inspired John Cusack's character in Spike Lee's 2015 movie "Chi-raq."

Pflieger's initial accusers were two brothers in their 60s who haven't publicly identified themselves. They allege that Pflieger groomed them as children and abused them at Chicago-area rectories. Their attorney, Eugene Hollander, said they "went through hell."

Their stories led a third man, who hasn't been named, to come forward this month. Through a lawyer, he alleges that Pflieger grabbed his crotch in 1979, when he was 18.

The brothers' complaint led to archdiocese and police investigations. Charges haven't been filed, but Illinois has no statute of limitations for major sex crimes. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services completed its review, concluding there wasn't sufficient evidence to show that Pflieger was a threat.

But the archdiocese is still investigating. Church officials said their investigation would note DCFS's findings, but that their process shouldn't be rushed.

"Giving a case special treatment undermines the credibility of its outcome and ultimately serves neither the accuser nor the accused," the archdiocese said in a statement. "Justice demands a thorough and impartial process and there is no timeframe in which we 'should' make a determination."

Pflieger moved out of the rectory and has laid low while living elsewhere in Chicago during the investigation. He declined to be interviewed, but he tweeted that he's innocent: "When this is over, which I hope is soon, I will have much more to say."

His attorney, Jim Figliulo, said: "It is really unfair that his reputation is being smeared by these false charges."

Pflieger was ordained in 1975 and assigned to St. Sabina. He became a priest six years later at 31 — then the youngest full-time pastor in the archdiocese.

He shook things up, encouraging gospel music and helping teenagers get jobs, recalled 54-year-old congregant Stephanie Falls-Warr.

"Back then, the youth were to be seen, not really to be heard," she said. "He really gave us a voice."

Congregants say they're suffering, and church officials say a cloud has hung over St. Sabina's since the allegations arose. Associate Minister Kimberly Lymore estimates that roughly \$500,000 in private funding and grants has been put on hold until the investigation ends.

The DCFS findings took center stage at a rally last month outside archdiocese offices, where a state senator was among those who demonstrated.

Falls-Warr said she never questioned her children's safety at the church. Like others, she doubts the abuse claims because they surfaced late and because one brother acknowledged asking Pflieger for \$20,000 to help heal.

However, experts say neither is unusual. According to the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, which has been central in helping reveal church sexual abuse scandals, the average age a childhood abuse victim comes forward is 52 and requesting payment from an abuser might make sense to someone who

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experienced trauma.

Bosley believes Pflieger was set up, but she doesn't know who's behind it. Other parishioners theorize that the abuse claims are a way for the church to damage Pflieger's influence before it ousts him.

Pflieger has been suspended twice, including in 2008 during Barack Obama's presidential campaign when he mocked Obama's primary opponent Hillary Clinton.

The archdiocese dismissed the speculation.

"It is mystifying why anyone would believe the leadership of the archdiocese, which has consistently supported Fr. Pflieger's good works, would concoct a ruse to remove him," the archdiocese said.

Still, the situation has triggered conflicting feelings for some outside the church. Carlos Nelson, who grew up nearby, runs the Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corp., which often works with Pflieger.

"My heart went out to the alleged victims because whether that is a falsified story or not, these individuals are carrying around this burden," he said. "Whether the burden is a lie or truth, it is still a burden."

It's unclear how St. Sabina's would function without Pflieger.

Black Catholic parishes are few and dwindling. Of roughly 21,000 American Catholic parishes, about 800, or less than 4%, are mostly Black, according to a University of Notre Dame and National Black Catholic Congress study. Black priests are more rare, making up 250, or under 1%, of roughly 36,500 Catholic priests, according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Parishioners say "Father Mike" has credibility from living in the neighborhood with insight even lifelong residents lack.

Over archdiocese objections, Pflieger adopted two sons, including one who was fatally shot — a tragedy he discusses in sermons.

He also has the ear of city leaders, who've marched alongside him.

In Pflieger's absence, guest pastors preach at the 1,500-member St. Sabina, which runs a school and community center.

"We've prayed for him. I just want to lift him up one more time. I cannot say enough about the gift that is Michael Lewis Pflieger," the Rev. Reginald Williams Jr. of a nearby church said recently. "I thank God for you. If you're going down, we're going down with you."

Parishioners, spaced apart in pews and wearing masks, applauded.

Follow Sophia Tareen on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sophiatareen>

Flights canceled during China's worst sandstorm in a decade

BEIJING (AP) — China's capital and a wide swath of the country's north were enveloped Monday in the worst sandstorm in a decade, forcing the cancellation of hundreds of flights.

Skyscrapers in the center of Beijing appeared to drop from sight amid the dust and sand. Traffic was snarled and more than 400 flights out of the capital's two main airports were canceled amid high winds and low visibility.

The National Meteorological Center said Monday's storm had developed in the Gobi Desert in the Inner Mongolia Region, where schools had been advised to close and bus service added to reduce residents' exposure to the harsh conditions.

Such storms used to occur regularly in the springtime as sand from western deserts blew eastwards, affecting areas as far as northern Japan.

Massive planting of trees and bushes in fragile areas has reduced the intensity of storms in recent years, but the expansion of cities and industries, along with strip mining and overgrazing, has put constant pressure on the environment throughout China. With its mix of desert and grassy steppe, Inner Mongolia is particularly prone to extreme weather resulting from resource exploitation.

The National Meteorological Center forecasted the sand and dust would affect 12 provinces and regions from Xinjiang in the far northwest to Heilongjiang in the northeast and the eastern coastal port city of

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Tianjin.

"This is the most intense sandstorm weather our country has seen in 10 years, as well as it covering the broadest area," the center said in a post on its website.

It wasn't clear if the storm was related to a recent general decline in air quality despite efforts to end Beijing's choking smog.

The ruling Communist Party has pledged to reduce carbon emissions per unit of economic output by 18% over the next five years. Environmentalists say China needs to do more to reduce dependency on coal that has made it the world's biggest emitter of climate changing gasses.

Myanmar junta orders martial law in 6 Yangon townships

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's ruling junta has declared martial law in six townships in the country's largest city, as security forces killed dozens of protesters over the weekend in an increasingly lethal crackdown on resistance to last month's military coup.

State broadcaster MRTV said Monday that the Yangon townships of North Dagon, South Dagon, Dagon Seikkan and North Okkalapa have been put under martial law. An initial announcement was made late Sunday saying two other townships — Hlaing Thar Yar and neighboring Shwepyitha — were being placed under martial law.

At least 38 people were killed Sunday and dozens were injured in one of the deadliest days of the crackdown on anti-coup protesters, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, or AAPP, an independent group tracking the toll of the violence. Several estimates from other sources gave higher figures.

Complicating efforts to organize new protests as well as media coverage of the crisis, mobile internet service has been cut, though access is still available through fixed broadband connections.

Mobile data service has been used to stream live video coverage of protests, often showing security forces attacking demonstrators. It had been turned off only from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. for several weeks, with no official explanation.

The blockage of internet service forced postponement of a court hearing in the capital, Natpyitaw, for Myanmar's detained leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was supposed to take part via a video conference, said her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw. Suu Kyi and President Win Myint were detained during the Feb. 1 military takeover, and have been charged with several criminal offenses that their supporters believe are politically motivated to keep them locked up.

Since the takeover six weeks ago, Myanmar has been under a nationwide state of emergency, with its civilian leaders ousted and detained, and military leaders in charge of all government. But Sunday's announcement was the first use of martial law since the coup and suggested more direct military control of security, instead of local police.

The announcement said that the State Administrative Council acted to enhance security and restore law and order, and that the Yangon regional commander has been entrusted with administrative, judicial and military powers in the area under his command. The orders cover six of Yangon's 33 townships, all of which suffered major violence in recent days.

Thirty-four of the deaths were in Yangon. Video from Hlaing Thar Yar township showed people running away after gunfire was heard at nighttime. Those fleeing carried one injured person and tried to revive two others, one who seemed to be dead or dying, the footage from independent Democratic Voice of Burma showed.

Hlaing Thar Yar was the location of 22 civilian deaths Sunday, according to the AAPP, which said more than a dozen civilians were wounded and described a large number of junta forces engaged in the township.

Four other deaths were reported in the cities of Bago, Mandalay, and Hpakant, according to the AAPP and local media.

In a new tactic, anti-coup demonstrators used the cover of darkness to hold mass candlelight vigils in various parts of Yangon over the weekend, including some that took place after 8 p.m., when a curfew

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imposed by authorities starts.

The protest movement has been grounded in nonviolent civil disobedience from the start, with marches and general strikes among its main features. But some protesters have advocated stronger, more agile methods of self-defense — such as holding small rallies that are quick to disband and reunite, and devising cover from fire extinguishers, billowing laundry and burning tires.

The AAPP's tally of Sunday's victims raised the number of civilians killed by security forces since the coup to over 100. Confirmation of the number of casualties is nearly impossible due to the security situation and a crackdown on independent media in Myanmar, but various groups have compiled tallies with similar figures.

The actual death toll is likely higher, as police apparently have seized some bodies, and some victims have had serious gunshot wounds that medical staff at makeshift clinics would be hard-pressed to treat. Many hospitals are occupied by security forces, and as a result are boycotted by medical personnel and shunned by protesters.

Police have also aggressively patrolled residential neighborhoods at night, firing into the air and setting off stun grenades as an intimidation tactic. They have also taken people from their homes in targeted raids with minimal resistance. In at least two known cases, the detainees died in custody within hours of being hauled away.

Denied benefits, Chinese single moms press for change

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Sarah Gao had a busy job. As the head of a 500 million yuan (\$76.8 million) investment fund, she was constantly flying across China on business trips. Then she found out she was pregnant.

Her pregnancy, with her then-boyfriend, was unplanned. But Gao, who was 40, thought she wouldn't have any more chances, and decided to keep the baby. What she did not realize was how that decision would lead to a nearly four-year legal battle for her maternity benefits.

Her protracted fight highlights the consequences that Chinese women face when they raise a child outside of a marriage. The vast majority are unable to access public benefits, ranging from paid maternity leave to prenatal exam coverage, because their status is in a legal gray zone. Some may even face fines.

Gao and some other single mothers want to change this. They are part of a small group, organized by Advocates for Diverse Family Network, that petitioned the Legal Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress at its recently concluded annual meeting. They don't expect immediate action, but they hope their needs will be reflected in the legislative agenda in the future.

China's population is rapidly aging, and the government is eager to promote higher birthrates, relaxing restrictive family planning laws in 2015 so that each family can have two kids. Yet, the laws have not changed as quickly with regards to single parents.

There are no official statistics on the number of single-parent households in China, but a National Health Commission survey in 2014 estimated that there would be nearly 20 million single mothers by 2020. Many of them come from divorce, with divorce rates in the country nearly doubling from 2009 to 2018, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Following a difficult pregnancy, Gao gave birth to her daughter in November 2016. She went back to work after seven months of sick leave and maternity leave. Throughout her sick leave, her company, KunYuan Asset Management, paid her the bare minimum: roughly 1,000 yuan (\$153) a month, a huge drop from her usual monthly salary of 30,000 yuan (\$4,606). The company did not pay her during maternity leave.

Gao pressed the company for full salary and maternity leave benefits, part of which would come from the social insurance to which companies contribute by law.

In Beijing, where Gao lives, an employee can apply for those public benefits only through their company. But Gao's company refused to apply for her, saying her materials were incomplete because she lacked a marriage license.

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When she forced the issue, the company asked her to resign. Gao refused to quit at first, but eventually she was fired. However, the company refused to issue her a formal letter that would acknowledge her departure, making it difficult for her to find a new job.

The company did not respond to requests for comment via email, and phone calls to the head office in Beijing went unanswered.

Gao is suing the company for 1 million yuan (\$153,645) in back pay, in addition to her maternity leave payment. She has lost twice in court since July 2017 and is appealing for a third time.

Each time, the court said that "Gao's unmarried status while giving birth is not in line with national policy, and therefore lacked the legal basis for her to receive a salary during maternity leave."

China's family planning policy does not explicitly forbid unmarried women to have children, but says that "the state encourages a husband and wife to have two children."

At the local level, this has been interpreted to mean that only a married couple can have children. This becomes an obstacle when trying to access benefits, such as reimbursement for prenatal visits and salary during pregnancy leave.

Many local governments require a marriage permit during this process, said Dong Xiaoying, the founder of Advocates for Diverse Family Network.

There have been some changes. In Guangdong province and Shanghai, governments have changed regulations so that a woman does not have to provide proof of marriage before getting benefits.

In January, Shanghai quietly implemented a new regulation that removed the need for a marriage permit to apply for benefits, helping women like Zou Xiaoqi, a single mother turned activist in Shanghai. Zou sued a Shanghai government agency in 2017 to get her maternity leave salary and the public insurance benefits. After years of media interviews, court appearances and lobbying city politicians, Zou received her benefits earlier this month.

The laws must change, Zou believes, as the cultural stigma is still very intense. Only recently did she find out that the mother of her son's playmate was also a single mother. They had known each other for five months before the woman revealed that detail.

"Its direct impact is that there are some single moms already facing great difficulties who fall into more difficult positions," Zou said. "The indirect impact is that some people are afraid to speak up, and some are afraid to face society and will face a lot of suppression. People who don't want to marry end up getting married and enter into an unhappy marriage."

Single moms and activists are hoping that a change on the national level can smooth out the situation for single mothers in the rest of the country, like Gao. A Guangdong delegate to the National People's Congress said in February that the family planning law may need some clarifications to address the needs of single mothers, acknowledging their legal quandary.

"I just want to know in the national policy, as a single parent, as an unmarried woman, do I have the right to give birth?" Gao said.

The joy of music returns for Grammy winners, performers

By DAVID BAUDER AP Entertainment Writer

Beyoncé, Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish made history at the Grammy Awards. Just as joyously, dozens of creators largely sidelined for a year due to the pandemic got to make music again.

The Grammys on Sunday broke through the Zoom trap that has bedeviled other awards shows with a surprisingly intimate evening that, at its best, felt like viewers were invited into a private club with their favorite musicians.

Four different women won the four most prestigious Grammys. Swift's quiet surprise, "folklore," was album of the year; Eilish's "Everything I Wanted" was her second consecutive record of the year winner; H.E.R.'s topical "I Can't Breathe" won song of the year and Megan Thee Stallion was named best new artist.

Beyoncé's four awards Sunday brought her up to 28 Grammys in her career, more than any other female artist. Her celebration of Black history, "Black Parade," released last Juneteenth, won best R&B

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performance and she shared two awards for collaborating with Megan Thee Stallion on "Savage."

She ties Quincy Jones for second most Grammys ever and has the leader — the late conductor George Solti, who won 31 — in her sights.

Further crowding the family trophy case is husband Jay-Z, whose songwriting on "Savage" earned him his 23rd Grammy on Sunday, and even their 9-year-old daughter, Blue Ivy Carter, who won best music video together with mom.

"This is such a magical night," Beyoncé said.

Swift, who also found time during the pandemic to make another album and re-record one of her old ones, became the first woman to win the album of the year Grammy for the third time. Stevie Wonder, Paul Simon and Frank Sinatra have also done it. She won in 2009 for "Fearless" and 2015 for "1989."

She sang a medley of three songs on the Grammys, "cardigan" and "august" from "folklore" and "willow" from its follow-up disc, "evermore," with collaborators Jack Antonoff and Aaron Dessner.

"I want to thank the fans," she said. "You guys met us in this magical world that we created."

After her sweep last year, Eilish became only the third artist to win back-to-back record of the year Grammys. Roberta Flack won in 1973 for "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" and in 1974 for "Killing Me Softly With His Song," while U2 won in 2001 and 2002 for "Beautiful Day" and "Walk On."

Then, when Eilish and her collaborator-brother Finneas accepted the award, she almost gave it away. She brought Megan Thee Stallion to tears by saying the rapper deserved the Grammy for "Savage."

Because of the pandemic, CBS host Trevor Noah handed out the Grammys at an outdoor stage set up across from Los Angeles' Staples Center, with relatively few nominees and guests in the audience.

Performances were held in the Staples Center but multiple artists were often on the cavernous stage at the same time, like when Harry Styles, HAIM and Eilish opened the show. Cameras caught artists enjoying their fellow nominees, like when country singer Mickey Guyton sang along quietly to Miranda Lambert, and Post Malone held up a red cup in glee at Cardi B and Stallion's performance of "WAP."

It made for an atmosphere unlike any other Grammy show, British singer Jacob Collier told reporters.

"There was something very special about how intimate it was and to have everything stripped back and just to be hanging out with those fellow nominees was just fantastic," said Collier, who won his fifth Grammy. "To me, there's something so special about communal celebration, especially after all this time of silence and being on our own."

Lambert said that "I can't wait to get out as a band." Lizzo, even though she was giving out an award and not performing, couldn't hold back: "I'm presenting because I L-O-O-O-V-E you," she belted.

Some of the performances, like Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak's Silk Sonic and Dua Lipa, felt like they were on the soundstage of "Soul Train" — ask your parents, kids.

Even with the stripped-down setting, there was still room for spectacle: the giant bed for "WAP" belongs in the Grammy hall of fame. Lil Baby's "The Bigger Picture" had an elaborately choreographed scene recreating the police shooting of Rayshard Brooks and subsequent unrest.

The latter joined with "Black Parade," which Beyoncé said was created to honor the world's "beautiful Black kings and queens," and H.E.R.'s "I Can't Breathe," a reference to Black people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor who died at the hands of police, as songs and performances that recalled last summer's social unrest.

"The fight that we had in us in the summer of 2020 — keep that energy," H.E.R. said.

A particularly effective "in memoriam" section — lengthened because of coronavirus deaths — featured Lionel Richie paying tribute Kenny Rogers, Silk Sonic raising the spirit of Little Richard, Brandi Carlile honoring John Prine and Brittany Howard's roof-rattling version of "You'll Never Walk Alone," accompanied by Chris Martin.

Other performances that impressed included DaBaby's "Rockstar," country singer Guyton, the first Black woman nominated for best country solo performance, on "Black Like Me," and Black Pumas' "Colors."

H.E.R., Fiona Apple and Kaytranda won two Grammys each. Prine and Chick Corea also won two awards each posthumously.

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Other notable Grammy winners were Kanye West, whose "Jesus is King" won best contemporary Christian album; Canadian pop star Justin Bieber, who shared in Dan + Shay's country award for the collaboration "10,000 Hours"; and MSNBC's Rachel Maddow, who won best spoken word album for "Blowout: Corrupted Democracy, Rogue State Russia and the Richest, Most Destructive Industry on Earth."

Associated Press music writer Mesfin Fekadu and entertainment writer Kristin M. Hall contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: Myanmar using martial law to 'legitimize' tactics

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's ruling junta on Monday imposed martial law in parts of the country's biggest city, a day after at least 38 people were killed in the bloodiest crackdown yet on resistance to last month's military coup.

NOT THE FIRST RESTRICTIONS

After the Feb. 1 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, the military declared a nationwide state of emergency and gave itself broad powers. It also put in place similar but milder restrictions to martial law in dozens of townships across the country.

Those earlier measures used Section 144 of the penal code and the main impact was a ban on gatherings of more than five people — which was generally ignored — and an 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew, which protesters last week began defying in large numbers.

MARTIAL LAW TRUMPS ALL ELSE

Martial law basically supersedes all other law, allowing the military total authority over the specified area, including administrative, judicial and law enforcement functions.

The imposition of martial law in six townships in Yangon in legal terms legitimizes actions that the military had already been taking to suppress the protests. The immediate trigger appeared to be escalating violence — mostly on the part of the security forces but with increasing signs that at least some demonstrators are starting to take active self-defense measures including burning tires at makeshift barricades.

The official order issued Monday said martial law was imposed "to take more effective measures for the security, rule of law and community peace and tranquility."

Violators of orders issued by the military can now be tried by military courts and could face punishments as harsh as death or life imprisonment, according to local news outlet Eleven Media. The minimum punishment, it said, was three years in prison with hard labor and a fine.

Eleven Media appeared to be basing its report on times martial law was declared in 1989 and 1974. Martial law remained in place for three years after it was declared in 1989 in the wake of a failed popular uprising against a military dictatorship.

PROTECTING BUSINESS INTERESTS

The first two places martial law was declared were two Yangon townships that are industrial zones home to garment factories, a major source of export earnings for Myanmar. One of those townships, Hlaing Thar Yar, was the scene of Sunday's worst violence, with at least 22 protesters killed. Later the order was extended to another heavily industrial Yangon township as well as three other townships in the city.

The declaration follows reports that at least two factories that have Chinese ownership were set on fire Sunday night. It was not clear who set the fires.

A Chinese Embassy statement issued Sunday said several Chinese-owned factories were burned and multiple Chinese employees were injured and trapped.

"China requires Myanmar to take further effective measures to stop all violent acts, investigate and deal with relevant perpetrators in accordance with the law, and ensure the safety of the lives and property of Chinese enterprises and personnel in Myanmar," the statement said.

Many factories in Myanmar have Chinese ownership or partners. China's political and economic clout in Myanmar is a point of great resentment among many Myanmar people, who accuse China of exploiting their country for its natural resources and protecting the military from international consequences.

Former TV presenter puts race on Dutch political agenda

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP) — Sylvana Simons is campaigning for the Dutch general election on a platform of what she calls radical equality.

Simons, a former television presenter who is arguably the country's best-known Black woman, leads a small party that wants to put ending racial inequality front and center on the political stage before and after this week's election.

Voting for the the lower house of parliament's 150 seats begins Monday and ends Wednesday. The party that wins the most seats will be first in line to form the next ruling coalition, a process likely to take weeks or months. It remains to be seen if Simons' BIJ1 party — a wordplay that translates as Together — will get enough votes to win a seat.

In this nation, long considered a beacon of free-thinking tolerance, institutional racism has become a theme amid an increasingly polarized national discourse touching on issues including the divisive traditional children's character of Black Pete and racial profiling. The Black Lives Matter movement gave the debate new impetus last year.

"It was good to see that so many people said 'enough is enough' and they came out and spoke out," Simons said of Black Lives Matter rallies in the Netherlands last year. "And I do also hope that they will use that same voice when we have our general elections."

Simons' BIJ1 is not the only party that has equality issues high on its agenda. Others include DENK, a party she once belonged to and that already has three seats in the 150-seat lower house. That party appeals mainly to Dutch voters of Turkish and Moroccan descent.

The Netherlands has a long history of migrants arriving on its shores from former colonies such as Indonesia and Suriname, as well as more recently economic migrants guest workers from Turkey and Morocco. The country's sometimes-brutal colonial history was brought into sharp focus amid Black Lives Matter demonstrations last year and demands for the removal of statues and street names honoring historical figures with close ties to the slave trade.

Simons says racism is a systemic problem in the Netherlands, where there are widespread reports of bias against people of color in the employment and housing markets and ethnic profiling by police.

"If your reality is that of a young Black person in this country, what you'll find is that from the moment you enter school, you enter the system. There is bias and prejudice. People have lower expectations of you. People judge you differently," Simons said.

Right-wing parties reject claims of racism and instead say that the country's traditional culture needs protection from what they cast as left-wing elites.

Anti-immigration lawmaker Geert Wilders, whose Party for Freedom is the largest opposition group in parliament, says in his manifesto: "We express that our own culture is best. And we're proud of that! Unfortunately, the attack on the Netherlands' culture went into high speed last year because of the glorification of dangerous activist groups like Black Lives Matter and Kick Out Black Pete."

Black Pete — according to children's stories a helper of the Dutch version of Saint Nicholas — is sometimes portrayed by white people in blackface makeup and has been at the center of fierce debate for years in the Netherlands.

Revelations about the use of dual nationality data by tax officials trying to identify child benefit fraudsters has also helped push inequality issues into the mainstream.

A highly critical report issued by a parliamentary inquiry into the child benefits scandal led Prime Minister Mark Rutte and his government to resign in January, though the move was largely symbolic as the election date was already set.

"We are of one mind that if the whole system has failed, we all must take responsibility," Rutte said when announcing his government's resignation.

The parliamentary inquiry didn't probe allegations of racial profiling. That was done earlier by the coun-

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try's Data Protection Authority, which said last year that the tax office's use of dual nationality data was "unlawful and discriminatory."

Azan Aydin and her husband Aytac, who are of Turkish descent but were both born and raised in the Netherlands, said they went through a decade of battling tax authorities after wrongly being labeled fraudsters and ordered to repay some 52,000 euros.

The experience has destroyed their trust in the Dutch government to the extent that they may not even vote.

"What's the point for me?" said Azan.

"Mark Rutte is standing for re-election again," she added. "Okay, the mistake was the tax office but he was leader at the time. I mean, this simply shouldn't be allowed to happen. And he's standing for re-election."

Orlando Kadir, a lawyer handling a class action case for dozens of victims including the Aytac family, was himself targeted by the tax office. Kadir was born in the former Dutch colony of Suriname.

"So the racial undertone specifically was: Moroccan-Dutch, Turkish-Dutch, Caribbean-Dutch, Indonesian, Asian-Dutch were targeted on the basis of their name and double nationality," he said.

Kadir said he has voted for Rutte's conservative, pro-business VVD party for 20 years, but he won't at this election.

"He's not the man to lead this country anymore," he said.

Simons wants to be a voice for the marginalized.

She has been vilified by social media trolls for calling out racism in this country where about a quarter of the population is listed by the national statistics office as having a "migration background." But still she wants to keep doing just that in the country's parliament.

Even if her party doesn't secure any seats, she still feels like a winner.

"Just being here as a movement, that's enough," she said. "Just being here as a vehicle for so many people's unheard voices, that's enough."

Pandemic sets back Italian women's long fight for jobs

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — One of hundreds of thousands of women in Italy who lost jobs in the pandemic, Laura Taddeo has a masters degree in tourism, speaks fluent English and Spanish and some Arabic, too.

Her contract as a tour operator with a high-end Italian hotel company expired in May, just as COVID-19 travel restrictions were crippling tourism, and it wasn't renewed. But whenever tourism does rebound, Taddeo, who cuts a confident figure, will brace for the job interview questions.

"It's not, 'What have you studied? What languages do you speak?' but 'Do you have a family? Do you intend to have children?'" Taddeo, who is 33, said every man who has interviewed her asked her that right off the bat.

Worldwide, working women have paid a painfully high price during the pandemic as many quit jobs to care for children when schools closed or saw employment evaporate in hard-hit retail and hospitality businesses. But Italian women went into the COVID-19 crisis already struggling for decades to expand their presence in the workforce.

Among the 27 European Union nations, Italy ranks next to last, just above Greece, in terms of women's participation in the workforce. In 2020, while Europe's economy was reeling from pandemic restrictions, 49.4% of women aged 15 through 64 worked in Italy, compared with an EU average of 67.3%. By comparison, 67.3% of men had jobs, against an EU rate of 79%.

Deeply rooted Italian societal attitudes that hold a woman's main vocation is in the home help to explain the lag.

"It's not so much that women shouldn't work, but they shouldn't neglect the household. That's the responsibility of women," said sociologist Chiara Saraceno of the widespread attitudes. Affordable day-care is chronically scarce, both public and private.

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Of 456,000 jobs lost in 2020 in Italy, where the pandemic first erupted in the West, 249,000 were held by women, many of whom had been working as waitresses, store clerks, nannies and caretakers for the elderly. According to the national statistics bureau, ISTAT, between November and December, when Italy was grappling with a devastating resurgence of infections, a staggering 99,000 of the 101,000 jobs that disappeared were women's, mostly among the self-employed.

Even before the pandemic, Italy's economy had never fully recovered from the economic crisis of more than a decade ago. The Bank of Italy has estimated that GDP would improve by some 7 percentage points if the proportion of women in the workforce climbs to 60%.

"We're talking about women who are more educated than men, but that our country doesn't succeed in employing," ISTAT's central director Linda Laura Sabbadini said in an interview last month with the weekly *Io Donna*, (I, Woman). "The point is that, as long as women are underutilized in respect to their potential, Italy won't grow."

If anyone is acutely aware of that issue that would be Mario Draghi, who headed both the Bank of Italy and the European Central Bank and last month became the nation's premier.

A hefty chunk of the 209 billion euros (\$250 billion) in EU pandemic aid for Italy is to be earmarked for digital innovation and shifting the economy to environmentally friendly technologies. In laying out his priorities to Parliament last month, Draghi said Italy must invest "economically, but above all, culturally," so that young women can train for careers in sectors that will get the new investment.

Some 37% of Italian men have degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), compared with 16% for women.

That has some worried that EU funding could widen the gender gap.

"There is a big risk it will end up increasing jobs for men," said sociologist Saraceno, who is based in Turin. "I have been saying for some time that you have to prepare both sexes for this kind of work."

Daniela Magnanti, 42, says the push for tech and engineering jobs for women comes too late for her. She wrote computer code for years until her employer went bust. In a phone interview from her home in a Rome suburb, Magnanti recounted how, when she tried to get back to work after the birth of her second daughter, parenthood hurt her prospects.

For recruiters, asking if she had a child "was a routine question. (And) it was always a male (recruiter) who called."

Magnanti now works part-time at the check-in desk of a hotel in a nearby beach town and does administrative work for her brother's plumbing business.

"At first, in the 1960s and 1970s, (lack of women working) was justified by saying they weren't prepared, they didn't have the competence," said Liliana Ocmin, who coordinates the CISL labor union group's efforts for women. But even after Italian women armed themselves with college degrees and skills they remained behind in the workforce.

ISTAT's Sabbadini noted last year that day-care availability nationwide was a scarce 25%. In southern Calabria, it was a mere 9%.

Draghi seems to be getting the message. In remarks to the nation on Monday, International Women's Day, he said Italy needed "profound reforms" to narrow the gender gap, including more equitable access to day-care.

Meanwhile, Italian cultural attitudes toward working women seem stuck in a time warp for Carmen Basso, 63.

One of her daughters is a lawyer and the other a psychologist. But when she meets people, the first question many ask about her daughters is, "Are they married?"

"If they were men, they'd ask 'What do your children do?'" said Basso, who lives near Venice.

Among those suffering economically from the pandemic is Anita Galafate, who started a wedding planner business 15 years ago, when she was 23 and newly married.

Before her 3-year-old twin sons were born, she handled 25 weddings a year, then cut back to 15. During the pandemic she received two bookings.

"As far as my boys go, I don't want them to see a woman who stays home. I want them to think that

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when they have a future wife or companion, it's perfectly fine to work," Galafate said. "Even if the pandemic costs me this job, I will find another."

'Republic of Queues': 10 years on, Syria is a hungry nation

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The lines stretch for miles outside gas stations in Syrian cities, with an average wait of five hours to fill up a tank. At bakeries, people push and shove during long, chaotic waits for their turn to collect the quota of two bread packs a day per family.

On the streets in the capital of Damascus, beggars accost motorists and passers-by, pleading for food or money. Medicines, baby milk and diapers can hardly be found.

As Syria marks the 10th anniversary Monday of the start of its uprising-turned-civil war, President Bashar Assad may still be in power, propped up by Russia and Iran. But millions of people are being pushed deeper into poverty, and a majority of households can hardly scrape together enough to secure their next meal.

With Assad preparing to run for a fourth seven-year presidential term in the spring, some have questioned whether he can survive the sharp economic deterioration and anger in areas under his control. Poverty levels are now worse than at any point throughout the 10-year conflict.

"Life here is a portrait of everyday humiliation and suffering," said one woman in Damascus. Her husband lost his job at an electronics store last month, and now the family is drawing on meager savings that are evaporating fast. The woman said she had taken up teaching part-time to help make ends meet. Like others, she spoke on condition her identity remains hidden, fearing arrest.

With two kids and an elderly father to care for, she said life had become unbearably difficult and she is gripped by anxiety for the future. Until recently, she could smuggle in her father's medicines from Lebanon, but now Lebanon has its own meltdown and shortages.

"I go to the souk and really have to think of priorities, buying only the bare necessities for cooking. I try not to look at the other stuff my children might like," she said.

The decade of war has wreaked unfathomable destruction on Syria. Nearly half a million people have been killed and more than half the pre-war population of 23 million displaced, whether inside or outside the country's borders, the world's worst displacement crisis since World War II. Infrastructure is in ruins.

Through most of the conflict, Assad was able to shield Syrians in government-held territory from unbearable economic pain. Even if barely sometimes, the state kept fuel, medicine and other supplies coming and the currency propped up.

Now he has gained a decisive upper hand in the war with Russia and Iran's help, his grip on areas under his control is unquestioned, and the rebellion is largely crushed.

But the economy has fallen apart with startling swiftness. It was hit by a double blow of new, far-reaching U.S. sanctions imposed last year and the financial meltdown in Lebanon, Syria's main link with the outside world. That proved too much, on top of the strains of war, government corruption, other Western sanctions in place for years and the coronavirus pandemic.

The United Nations says more than 80% of Syrians now live in poverty, and 60% are at risk of hunger. The currency has crashed, now at 4,000 Syrian pounds to the dollar on the black market, compared to 700 a year ago and 47 at the beginning of the conflict in 2011.

"When you put all of these things together, there is no surprise that we are seeing rising food insecurity, rising hunger," said Arif Hussein, chief economist at the U.N. World Food Program. "Not only in the breadth, meaning lots and lots of people, but also in the depth, meaning people are closer to starvation today than ever before."

Residents of government-held areas who spoke to The Associated Press paint a grim picture. Prices go up several times a day. Families now rely on electronic "smart cards" to secure subsidized and rationed goods that include fuel, gas canisters, tea, sugar, rice and bread. To collect them, they wait in long lines, often pushing, shoving and fighting.

At gas stations, some park their cars at night to claim a place in line and come back early in the morning

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to fill their cars. Residents carpool or walk whenever possible, to avoid wasting fuel.

REPUBLIC OF QUEUES

"It is the 'Republic of Queues,'" said Ibrahim Hamidi, a Syrian journalist based in London who covers Syrian affairs for the Saudi-owned newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat.

Despite the rising discontent, Assad's rule is not threatened, because people are too busy with their own survival, he said. "They don't have time to think about anything political. They have no time to think about transition, or the constitution or reforms, because they are busy all the time."

Food prices have risen 230% the past year, and many Syrians say they are consumed with searching for essential goods that are no longer available. Many families go without meat and fruits for months. At vegetable markets, people often buy a single piece, because they can't afford more. The monthly salary of a state employee is now worth \$15-\$20, compared to around \$170 a year ago.

In the main cities, many plan their day around the electricity schedule, since power is cut four hours for every two it's on, sometimes longer. Unlike in Lebanon, where neighborhood generators have been institutionalized, only well-off people can afford them in Syria.

In winter, with gas bottles in short supply, many resorted to using toxic old wood heaters for warmth, with children seen rummaging through trash for anything to burn.

The simultaneous crises in Lebanon and Syria have fed off each other. Where Lebanese once traveled to Damascus to buy cheaper, good quality medicine, textiles and other goods, now Lebanon's subsidized goods, including fuel and medicine are smuggled to Syria, exacerbating Lebanon's economic crisis.

A Syrian media activist who goes by the pseudonym of Omar Hariri said rations of bread, gasoline, cooking gas and diesel barely cover 10% of people's needs. Waiting in line for hours has become "a way of life," he said.

"I have a relative who got his turn for gasoline in January after two months of cold had passed, and he was forced to buy from the black market at a much higher price," he said.

WALLS OF FEAR

Syrian economist Samir Seifan said the collapse of Lebanon's banking system, the U.S. sanctions, and the pandemic are all "factors that exploded at the same time." Now the regime has no more sources of income, so they are printing money and fueling inflation, he said.

Frustration is voiced even among Assad's most loyal supporters. One lawmaker questioned recently why Iran and Russia were not helping by sending oil and wheat.

The government has cracked down, detaining at least nine people in the last six weeks, including a prominent state TV anchor for social media posts deemed critical.

"The regime is trying to rebuild the walls of fear, to remind people that even if you are loyalists you cannot criticize us," Hamidi said.

Assad blames the U.S., calling its sanctions economic terrorism that seeks to starve the people. Shifting regional dynamics are boosting his confidence; some Gulf Arab countries that supported the Syrian opposition now openly criticize the sanctions.

"In 10 years of war, the (Syrian) regime did not offer a single concession. There is a general feeling that things can only get worse," Hamidi said.

"There is no horizon, no hope."

Associated Press writer Bassem Mroue in Beirut contributed reporting.

68 teams punch their ticket. Now comes the hard part

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

The 68 teams whose names popped up in the March Madness bracket only thought it was time to celebrate: The next four or five days figure to be the most nerve-racking part of their seasons.

Welcome to Bubble Ball — the NCAA Tournament is being played in a pandemic, where no player can show up for the games in Indianapolis without seven negative COVID tests, and no team is really "in" the

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tournament until the ball is tipped off.

"Which potential season-ending test was more stressful than the other?" Drexel coach Zach Spiker said, meaning the challenges that still await. "Testing, practice, getting on the bus in Philadelphia, waiting for that reply, that response time to say, 'We're all negative here. OK, let's get out of here. Let's get to Indianapolis.'"

Because of COVID—19 issues, Drexel played a grand total of 19 games — about 11 fewer than usual — en route to the Colonial Athletic Conference title. That earned the Dragons an automatic bid into the tournament. The reward? in addition to a battery of nasal swabs, they get a No. 16 seed and an opening-round meeting with top-seeded Illinois.

The other top seeds were Michigan, Baylor and Gonzaga, which is the overall No. 1, and a 2-1 favorite to win it all and complete the first undefeated season since the 1976 Indiana Hoosiers.

In the biggest adjustment to a normal March Madness, all the games will be played in and around Indianapolis over 19 days. No more worrying about who got shipped to Spokane or mired in Memphis. The NCAA did, however, keep the region names — West, East, South and Midwest — to at least make the bracket look normal.

More about that bracket: A few bubble teams are coming from unexpected places, namely UCLA and Michigan State. Both were widely projected to make the field with ease, but they ended up as 11 seeds, paired in a First Four matchup on Thursday. The other 11-11 game pits Wichita State against Drake.

Teams like Louisville, Saint Louis, Colorado State and Mississippi would gladly trade places with them. And still might. In one of many first-of-its-kind moves made to accommodate a one-of-a-kind tournament, the NCAA put team Nos. 69-72 on standby in case a program in the 68-team draw has to withdraw because of a COVID-19 outbreak.

They have until Tuesday night to notify the NCAA they can't make it. After that, a team that withdraws will simply go home, and its opponent will get a walkover into the next round.

"If the teams continue to do the great work that they've done just to get to the tournament, we will have a very safe, very healthy 67-game tournament and we'll crown a champion," selection committee chairman Mitch Barnhart said.

But to underscore what a different, and difficult, season this has been, the committee spent a lot of time stressing over two shoo-ins, Kansas and Virginia, each of which pulled out of their conference tournaments last week because of outbreaks.

Barnhart said both are following proper protocols to make it to Indianapolis for their games on Saturday. Kansas is the No. 3 seed in the West and Virginia, the defending champion (from 2019), is the fourth seed in the same region.

"The one thing I've found out through this, probably as much as anybody, is expect the unexpected," Kansas coach Bill Self said.

That is, after all, what March Madness is about — three weeks filled with busted brackets, out-of-nowhere surprises, teams that take care of unfinished business and an occasional visit from an old friend.

Remember Sister Jean? She's 101 now, and her team, Loyola Chicago, is back in the dance, hoping for a reboot of the, shall we say, "miracle" run to the Final Four in 2018.

Remember Patrick Ewing? He lifted Georgetown to national prominence back in the 1980s, and now he's back as the coach, guiding the underdog — yes, underdog — Hoyas to a Big East Tournament title and a surprise trip to the tourney.

And Rick Pitino? His career was left for dead after his ouster from Louisville following that school's unseemly recruiting scandal a few years back. He's back, too, as coach of Iona, which played only 13 regular-season games, but won its conference tourney and made it to Indy. The Gaels are a 15th seed — not what Pitino is used to this time of year.

"A little role reversal," he said, "but still you have to play the game."

And play they will. From the First Four on Thursday through the Final Four, which ends with nets the coming down on April 5.

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So much could go wrong between now and then. So much has to go right. But a year after the tournament was scrubbed in the early days of the pandemic, it feels good to have a bracket to fill out. Even if it feels a little different.

More AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and updated bracket: <https://apnews.com/hub/ncaa-mens-bracket>

Ladies night: Beyoncé, Swift make history as others win big

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Female performers including Beyoncé and Taylor Swift had a record-making night at the 2021 Grammy Awards, a jam-packed but socially distanced show highlighted by live music sorely absent during the pandemic era.

Four women won the top four prizes Sunday, including Swift, who became the first female performer to win album of the year three times. Beyoncé — with her 28th win — became the most decorated woman in Grammy history.

H.E.R. won song of the year and Billie Eilish picked up her second consecutive record of the year honor, telling the audience that best new artist winner Megan Thee Stallion deserved the award.

Though women have won all top four awards in the past — including Eilish's sweep last year — it marked the first time four separate and solo women won the top four honors.

"I feel like there's been a lot of female empowerment and lots of women winning awards tonight. And so it's been absolutely amazing to just be alongside all that, to feel that energy," Dua Lipa, who won best pop vocal album, said backstage.

Swift won the top prize with "folklore," the folky, alternative album she released as a surprise last year. She previously won album of the year with "Fearless" and "1989."

Beyoncé walked into the show with 24 wins and picked up four honors, including best R&B performance for "Black Parade," best music video for "Brown Skin Girl" as well as best rap performance and best rap song for "Savage," with Megan Thee Stallion.

"As an artist I believe it's my job, and all of our jobs, to reflect time and it's been such a difficult time," Beyoncé said onstage as she won best R&B performance for "Black Parade," which was released on Juneteenth.

She went on to say she created the song to honor the "beautiful Black kings and queens" in the world. She added: "I have been working my whole life ... This is such a magical night."

Beyoncé now ties producer and multi-instrumentalist Quincy Jones for second place among all Grammy winners. She is only behind the late conductor Georg Solti, who is the most decorated Grammy winner with 31 wins.

But Beyoncé didn't only make history, her whole family did. The royal family of music all won honors Sunday: Jay-Z picked up his 23rd Grammy, sharing the best rap song win with his wife since he co-wrote "Savage." And 9-year-old Blue Ivy Carter — who won best music video alongside her mother — became the second youngest act to win a Grammy in the show's 63-year history. Leah Peasall was 8 when The Peasall Sisters won album of the year at the 2002 show for their appearance on the T Bone Burnett-produced "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" soundtrack.

Megan Thee Stallion, who won three honors, also made history and became the first female rapper to win best rap song. She's also the fifth rap-based act to win best new artist.

Beyoncé was the night's top contender with nine nominations. She didn't perform but Swift did.

She sang "cardigan" and "august" from "folklore," as well as "willow" from "evermore," and was joined by the collaborators who helped her make the albums, Jack Antonoff and Aaron Dessner, who both won album of the year with Swift.

The Grammys featured pre-taped performances that helped the nearly four-hour show run seamlessly

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— a not-so-easy feat during a global pandemic. Host Trevor Noah told jokes about the pandemic and the year that was 2020, appearing live from downtown Los Angeles with attendees wearing masks and sitting, socially distanced, at small round tables.

Silk Sonic, aka Bruno Mars and Anderson Paak, also performed, bringing a throwback R&B vibe to the show with their smooth new single, "Leave the Door Open." Lipa proved her pop star status with a performance of her hits "Don't Start Now" and "Levitating," where she was joined by DaBaby, who was an all-star during his own performance of his guitar-tinged rap hit "Rockstar," flipping the song for an exceptional live rendition featuring R&B singer Anthony Hamilton, a skilled violinist and background singers.

Country singer Mickey Guyton — the first Black woman nominated for best country solo performance — gave a top notch performance of her song "Black Like Me," which she released last year as police brutality continued to devastate Black families and the coronavirus ravished Black America disproportionately. Lil Baby, joined by Killer Mike and activist Tamika Mallory, gave a political performance that impressed.

"Black Parade" joined a list of songs honoring the Black experience that won Sunday, including H.E.R.'s protest anthem "I Can't Breathe" and Anderson Paak's "Lockdown," which was released on Juneteenth like "Black Parade."

Other performers Sunday included Eilish, Cardi B, Bad Bunny, Miranda Lambert, Maren Morris and Harry Styles, who won best pop solo performance for the hit "Watermelon Sugar."

"To everyone who made this record with me, thank you so much," said Styles, the first member of One Direction to win a Grammy.

Double winners included H.E.R., Fiona Apple, Kaytranada and late performers John Prine and Chick Corea.

Associated Press Writers Kristin M. Hall and Jamia Pugh contributed to this report.

Follow AP's complete coverage of the Grammys at www.apnews.com/GrammyAwards.

Australians rally at Parliament to demand justice for women

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australians rallied in the capital and other cities Monday demanding justice for women and calling out misogyny and dangerous workplace cultures as the government reels from two rape allegations.

Outside Parliament House in Canberra, the crowd of hundreds was mostly female and most wore black. They carried placards including "Justice for Women" and "Men, Own Your Guilt."

Prime Minister Scott Morrison refused organizers' demand that he address the crowd and they would not meet him in his office.

"We have already come to the front door, now it's up to the government to cross the threshold and come to us," organizer Janine Hendry said.

"We will not be meeting behind closed doors," she added.

Morrison later told Parliament that he shared the protesters' frustration and concern. "This is not to suggest that good faith and genuine efforts are not being made whether by this government or the many governments that have preceded us. Those efforts are being made. But the outcomes still elude us," he said.

Morrison is standing by his Attorney-General Christian Porter over an allegation that he raped a 16-year-old girl when he was aged 17 in 1988. Porter denied the allegation. His accuser took her own life last year after withdrawing a complaint to police.

Separately, Defense Minister Linda Reynolds has been criticized for failing to adequately support a young staffer who alleged she was raped by a more senior colleague in the minister's office in Parliament House in 2019.

Brittany Higgins said she felt she had to make a choice between reporting her allegations to police or continuing her career. She quit her government job in January and reported her allegation to police.

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"I was raped inside Parliament House by a colleague, and for so long it felt like the people around me only cared because of where it happened or what it might mean for them," a tearful Higgins told the Canberra crowd.

"It was so confusing because these people were my idols. I had dedicated my life to them. They were my social network, my colleagues, and my family. And suddenly they treated me differently. I wasn't a person who had gone through a life-changing, traumatic event. I was a political problem," she added.

The Associated Press does not usually identify alleged victims of sexual assault, but Higgins has chosen to identify herself in the media.

The protests, which also took place in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart, coincide with the first sitting of Parliament since the allegation against Porter became public in early March.

Reynolds has since apologized for describing Higgins to her staff as a "lying cow" and said she was referring to Higgins' allegation of inadequate support, not the rape allegation. The minister also agreed to pay Higgins an undisclosed sum as compensation.

Porter's lawyers announced on Monday that he is suing Australian Broadcasting Corp. for defamation over a news article that he said made false allegations against him. ABC said in a statement it will be defending the action.

"Although he was not named, the article made allegations against a senior Cabinet minister and the attorney-general was easily identifiable to many of Australians as the subject of the allegations," the lawyers said in a statement.

Opposition lawmakers called on Morrison to establish an independent inquiry into the allegations against Porter.

But Morrison said the defamation case was the correct forum to examine the allegations.

"The arguments will be made, the evidence will be presented. And that matter can be rightly addressed through our courts where it should be and that is the approach which I think best addresses the matter," Morrison said.

Porter has been on mental health leave since March 3 when he held a news conference denying that he had raped the girl, who has not been named.

Reynolds has also been on sick leave with a heart condition since Higgins made her allegations.

7 picked, 7 to go for jury in ex-cop's trial in Floyd death

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Jury selection continues Monday for a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death, with the process halfway complete after the first week.

Seven people have been picked to hear evidence in the trial against Derek Chauvin, who is charged with murder and manslaughter. Attorneys will continue questioning jurors one by one until they get to a total of 14. Twelve will deliberate and two will be alternates.

Floyd, a Black man, was declared dead on May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against his neck for about nine minutes. Floyd's death sparked sometimes violent protests in Minneapolis and beyond and led to a national reckoning on racial justice. Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter and at least three weeks have been set aside for jury selection.

In the midst of jury selection, Minneapolis last week agreed to pay \$27 million to settle a civil rights lawsuit from Floyd's family over his death. Floyd family attorney Ben Crump, called it the largest pretrial settlement ever for a civil rights claim. The settlement includes \$500,000 for the south Minneapolis neighborhood that includes the 38th and Chicago intersection that has been blocked by barricades since Floyd's death, with a massive metal sculpture and murals in his honor. The city didn't immediately say how that money would be spent.

Legal experts said publicity about the settlement could be bad for the defense, leading some potential jurors to think guilt has been decided. But they doubted it would really affect the criminal trial. Judge Peter Cahill has told members of the jury pool to avoid all news coverage about the case.

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The process of questioning jurors has been long and nuanced, with attorneys for both sides trying to ferret out potential jurors who may be biased. The defense is striking people who tell they court they already have strong feelings about Derek Chauvin's guilt. The prosecution, meanwhile, is blocking potential jurors who seem inclined to give police the benefit of the doubt.

The seven jurors selected so far include five men and two women. Four of the jurors are white, one is mixed race, one is Black and one is Hispanic. The jurors range in age from their 20s to their 50s.

The earliest opening statements would begin in Chauvin's trial is March 29.

Three other former officers face an August trial on charges of aiding and abetting second-degree murder and manslaughter.

The Latest on Selection Sunday: NCAAs start with SWAC vs NEC

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest from the NCAA Tournament's Selection Sunday (all times EDT):

10:55 p.m.

The first game of the NCAA Tournament's First Four will be between SWAC champion Texas Southern and Northeast Conference champ Mount St. Mary's on Thursday at 5:10 p.m. at Indiana's Assembly Hall in Bloomington. The game will be broadcast on truTV.

CBS and Turner Sports announced the tipoff times for the First Four and Friday and Saturday's 32 first-round games. The First Four's main event featuring for national champions UCLA and Michigan State is slated to tipoff at 9:57 p.m. ET at Purdue's Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Indiana. Bruins-Spartans will be on TBS.

The first round starts at 12:15 p.m. Friday at Butler's Hinkle Fieldhouse with a South Region matchup between No. 7 seed Florida and No. 10 seed Virginia Tech.

The first No. 1 seed to play will be Illinois, the top seed in the Midwest. The Ilini face Drexel at Farmers Coliseum in Indianapolis at 1:15 p.m.

All games will be televised on CBS, TBS, TNT and truTV.

8:25 p.m.

Virginia coach Tony Bennett says most of his players are in quarantine after being exposed to an individual infected with COVID-19, but he is still hopeful the Cavaliers will be able to play in the NCAA Tournament.

Virginia was forced to withdraw from the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament on Saturday because of a single COVID-19 case. Bennett told reporters that all the players in quarantine have so far tested negative.

The quarantine is scheduled to end Thursday. Bennett says the team plans to travel to Indianapolis on Friday and be ready to play Saturday. The NCAA is requiring seven consecutive negative COVID-19 tests for anyone traveling to Indianapolis to compete in the tournament. Virginia is the fourth seed in the West Region and set to play Mid-American Conference champion Ohio in the first round.

The NCAA has chosen four teams to be on standby if one of the 68 in the field cannot participate. Louisville would be the first replacement team.

Kansas coach Bill Self says three Jayhawks players will not travel with the team to Indianapolis for the NCAA Tournament because of COVID-19.

Kansas is a three seed in the West Region with a first-round game against Eastern Washington. The Jayhawks had to withdraw from the Big 12 Tournament on Friday because of a positive COVID-19 test. They were already missing David McCormack and Tristan Enaruna, who both tested positive before the conference tournament. Self said McCormack and Enaruna could join the team later in the week in Indianapolis.

First-round games will be played Friday and Saturday.

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7:42 p.m.

In an NCAA Tournament that will take place entirely in the state of Indiana, Purdue is the only in-state team in the field of 68 teams.

The Boilermakers are the fourth seed in the South Region and face 13th-seeded North Texas in the first round, and one of nine Big Ten teams in the field. Purdue's Mackey Arena will host First Four and first round games.

Nowhere to be found is Purdue's Big Ten rival Indiana. The Hoosiers went 12-15 to put coach Archie Miller on the hot seat. There will be NCAA First four games played at Indiana's Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall in Bloomington on Thursday and first round games scheduled for Friday and Saturday. Butler's Hinkle Fieldhouse will also host games, but the Bulldogs also finished under .500 this season.

6:55 p.m.

Louisville was the first left out of the field of 68, but former Cardinals coach Rick Pitino is back in the NCAA Tournament — this time with Iona.

Pitino was fired by Louisville in 2017 as part of the fallout from the FBI investigation into college basketball. He was hired by Iona College, the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference school in New Rochelle, New York, last year.

Pitino is the fifth coach to lead five teams to the NCAA Tournament, joining Lon Kruger and Tuby Smith.

The Gaels are a No. 15 seed and will face Alabama in the first round in the East Region.

Louisville will be the first replacement team if one is needed in the field because of COVID-19 issues.

6:42 p.m.

Michigan is the top seed in the East Region of the NCAA Tournament, giving the Big Ten two No. 1s in the field of 68 teams along with Illinois.

The region also includes a marquee matchup in the First Four involving two of the biggest names in college basketball: Michigan State and UCLA play Thursday.

Louisville, Colorado State, Saint Louis and Mississippi were the first four teams left out and those teams will be on standby to replace any team from a multi-bid league that has to withdraw because of COVID-19 issues.

6:32 p.m.

Illinois is the No. 1 seed in the Midwest Region of the NCAA Tournament and could face Loyola-Chicago in round two. Loyola, which made a memorable Final Four run in 2018, is back in the NCAAs for a third straight tournament.

Syracuse is the No. 11 team in the Midwest Region, one of several bubble teams to get good news during the bracket reveal. Utah State is the No. 11 seed in the South. Drake, which lost the Missouri Valley Conference title game to Loyola, earned an at-large bid, but the Bulldogs will have to play Wichita State in a First Four game Thursday.

6:22 p.m.

Baylor is the top seed in the South in the NCAA Tournament and could face either North Carolina or Wisconsin in the second round. The Bears are a No. 1 seed for the first time. Gonzaga is the top seed in the West, a region that includes both Virginia and Kansas, two teams that had to withdraw from their conferences tournaments because of COVID-19 issues.

Colgate, which locked up its spot in the Patriot League title game earlier Sunday, will face third-seeded Arkansas as an intriguing No. 14 seed. Colgate is one of the top scoring teams in the country.

6:16 p.m.

Gonzaga is the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament. After a year without March Madness, the bracket is back. The pandemic forced the cancelation of the tournament by the NCAA last year. This year, the entire field is heading to Indianapolis, which hosting the whole tournament this year. Starting with

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the First Four on Thursday, every game will be played in Indiana. The first round will be played Friday and Saturday.

Virginia is the No. 4 seed in the West Regional. The Cavaliers were the champions in 2019 and there was some concern that COVID-19 issues might keep them out of the NCAAs after they had to withdraw from the ACC tournament.

5:40 p.m.

No. 7 Houston won the the American Athletic Conference championship and gave a boost to a bunch of bubble teams in the process.

The Cougars routed Cincinnati in the AAC final, ending the Bearcats hope of slipping into the NCAA Tournament field of 68 as an automatic qualifier.

The Big Ten championship between No. 3 Illinois and No. 9 Ohio State was winding down. The full bracket is scheduled to begin being unveiled around 6 p.m.

3:45 p.m.

Alabama, St. Bonaventure and Colgate locked up automatic bids to the NCAA Tournament by winning conference championships a few hours before the field of 68 was revealed.

Selection Sunday featured five conference tournament title games as a undercard to the main event starting around 6 p.m. EDT: the unveiling of the NCAA bracket.

There were no potential "bid stealers" in the early games.

No. 6 Alabama won the Southeastern Conference by beating LSU, but the Tigers are in good shape to earn an at-large bid. The Crimson Tide made their case for a No. 1 seed with an 80-79 victory.

St. Bonaventure beat VCU to win the Atlantic 10's automatic bid as the top seed in the conference. The Rams went into the game expected to be on the right side of the bubble no matter the result, but they'll have to wait a few hours to make it official.

Colgate earned the Patriot League's automatic bid by beating Loyola Maryland.

Still to be played was the Big Ten Conference championship game between No. 3 Illinois and No. 9 Ohio State and the American Athletic Conference championship between No. 7 Houston and Cincinnati, which needs to win to get in the NCAA field. The Bearcats could put the tournament hopes of bubbles team such as Syracuse, Utah State and Mississippi in jeopardy.

There are 38 at-large selections available and the NCAA's deadline for teams to inform the selection committee that they would not be able to compete in the tournament passed Saturday night with no schools dropping out.

More AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball>

Doja Cat, Cynthia Erivo led the fashion march at the Grammys

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Doja Cat went for neon feathers and a moto-inspired look zipped all the way down and Cynthia Erivo stunned in a sparkling silver gown with gold accents by Louis Vuitton at the Grammys as music's big night Sunday offered a luxe fashion moment for the stars.

Dressed in Roberto Cavalli, Doja's revealing look included cat-claw zips on each arm and a feathered skirt. "I want to be the cat lady, so let me be that," she said.

Erivo's gown included a low cutout at the front with a gold bib effect at the top and a gold belt, while DaBaby brightened up a drastically pared-down red carpet in a bright mustard and green floral suit from Dolce & Gabbana. Erivo didn't hit the carpet, but she made a statement nevertheless. Her gown was adorned with more than 60,000 glass beads, crystals and sequins. She topped off the look with jewels from Tiffany & Co.

Dua Lipa also sparkled, in a pink sequin Versace gown with a butterfly motif. The body-skimming gown

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included cutouts at the hips and a sexy high slit.

"It was really cool to collaborate," she said of the look.

Billie Eilish matched her long nails to a loose pink and black trouser look by Gucci, her hat and face mask also a match.

DaBaby, his mom, Linda, by his side in red, topped off his suit with a wide-brim green hat with red underneath. He was on hand in person but earlier created an Instagram red carpet moment with his daughter since no kids were allowed at the Los Angeles show.

Joanie Leeds, winner of the best children's music album, did something similar at a distance from home in New York.

"I actually created a step and repeat and a red carpet," she told reporters during a virtual news conference before the show. "We all walked the red carpet and we had a photographer here and took some really good pictures."

Leeds wore a multicolor sequined gown by Nicole Miller, and she slid off her silver heels to show on camera.

"Just because we're virtual this year, I wasn't going to wear my hoodie sweatshirt," said Leeds, a first-time Grammy winner.

Due to pandemic precautions, the "red carpet" was not the usual mass of cameras and TV crews. A select few outlets were permitted on site to conduct live interviews — a safe distance apart.

The night's host, Trevor Noah, showed up for the pared-down carpet in a classic black tuxedo by Gucci, while nominee Debi Nova went big — and pink — in a mini dress that had a huge train and tropical details, by Georges Chakra. Phoebe Bridgers wore a black gown adorned with a beaded human skeleton, from Thom Browne, and Megan Thee Stallion wore a strapless bright orange princess look with a high side slit and a huge back bow and train by Dolce & Gabbana. Her Chopard choker finished off the look.

"I wanted to pop. I wanted to look like a Grammy," Megan said.

Nandi Howard, associate fashion editor at Essence, lauded the style moments provided by Megan and DaBaby.

"I'm eager to see D&G work more with hip-hop artists. Megan looked so regal in her orange gown, and tonight she wore her outfit effortlessly. I hope to see her in couture more often. She wears it very well," she said.

Howard also offered kudos to Lizzo, who shimmered in a pink mermaid look to present an award and earlier wore a short ruched sea foam strapless dress by Balmain. She dripped in Bulgari jewels.

"We normally see avant-garde gowns at the Grammys, but leave it up to Lizzo to switch it up in the best way," Howard said.

Jacob Collier said he went for comfort in a floral Stella McCartney turtleneck and red suit.

"I've never been asked about clothes before," he said. "I feel like a rock star."

In Dundas, H.E.R. rocked a burgundy, mid-calf robe with matching wide-leg trousers.

Jonathan Evans, style director for Esquire, saw a healthy dose of 1970s flare running through menswear, in no small part to Gucci. Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak slid into leisure suits for Silk Sonic's debut.

"Big lapels and flared trousers might, I'll admit, sound a little intimidating, or like a return to the bad old days, but when you see the way guys like Anderson .Paak, Finneas and Harry Styles are wearing it, it feels fresh," he said.

All three wore Gucci. Evans said of Styles' look: "A jacket with a pattern that looks like it could be one of your grandmother's favorite tea cozies is one thing, but a cropped jacket with a gigantic lapel that channels Nana? That's the kind of thing that Styles seems to make wearable."

Styles later performed in a black leather suit — who needs a shirt — with a green boa around his neck. He wore a purple boa with his cropped jacket.

Noah Cyrus spoke to reporters in a cream gown with a huge cape-like effect that encircled her face. It was a Schiaparelli, a somber Cyrus and first-time Grammy nominee said. She said she was honored to be the first to wear it. Cyrus is mourning the recent death of her grandmother.

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"I just wish my grandma could have seen this," she said of her nomination.

Associated Press reporters Marcela Isaza and Jonathan Landrum in Los Angeles and Kristin Hall in Nashville contributed to this story.

Follow AP's complete coverage of the Grammys at www.apnews.com/GrammyAwards.

Martial law imposed in parts of Myanmar city as deaths rise

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's ruling junta has declared martial law in parts of the country's largest city as security forces killed more protesters in an increasingly lethal crackdown on resistance to last month's military coup.

At least 38 people were killed Sunday and dozens were injured in one of the deadliest days of the crackdown, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an independent group tracking the toll of the violence.

Most of those killed — 34 — were in Yangon, where two townships, Hlaing Thar Yar and neighboring Shwepyitha were being placed under martial law.

Video from Hlaing Thar Yar township showed people running away after gunfire was heard. Those fleeing carried one injured person and tried to revive two others, one who seemed to be dead or dying, the footage from independent Democratic Voice of Burma showed.

Hlaing Thar Yar was the location of 22 civilian deaths Sunday, according to the aid group, which said more than a dozen civilians were wounded and described a large number of junta forces engaged in the township.

Since the takeover six weeks ago, Myanmar has been under a nationwide state of emergency, with its civilian leaders ousted and detained and military leaders in charge of all government. But the announcement on state broadcaster MRTV late Sunday appeared to be the first use of the term martial law since the coup and suggested more direct military control of security, instead of local police.

The announcement said the State Administrative Council acted to enhance security and restore law and order and said the Yangon regional commander has been entrusted with administrative, judicial and military powers in the area under his command.

Four other deaths were reported in Bago, Mandalay, and the northern city of Hpakant in Kachin state, according to the aid group and local media.

In Yangon, video posted on social media showed crowds of people, some wearing hard hats and gas masks, running down a street amid sounds of gunfire. The demonstrators quickly sprayed vapor from fire extinguishers as they retreated — a tactic widely used to smother tear gas and create a vapor screen that makes it harder for police to pursue or shoot demonstrators.

There were also reports of injuries from live rounds and rubber bullets in other parts of Yangon, including Insein district, where billows of black smoke could be seen after security forces reportedly set roadblocks on fire.

In a new tactic, anti-coup demonstrators used the cover of darkness to hold mass candlelight vigils Saturday and Sunday nights in a Yangon commercial area that was usually the scene of their daytime protests. After-dark rallies were also held in Mandalay and elsewhere.

The protest movement has been grounded in non-violent civil disobedience from the start, with marches and general strikes among its main features. But some protesters have advocated stronger, more agile methods of self-defense — such as holding small rallies that are quick to disband and reunite, and devising cover from fire extinguishers and billowing laundry.

On Saturday, the civilian leader of Myanmar's government in hiding vowed to continue supporting a "revolution" to oust the military leaders who seized power in the Feb. 1 coup. Mahn Win Khaing Than, who was named the acting vice president by Myanmar's ousted lawmakers and is a member of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, addressed the public for the first time since the coup.

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"This is the darkest moment of the nation and the moment that the dawn is close," he said in a video posted on the shadow government's website and social media.

"In order to form a federal democracy, which all ethnic brothers who have been suffering various kinds of oppressions from the dictatorship for decades really desired, this revolution is the chance for us to put our efforts together," he said.

He added: "We will never give up to an unjust military, but we will carve our future together with our united power. Our mission must be accomplished."

At the end of the message, he flashed the three-finger salute that has become a symbol of resistance to the military rulers.

The aid group's tally of Sunday's victims appeared to raise beyond 100 the number of civilians killed by security forces since the coup. Confirmation is nearly impossible in the country due to the security situation and a crackdown on independent media, but various groups have carefully compiled tallies with similar figures.

The actual death toll is likely higher, as police apparently seized some bodies, and some victims have had serious gunshot wounds that medical staff at makeshift clinics would be hard-pressed to treat. Many hospitals are occupied by security forces, and as a result are boycotted by medical personnel and shunned by protesters.

Police have also aggressively patrolled residential neighborhoods at night, firing into the air and setting off stun grenades as an intimidation tactic. They have also taken people from their homes in targeted raids with minimal resistance. In at least two known cases, the detainees died in custody within hours of being hauled away.

Life on the bubble: Brackets set for return of March Madness

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

The biggest unknown leading into a March Madness bracket reveal more than a year in the making had nothing to do with bubble teams or top seeds. Instead, it was the not-so-simple matter of which programs would be healthy enough to play.

Kansas and Virginia, two programs hit with COVID-19 breakouts over the past week, made it into the bracket released Sunday by the NCAA selection committee. It was a signal that both teams believe they'll have enough healthy players to be ready for their tip-offs next weekend.

That there was any doubt about the Jayhawks and defending champion Cavaliers securing spots in the 68-team field was the most jarring reminder that the 2021 tournament itself will look and feel much different than any that's come before.

"The one thing I've found out through this, probably as much as anybody, is expect the unexpected," said Kansas coach Bill Self.

A year after the tournament was canceled as the COVID-19 virus was mushrooming into a worldwide pandemic, all 68 teams will gather in Indiana for all 67 games beginning Thursday and ending April 3 and 5 with the Final Four. But all it takes is a single COVID outbreak to upend the finely calibrated beauty of that plan. Multiple outbreaks could crater the entire endeavor.

Selection committee chair Mitch Barnhart said the committee was in frequent contact with leaders at Kansas and Virginia to ensure "the protocols were being met that would allow them to come to Indianapolis and participate."

"We're confident at this point that we're moving forward to tip off Thursday with a full field of 68," Barnhart said.

Virginia coach Tony Bennett said most of his team remained in quarantine Sunday night, but expected to be in Indy this week.

There were no surprises among the four No. 1 seeds. Gonzaga, Baylor, Illinois and Michigan earned those slots – with the Bulldogs the early 2-1 favorite to win it all and become the first team since the 1976 Indiana Hoosiers to finish a season undefeated.

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There was also none of the traditional drama about who was going where — which team was getting shipped to Boise, which was staying close to home in Memphis. The NCAA did, however, keep the names of the regions — East, West, Midwest and South — even though everyone's gathering together in a single city.

The last of the 37 at-large bids went to Drake and Wichita State, which play Thursday in a First Four game, and UCLA and Michigan State, two decorated programs with surprisingly low seeds that meet in another play-in game.

Four teams that didn't make it — Louisville, Colorado State, St. Louis and Mississippi — have been put on stand-by. They could find their way into the bracket if a team in the field notifies the NCAA by Tuesday night that it must withdraw because of health concerns. After that, if a team pulls out, its opponent will advance via what is essentially a forfeit.

Fittingly for such an unpredictable season, some teams hoping to sneak in off the bubble were denied when Oregon State, picked last in its conference in some preseason polls, and Georgetown, a storied program coached by its own former superstar, Patrick Ewing, won their conference tournaments to steal bids they wouldn't otherwise have won.

"It's a different year. Different world," Ewing said. "The pandemic has definitely changed everything. I'm here quarantining in a room for 24 to 48 hours before we can get out and do things."

Another unexpected entry is a familiar face: Rick Pitino. The coach, ousted at Louisville after a sordid recruiting scandal that enveloped the program for years, led his new team, Iona, from the ninth seed in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference all the way to the league title and the automatic bid that comes with it. Pitino said he'll bring eight suits to Indy, just in case. Big talk for a team that played only 13 regular-season games because of COVID-19 concerns that sidelined the Gaels for weeks. It was that kind of season.

Speaking of which, for the first time since 1976, both Duke and Kentucky will both be missing from the tournament. Like Virginia and Kansas, Duke pulled out of its conference tournament last week because of COVID-19., marking the end of a 13-11 season that never got on track.

Virginia and Kansas were never in doubt until the coronavirus hit both programs. The Jayhawks (20-8) will bring a No. 3 seed into the tournament's West region (The NCAA chose to keep the usual geographical names of the regions even though everyone's playing in the same place) while the Cavaliers (18-6) will be a 4 seed in the same part of the bracket. They come in as the most unusual of defending champions.

They won it all in 2019, and were poised for the run at a repeat last March when sports got wiped off the map by the still-nascent pandemic.

A year later, sports are back, but the hoops the NCAA is jumping through to make this tournament go are a symbol of how far we are from normal.

The decision to place all the games in and around the Indianapolis area is a first-of-its-kind move. Also unique are the quarantine-like situations all teams will be under during their stay. Players will get their own rooms and teams will have their own floors in a cluster of hotels around the downtown convention center. That facility, usually a magnet for fan fests and coaching conferences, will turn into the practice and meeting area for all the teams. Players will have to produce negative tests for seven days before arriving in Indianapolis to be eligible to play.

In one of its most eye-grabbing tidbits, the NCAA announced that if a team is hit with the virus but still has five players who can pass the protocol, that's enough to get on the floor for tip-off.

All par for the course and part of the plan for March Madness during a pandemic.

"This year has been unlike any other year we've ever been through," said Tad Boyle, the coach of fifth-seeded Colorado. "And I'm hopeful unlike anything we'll go through again."

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

Record-setting Saints QB Brees announces retirement at 42

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By BRETT MARTEL AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Drew Brees era with the New Orleans Saints — marked by a Super Bowl celebration, raucous record-setting nights in the rebuilt Superdome and the undersized quarterback's outsized role in a historic city's rebirth — has ended.

Brees, the NFL's leader in career completions and yards passing, has decided to retire after 20 NFL seasons, including his last 15 with New Orleans.

"Til the very end I exhausted myself to give everything to the Saints organization, my team and the great city of New Orleans," Brees said in social media post on Sunday, 15 years to the day after he signed with the Saints.

"We shared some amazing moments together, many of which are emblazoned in our hearts and minds and will forever be a part of us," Brees continued. "I am only retiring from football. I am not retiring from New Orleans. This is not goodbye."

The post also included a short video in which his four young children — the three boys wearing No. 9 Saints jerseys — exclaimed, "Our dad is finally going to retire so he can spend more time with us!"

The decision comes after the 42-year-old quarterback won nine of 12 regular-season starts while completing 70.5% of his passes in 2020, and then won a wild-card round playoff game before New Orleans' season ended with a divisional-round loss to eventual Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay.

Brees missed four games this season with multiple fractured ribs and a collapsed lung. It marked the second straight season Brees had to miss part of a season with an injury after missing just one game because of injury in the previous 13. In 2019, Brees missed five games because of a thumb injury on his throwing hand that required surgery.

Saints coach Sean Payton said Brees had plenty of other injuries or ailments during his Saints tenure, but willed himself to play through them whenever possible.

"Over the years his durability and availability is quite amazing. I can recall so many of these different injuries," Payton said. "He's as courageous and as tough a player as I've ever been around."

Brees is the NFL's all-time leader in yards passing with 80,358, although that mark will be under threat next season by 44-year-old Tom Brady, who has 79,204 career yards passing. Brees' 571 career touchdown passes rank second behind Brady's 581.

Brees had dropped hints about his intentions, saying he considered himself to be on "borrowed time." After his final game, he returned to the Superdome field in street clothes, embraced his wife, Brittany, and played catch with his children for nearly two hours. When Brady saw them on his way to the Tampa Bay bus, he stopped, chatted, threw passes to Brees children and hugged Brees before departing.

Still, Brees declined to confirm his plans until now, even throwing many for a loop when a video of one of his recent workouts appeared on social media.

"Congrats my friend on an incredible career," Brady said in a social media post Sunday. "Thank you for the inspiration and dedication on and off the field! Look forward to seeing what's next."

The Saints currently have one quarterback under contract: Taysom Hill, who went 3-1 as a starter during Brees absence in 2020. New Orleans also is expected to pursue another veteran QB to compete for a starting job, including free agent Jameis Winston, who spent 2020 as a Saints reserve.

Brees retirement brings an end to a career that came to embody resilience and renewal on multiple levels. His most prolific seasons came after he underwent major reconstructive surgery in early 2006 to repair a career-threatening throwing shoulder injury.

He joined the Saints shortly after, at a time when New Orleans was still coping with widespread devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. When Brees moved to New Orleans, he bought and renovated a historic home in the city's Uptown neighborhood, just a block away from Audubon Park.

The storm had forced the Saints to play all of their 2005 games outside New Orleans, and the Saints finished that season 3-13.

"When I was hired by the Saints as head coach in 2006, the very first goal was to establish a functional and winning culture," Payton said. "It was vital to know what we were looking for in a player, talent,

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work ethic, makeup, intelligence and leadership are all qualities we found in Drew Brees. We also found a player with a burning desire to win.”

With Payton calling plays and Brees executing them, the Saints won 10 regular-season games in 2006, and then won a divisional-round playoff game in a rebuilt Superdome — a storybook run that didn’t end until a loss in Chicago in New Orleans’ first ever NFC championship game. That would be the first of nine seasons in which Brees led the Saints to the playoffs.

“Drew is so much more valuable than all the records, awards and accolades that he amassed,” Saints owner Gayle Benson said. “Drew came to represent the resolve, passion and drive that resonates not only with Saints fans and football fans, but our entire community.”

The franchise’s only Super Bowl appearance and championship came in the 2009 season, with Brees, selected as the game’s MVP, memorably celebrating with first child Baylen in his arms as confetti floated around them.

Brees’ 32 completions (on 39 attempts) tied a Super Bowl record, just one of numerous times the 6-foot-1 quarterback, drafted by the San Diego Chargers out of Purdue in the beginning of the second round of the 2001 draft, etched his name in NFL record books.

Indeed, the hallmarks of Brees’ career have been his decision-making, timing and accuracy.

Brees not only holds the NFL’s single-season record for completion rate at 74.4% in 2018, but also holds the second-highest mark at 74.3 in 2019 and third-highest at 72% in 2017.

His 70.5% rate in 2020 ranked ninth all time, giving Brees six of the top nine season completion rates in NFL history.

Payton’s offenses were more passing oriented in some seasons than others for a variety of reasons related to personnel, the types of defenses the Saints faced and the way games played out.

But when Brees had to throw, he piled up yardage whether the Saints were a playoff team or not.

Brees eclipsed the 5,000-yard mark in five seasons, with his career-best 5,476 yards coming in 2011. That mark ranks second all time, one yard behind Peyton Manning’s 5,477 yards with Denver in 2013. Brees’ five 5,000-yard seasons all rank in the top 11 all time.

Brees also has been the unquestioned face of the franchise and leader in the locker room throughout his time in New Orleans. Teammates have often remarked that Brees was usually the first player to arrive at the team’s training headquarters and last to leave.

Payton often spoke of his collaborative relationship with Brees in formulating the offensive game plan and routinely letting Brees call his own plays, particularly during hurry-up drives.

“Since I’ve been here Drew has been nothing but a good teammate, a good guy, great leader, and I respect him so much in all facets of his life,” said center Erik McCoy, a two-year pro who grew up watching Brees and wound up snapping him the ball the past two seasons.

“The way that he came into work every day. He was always locked in. He was always on point. He was always sharp. ... I feel like that has kind of molded me.”

While Brees was popular in San Diego during his first five NFL seasons, he became synonymous with New Orleans after signing with the Saints. He participated in marketing campaigns for the city’s tourism industry, professed his affection for the community in countless interviews, talked up the city’s renowned restaurant scene and was a celebrity rider in Mardi Gras parades. Between his Brees Dream foundation and his own personal work, Brees has donated or committed more than \$35 million to charitable causes in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region, according to his marketing agent, Chris Stuart.

“No one has ever scored higher as far as their combination of athletic achievement and involvement in a community,” said political pundit, Louisiana native and New Orleans resident James Carville, asserting that Brees is to New Orleans what Ted Williams was to Boston and Michael Jordan to Chicago. “In more ways than one, he’s arguably the most significant New Orleanian of the 21st century.”

Ireland suspends AstraZeneca vaccine amid blood clot reports

LONDON (AP) — Irish health officials on Sunday recommended the temporary suspension of the AstraZeneca vaccine after reports of serious blood clotting after inoculations in Norway.

Dr. Ronan Glynn, Ireland's deputy chief medical officer, said the recommendation was made after Norway's medicines agency reported four cases of blood clotting in adults after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine.

He said that while there was no conclusive link between the vaccine and the cases, Irish health officials are recommending the suspension of the vaccine's rollout as a precaution. Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic authorities have taken similar precautionary steps.

The Netherlands followed suit late Sunday, suspending vaccinations with the AstraZeneca shot as a precaution for two weeks. The health ministry said the move followed six new reports in Denmark and Norway of blood clotting and lowered levels of blood platelets in people aged under 50.

The Dutch medicines authority also stressed that no link has been proven between the cases and the vaccine.

The health ministry said that no cases had been reported in the Netherlands.

AstraZeneca said in a statement Sunday that it "would like to offer its reassurance on the safety of its COVID-19 vaccine based on clear scientific evidence."

"The safety of the public will always come first," the British-Swedish biopharmaceutical company said, adding that it's "keeping this issue under close review but available evidence does not confirm that the vaccine is the cause."

The company said that a review of safety data of more than 17 million people who have received the AstraZeneca vaccine in the European Union and the U.K. "has shown no evidence of an increased risk of pulmonary embolism, deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or thrombocytopenia, in any defined age group, gender, batch or in any particular country."

The World Health Organization and the European Union's medicines regulator have previously said that there was no link between the jab and an increased risk of developing a clot.

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Yo-Yo Ma serenades newly-vaccinated at inoculation clinic

PITTSFIELD, Mass. (AP) — Newly vaccinated Massachusetts residents were treated to a mini concert over the weekend when famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma brought out his instrument after getting his second coronavirus shot.

A masked-up Ma took a seat along the wall of the observation area Saturday at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield and played for about 15 minutes to applause from the other attendees.

The renowned musician, who lives part-time in the area, said he "wanted to give something back," The Berkshire Eagle quoted Richard Hall of the Berkshire COVID-19 Vaccine Collaborative as saying.

The quick concert came exactly one year after Ma started posting recordings of himself using the hashtag #SongsOfComfort on social media in an effort to ease anxiety throughout the early days of the pandemic.

"I wanted to find a way to continue to share some of the music that gives me comfort," the cellist wrote on Twitter on March 13, 2020.

Since then, Ma has also played surprise pop-up concerts and live-streamed virtual concerts for essential workers and first-responders.

Massachusetts state Rep. William Pignatelli responded to a video posted on social media of the surprise show and praised Ma for bringing people "hope and optimism through his beautiful music."

Chile becomes Latin America's COVID-19 vaccination champion

By EVA VERGARA and PATRICIA LUNA Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — After being among the world's hardest-hit nations with COVID-19, Chile is now near the top among countries at vaccinating its population against the virus.

With more than 25% of its people having received at least one shot, the country of 19 million on South America's Pacific coast is the champion of Latin America, and globally it is just behind Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

That's a far cry from the beginning of the pandemic, when Chile was criticized over its inability to trace and isolate infected people.

So what is the secret to its success?

Government officials and health experts say it was the country's early negotiations with vaccine producers, as well as its past experience with robust vaccination programs, a record praised by the World Health Organization.

During the first months of the pandemic, the headlines in Chile were bleak, with the country's intensive care units almost full and the government unable to control the virus's spread despite restrictions that included mandatory lockdowns.

But another story was developing in parallel that few people knew about, one that had begun months before and would later guarantee Chile fast access to vaccines.

Andrés Couve, Chile's minister of science, told The Associated Press that formal negotiations with vaccine-producing companies started last April, only a month after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic.

By May, Couve said, a team of experts and officials presented a plan to President Sebastián Piñera, including a road map about how to use the country's network of trade agreements and its previous contacts with pharmaceutical companies to get vaccines once they were developed. Recommendations included being part of clinical trials.

This effort was helped by contacts made months earlier in China. In October 2019, Chilean biochemist Dr. Alexis Kalergis had traveled to Beijing with two Chilean colleagues for an international congress on immunology. There Kalergis met experts from the Chinese pharmaceutical Sinovac Biotech Ltd.

Kalergis had already approached Sinovac about working on vaccine research. So when China announced in January 2020 that it had identified a new virus, and within weeks the world saw it spreading around the globe, Kalergis knew he needed to reach out to his colleagues at Sinovac.

"Taking advantage of our experience, the contacts and the interest that we expressed ... we started conversations with Sinovac," said Kalergis, director of the Milenio Institute for Immunology and Immunotherapy at Chile's Catholic University.

He spoke to Sinovac colleagues in January and February 2020, then went to Catholic University Dean Ignacio Sánchez with the details, saying they needed to be passed on to the government.

Sánchez approached Chile's health minister and foreign secretary, urging early negotiations with Sinovac and other pharmaceuticals and for Chile to be part of their clinical trials. The ministers agreed, and the Chilean government began making diplomatic contacts.

By June, long before any other country in Latin America, Chile had secured a contract with Sinovac, which agreed to deliver an early batch once the vaccine was authorized, Kalergis said.

Rodrigo Yáñez, undersecretary for international economic relations and lead negotiator with companies to get the vaccines, said Chile understood from the beginning that it needed to work with different pharmaceutical companies at the same time.

"We looked at different alternatives and didn't put all the eggs in the same basket," he said.

Chile was part of a Sinovac clinical trial that started in December and involved 2,300 medical workers. The government has not published its results, saying only that they were good.

Trials for vaccines by AstraZeneca, Janssen and the Chinese pharmaceutical CanSino were also done in Chile, and those results also have not been disclosed.

Chile received its first vaccine doses in December, some 21,000 from Pfizer, but they were fewer than

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promised. The country immediately began vaccinating medical workers. By the end of January, Chile received the first 4 million doses from Sinovac and was able to speed up inoculation. Massive vaccination started in February.

Chile was administering more than 100,000 shots almost daily since early February, and that more than tripled this week.

On Wednesday, it reached a daily global record of 1.3 shots per 100 inhabitants, followed by Israel with 1.04 doses, according to Our World in Data, a collaboration between researchers at the University of Oxford and the nonprofit Global Change Data Lab.

No other country in Latin America has had anything near Chile's success. Brazil, for example, has vaccinated only 4% of its population, and Argentina around 3%.

Health Minister Enrique Paris said Chile has now secured 35 million doses to vaccinate 15 million people, and it's already helping other countries. Earlier this month, Chilean authorities donated 20,000 Sinovac doses to Paraguay and the same amount to Ecuador.

Chile had "good planning and wisely used the resources it has to make bilateral agreements with some producers," Jarbas Barbosa, deputy director of the Pan American Health Organization, said this week.

This is not the first time Chile has conducted a successful vaccination program. Last year, between March and April when the virus was emerging, Chilean authorities vaccinated 8 million people against the flu.

Mario Patiño, 75, was among the first to be vaccinated with a Sinovac dose in February at a school in Lo Prado, a poor residential area of Santiago.

"Everything was perfect, fast, with an excellent service, well organized," said Patiño, who was getting his second shot on Saturday. "For me, the vaccine means to be calmer."

Coworkers: Man charged in Capitol riot had a Hitler mustache

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Army reservist charged with taking part in the attack on the U.S. Capitol was known as a Nazi sympathizer who wore a Hitler mustache, coworkers told federal investigators.

Timothy Hale-Cusanelli, 30, was employed as a security contractor at a Navy base when he was alleged to have breached the Capitol on Jan. 6, authorities said.

In court papers filed Friday, federal prosecutors in Washington said his coworkers at the Naval Weapons Station Earle in Colts Neck, New Jersey, told investigators that he held white supremacist views.

The filing included photos from Hale-Cusanelli's cellphone of him with a Hitler mustache, along with pro-Nazi cartoons.

One Navy seaman said that Hale-Cusanelli told him "he would kill all the Jews and eat them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and he wouldn't need to season them because the salt from their tears would make it flavorful enough."

Other coworkers recalled Hale-Cusanelli making derogatory remarks about women, Black people and other minorities.

Prosecutors argued in the filing that Hale-Cusanelli is a danger to the public and should remain jailed while he awaits trial.

Jonathan Zucker, Hale-Cusanelli's attorney, wrote in a filing that there was no evidence his client belongs to any white supremacist organizations.

Authorities said Hale-Cusanelli made videos of himself screaming at Capitol Police officers, climbing a scaffolding to enter the building through doors kicked open by rioters, and chanting "Stop the steal!" Some of those videos were posted to social media.

Hale-Cusanelli has since been discharged from the Army Reserve and barred from the Navy base, according to the filing.

Reports: Cuomo vaccine czar's loyalty calls raise concerns

NEW YORK (AP) — A longtime adviser to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo leading the state's COVID-19 vaccine rollout has been calling county executives to gauge their loyalty to the Democratic governor amid

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a sexual harassment investigation, according to reports in The Washington Post and The New York Times.

One Democratic county executive, who was not named by the newspapers, was so disturbed by the call from vaccine "czar" Larry Schwartz that the executive filed notice of an impending ethics complaint with the public integrity unit of the state attorney general's office on Friday, the newspapers reported.

The executive feared the county's vaccine supply could suffer if the executive did not indicate support for Cuomo, the Post reported.

Schwartz served as secretary to the governor from 2011 until 2015 and has advised Cuomo off and on since then. He returned last spring to assist the administration with the response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Schwartz, who is working in a volunteer capacity to run New York's vaccine distribution, acknowledged making the calls to county executives, but told the Post he did not discuss vaccines in the conversations.

"I did nothing wrong," Schwartz told the newspaper. "I have always conducted myself in a manner commensurate to a high ethical standard."

But the phone calls could raise questions about an intermingling of politics with the state's coronavirus response.

"People do not see calls coming from the governor's mansion as somebody wearing one hat and then putting on another hat," Arthur Caplan, director of medical ethics at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine, told the Post. "If you are in control of a vital supply of a lifesaving resource like vaccines, you are carrying an enormous amount of implicit clout when you ask for political allegiance."

Cuomo is facing allegations that he sexually harassed or behaved inappropriately toward six women, including several former staffers. He has denied touching any women inappropriately.

The three-term governor has rejected calls for his resignation from fellow Democrats, including New York's two U.S. senators, Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, and has asked New Yorkers to await the results of an investigation headed by state Attorney General Letitia James.

Schwartz told the Post that the calls he made to assess political support for Cuomo were distinct from the role he plays in the vaccination effort.

"I did have conversations with a number of County Executives from across the State to ascertain if they were maintaining their public position that there is an ongoing investigation by the State Attorney General and that we should wait for the findings of that investigation before drawing any conclusions," he wrote in an email.

Beth Garvey, acting counsel to the governor, said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press through a Cuomo spokesperson on Sunday that any assertion Schwartz "acted in any way unethically or in any way other than in the best interest of the New Yorkers that he selflessly served is patently false."

"Larry answered our call to volunteer in March and has since then worked night and day to help New York through this pandemic, first managing surge capacity, and procuring necessary supplies for the state, setting up the contact tracing efforts, and now assisting with vaccine distribution," the statement said.

London police chief says she won't quit after vigil clashes

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — London's police commissioner on Sunday defended her officers' actions and said she didn't intend to resign, after coming under heavy criticism for the way police treated some protesters during a vigil for a woman whom one of the force's own officers is accused of murdering.

Hundreds defied coronavirus restrictions Saturday to protest violence against women and remember Sarah Everard, a 33-year-old London resident whose disappearance and killing prompted a national outcry. But the vigil ended with clashes between police and those attending, and many questioned whether the police force was too heavy-handed.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said scenes from the vigil in south London were "upsetting." The capital's mayor, Sadiq Khan, said the police response was "at times neither appropriate nor proportionate." Both said they were not satisfied with the force's report of events and were seeking a full and independent

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investigation.

Police were seen scuffling with some women at the event, and one woman was seen pinned to the ground by two officers. Video widely shared on social media showed a woman was pulled up from the ground by officers who then shoved her from the back. Several women were led away in handcuffs as other attendees chanted "Shame on you" at police. The force later said four people were arrested for violating public order and coronavirus regulations.

On Sunday, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick, who is the first woman to head the force, said she was personally appalled by the attack on Everard and she was more determined than ever to lead the organization. She said she fully understood the strength of feeling in response to Everard's case, but stressed that Saturday's vigil was an unlawful gathering and officers had been put in a "very difficult position" trying to police a protest during a pandemic.

She said that as big crowds gathered, officers needed to act to counter the considerable risk to people's health. She added that she welcomed a review into her force's operations.

Many of those attending the vigil were already wary of police because a serving Metropolitan Police officer, Wayne Couzens, was charged with the kidnap and murder of Everard, who vanished March 3 while walking home in London. Her body was found a week later.

The case has sparked a heated debate on women's safety in the public space. Organizers had planned an official vigil at Clapham Common, a park near where Everard was last seen alive, but were forced to cancel the event because of COVID-19 restrictions. A huge crowd turned up Saturday nonetheless.

Khan, London's mayor, said Sunday the police force had assured him the vigil would be "policed sensitively" but that this wasn't the case.

Jamie Klingler, who organized the canceled "Reclaim These Streets" event, blamed police for denying women their right to have a silent vigil in the first place. The force got the angry reaction Saturday because they refused to facilitate a peaceful rally, she alleged.

"I think we were shocked and really, really sad and to see videos of policemen handling women at a vigil about violence against women by men ... I think it was painful and pretty triggering to see," Klingler said Sunday.

Patsy Stevenson, who was pictured pinned to the ground by two officers during Saturday's clashes, said she was considering whether to challenge the 200-pound (\$278) fine she received.

"We were there to remember Sarah, we all felt deeply saddened and still do that it happened, so I brought a candle with me but unfortunately wasn't even able to light it to put it down because the police turned up and barged their way through," she told LBC radio.

Emotions were still running high Sunday, as several hundred demonstrators gathered outside London police headquarters. The crowds, which were peaceful, then marched to Parliament and laid down on the ground for a minute of silence to remember Everard.

Couzens, 48, appeared in court Saturday for the first time. He was remanded in custody and has another appearance scheduled Tuesday at London's Central Criminal Court.

The Metropolitan Police has said it is "deeply disturbing" that one of its own is a suspect in the case. The force said Couzens joined its ranks in 2018 and most recently served in the parliamentary and diplomatic protection command, an armed unit responsible for guarding embassies in the capital and Parliament.

Everard, a marketing executive, was last seen walking home from a friend's apartment in south London at about 10:30 p.m. on March 3. Her body was found hidden in an area of woodland in Kent, more than 50 miles southeast of London, on Wednesday. A post-mortem examination was underway, police said Friday.

Fauci: Trump should urge his followers to get vaccinated

By MICHELLE LIU Associated Press

Dr. Anthony Fauci said Sunday he wishes former President Donald Trump would use his popularity among Republicans to persuade more of his followers to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

In a round of interviews on the morning news shows, the government's top infectious disease expert lamented polling showing that Trump supporters are more likely to refuse to get vaccinated, saying politics

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needs to be separated from "commonsense, no-brainer" public health measures.

Fauci said it would be a "game changer" for the country's vaccine efforts if the former president used his "incredible influence" among Republicans.

"If he came out and said, 'Go and get vaccinated. It's really important for your health, the health of your family and the health of the country,' it seems absolutely inevitable that the vast majority of people who are his close followers would listen to him," Fauci told "Fox News Sunday."

There was no immediate comment from the former president's office Sunday.

Trump has urged people to get vaccinated, doing so again two weeks ago at a conservative political gathering in Florida.

But he hasn't been among former presidents and other public officials who have been vaccinated on camera to encourage others to get the shot. It was revealed only recently that he was vaccinated in private at the White House before leaving office in January.

Trump did not appear in a new public service campaign for the COVID-19 vaccine that included former Presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

Polls have shown Republicans joining Black people and other groups in expressing greater skepticism than others about the safety of the vaccine.

Fauci said he doesn't understand the resistance.

"What is the problem here? This is a vaccine that is going to be lifesaving for millions of people," he said on NBC's "Meet the Press." He added: "I mean, I just can't comprehend what the reason for that is when you have a vaccine that's 94-95% effective and it is very safe. I just don't get it."

The number of vaccine doses distributed and administered each day in the U.S. is rising, with more than 2.5 million daily shots in arms on average in the last week.

About 1 in 5 Americans have received at least one dose, with about 1 in 9 fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The coronavirus is blamed for over 530,000 deaths in the United States. Deaths and newly confirmed infections per day have tumbled over the past two months. But cases are running at a still-troubling average of about 55,000 a day.

Fauci repeatedly warned against pulling back on public health measures too early, saying the virus could come surging back, endangering the goal of getting the country closer to normal by early July.

He pointed to Europe as a cautionary tale. Rising virus cases this winter followed rollbacks on restrictions on the continent.

Associated Press writer Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Pelosi pledges swift work on major infrastructure package

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Sunday pledged swift work by Congress on a job and infrastructure package that will be "fiscally sound," but said she isn't sure whether the next major item on President Joe Biden's agenda will attract Republican backing.

Fresh off a major legislative victory on the \$1.9 trillion virus relief package that passed on near-party lines, Democrats face long and tough battles ahead in winning GOP endorsement of the administration's plans.

Road- and bridge-building legislation has a long history of support from both parties as lawmakers aim to deliver on projects back home. But Republicans disagree with Biden's focus on the environment and the possibility of financing any program with debt after the government borrowed heavily to address the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Building roads and bridges and water supply systems and the rest has always been bipartisan, always been bipartisan, except when they oppose it with a Democratic president, as they did under President Obama, and we had to shrink the package," said Pelosi, D-Calif.

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"But, nonetheless, hopefully, we will have bipartisanship," she said.

Pelosi has directed key Democratic lawmakers to begin working with Republicans on a "big, bold and transformational infrastructure package."

During the presidential campaign, Biden laid the groundwork by proposing \$2 trillion in "accelerated" investments to shift to cleaner energy, build half a million charging stations for electric vehicles, support public transit and repair roads and bridges. The plan emphasizes the importance of creating unionized jobs and addressing climate change.

The White House originally planned to come out with a plan in February, but more recently hasn't committed to a timeline. A rollout is likely to slide into April as the administration embarks on a nationwide push over the coming weeks to sell Americans on the benefits of the COVID-19 relief bill.

Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., chairman of House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, hope to pass a bill out of their committees in May.

The package could include policy changes — on green energy and immigration — and even try to make permanent some of the just-passed COVID-19 assistance such as child tax credits.

"It is going to be green and it is going to be big," DeFazio told The Associated Press.

Democrats used a fast-track budget process known as reconciliation to approve Biden's COVID-19 relief plan without Republican support, a strategy that succeeded despite the reservations of some moderates.

But work on passing infrastructure legislation in a Senate split 50-50 with Vice President Kamala Harris providing a tiebreaking vote will probably prove more difficult. Moderate Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., recently made clear he will block infrastructure legislation if Republicans aren't included.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the No. 3 Senate Republican, said he wants to see bipartisan support for an infrastructure legislation. But he said the House in the last Congress refused to embrace a \$287 billion bill unanimously passed by a Senate committee and changed it in a way that Republicans could not accept.

"What did the House do? They replaced our highway bill with the Green New Deal," Barrasso said. "So they ignored what we have done in a bipartisan way. If they would take the model that we came up with in the committee in the Senate for highway and transportation, I think that's a very good start. I talked with the secretary of transportation, Pete Buttigieg, about it, and I think that is the model on which we should move forward on transportation and infrastructure."

On Sunday, Pelosi declined to say whether tax increases would be required for the House legislation, stressing that Congress would explore all options, including generating revenue with something similar to the Obama administration's Build America bonds.

Cost will be a major hurdle in passing an infrastructure plan. There's little political interest in increasing the 18.3-cent-per-gallon federal gas tax, which generates revenue for the Highway Trust Fund, even though the rate has not increased since 1993. Biden promised during the campaign he would not increase taxes on people making less than \$400,000 a year.

"This is about broadband. It's about water systems. It's about mass transit, it's about good paying jobs all over the country," she said. "It's also about schools and housing and the rest. ... So the goal is to promote good growth, creating good-paying jobs as we protect our planet and are fiscally sound."

Pelosi and Barrasso spoke on ABC's "This Week."

Associated Press writer Josh Boak contributed to this report.

US female firefighters fight discrimination with lawsuits

By TOM FOREMAN Jr. Associated Press

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (AP) — The highest ranking female firefighter in Asheville, North Carolina, says she was repeatedly discriminated against because of her sex and fought to keep her job while battling breast cancer. The first female chief of a municipal fire department in the state says she briefly pondered suicide after years of sexual harassment.

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Joy Ponder and Susanna Schmitt Williams are among numerous female fighters in the United States who have filed lawsuits against their employers alleging they were subjected to demeaning behavior that helped end their careers.

Advocates say going to court is sometimes the only effective recourse in a field where women make up such a tiny part of the workforce. According to the National Fire Protection Association, 93,700, or 8%, of U.S. firefighters were female in 2018, the latest year for which data was available.

Williams, who was fired in July 2019, told The Associated Press that she was "the subject of sexualized rumors (and) hostility in the form of insubordination by those who reported to me."

Williams said Carrboro Town Manager David Andrews overturned both her disciplinary and operational decisions, and for the latter, relied instead on the recommendations of men in the department who were lower ranked and had less experience and education. Andrews didn't respond to an email seeking comment.

Ponder, who resigned from her post as Asheville Fire Department division chief in September, said she faced years of harassment and gender discrimination from Chief Scott Burnette after she led outside research on the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder among city firefighters.

Burnette did not return a phone call seeking comment. Peggy Rowe, an assistant to City Manager Debra Campbell, said the city doesn't comment on ongoing lawsuits.

Ponder filed her lawsuit in November and then an amended complaint last month. Williams filed her lawsuit in January. Both are still pending.

Similar lawsuits have been filed — and won — by female firefighters in Illinois, Texas and Virginia.

Court documents show a female firefighter in Country Club Hills, Illinois, won an \$11 million verdict in 2018 after filing a lawsuit alleging that her colleagues openly watched pornography at the station house and broke down a shower door while she was bathing.

The U.S. Department of Justice announced a \$275,000 settlement with the City of Houston in October, after two female firefighters alleged their male co-workers urinated on the walls, floors and sinks, soiled their bathroom, and wrote race-based slurs on the walls of their work and living space at the fire station.

The City of Norfolk, Virginia, last year agreed to an \$87,000 settlement with a female firefighter who alleged a hostile work environment.

Williams' lawsuit contends that a Charlotte, North Carolina-based law firm hired by the town of Carrboro to conduct a questionnaire of employees found up to 12 instances of harassment and discrimination against her that led to a hostile work environment. The law firm also found fault with Andrews, the town manager, for allowing fire department employees to go around Williams and take their complaints about the department to him, according to the suit.

Williams said she filed two complaints of sexual discrimination against members of the fire department during her tenure as chief but neither was taken seriously. She says she became so distressed by the situation that one day after work she walked into her garage and considered taking her own life.

"I thought 'Oh, my God, I could crank up the car and just silently go and just be done with it all' because I was that stressed and that depressed over everything that had happened," Williams said.

Instead, she thought of her sons and decided to see her fight through to the end. She received clearance from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to proceed with a lawsuit against Carrboro.

Williams said she is the third female department head in Carrboro to file such a suit against Andrews, who recently announced that he would retire in July.

Ponder, who became division chief in 2014, took a leave of absence in early 2019 to battle breast cancer. She said that when she returned at the end of the year, Burnette and the deputy chief "designed and executed an effective demotion and campaign to display me as a poor performer and divisive employee."

She was placed under her bosses' close supervision — "effectively surveillance," she said — told to stay away from the firefighters under her command and moved to an isolated corner office from which she said she "was afraid to even walk to the restroom or copier."

"The continued harassment and abrupt disruption of my schedule and life that I had maintained successfully for many years led to a deterioration in my physical and mental health and I was forced to leave," Ponder told the AP.

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Tina Guiler, a lieutenant for Miami-Dade Fire-Rescue and CEO of the national support group Fierce Female Firefighters, or Triple F, said she had two bad experiences as she advanced through the ranks, starting when a superior tried to get her to quit when she was still a rookie.

"A lot of these women just don't do the profession anymore" because of the harassment, Guiler said. "And their department isn't professional enough to handle it and take care of it, so they end up leaving and having to file these lawsuits. ... The job's hard enough without having to be harassed on top of it."

With sports paused, life altered, athletes make do, make new

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Sports Writer

Parker Tuomie and his Minnesota State hockey team were thriving last season, pursuing the program's first NCAA Tournament victory with a fervor that suggested a bigger goal than that.

As the winter transpired, news from Tuomie's father coaching overseas about the virus outbreak portended a major roadblock lurking further down the path. First, the top-tier league in Tuomie's native Germany had banned postgame handshake lines. Then, the season was canceled.

"I knew that we weren't far away from that possibility," Tuomie said, "but it did happen quicker than I thought it would."

March 12, 2020, that tipping-point day of dread for so many as the dark clouds of COVID-19 drifted in, was the end of the run for the second-ranked Mavericks and their 31-5-2 record. The plug was pulled on the rest of the WCHA playoffs, then hours later on the entire NCAA Tournament. Tuomie and his teammates gathered for goodbyes to their national championship chase — and one another.

"A lot of tears were flowing. It was just a very emotional day," said Tuomie, one of seven seniors on the 2019-20 squad. "Every year you have a feeling that you can do it, but right from the get-go we had that feeling that this was our year and we were going to be the first to do it."

Life often strays from the preferred script, as much of the world was reminded by the pandemic.

By summertime, with opportunities to play professionally in the U.S. drying up, Tuomie was back in Germany. He signed with Eisbären Berlin in the Deutsche Eishockey Liga, where his dad is the head coach of a different team. This was a goal of his all along, not some last-ditch idea, but the way it unfolded wasn't ideal.

What a time he had on American ice, though. Three years of junior hockey. Four seasons at Minnesota State, with a 114-36-9 career record. Being part of the WCHA, the same storied league his dad once skated in for St. Cloud State and Wisconsin. Playing in front of relatives of his Minnesota native father, Tray Tuomie, who married a German while playing there and stayed to raise a family.

Marc Michaelis became one of Parker Tuomie's close pals, a fellow German and four-year roommate in that class of Mavericks seniors last year who recently made his NHL debut with Vancouver. Tuomie was returning home around 4 a.m. from a road trip with his team, so he took advantage of the time difference and turned on the Canucks game live. He fell asleep on the couch after the first period and caught up to the action with his friend in the morning.

Maybe next month Tuomie, Michaelis and the others who used to wear the purple and gold will be able to tune in to the NCAA Frozen Four and cheer for the Mavericks from afar. They're currently ranked third, poised again for a postseason run. Perhaps there'll be a twinge of envy or regret, but mostly they'll feel pride in the program they left behind and a sense of identity as the class that got stonewalled by a pandemic.

"I got a chance to see how special it can be to be around a group of guys for four years and really make those friendships and those bonds that will last forever," Tuomie said.

IN THE MOMENT

As the Farmington Tigers girls basketball team prepared last year for the program's first appearance in the Minnesota state high school tournament, head coach Liz Carpentier passed out a journal to each of her players. Not for game-planning, just for memory-keeping.

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The good-luck cards from the kindergarteners. The pep fest. The team restaurant outings. The police car-and-fire truck escort out of town, on the way to the quarterfinal game. The get-out-of-school early excuse.

"I really wanted them to be in the moment," Carpentier said, "just so they could enjoy the week and look back on it."

After fighting through a couple of significant injuries to important players earlier in the season, the Tigers were crushing it as the No. 2 seed in the Class 4A bracket. They cruised to victory in the semifinals on March 12 and into the title game against Hopkins, which boasted a 62-game winning streak and UConn-bound guard Paige Bueckers.

The sports world was swiftly shutting down amid the COVID-19 outbreak, and an attendance limit had been set for the finals for March 14. Still, Carpentier figured they'd be able to finish the tournament. Between celebrating the feat, handling ticket logistics and strategizing for the championship, she didn't have time to dwell on this worst-case scenario.

The cancellation announcement came before practice on March 13. That end-of-season speech Carpentier had rehearsed in her head was moved up a day. As the girls gathered as an official team one last time, they made a quintessential stop at Dairy Queen before re-watching the semifinal game at a teammate's house.

One year later, the Tigers are undefeated. Ultimately beaten by an invisible opponent in 2020, they're determined to avoid going down on the court in 2021 — and grateful for each moment together in this tenuous season. A couple of positive cases could bring their games to another halt.

The five seniors from last season's team, four of whom are playing NCAA sports, are among their biggest fans. Carpentier will always remember the day she had to tell them they were done playing.

"I told them, 'You're going to go through a lot tougher things in life than not getting to play a basketball game,' but it meant a lot to them," Carpentier said. "I think they look back on it now and say: 'That was the best week of our life. That was the greatest.'"

TIME TO MOVE ON

As far back as grade school, Quinn Alo had his heart set on playing football for North Dakota State. He grew up two hours southwest of Fargo in tiny LaMoure, North Dakota, where passion for the Bison spiked in 2011 when they began a run of eight FCS championships in nine years.

Alo could have played at North Dakota on a scholarship. Instead, he accepted a preferred walk-on spot from North Dakota State in 2016. Part of the recruiting pitch was that if he stuck it out to become a fifth-year senior — most players redshirt at NDSU — he would get to experience the 2020 season opener at Pac-12 power Oregon.

As a backup offensive lineman and special teams player with his degree in hand, he knew football was about over for him. So he planned to get married on Aug. 1, play his last year and move on with life. The virus didn't yield to anybody's plans, though.

Alo's wedding was held. The season wasn't, save for an Oct. 3 game NDSU hurriedly scheduled against Central Arkansas. Missing out on that game against Oregon, fresh off a Rose Bowl victory, stung the most.

Returning for the Bison's eight-game spring season was not an option, given the amount of financial and emotional support he'd had from his now-wife, Kendra, a certified nursing assistant. It was time for Alo to give some of that back to her, so he went to work in sales while finishing his master's degree in business administration and hunting for a house with his wife.

They attended the Bison's opener against Youngstown State on Feb. 21 and sat with the parents of two of his old teammates and groomsmen. There were no regrets for Alo, no longing to be on the field, only missing being with his football friends.

"I was lucky to spend four years there and met my wife, met my groomsmen and got a great job," Alo said. "We're still living in Fargo, so we'll be going to Bison games for years to come."

"WAS THIS ALL WORTH IT?"

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Kyle Briggs was a late-blooming wrestler, finally making his mark on the mat for the long-strong program at Wartburg College.

The NCAA Division III championships in 2020 were even scheduled for his hometown of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He was 26-2 with 12 pins, seeded No. 2 at 174 pounds and even more motivated by a 5-4 defeat in the 2019 semifinals.

"This is my time to win," Briggs recalled thinking to himself. "In 2020, it was a totally different attitude shift. It wasn't like I was going to try to put myself in the best position. It was more like, 'This is mine to lose now.'"

On March 12, after lunch with his family at home before joining teammates for an afternoon workout at the arena, the NCAA canceled its championships as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19 — less than 24 hours before the wrestling competition was supposed to start.

"We felt we got the rug slipped out from underneath us since we were actually at the location that morning and had trained and we were all down to weight," Briggs said. "I knew nothing will ever compare to this as far as shock and disappointment goes."

So when the NCAA announced on Feb. 3 it was canceling Division III winter championships again for 2021, the news that reached Briggs at the grocery store didn't sting quite as much. He went unbeaten this season, winning an individual title on Saturday at a national Division III tournament arranged by USA Wrestling and the National Wrestling Coaches Association in Coralville, Iowa.

"Part of me is really happy just to have something because it doesn't feel like we've had any closure for our seasons. It really messes with your training and your head, like, 'Was this all worth it?'" Briggs said before the final meet.

He'll probably hold off on graduation this spring for a re-do on his senior year in 2021-22. Most likely, he'll return to Wartburg, though he's thought about trying to join a Division I program as a graduate transfer. There are still goals to achieve, with that abrupt end to the 2019-20 season never far from his mind as motivation.

"I was doing pretty good for myself," Briggs said, "but I never felt like a champion."

FAMILY MATTERS

U.S. Olympic marathon trials champion Aliphine Tuliamuk is taking baby steps in her return to training. She did, well, just have a baby.

The original plan was to start a family after the Tokyo Olympics. But when the Summer Games were postponed by the pandemic, the 31-year-old Tuliamuk and her fiance, Tim Gannon, decided not to wait. Their daughter, Zoe Cherotich Gannon, was born on Jan. 13.

That gave Tuliamuk about six months to return to the form that allowed her to win the U.S. marathon trials on Feb. 29, 2020. The women's Olympic marathon will be held on Aug. 7 in Sapporo, where it's expected to be cooler than Tokyo.

This is a marathon and not a sprint, of course, so she's been easing her way back into this at home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Strength training, elliptical machine, stationary bike. Her doctor wanted a minimum of eight weeks of rest, but her clearance to run again came on Thursday.

Tuliamuk grew up in Kenya as one of 32 siblings, all of whom share a father. She went to Iowa State and Wichita State and became a U.S. citizen in 2016. Recently, the USA Track and Field Foundation awarded her with its first elite maternity grant, which helps support women who are pregnant or recovering after birth.

"I'm very joyful," Tuliamuk said. "To have my daughter go with me to the Tokyo Olympics, it's a dream of mine that I've always wanted to have, but I really didn't think that it was going to happen this soon."

"I CAN'T THINK OF A BETTER WAY TO END"

As the coronavirus pandemic wiped out the entire minor league season, former New York Mets farmhand Jeremy Wolf spent most of 2020 helping others sustain their careers. The nonprofit he co-founded, More

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Than Baseball, raised over \$650,000 in grants for players, many of whom were cut midway through the summer.

Before the shutdown, Wolf had plans for a final on-field hurrah of his own. An outfielder and first baseman from Scottsdale, Arizona, Wolf joined Team Israel in 2019 and was preparing to compete at the Olympics in Tokyo — as one of several Jewish U.S. players on the roster.

A year later, that dream is still alive with the postponed Summer Games set to take place in four months. There's one problem for Wolf:

"I haven't faced live pitching since September of 2019," he said.

Those at-bats came at the European Baseball Championships, where Israel finished first to clinch its Olympic spot. Before that, Wolf hadn't faced a real pitcher since 2017, when an injury led to his release by the Mets.

Kept off the field for 16 months, Wolf is preparing for the Olympics with the resources of a weekend warrior. He's staying in shape at a nearby fitness-chain gym, throwing long toss with a buddy and taking batting practice off a machine at a batting cage.

When minor league pitchers arrive in Arizona for spring training this month, he's hoping someone will let him stand in for at-bats. He'll join an independent ball team in Ohio in late May for a few weeks of games. Then he'll meet Team Israel in July for an exhibition series in New York.

Wolf is an alternate on Israel's roster, and he won't know for sure if he's going to Tokyo until those exhibition games end. Either he'll board a plane for Japan or he'll go home to Arizona and hang up his cleats for good.

"It would mean everything, right?" he said. "To think my career is over in 2017, to have another opportunity to play in 2019 and then actually make the Olympics? I can't think of a better way to end my career. Myself and a lot of our guys have been through the long and winding road of baseball. I'm happy I can end it in a way I'm proud of and I know I left everything out there."

AP Sports Writers Pat Graham, Eric Olson and Jake Seiner contributed to this report.

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Mexico's last island penal colony may now host cruise ships

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican officials said ferries and cruise ships may soon be visiting the former Isla Marias prison, after the last island penal colony in the Americas was closed and turned into an environmental education center in 2019.

The education camp hasn't gone very well — only 40 youths have been trained on the island — and the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is now trying a different tack, because the island hasn't been offsetting the costs associated with keeping it open.

Officials said Saturday they are planning to build a dock for larger ships on the Isla Madre main island, the only one of the four Marias islands that is inhabited. Visitors will be able to tour the remote island jail, but not stay overnight. Tourism Secretary Miguel Torruco described future tours.

"The experience begins with the cruise ship or ferry arriving from Mazatlán or San Blas, to Isla Madre, and on the voyage the passengers can admire the beauty of the ocean," Torruco said. It would be quite a long ride; the four islands are located 70 miles (110 kilometers) off the Pacific coast of Nayarit state.

"Visitors will have their first contact with the former island prison which for 100 years sheltered numerous criminals," Torruco said. Officials compared it to the now-closed U.S. prison at Alcatraz, and said tourist visits could start within three months.

The penal colony, founded in 1905, passed through some periods of infamous brutality, and as recently as 2013, the Islas Marias held 8,000 inmates.

The hemisphere was once dotted with remote island jails like the one depicted in the movie "Papillon," but they all gradually closed. When Panama closed its Isla Coiba penal colony in 2004, Isla Marias became

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the last one remaining in the Americas.

But far from the bloody reputation of places like Devil's Island — the French Guiana penal colony shuttered in 1946 — toward the end, the Islas Marias harbored many lower-risk or well-behaved inmates and the colony was viewed as a step toward release or rehabilitation.

While the prison kept mass tourism at bay, the islands suffered severe environmental degradation from over a century of use as a penal colony.

Island penal colonies were used around the world starting in the 1700s as remote, escape-proof places to "rehabilitate" inmates through hard labor. Often known as "prisons without bars," with the ocean serving as the most effective barrier to escape, the penal colonies were also known for being at least in part self-supporting and a way to settle remote islands.

But in the end, the Islas Marias wound up costing Mexico far more per prisoner than did mainland jails. Chile closed its Santa Maria prison island in the late 1980s, Costa Rica's Isla San Lucas penal colony closed in 1991 and Brazil's Isla Grande in 1994. Peru dramatically ended its El Fronton island prison in 1986: Gunboats blew up most of the buildings to put down a riot, killing more than 100 inmates.

Lost to mountain, Japanese internee's bones return home

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (AP) — When Giichi Matsumura arrived at his final resting place in late December, the people who knew him best when he disappeared from a Japanese internment camp in 1945 already were there.

His wife, Ito, who had mourned his passing for 60 years before her death in 2005, was buried in the same plot, as was his daughter, Kazue, who died in 2018. His father, Katsuzo, who died in 1963, was nearby. His brother and two of his three sons were a short walk away, all buried in the shady, grassy haven of Woodlawn Cemetery in Santa Monica.

They last saw Giichi alive in the waning days of World War II at the Manzanar internment camp, one of 10 where the U.S. government held more than 110,000 people of Japanese descent for more than three years, claiming without evidence they might betray America in the war.

In the summer of 1945, Matsumura hiked from camp into the nearby Sierra Nevada, the rugged spine of California, and never returned. His remains were committed to a lonely mountainside grave left to the elements.

His journey home, 75 years in the making, only happened after a hiker bound for the summit of Mount Williamson, a massive peak overshadowing Manzanar, veered off route near a lake and spotted a skull in the rocks. He and his partner uncovered a full skeleton under granite blocks.

It was 2019, and the duty to bring him back fell to a granddaughter born decades after he died.

Lori Matsumura never expected to play that role. She knew of her grandfather's unfortunate death, but it wasn't something she often thought about.

Then an Inyo County sheriff's sergeant phoned and asked for a DNA sample to see if the unearthed bones belonged to her grandfather, the only Manzanar prisoner who died in the mountains.

"It was a complete surprise when I received a call from the sheriff," Lori said. "There were stories my grandmother told me about her husband passing on the mountain. They were stories to me, and it wasn't reality. But then when the sheriff called it, you know, brought it into reality."

That conversation set her on the first step of a mission to reunite her ancestors, a journey that awakened her to a history she had largely seen through a child's eyes, the edges softened by a generation more inclined to look forward than dwell in the past. Stories that once seemed rosy lost their bloom when faced with the harsh landscape where her relatives spent more than three years in captivity.

Until the U.S. entered WWII after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Giichi Matsumura and his family lived what seemed like a quiet life in the leafy oasis of Santa Monica Canyon, a retreat for artists and stars of old Hollywood.

Born in the Fukui prefecture on the coast of the Sea of Japan, he immigrated to the U.S. in 1916, ar-

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living in San Francisco on a steam ship with a single bag. His father already was there and they worked as gardeners and lived on property owned by the Marquez family, Mexican land grant owners of an area that became parts of Los Angeles and Santa Monica.

Giichi's wife, Ito, arrived from Kyoto in 1924, according to U.S. Census records. The couple had four children born in the U.S.: sons Masaru, Tsutomo and Uwao, and a daughter, Kazue, the youngest. Kazue, Lori's aunt, recalled a fun childhood in an interview by Rose Masters, a ranger with the Manzanar National Historic Site, a few months before her death in 2018.

Her mother would pull her in a wagon to play at the beach. She remembers seeing the actor Leo Carrillo, later known as sidekick Pancho to TV's "The Cisco Kid," doing lasso tricks.

Giichi Matsumura, who signed up for the World War I draft, registered again on Feb. 14, 1942. Five days later, President Franklin Roosevelt issued an executive order that would force people of Japanese descent on the West Coast into prison camps in waves.

Under an April 20, 1942 order, the Matsumura family had about a week to leave their life in the canyon behind.

Kazue, who wasn't even aware there was a war, recalled her experience as a 7-year-old.

Her father had to give away his car and they were only allowed to bring a single suitcase to camp.

She had been excited about taking a bus trip, but the novelty after a long ride from LA through the desert along the dramatic eastern flank of the Sierra quickly faded when they arrived at Manzanar.

"I noticed it was all dirt," she said. "Nothing there. Like a desert."

Manzanar, which means apple orchard in Spanish, quickly became home to 10,000 people of Japanese descent — two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens — living in hundreds of cramped, tar-paper covered barracks.

The family would have shared a barrack with four to six other families, each unit separated only by a thin wall that did not extend to the pitched roof. There was little privacy.

The shacks were so poorly built that frequent winds blew sand through the cracks in walls and floors. There was no insulation, making scorching summers intolerable and frigid winters unbearable.

Giichi Matsumura worked as a cook. In his spare time, he painted watercolors, capturing the guard tower, barracks and Mount Williamson, the second-highest peak in California.

His eldest son, Masaru, Lori's father, had been about to graduate from high school when they were imprisoned. Instead, he had to wait until the next spring when he was in the internment camp's first graduating class.

Lori remembers her father talking about the camp's most infamous incident when guards shot into a crowd of people, killing two and injuring nine.

But she doesn't know much about his time there. He didn't like to discuss it.

What she knew came mostly from her grandmother and Aunt Kazue, who lived together across the street, stories about squashing scorpions on the way to the bathroom using geta — elevated wooden sandals.

Lori Matsumura always meant to visit Manzanar. But she's not sure she would have made the more than three-hour drive north from Los Angeles.

Now she had to go.

A few weeks after the sheriff's call, she and her boyfriend, Thomas Storesund, drove to the station in Lone Pine where she gave an oral swab for DNA. They then drove a few miles north where the National Park Service operates the camp as a sort of living museum.

The sentry house still stands at the entrance. A replica of one of the eight guard towers looms overhead and replica barracks, a latrine and a mess hall recreate what the camp looked like, minus hundreds of other structures crammed into a square mile of high desert surrounded by barbed wire.

The buildings display vestiges of life in camp and some of the many indignities experienced, such as the loyalty questionnaire adults had to complete.

"How could something like this happen in America?" Lori thought.

But she wasn't struck by the gravity of her family's loss until she visited where they had lived.

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Standing near a sign for Block 18, Matsumura looked out at an inhospitable barren patch of scraggly rabbitbrush, fiddleneck weed and a row of barren locust trees. She was filled with sorrow.

"I was blown away by how desolate the place was," she said. "Seeing it in person made it so sad for me. I don't think I could have survived that."

For the first time, Matsumura felt a connection to the place her family lived. She was walking in their footsteps. It was now real.

While the buildings were gone, one reminder stood out: Mount Williamson standing at 14,374 feet (4,381 meters) to the west. It was the site of her grandfather's first grave.

Giichi Matsumura left camp July 29, 1945 heading toward that peak with a group of trout fishermen for a several-day outing. He planned to sketch and paint.

Prisoners had been free to leave camp six months earlier, but about 4,000 internees remained. Many, like the Matsumuras, had nowhere to go or feared racist reprisals in places they once called home.

Ito Matsumura didn't want her husband to go on the trip. She forbade him from taking his art supplies because she feared he would stop to paint and get lost, Lori's Aunt Kazue recalled.

It takes at least a full day to ascend about 8,000 feet (2,438 meters) to reach the chain of lakes where they were destined. The trail eventually ends and hikers must navigate a forbidding jumble of granite in the thin air at the high altitude.

On Aug. 2, Matsumura stopped to paint as others fished.

When a storm blew in, the fishermen, who had been there before, knew where to shelter in a cave, said Don Hosokawa, whose father, Frank, was on the trip. The men couldn't find Giichi after the storm and returned to camp, hoping he headed there.

Exactly what happened to Giichi Matsumura remains unknown. Aunt Kazue said she heard her father slipped on wet rocks and hit his head. Don Hosokawa said the body was later found next to a bloody rock.

His disappearance came four days before the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima that would hasten the Japanese surrender.

Three search parties looked for him in the following weeks. They found only his sweater.

About a month after he was lost, a hiker from nearby Independence was trying to summit Mount Williamson with her husband and a friend, but rain ruined their plans. They stopped for lunch, and Mary DeDecker, a botanist, noticed a branch in the rocks below, which struck her as unusual because trees don't grow at that altitude.

A closer look revealed a body.

A small burial party from camp made a last trip into the mountains, carrying a sheet from Ito Matsumura to wrap her husband in. They buried him under granite and affixed a simple piece of paper to a block to mark the grave. In Japanese characters, it gave his name, age and said, "Rest in Peace."

The group returned with locks of his hair and nail clippings, a Buddhist tradition for a body that couldn't be returned.

About 150 people attended a funeral ceremony back at the camp. A photo by Toyo Miyatake, famous for documenting Manzanar life, shows mourners in dark suits and dresses behind a wall of crepe paper flowers.

Aunt Kazue lamented that it was difficult never having seen her father's corpse or his gravesite.

"To this day it seems like he's not passed away," she said. "It seems like he's gone some place because I don't see his body."

At the Manzanar cemetery, where a tall white obelisk is often decorated with chains of origami cranes left by visitors, a sign says 150 people died at camp. Most were cremated and their ashes buried after their families left camp. One man, Giichi Matsumura, the sign says, died exploring the Sierra and "is buried high in the mountains above you."

That sign will have to be changed.

The gravesite was not widely known so it initially appeared to be a mystery when hikers unearthed it

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Oct. 7, 2019. Officers from Inyo County Sheriff's Office flew by helicopter to retrieve the remains.

When word reached rangers and historians at Manzanar, they had a hunch who it was.

"It wasn't a huge mystery," Ranger Patricia Biggs told Lori Matsumura in February last year. "We would have been amazed if it wasn't your grandfather."

Sgt. Nate Derr had called Matsumura for a DNA sample because she was listed at the historic site as a contact person for her aunt. It took about three months for the Department of Justice to match her DNA with a tooth from the remains to positively identify her grandfather.

Derr notified her in January last year. Then she had to decide what to do with the bones.

Manzanar wouldn't allow her grandfather to be buried in the small cemetery where only six bodies, interred when the camp was operating, remain. His bones also couldn't be returned to the mountain.

The thought of scattering his ashes at one of those places held some appeal. Although it's illegal to scatter ashes on public lands, Lori said she was told by one official that no one would stop her.

But it was unlikely her family would trek up the mountain for a burial service and returning him to a place he'd been captive seemed in poor taste.

After consulting her siblings and cousins, they decided he should be cremated and laid to rest with his wife. His name was already on the grave marker, his toenail clippings and hair buried with her.

Lori had to sign paperwork amending the death certificate from a burial to a cremation. And she wanted to view the remains.

On Presidents Day last year, she and other family members went to the small city of Bishop, about 45 minutes north of Manzanar, to Brune Mortuary, which is also the county coroner's office.

Coroner Jason Molinar began to lead Lori and her niece, Lilah, from his office to a private viewing room when Lori halted in the doorway to reassure the 11-year-old, who was scared.

"They're just his bones. That's all it is," Lori told the girl.

Laid on a sheet-covered gurney were the remains of the grandfather she'd never met.

The skeleton was roughly arranged in order. The skull was bleached white, most likely from sun exposure. The ribs, spine and joints were stained a shade of brown.

Molinar pointed to a coil of fishing line, the remains of a rusty pocket knife and two buttons found with the bones. A pair of shoes and belt he had worn were next to his lower leg bones.

It was remarkable to find the body 99% intact, Molinar said, a testament to a good burial in a climate where the remains were probably encased in snow and ice much of the year and undisturbed by people or critters.

"The crazy part is the fact that it's this well-preserved," he said. "Usually after this many years, you just find fragments."

Lori made a video call to her sister, Lisa Reilly, who lives in San Francisco and couldn't make the trip.

"Do you want to see Grandpa's bones?" she asked.

She then turned the camera to the skeleton and artifacts. She paused at the skull and pointed out the sutures, the fine cracks where the bones of the skull are joined that had begun to separate from exposure. The cracks had led the hikers to speculate on social media about foul play.

Lori and her niece stood with their hands clasped in prayer and heads bowed. They prayed he would rest in peace and be reunited with his family.

After the viewing, they went to Manzanar to donate the shoes, belt, fishing line and knife, to be put on display.

As Biggs looked at the weather-beaten shoes and withered belt, she was almost overcome with emotion.

"I just want to have a moment," the ranger said. "Out of respect. Wow. It's amazing to me the things that last forever and the things that don't."

In a guest book, Lori's nephew, Lukas, 9, wrote: "We are bringing you home Great Grampa Giichi Matsumura. We love you."

Two weeks later, Lori retrieved the ashes.

Lost once and found twice, it was now time to properly bury Giichi Matsumura.

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On Dec. 21, Lori, her brothers, Wayne and Clyde, along with Clyde's wife, Narumol, and two children brought his ashes to a burial service at Woodlawn, which is a block from where they grew up.

The Rev. Shumyo Kojima, a Buddhist priest, assembled a small altar with a framed photo of Giichi Matsumura in front of the box containing his remains.

"He moved from the high Sierra to here. All of you are eyewitnesses," Kojima said. "This is a kind of house-warming party. So, everyone will be here to celebrate his new residence."

Kojima lit incense and picked up a bell that he rang at different intervals as he chanted ancient sutras, bowing repeatedly.

Each family member stepped forward to sprinkle incense in a burner while Kojima chanted.

Kojima showed a document from the Zenshujii Buddhist Temple that recorded memorial services Ito held for her husband on important milestone anniversaries over the years. It showed how she kept thinking about him, the priest said.

Three cemetery workers then moved the altar to reveal a hole in the ground. One of them placed the box of ashes in the shallow grave.

As the interwoven threads of incense smoke drifted northeast — the direction of Manzanar — the family members each took a turn dropping a shovel full of dirt on the box.

The grave-diggers finished the job and placed a bouquet of white flowers on the grass. Kojima sprinkled water over the grave for purification.

Lori Matsumura wished the hikers hadn't disturbed the grave. She imagined it was a beautiful setting in mountains her grandfather admired.

Yet she was satisfied he was back with those who loved him.

"His body is laid to rest with everyone, so it's kind of just closed the chapter on my dad and his siblings and parents," she said.

She only regretted they weren't alive to see it.

China, North Korea loom as Blinken, Austin head to Asia

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Threats from China and North Korea will loom large over the Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster U.S. influence and calm concerns about America's role in Asia.

A senior administration official said Saturday that U.S. officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since last month, but have yet to receive a response. That makes consultations with the reclusive country's neighbors, Japan, South Korea and China, all the more critical.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are heading to Japan and South Korea for four days of talks starting Monday as the new administration tries to shore up partnerships with the two key regional allies. Blinken and Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, will meet with Chinese officials in Anchorage, Alaska, on Thursday.

The Cabinet members' Asia trip is intended to restore what Biden hopes will be a calming and even-keeled approach to ties with Tokyo and Seoul after four years of transactional and often temperamental relations under Donald Trump. He had upended diplomatic norms by meeting not once, but three times, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Blinken and Austin also plan virtual meetings with journalists, civil-society members and others. After reassuring their counterparts of U.S. commitments to Japanese and South Korean security, they plan to focus on an increasingly assertive China, the nuclear challenge from North Korea and the coronavirus pandemic.

In his first months in office, Biden has signaled his desire to return the Asia-Pacific to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In keeping with his broader "America is back" diplomatic theme, Biden has pledged to keep stability in the region at the core of his international initiatives.

On Friday, Biden participated in a virtual summit with the leaders of India, Japan and Australia. "A free

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and open Indo-Pacific is essential," Biden said. "The United States is committed to working with you, our partners and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability."

As part of that effort and "to reduce the risks of escalation," the senior official said efforts had been made to connect with the North Koreans since mid-February, including through what is known as the "New York channel." To date, the official said, "we have not received any response from Pyongyang." The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the diplomatic outreach and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, U.S. and South Korean negotiators have overcome years of contentious discussions under Trump to reach a tentative deal on paying for the American troop presence in South Korea. That agreement, along with a similar one for Japan, will be front and center in Blinken and Austin's meetings.

As he had done with allies in Europe, Trump threatened to reduce security cooperation unless host countries paid more. That led to fears of troop withdrawals at a time of particular uncertainty as China boosts efforts to dominate the region and North Korea's nuclear weapons remain a major source of angst.

"Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy, and we are working to strengthen America's relationships with our allies as well as the relationships among them," said Sung Kim, who is the top U.S. diplomat for Asia. He served in the Philippines and Indonesia during the Trump administration and was also previously the special envoy for North Korea.

For all of Biden's suggestions that he will reverse Trump's overt hostility to China, Biden has yet to countermand a single one of his predecessor's policies. He has, in fact, reaffirmed several of them, including maintaining sanctions in response to human rights abuses in western Xinjiang and Hong Kong and restating a Trump-era decision to reject outright nearly all of China's maritime claims in the South China Sea.

Many of China's policies that the U.S. finds objectionable — including its crackdown in Hong Kong, stepped up rhetoric against Taiwan and actions in the South China Sea — began during the Obama administration. The previous Democratic administration took office promising a "pivot to Asia" after a period of what many saw as American neglect for the region during George W. Bush's presidency, which was consumed by the onset of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In fact, although some obvious circumstances have changed since 2009, Blinken and Austin's trip mirrors in many ways the initial overseas journey of President Barack Obama's first secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, when she traveled to Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and then China in a bid to reassert U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific. Obama's engagement with China, however, did not produce the desired results, and the North Korean threat grew.

Although China is not on Blinken's itinerary, after wrapping up the stop in Seoul, he will fly back to Washington via Anchorage, Alaska, where he and Sullivan will meet senior Chinese officials. Austin will go from Seoul to New Delhi for meetings with Indian leaders.

Still, the administration is convinced that its domestic efforts to revitalize the U.S. economy and step up the fight against COVID-19 have put it in a better position both to blunt Chinese ambitions directly and leverage its partnerships to do the same.

"After the work of the past 50 days, Secretary Blinken and I will enter the meeting with senior Chinese representatives from a position of strength," Sullivan said Friday.

Democrats bank on relief aid to win back wary working class

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

JEANNETTE, Pa. (AP) — When Joe Biden visited this corner of southwestern Pennsylvania in the final weeks before the election, his goal wasn't to win it so much as to show the area's overwhelmingly white working-class electorate that his party was at least willing to try.

"A lot of white, working-class Democrats thought we forgot them," Biden said after touring a union training facility during a late September swing through Westmoreland County. "I get their sense of being left behind."

Democrats have offered paeans like that since President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered the New Deal and cemented an alliance with working-class voters. That bond was rooted in the notion that the Demo-

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crats' policies would improve workers' lives.

But that relationship has steadily frayed, with working-class voters now casting Democrats as the party of cultural elites who talk down to them and reject their values. Such resentment has even driven workers to vote against their seeming economic self-interest, given that GOP tax policy is often geared toward the well-to-do and business.

Now Biden and his party are hoping that by muscling through passage of the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief and economic stimulus bill — with benefits heavily weighted toward lower- and middle-income Americans — they can win back at least a larger share of working-class voters.

The president is flying Tuesday to Delaware County, outside Philadelphia, to help promote the new aid. Still, that proposition — which Republicans dismiss as a “liberal wish list” — will be tested in places such as Westmoreland County. More than 250 miles west, the county was a Democratic stronghold until its industrial base withered.

“These are the kind of issues that are a little bit more meat-and-potatoes and that we should focus on in this area,” said Paul Adams, a former county Democratic official.

“Despite the fact that our sympathies may be with other issues,” Adams said, referring to larger efforts to tackle racism and promote gay rights, “it’s hard to get traction with that with the local population.”

Democrats are banking on direct payments of \$1,400 to most Americans under the COVID-19 law as a strong counter to that criticism. The package also dramatically expands tax credits for families with children, bolsters unemployment benefits, reduces taxes on student loan debt and lowers costs of the Obama-era health law’s coverage.

Ed Rendell, a former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, said the legislation won’t singlehandedly solve the party’s problems with working-class voters but is “a good first mile down the road.”

“It is incumbent upon us to make the case — which I believe has always been there to make, we’ve just done a (terrible) job — that we’re the party of the working guy,” Rendell said. “And the Republicans are using smoke and mirrors.”

By some estimates, the law could reduce the nation’s poverty rate by one-third. That may have an outsize impact on Westmoreland County, whose under-65 population receives more federal disability benefits than the national average and where less than one-third of residents have a college degree, according to federal estimates.

The town of Jeannette used to boast of being the “Glass Capital of the World,” but nearly all of those factories are long gone. A nearby Volkswagen plant shuttered in 1988, wiping out 2,500 jobs.

But the strong economic incentives in the relief bill are colliding with the structural support here for former President Donald Trump. Trump 2020 yard signs and flags — often carefully preserved against winter snows — still line the hilly roadsides beyond the hulking husks of the abandoned bottle works. The Democratic county sheriff became a Republican last summer, saying his old party wasn’t supporting law enforcement strongly enough during demonstrations that swept the country over police brutality and racism.

Like Biden, Trump campaigned in Westmoreland County, and he won the county by nearly 30 percentage points. But Biden got about 11,000 more votes here than Hillary Clinton did in 2016. That’s significant given that Biden won Pennsylvania by only about 80,500 votes.

Bill Bretz, chairman of the county’s Republican Party, said the new direct economic benefits are canceled out by other Biden administration policies. That includes nixing the Keystone XL pipeline, which has raised fears that Pennsylvania’s natural gas producers could face similar limits in the name of battling climate change.

“There’s a lot of people who are still registered Democrats, who still hold on to those working-class Democratic values,” Bretz said. “But their sensitivities are violated by the national Democratic platform.”

Indeed, people like Mary Wilmes, who owns a gift shop in the county seat of Greensburg, doesn’t like to rile customers with talk of politics. But she did offer praise for Biden and his work promoting the stimulus. “He’s giving you the sense that he cares about people,” she said.

“It’s not like before,” Wilmes added, “when what we had was, ‘It’s all about himself.’”

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The white working-class helped fuel Trump's 2016 rise, but those voters have actually been gravitating to Republicans since 1992, according to research by Noam Lupu, a political science professor at Vanderbilt University. Working-class African Americans have remained steadfastly loyal to Democrats, but Trump saw his support among Latinos improve in 2020. That could indicate that a broader shift away from Democrats may be resonating with some Hispanics.

"I think, for the Democratic Party, it's a tough coalition to maintain: working-class voters who are really focused on their economic interests, but, at the same time, very progressive social positions for the urban, educated voters," Lupu said. "I think Biden has an opportunity to rebrand the party a little bit."

Working-class generally denotes people without college degrees who have lower wage jobs. It also can mean better educated, better paid middle-class earners who don't like defining themselves as rich or poor. Trump won 62% of white voters without a college degree in November, according to AP VoteCast, a nationwide survey of the electorate.

During the campaign, Biden tried to contrast what he called the working family sensitivities of his birth city of Scranton, Pennsylvania, with Trump's Fifth Avenue, big city values. Biden also has pledged to be "the most pro-union president you've ever seen."

"A number of working-class people have seen politics not deliver for their families, and sometimes that's when Democrats are in charge and sometimes that's when Republicans are in charge," said Rick Levy, president of the Texas AFL-CIO. "It creates an opening for demagogues who say, 'I can fix it.'"

Some top Republicans have begun arguing that theirs is actually the party of the working-class — mixing economic appeal with key social issues such as promoting gun rights and opposing abortion, along with emphasizing opposition to the cancellation of some Dr. Seuss books and dropping "Mr." from Potato Head so the toy better promotes gender inclusivity.

"We are a working-class party now," Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley tweeted on election night. Hawley also offered legislation to raise the minimum wage to \$15, long a position of progressive Democrats.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, recently declared the GOP the "party of steel workers and construction workers and taxi drivers and cops and firefighters and waitresses." He has proposed a \$10,000 scholarship helping parents who live in areas where schools remain shuttered because of the virus to pay for education elsewhere.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., endorsed a union organizing drive at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama, accusing the online giant's leadership of waging a "culture war against working-class values."

Levy said Democrats can now point to concrete provisions of the relief law, which he said also shows that the GOP is "never going to support working-class people."

But some say the stimulus package may prove hollow over the long term.

"It's a good thing now," Lucas Szekely, a 19-year-old community college student from Irwin, west of Jeannette, said of getting another stimulus check. "But you can't keep doing it forever."

Survivors struggle as scientists race to solve COVID mystery

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

There was no reason to celebrate on Rachel Van Lear's anniversary. The same day a global pandemic was declared, she developed symptoms of COVID-19. A year later, she's still waiting for them to disappear. And for experts to come up with some answers.

The Texas woman is one of thousands of self-described long-haulers, patients with symptoms that linger or develop out of the blue months after they first became infected with coronavirus. Hers first arrived March 11, 2020.

The condition affects an uncertain number of survivors in a baffling variety of ways.

"We're faced with a mystery," said Dr. Francis Collins, chief of the National Institutes of Health.

Is it a condition unique to COVID-19, or just a variation of the syndrome that can occur after other infections? How many people are affected, and how long does it last? Is it a new form of chronic fatigue syndrome — a condition with similar symptoms?

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Or could some symptoms be unrelated to their COVID-19 but a physical reaction to the upheaval of this past pandemic year — the lockdowns, quarantines, isolation, job losses, racial unrest, political turmoil, not to mention overwhelming illness and deaths?

These are the questions facing scientists as they search for disease markers, treatments and cures. With \$1 billion from Congress, Collins' agency is designing and soliciting studies that aim to follow at least 20,000 people who've had COVID-19.

"We've never really been faced with a post-infectious condition of this magnitude so this is unprecedented," Collins said Monday. "We don't have time to waste."

With nearly 30 million U.S. cases of COVID-19 and 119 million worldwide, the impact could be staggering, even if only a small fraction of patients develop long-term problems.

Fatigue, shortness of breath, insomnia, trouble thinking clearly and depression are among the many reported symptoms. Organ damage, including lung scarring and heart inflammation, have also been seen. Pinpointing whether these symptoms are directly linked to the virus or perhaps to some preexisting condition is among scientists' tasks.

"Is it just a very delayed recovery or is it something even more alarming and something that becomes the new normal?" Collins said.

There are a few working theories for what might be causing persistent symptoms. One is that the virus remains in the body at undetectable levels yet still causes tissue or organ damage. Or it overstimulates the immune system, keeping it from returning to a normal state. A third theory: Symptoms linger or arise anew when the virus attacks blood vessels, causing minute, undetectable blood clots that can wreak havoc throughout the body.

Some scientists think each of these may occur in different people.

Dr. Steven Deeks, an infectious disease specialist at the University of California, San Francisco, said researchers first need to create a widely accepted definition of the syndrome. Estimates are "all over the map because no one is defining it in the same way," he said.

Deeks is leading one study, collecting blood and saliva samples from volunteers who will be followed for up to two years.

Some people develop long-term problems even when their initial infections were silent. Deeks said some evidence suggests that those who initially get sicker from a coronavirus infection might be more prone to persistent symptoms, and women seem to develop them more than men, but those observations need to be confirmed, Deeks said.

Van Lear says she was in great shape when she got sick. At 35, the suburban Austin woman had no other health issues and was a busy mother of three who often worked out. First came a chest cold, then a high fever. A flu test came back negative, so her doctor tested for COVID-19. Soon after she developed blinding headaches, debilitating fatigue and nausea so severe that she needed emergency room treatment.

"I was very scared because no one could tell me what was going to happen to me," Van Lear said.

Over the next several months, symptoms would come and go: burning lungs, a rapid heartbeat, dizzy spells, hand tremors and hair loss. While most have disappeared, she still deals with an occasional racing heartbeat. Heart monitoring, bloodwork and other tests have all been normal.

Fatigue, fever, and no taste or smell were Karla Jefferies' first symptoms after testing positive last March. Then came brain fog, insomnia, a nagging smell of something burning that only recently disappeared, and intermittent ringing in her ears. Now she can't hear out of her left ear.

Doctors can't find anything to explain it, and she bristles when some doctors dismiss her symptoms.

"I understand that COVID is something that we're all going through together but don't brush me off," said Jefferies, 64, a retired state worker in Detroit.

As an African American woman with diabetes and high blood pressure, she was at high risk for a bad outcome and knows she's lucky her initial illness wasn't more serious. But her persistent symptoms and home confinement got her down and depression set in.

Political and racial unrest that dominated the news didn't help, and church services — often her salva-

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tion — were suspended. She knows all that could have contributed to her ill health and says listening to music — R&B, jazz and a little country — has helped her cope.

Still, Jefferies wants to know what role the virus has played.

"I'm a year in, and to still from time to time have lingering effects, I just don't understand that," Jefferies said.

Jefferies and Van Lear are members of Survivor Corps, one of several online support groups created during the pandemic and that have amassed thousands of members. Some are enrolling in studies to help speed the science.

Dr. Michael Sneller is leading one study at the NIH. So far, 200 have enrolled; they include survivors and a healthy comparison group.

They are being given a series of physical and mental tests once or twice a year for three years. Other tests are seeking signs of ongoing inflammation, abnormal antibodies and blood vessel damage.

Sneller said he's found no serious heart or lung tissue damage so far. He notes that many viruses can cause mild heart inflammation, even some cold viruses. Many people recover but in severe cases the condition can lead to heart failure.

Fatigue is the most common symptom in the coronavirus group, and so far researchers have found no medical explanation for it. Insomnia is common, too — in both groups. Sneller says that's not surprising.

"The whole pandemic and lockdown affected all of us," he said. "There's a lot of anxiety in the control group too."

Many have symptoms similar to chronic disease syndrome; and to a condition involving fatigue and thinking difficulties that can develop after treatment for Lyme disease, a bacterial infection spread by certain ticks.

Researchers are hopeful that studies of long-term COVID-19 may yield answers to what causes those conditions, too.

Follow AP Medical Writer Lindsey Tanner at @LindseyTanner.

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Africans rethink big, bountiful weddings as pandemic bites

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA and FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — The moment of truth for Ivan Arinaitwe came when he had to choose among many relatives and friends whom to invite to his wedding. An initial 150 people swelled to 300 as he agonized. No matter how he tried, it would be hard to achieve Uganda's recommended "scientific" wedding, slimmed down for the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Africa, where weddings often go big, he would invite 1,300 people if he could. Now he worries about how the uninvited might react and the consequences for his family.

"It's a bit complicated, very complicated actually," said the employee of a government research agency whose wedding is scheduled for April. "But we have a scapegoat of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will say, 'It's not me. It's what the government has said. If I didn't invite you, please understand.'"

He is not alone. Many Africans are rethinking big, bountiful weddings amid efforts to discourage big gatherings to combat the spread of COVID-19 and in response to the economic ravages of the pandemic. In Uganda, an East African country of 45 million where colorful wedding convoys are a street spectacle on weekends, President Yoweri Museveni last year ordered so-called scientific weddings, attended by no more than 10 people, to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

Museveni put on such a wedding for a cousin in July in the lush gardens of the official residence, State House, with the masked couple in socially distanced seats. Even the simple bridal cake looked dismal, unlike the giant tiered cakes that often dominate receptions.

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The pandemic is forcing change in communities where family can mean a whole clan and weddings are seen as key in cementing relations between communities. Extended families often plan weddings, and large, extravagant ones are a status symbol in places like Nigeria, where over \$2 million can be spent.

Many in Uganda have expressed skepticism about small weddings, and there were reports of police interrupting noncompliant ceremonies before the rules were gradually eased to allow up to 200 attendees. But now, as the pandemic continues to bite, more people are cautious with their money.

"When the coronavirus struck, people adjusted quickly, very quickly," said the Rev. Sammy Wainaina, provost of All Saints Cathedral in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. "For weddings, people have gone small."

More Kenyans now opt for laid-back "garden" events as well as the civil unions that became popular in the past year, he said. While that may be a good thing, Wainaina said, he's concerned that some "can become very casual with such weddings and only realize later that they were not committed to the vows they made."

The demand for church weddings "has gone down considerably," he said.

A similar trend is reported in Uganda by Charles Nsimbi, an official in charge of registering civil unions, who told the New Vision newspaper that the average number of unions per day has risen to 12 from five before the pandemic.

Arinaitwe, the Ugandan planning a small church wedding, said he decided not to have the reception in his rural district, where even the uninvited can show up. The invitations specify two people, and no children. He knows that will leave many upset, yet it's necessary to keep numbers in check and avoid starting his marriage with a hefty bill to pay.

"Given that the disposable incomes of people have drastically reduced, people are in survival mode," said Moses Mugarura, a Ugandan pastor who owns a restaurant in the capital, Kampala, that was once in high demand by couples.

His restaurant hosted no wedding meeting from February 2020 through January, he said. And he went from attending a wedding every other weekend to only four last year, citing families worried that their eligible daughters "are not exposed to the normal opportunities."

"I believe that many people have lost faith and have gotten to the low-hanging fruit," he said, referring to cohabitation.

But simply living together is not a solution for some in conservative societies including Noel Mporebuce in the Rwandan capital, Kigali. When the central African nation reported its first virus cases, he was preparing for a wedding initially scheduled for Boxing Day. The lockdown imposed to slow the pandemic effectively banned social gatherings and left him with fading hopes of a classic wedding.

"By now we would be happily married, living as husband and wife," he said. "Everything is now left in the hands of God. Coronavirus is busy killing our future."

Another Kigali resident, teacher Emmanuel Gatera, described a different problem for a sister whose wedding had been scheduled for Christmastime but is indefinitely postponed as her partner struggles to make ends meet. The pregnant woman moved in with him anyway because she feared he would change his mind about getting married.

"Cohabitation is unthinkable in our society, and that scar will live with (my sister) forever," Gatera said.

And yet for others the pandemic has presented an opportunity to circumvent wedding ceremonies that normally cannot be bypassed.

Philemon Jambaya, a freelance journalist in Zimbabwe, said he negotiated down the bride price via WhatsApp, then had a small and brief traditional wedding recorded on smartphones. Family elders didn't resist, he said.

His success is noteworthy in the southern African country where a traditional marriage can be elaborate, involving up to a dozen steps that take months leading to a crowded betrothal and meal.

"I never imagined marrying that way, but I couldn't wait," Jambaya said. "Everyone knew how much I loved her and how desperate I was to make her my wife, and that we are also living in abnormal times."

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Mutsaka reported from Harare, Zimbabwe. Associated Press writer Ignatius Ssuuna in Kigali, Rwanda, contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, March 15, the 74th day of 2021. There are 291 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 15, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson, addressing a joint session of Congress, called for new legislation to guarantee every American's right to vote. The result was passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

On this date:

In 44 B.C., Roman dictator Julius Caesar was assassinated by a group of nobles that included Brutus and Cassius.

In 1493, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus arrived back in the Spanish harbor of Palos de la Frontera, two months after concluding his first voyage to the Western Hemisphere.

In 1820, Maine became the 23rd state.

In 1913, President Woodrow Wilson met with about 100 reporters for the first formal presidential press conference.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied bombers again raided German-held Monte Cassino.

In 1964, actor Elizabeth Taylor married actor Richard Burton in Montreal; it was her fifth marriage, his second. (They divorced in 1974, remarried in 1975, then divorced again in 1976.)

In 1972, "The Godfather," Francis Ford Coppola's epic gangster movie based on the Mario Puzo novel and starring Marlon Brando and Al Pacino, premiered in New York.

In 1975, Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis died near Paris at age 69.

In 1985, the first internet domain name, symbolics.com, was registered by the Symbolics Computer Corp. of Massachusetts.

In 1998, Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose child care guidance spanned half a century, died in San Diego at 94.

In 2005, former WorldCom chief Bernard Ebbers was convicted in New York of engineering the largest corporate fraud in U.S. history. (He was later sentenced to 25 years in prison.)

In 2019, a gunman killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, streaming the massacre live on Facebook. (Brenton Tarrant, an Australian white supremacist, was sentenced to life in prison without parole after pleading guilty to 51 counts of murder and other charges.)

Ten years ago: The Syrian civil war had its beginnings with Arab Spring protests across the region that turned into an armed insurgency and eventually became a full-blown conflict.

Five years ago: Democrat Hillary Clinton triumphed in the Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Illinois and Missouri presidential primaries; Donald Trump strengthened his hand in the Republican race, winning in Florida, North Carolina, Illinois and Missouri, but falling in Ohio to the state's governor, John Kasich (KAY'-sihk), while Florida Sen. Marco Rubio ended his campaign after his home-state loss. In a major reversal, the Obama administration barred offshore drilling off the Atlantic Coast. Dallas Seavey won his third straight Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in a record time of 8 days, 11 hours, 20 minutes, 16 seconds.

One year ago: The Federal Reserve took massive emergency action to help the economy withstand the coronavirus by slashing its benchmark interest rate to near zero and saying it would buy \$700 billion in treasury and mortgage bonds. After initially trying to keep schools open, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said the nation's largest public school system would close in hopes of curbing the spread of the coronavirus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that gatherings of at least 50 people be canceled or postponed for the next eight weeks. President Donald Trump called on Americans to stop hoarding groceries and other supplies. Pastors across the United States delivered sermons to empty pews; many religious institutions had started using the Internet to stream their services.

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Today's Birthdays: Actor Judd Hirsch is 86. Jazz musician Charles Lloyd is 83. Rock musician Phil Lesh is 81. Singer Mike Love (The Beach Boys) is 80. Rock singer-musician Sly Stone is 78. Rock singer-musician Howard Scott (War; Lowrider Band) is 75. Rock singer Ry Cooder is 74. Actor Frances Conroy is 68. Actor Craig Wasson is 67. Rock singer Dee Snider (Twisted Sister) is 66. Actor Joaquim de Almeida is 64. Actor Park Overall is 64. Movie director Renny Harlin is 62. Model Fabio is 60. Singer Terence Trent D'Arby (AKA Sananda Maitreya) is 59. Rock singer Bret Michaels (Poison) is 58. R&B singer Rockwell is 57. Actor Chris Bruno is 55. Actor Kim Raver is 54. Rock singer Mark McGrath (Sugar Ray) is 53. Rock musician Mark Hoppus is 49. Country singer-musician Matt Thomas (Parmalee) is 47. Actor Eva Longoria is 46. Rapper-musician will.i.am (Black Eyed Peas) is 46. Rock DJ Joseph Hahn (Linkin Park) is 44. Rapper Young Buck is 40. Actor Sean Biggerstaff is 38. Actor Kellan Lutz is 36. Actor Caitlin Wachs is 32.