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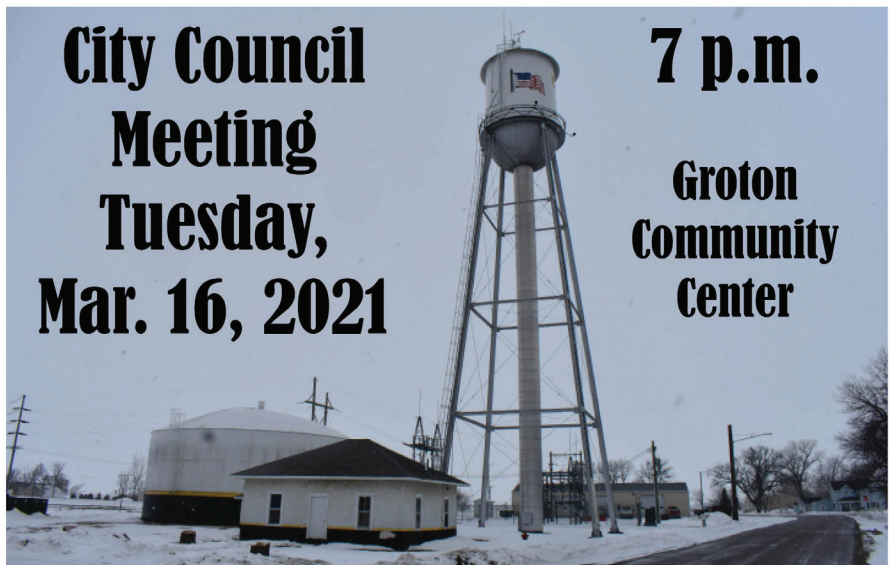
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**City Council
Meeting
Tuesday,
Mar. 16, 2021**

7 p.m.

**Groton
Community
Center**



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda
March 16, 2021 – 7:00pm
Groton Community Center

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Groton Firemen – Special Event Retail on Sale Liquor License April 24, 2021
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Minutes
4. Bills
5. February Finance Report
6. Heartland Consumer Power Economic Development Grant – Library Expansion
7. Thank you to the Groton American Legion Post for raising the funds to add a flag to the new water tower
8. Appoint Election Board for April 13th Election:
Anita Lowary, Julie Hinds, Connie Stauch, Rebecca Hunter, and Melanie Sombke
9. Second Reading of the Ordinance Amending Liquor Revenues #744
10. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
11. Daniel Sunne job resignation
12. Job offer for an Electric Utility Supervisor
13. Hire Summer Employees
14. Adjournment

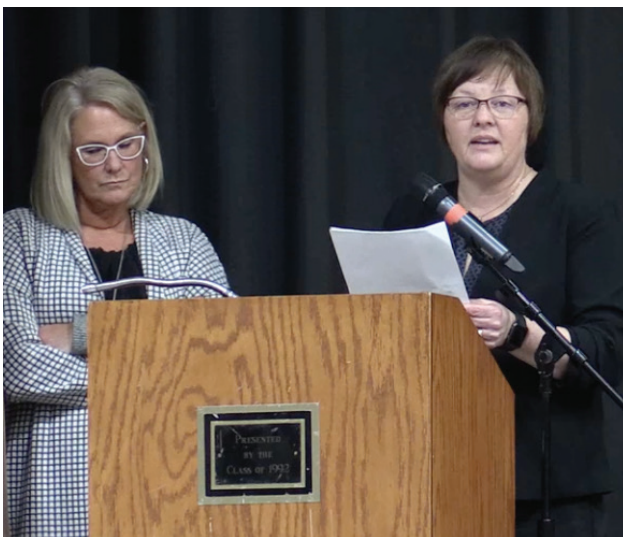
Equalization meeting to follow approximately 7:30pm

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Dr. Seven Smith gave a few remarks at the National Honor Society program held Monday in the GHS Gym. MS/HS Principal Kiersten Sombke announced the names as each recipient received their certificate and medal. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM video)



Brenda Madsen and Jan Seibel were the masters of ceremony for the event.

(Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM video)



The 2021 inductees into the Gold Key of the National Honor Society are Travis Townsend, Madeline Flihs, Regan Leicht, Kansas Kroll; and in front are Trista Keith, Alyssa Thaler and Allyssa Locke. (Photo by Carol Smith)



The 2020 inductees into the Gold Key of the National Honor Society are Samantha Pappas, Erin Unzen, Alexis Hanten, Isaac Smith, Tanea Lipp and Tessa Erdmann. (Photo by Carol Smith)

#386 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Numbers are staying lowish; we'll see what tomorrow brings when any weekend effect wears off. Meanwhile, we're up to 29,516,500 total cases in the US, 0.2% more than yesterday. There were 55,600 new cases reported today. Hospitalizations have finally started downward again after a week stalled. We have just 40,976 people hospitalized with Covid-19 today. Last time we were this low was way back on October 6, some five months ago. We're still well above our last low spot which was 35,382 on September 27. Be nice to beat that one day soon. There were 820 deaths reported today. That brings us to 535,280 total deaths, 0.2% more than yesterday. I wonder whether we can sustain—or decrease—these numbers for another month until we have significant numbers of us vaccinated. We hit three million vaccinations a couple of days ago and are averaging close to that; at this rate, a month can make a world of difference. Some expert or other said in the last few days that we're at a tipping point; I really feel this. Time will tell.

On March 15, 2020, one year ago today, we had 3453 cases in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the US Virgin Islands—758 cases more than the prior day. This means numbers were climbing at dizzying rates—25+ percent per day. That's a doubling time something like three days. The case count one week prior was 70, an almost 5000 percent increase in a week. Glad we're not doing that anymore. Still over half of cases were in Washington, New York, and California; we were up to seven states that had over 100 cases. There had been 62 deaths in 12 states; well over half of them were in Washington.

This was the day the number of cases outside China approached the number of cases inside: China had 81,048 of the world's 153,517 cases. The world was walking right up to a tipping point. Italy had 24,747, Iran had almost 14,000, and Spain had more than 7000. Italy had reported 368 deaths in 24 hours, bringing its total to 1809.

The first US sailor was diagnosed. The CDC recommended shutting down any event with more than 50 people in attendance. We were up to 29 states with closed schools. We still couldn't figure out testing in the US. With so many out of work, food banks were feeling great strain. Cancellations and closures: Wynn and MGM resort properties in Las Vegas; bars and restaurants in Massachusetts; Lebanon; all elective surgeries in New York; schools in Massachusetts, New York, Vermont, Minnesota, and South Carolina; bars, nightclubs, and wineries in California; bars and restaurants in Illinois; casinos and racetracks in Maryland; cafes and ski resorts in France; the Academy of Country Music Awards;

There's been quite a lot of fuss across Europe over the past couple of weeks about the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. First there were claims it wouldn't protect older people well. Those seem to have resolved, and it appears the vaccine has good effectiveness in older age groups. Now we see some countries suspending its use over concerns about blood clots with others, the UK and Canada, for example, insisting it is perfectly safe. What we have is about 30 reported "thromboembolic events" (clots forming in blood vessels and blocking blood flow) in people who have been vaccinated; that's out of around five million doses given in Europe. Now, we've talked before about the fact that two things that are related in time are not necessarily related causally, that just because something happens after something else happens, this is not proof the first event caused the second one. At sun-up this time of year, the birds really chatter and sing in our trees, and then my husband eats scrambled eggs: No one thinks the birdsong caused him to feel hunger or to consume eggs; those things have other causes, right? We need more than this thing happened after that thing happened.

So the mere fact that some people had blood clots is not evidence the vaccine caused the clots. What normally happens when an adverse event occurs in a vaccinated person is that it gets investigated to determine whether it is likely the vaccine caused the adverse event. There is some background number of thromboembolic events which occurs in a population even when they haven't been vaccinated, that is, blood clots sometimes happen. So it could coincidentally occur that someone who was about to have a blood clot just happened to go in for a vaccination last Tuesday or this morning or whenever. In fact, Health Minister in the Netherlands, Hugo de Jonge said in a statement today, "Thrombosis is of course a

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very common complaint. And so if you are vaccinating a large group of people, it's not crazy that there will also be people with thrombosis after vaccination." So an investigation would focus on two things: (1) whether there is anything in the vaccine that could reasonably be expected to mess around with the clotting factors in your blood and (2) whether the incidence of thromboembolic events is higher in the folks who've been vaccinated than it is in the general population—that's how you sort out the attribution of the blood clots.

It so happens I haven't the slightest idea what the background level of these events is in Europeans of whatever age are receiving these vaccines, so I can't even guess whether 30 such events is an Oh-wow! thing or not. Additionally, I haven't seen any safety data on this vaccine or any analysis of the safety data except in broad strokes when the EU's regulatory authorities concluded the vaccine carried more benefit than risk and has an acceptable safety profile. Their phase 3 clinical trial in the US is not yet ready for prime time, so we don't have any data from it to compare. We do have this: (1) The WHO is investigating the reports. This is what's supposed to happen. (2) AstraZeneca says, "The observed number of these types of events are significantly lower in those vaccinated than what would be expected among the general population." But then you'd expect AstraZeneca to say that, I guess. (3) The European Medicines Agency, the EU's equivalent to our FDA, says there is no reason to believe the vaccine is what's causing the adverse events and its benefits "continue to outweigh its risks." (4) Anthony Harnden, Deputy Chair of the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations made a statement: "The UK has administered 11 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and there has been no demonstrable difference in the number of blood clots since the vaccine was introduced. . . . [P]eople should continue to take it." I guess we'll see what happens from here. I certainly have no opinion on its safety at all—and if I did, you should ignore it. I'm not a vaccinologist, and I don't play one on TV either.

But here's my concern: Let's say it turns out to be completely safe. I worry that after all this publicity no one's going to want it. And we can't afford to have good vaccines no one wants, not if we're going to get out ahead of this virus once and for all. Shelf-stable, this is a vaccine that would be ideal for places without great cold-chain transportation, and it's very inexpensive such that it has great appeal for countries without lots of resources; but if it is perceived as a second-class, even dangerous alternative, that could inhibit the vaccination effort in much of the world. And, as I've mentioned before, none of us is really safe until all of us are safe. It's a worry. Of course, none of that matters until we figure out whether it is, indeed, safe. Stay tuned.

Apparently, the US is now doing sufficient genomic surveillance to have a clear picture of the increasing prevalence of B.1.1.7, the variant first identified in the UK. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, said in this morning's White House briefing, "Our current models still project that by end of March, early April, B.1.1.7 will be the dominant variant." Buckle your seat belts; these next few weeks are the time we need to get through safely. I wonder whether we're up to it; I very much fear we are not—haven't shown much ability to discipline ourselves so far, even in the face of pestilence and death.

Dr. Walensky also mentioned the results of data analysis with respect to dosing schedules, and this is good news. Of those who had received a first dose and the scheduled time for a second dose had passed, 88 percent completed the second dose and another 8.6 percent still had time to be within the outside time frame of 42 days. Only 3.4 percent had passed the 42 days without a second dose. These are very good numbers, especially when you consider the challenges of winter storms and such that intervened in some of the locations.

There's a small study published today in the journal JAMA Network Open that looks at 78 patients at a hospital in Paris who had severe Covid-19 and received EEG tests (electroencephalogram: measures patterns of electrical firing of brain cells) between March 30 and June 11. Nine of these patients were described as having Covid-19-related encephalopathy (CORE). The study's authors explain, "In our study, we showed that patients with CORE mostly had movement disorders (mainly seizures and/or myorhythmia), brainstem impairment (oculomotor disorders such as head bobbing) and frontal syndrome (disinhibition and grasping)." [Translator: A seizure is a burst of uncoordinated electrical activity in the brain that causes abnormal movements, sensations, or states of awareness. Myorhythmias are repetitive, rhythmic, slow

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movements, mainly in limbs or facial and ocular muscles. Disinhibition is failure to follow social norms which can be perceived as rude or offensive behaviors.]

This was taken to mean the virus may have traveled through nerves in the nose to the frontal lobe of the brain where it is causing injury. Please understand, no one knows for sure what's going on here; this is still a hypothesis. The sample in this study was small, so it certainly isn't definitive; but it suggests some avenues for further research. At this point, that's a step.

Moderna has begun an early-stage trial for a refrigerator-stable version of their vaccine. Removing the requirement to keep the vaccine frozen would simplify the logistics of distribution quite a bit. They're testing a single-dose, as well as a two-dose, regimen. They are thinking about this as a possible booster, and they're also thinking about it as something with a practical advantage in developing countries. Both could have value. We'll see what they discover as they go along.

It appears something that was in that gigantic economic rescue bill signed by the President last week is money to market vaccination. There is a plan to drop a \$250 million promotional effort to encourage people to be vaccinated. I am normally a little bit suspicious of government attempts to advertise things; but I think this is an excellent plan if it's done right. We know we're going to have to persuade some folks who are currently still doubtful about these vaccines, and well-designed efforts to accomplish that have my support. I hope they work. For the record I am still convinced one of the largest factors in turning opinion will be seeing people all around you getting vaccinated. The more people you know who were vaccinated without developing problems, the safer it's going to look to go do it yourself—which is good because these vaccines are very, very safe.

Ethan Hill was six when he noticed a man sleeping under the freeway every day on his way to school in Birmingham, Alabama. He told Kelly Clarkson, "It really hurt me that every day we had to see him laying on a dirty mattress, not having anywhere to go or to stay." He was troubled, so he talked his mom into stopping to meet the man. They learned "Mr. Marcus" had been living there for more than 30 years. Hill told WBRC TV he got the idea to take his Christmas money and buy some things for Marcus to make him a little more comfortable. Then they decided to make up some "homeless buckets," five-gallon pails filled with essentials for someone living on the street. They made up about ten buckets and delivered them to homeless people in his city. Hill has continued to grow his idea since then into the effort he now calls Ethan's Heart, whose purpose according to his Facebook page, is "to support the homeless population and those at risk for homelessness." He explained to WBRC, "It makes me feel like I'm helping other people and it's not all about you. It's about other people that doesn't have as much as you."

He raises money using social media and news stories; he has an Amazon wish list from which donors can purchase items; and he has a corps of volunteers who help to make up his care packages. They load everything into lime green bags they deliver to homeless people. The packages have sleeping bags, snacks, and washcloths. Hill says he tries to put himself in the homeless person's shoes when he thinks of what to include in the packages. "We thought about things that normal people may need in the winter time. And we just gave them ponchos, blankets and emergency blankets and stuff." He explained he includes items appropriate to the season and the needs of someone living outdoors. He knows the pandemic has made things harder for everyone, so he's "doing the best that we can to get everything together for everybody."

The pandemic has shifted his focus somewhat because he recognizes the needs have changed. He puts out alerts via social media when he spots a sale on disinfectant wipes or hand sanitizer or snacks so his legion of supporters can hit up whatever store and stretch their donations for maximum impact. And last week, his Facebook page had the following post: "Ethan (Ethan's Heart) secured a partnership with the Birmingham Police Department this week which will place his care packages in police cars across the city and in each precinct. These bags will go out into the streets during hours when many of us are sleeping." He followed that with a list of items needed to fill out the care packages the police were going to distribute. That seems to be working well for him—and for the homeless of Birmingham.

And now, Hill's work is being recognized. He recently received the 2021 Academic Leader Award from the Minority Business Awards. He is the only child to receive the award; runners up included a former college president and a current one, pretty fancy company for a 10-year-old—or maybe he's pretty fancy company

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for a mere college president, huh? He told WBRC, "I felt grateful. It's not for me. It's for everybody that's out here. . . . I'm going to be the one looking at it. But it's going to be helping the homeless people in the long run." Having given out around 150 of his care packages this year so far, Hill says looking at that award inspires him to do more.

And now there's something else: On April 22, United Way of Central Alabama will present Hill with their 2021 Ignite Student Volunteer of the Year Award. Can you imagine what this kid's resume's going to look like by the time he's ready to apply for college? Terrifying. The world is filled with goodness. If we keep our heads up and our eyes open, we won't miss it.

Stay healthy. 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	6.3%
Beadle	2825	2694	5982	39	Substantial	14.9%
Bennett	383	371	1185	9	Minimal	3.1%
Bon Homme	1510	1479	2104	26	Minimal	1.5%
Brookings	3663	3549	12191	37	Substantial	3.7%
Brown	5207	5046	12892	89	Moderate	6.2%
Brule	697	682	1893	9	Minimal	3.2%
Buffalo	421	407	902	13	Minimal	8.3%
Butte	990	957	3257	20	Moderate	6.7%
Campbell	131	127	259	4	Minimal	0.0%
Charles Mix	1320	1254	3982	21	Substantial	7.2%
Clark	377	364	960	5	Minimal	16.7%
Clay	1823	1783	5463	15	Substantial	6.2%
Codington	4093	3903	9773	77	Substantial	21.6%
Corson	473	458	1004	12	Minimal	9.1%
Custer	768	742	2752	12	Moderate	3.5%
Davison	3000	2893	6651	64	Substantial	13.4%
Day	675	636	1802	29	Moderate	3.6%
Deuel	479	463	1150	8	Minimal	5.0%
Dewey	1434	1399	3872	26	Substantial	6.9%
Douglas	437	422	925	9	Minimal	6.5%
Edmunds	488	467	1072	13	Minimal	14.8%
Fall River	553	525	2660	15	Substantial	4.5%
Faulk	362	348	704	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	988	927	2275	39	Moderate	5.0%
Gregory	555	512	1313	30	Moderate	4.0%
Haakon	258	243	544	10	Minimal	14.3%
Hamlin	729	671	1801	38	Moderate	4.3%
Hand	350	332	831	6	Moderate	9.1%
Hanson	370	360	735	4	Moderate	13.6%
Harding	92	90	186	1	Minimal	0.0%
Hughes	2333	2270	6676	36	Moderate	2.2%
Hutchinson	796	758	2410	26	Moderate	0.0%

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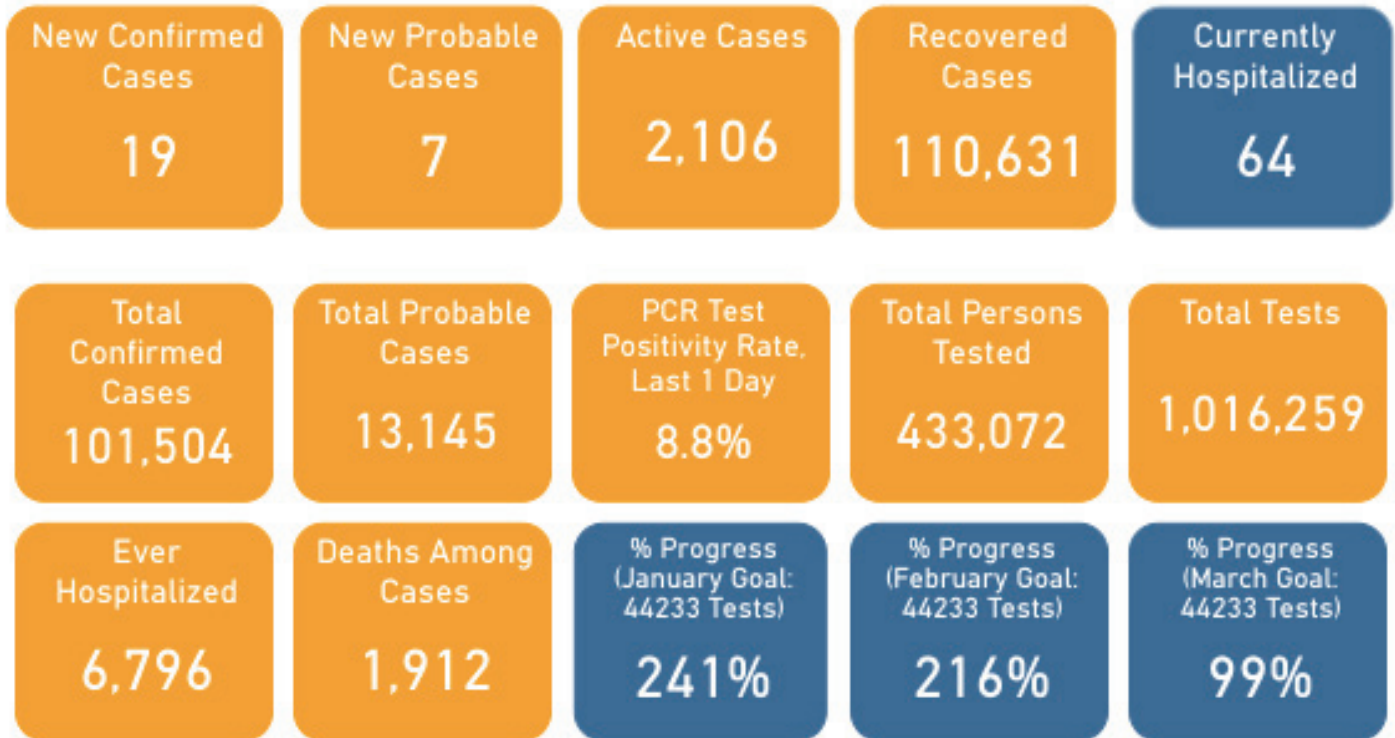
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Hyde	139	138	413	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	281	264	918	14	Minimal	9.1%
Jerauld	275	252	561	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	86	86	229	0	None	0.0%
Kingsbury	653	627	1696	14	Moderate	2.4%
Lake	1237	1174	3402	18	Substantial	12.7%
Lawrence	2840	2774	8609	45	Moderate	2.0%
Lincoln	7944	7699	20593	77	Substantial	10.5%
Lyman	607	590	1883	10	Moderate	6.5%
Marshall	349	321	1211	6	Substantial	10.0%
McCook	766	718	1655	24	Substantial	19.4%
McPherson	240	233	561	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2642	2558	7794	31	Moderate	7.4%
Mellette	256	248	743	2	Moderate	0.0%
Miner	277	255	583	9	Minimal	10.0%
Minnehaha	28662	27762	79430	337	Substantial	9.4%
Moody	621	599	1778	17	Minimal	0.0%
Oglala Lakota	2075	2001	6675	49	Moderate	9.2%
Pennington	13072	12713	39885	190	Moderate	6.2%
Perkins	348	331	826	14	Minimal	0.0%
Potter	384	367	840	4	Moderate	13.8%
Roberts	1261	1170	4201	36	Substantial	18.7%
Sanborn	335	324	698	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	814	770	2157	26	Moderate	9.4%
Stanley	338	333	946	2	Minimal	4.3%
Sully	137	133	318	3	None	0.0%
Todd	1220	1188	4172	29	Minimal	1.5%
Tripp	720	681	1504	16	Substantial	11.9%
Turner	1091	1016	2751	53	Substantial	20.8%
Union	2035	1940	6373	40	Substantial	11.3%
Walworth	733	705	1838	15	Moderate	12.8%
Yankton	2840	2771	9437	28	Moderate	9.0%
Ziebach	337	326	871	9	Minimal	0.0%
Unassigned	0	0	1785	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	4672	0
10-19 years	13031	0
20-29 years	20268	7
30-39 years	18868	18
40-49 years	16387	37
50-59 years	16152	114
60-69 years	13151	253
70-79 years	6977	437
80+ years	5143	1046

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	59653	900
Male	54996	1012

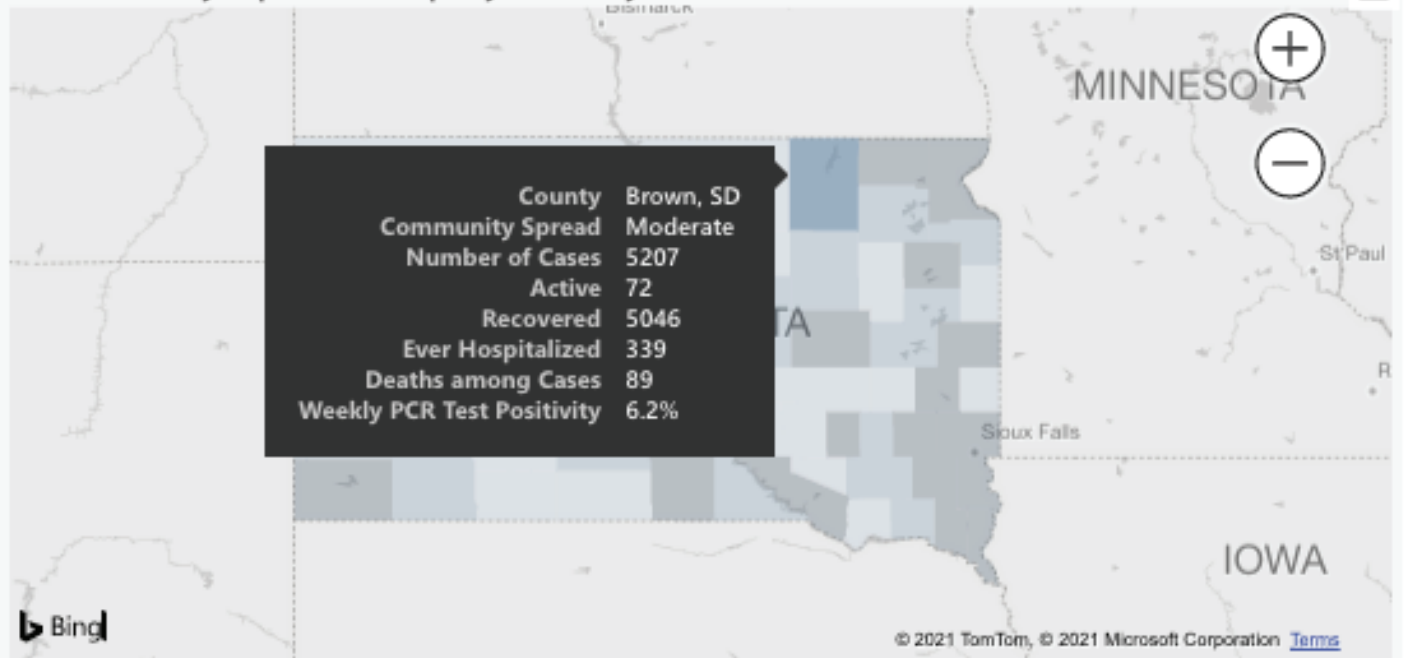
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Brown County

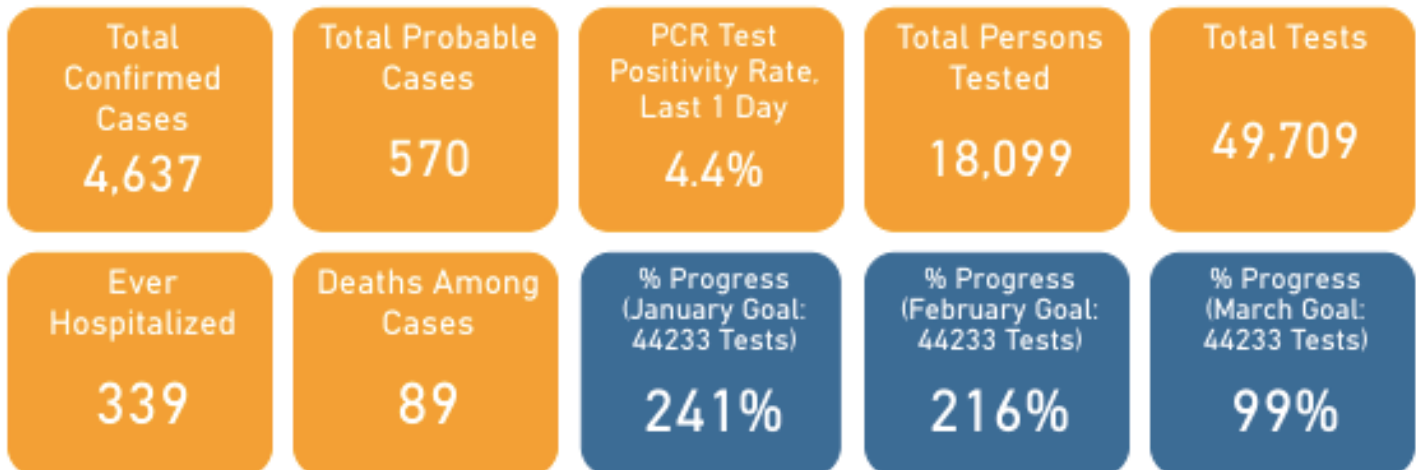


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

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



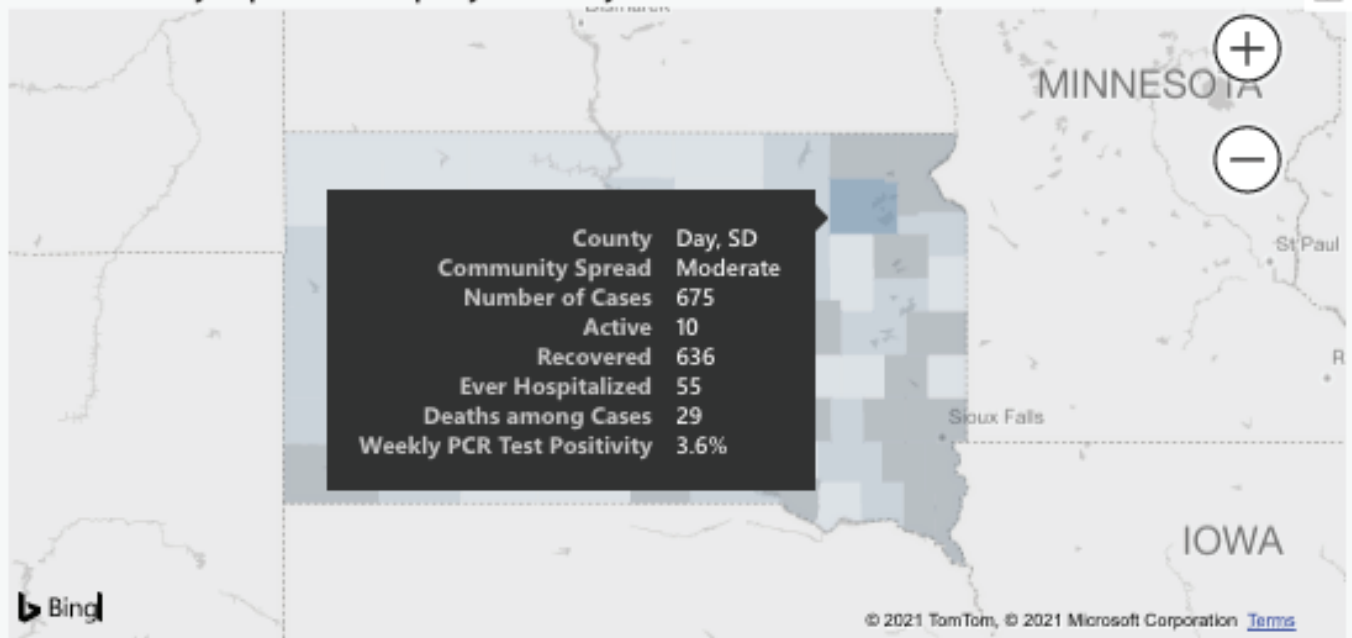
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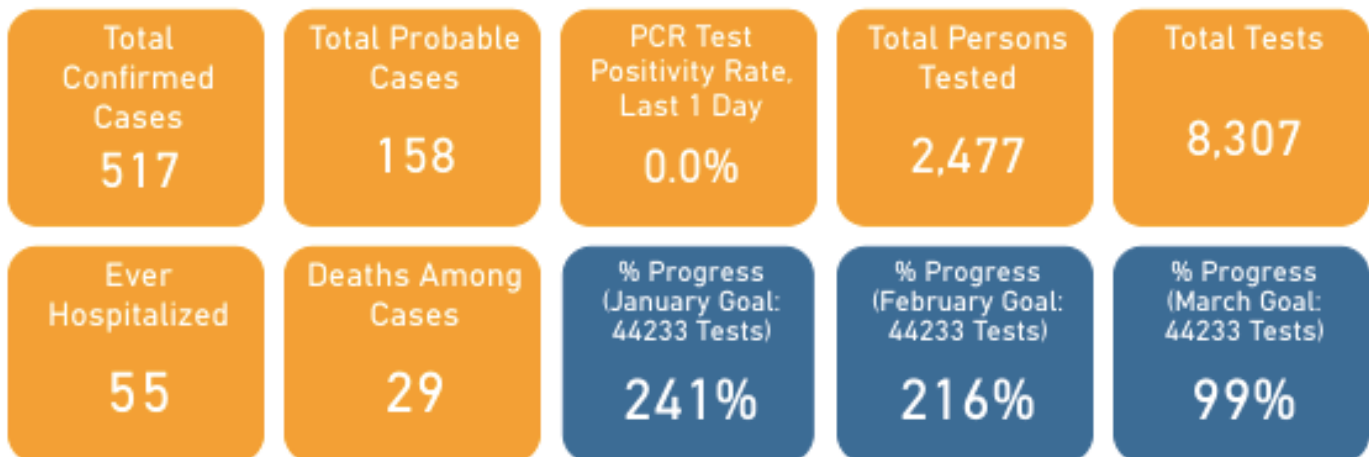
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

307,059

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	3,345
Moderna	150,354
Pfizer	153,360

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

197,651

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	3,345
Moderna - 1 dose	44,084
Moderna - Series Complete	53,135
Pfizer - 1 dose	40,831
Pfizer - Series Complete	56,264

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

34%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	34.13%
Series Complete	19.62%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	875	315	280	595
Beadle	6164	2,011	2,076	4,087
Bennett*	476	132	172	304
Bon Homme*	3531	1,123	1,204	2,327
Brookings	9780	4,106	2,837	6,943
Brown	14743	4,161	5,291	9,452
Brule*	1816	538	639	1,177
Buffalo*	126	80	23	103
Butte	2115	873	621	1,494
Campbell	964	270	347	617
Charles Mix*	3164	1,146	1,009	2,155
Clark	1216	400	408	808
Clay	4988	1,754	1,617	3,371
Codington*	9535	3,219	3,158	6,377
Corson*	294	90	102	192
Custer*	2763	897	933	1,830
Davison	7408	2,190	2,609	4,799
Day*	2493	887	803	1,690
Deuel	1457	545	456	1,001
Dewey*	370	74	148	222
Douglas*	1167	369	399	768
Edmunds	1363	459	452	911
Fall River*	2488	780	854	1,634
Faulk	1006	296	355	651
Grant*	2704	1,200	752	1,952
Gregory*	1718	612	553	1,165
Haakon*	530	156	187	343

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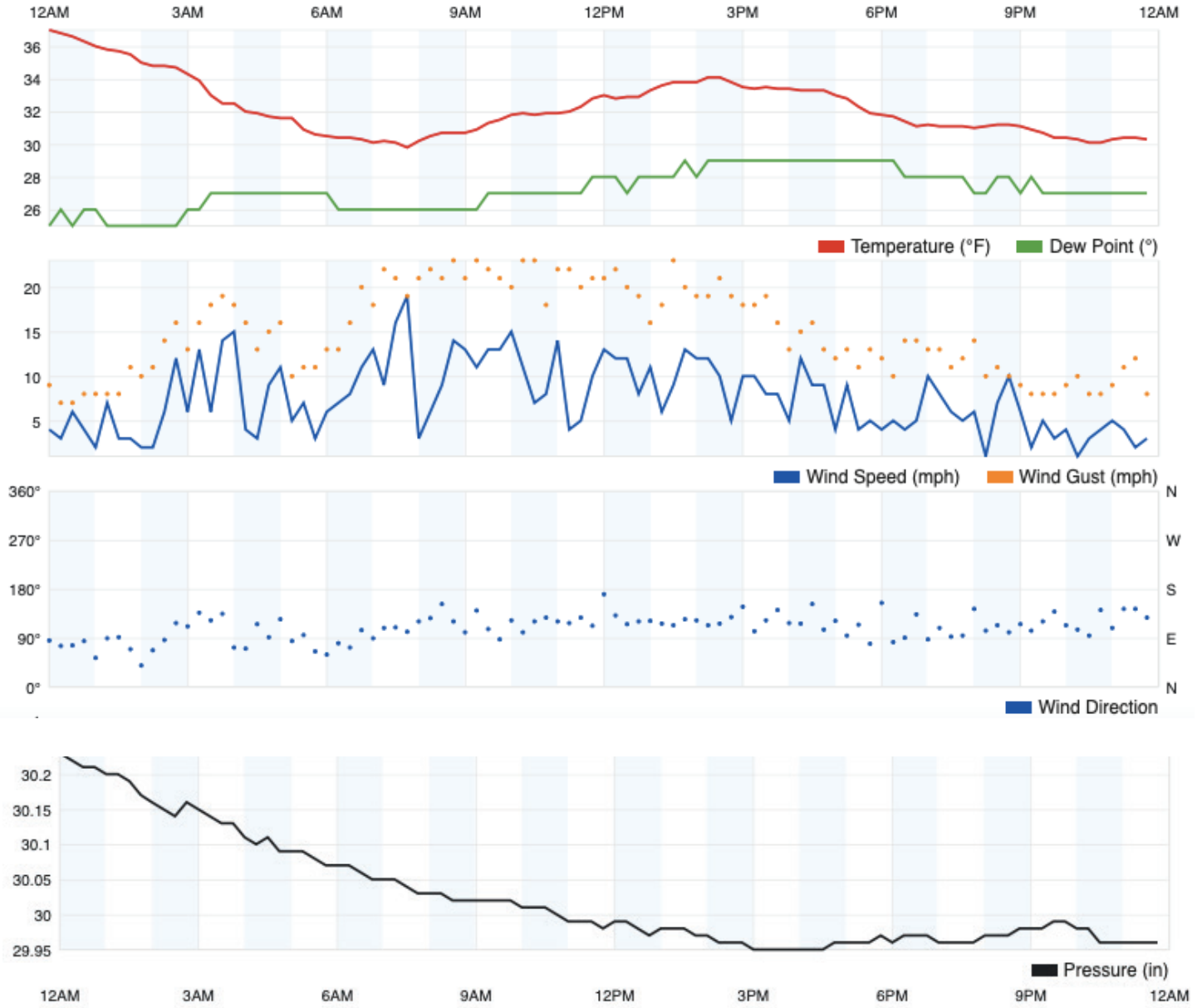
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Hamlin	1671	533	569	1,102
Hand	1344	446	449	895
Hanson	482	170	156	326
Harding	100	52	24	76
Hughes*	7640	1,594	3,023	4,617
Hutchinson*	3320	1,033	1,143	2,176
Hyde*	526	142	192	334
Jackson*	382	114	134	248
Jerauld	819	339	240	579
Jones*	618	158	230	388
Kingsbury	2375	925	725	1,650
Lake	3950	1,524	1,213	2,737
Lawrence	7932	3,054	2,439	5,493
Lincoln	25114	5,719	9,697	15,416
Lyman*	783	269	257	526
Marshall*	1740	570	585	1,155
McCook	2199	615	792	1,407
McPherson	240	78	81	159
Meade*	6168	1,942	2,113	4,055
Mellette*	42	18	12	30
Miner	861	249	306	555
Minnehaha*	78556	19,211	29,670	48,881
Moody*	1745	648	548	1,196
Oglala Lakota*	171	55	58	113
Pennington*	36109	9,279	13,415	22,694
Perkins*	661	299	181	480
Potter	850	304	273	577
Roberts*	4359	1,273	1,543	2,816
Sanborn	952	304	324	628
Spink	2800	884	958	1,842
Stanley*	1170	236	467	703
Sully	357	73	142	215
Todd*	156	48	54	102
Tripp*	1944	574	685	1,259
Turner	3360	948	1,206	2,154
Union	2841	1,131	855	1,986
Walworth*	1842	516	663	1,179
Yankton	9776	2,596	3,590	6,186
Ziebach*	55	15	20	35
Other	5795	1,631	2,082	3,713

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
 20% 20%	 20%			
Patchy Freezing Drizzle and Patchy Fog then Patchy Drizzle	Slight Chance Snow and Patchy Fog	Patchy Fog then Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 36 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 42 °F	Low: 27 °F	High: 48 °F

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Updated: 3/16/2021 2:36 AM Central

Cool Through Wednesday

Today

Cloudy with chance of light snow. Patchy drizzle/freezing drizzle.

Highs in the 30s.

Wednesday

Mostly Cloudy and dry.

Highs 40 - 45°

Warming up for the latter part of the week!

Today should provide for patchy drizzle/freezing drizzle, along with a chance of light snow as a system aloft moves over the region. Conditions should dry out on Wednesday, but it will remain somewhat cool. A warm up is expected later this week. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

March 16, 2012: Temperatures reaching eighty degrees or higher in March across central and northeast South Dakota is a rare occurrence, and for this to occur in mid-March is exceedingly rare. On March 16th, several locations across the area set record highs by topping the 80-degree mark, including Aberdeen, Mobridge, and Pierre. Sisseton and Watertown also set records for March 16th. Aberdeen topped out at 81 degrees, Mobridge reached 83 degrees, with 86 degrees at Pierre.

1885: On this date through the 21st, Pointe-des-Monts, Quebec Canada, received 98 inches of snowfall.

1942: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred over the Central and Southern US on March 16-17th. The tornado outbreak killed 153 people and injured at least 1,284. The best estimate indicates this event contained 13 F3 tornadoes, 6 F4s, and one F5. The F5 tornado occurred north of Peoria, Illinois, in the towns of Alta, Chillicothe, before crossing the Illinois River and striking the town of Lacon. A quarter of the homes in Lacon were destroyed, and debris was carried for 25 miles.

1975 - A single storm brought 119 inches of snow to Crater Lake, O,R establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A small but rare tornado touched down perilously close to Disneyland in Anaheim CA. (Storm Data)

1987 - Softball size hail caused millions of dollars damage to automobiles at Del Rio TX. Three persons were injured when hailstones crashed through a shopping mall skylight. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Central Rockies. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Eighteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee FL with a reading of 24 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A winter storm brought heavy snow and high winds to the southwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Lovelock NV, Salt Lake City UT, and Fort Carson CO. Snow fell at a rate of three inches per hour in the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail and damaging winds from northwest Florida to western South Carolina. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 75 mph at Floridatown FL. Sixteen cities across the northeastern quarter of the nation reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 78 degrees at Burlington VT smashed their previous record for the date by 23 degrees. New York City reported a record high of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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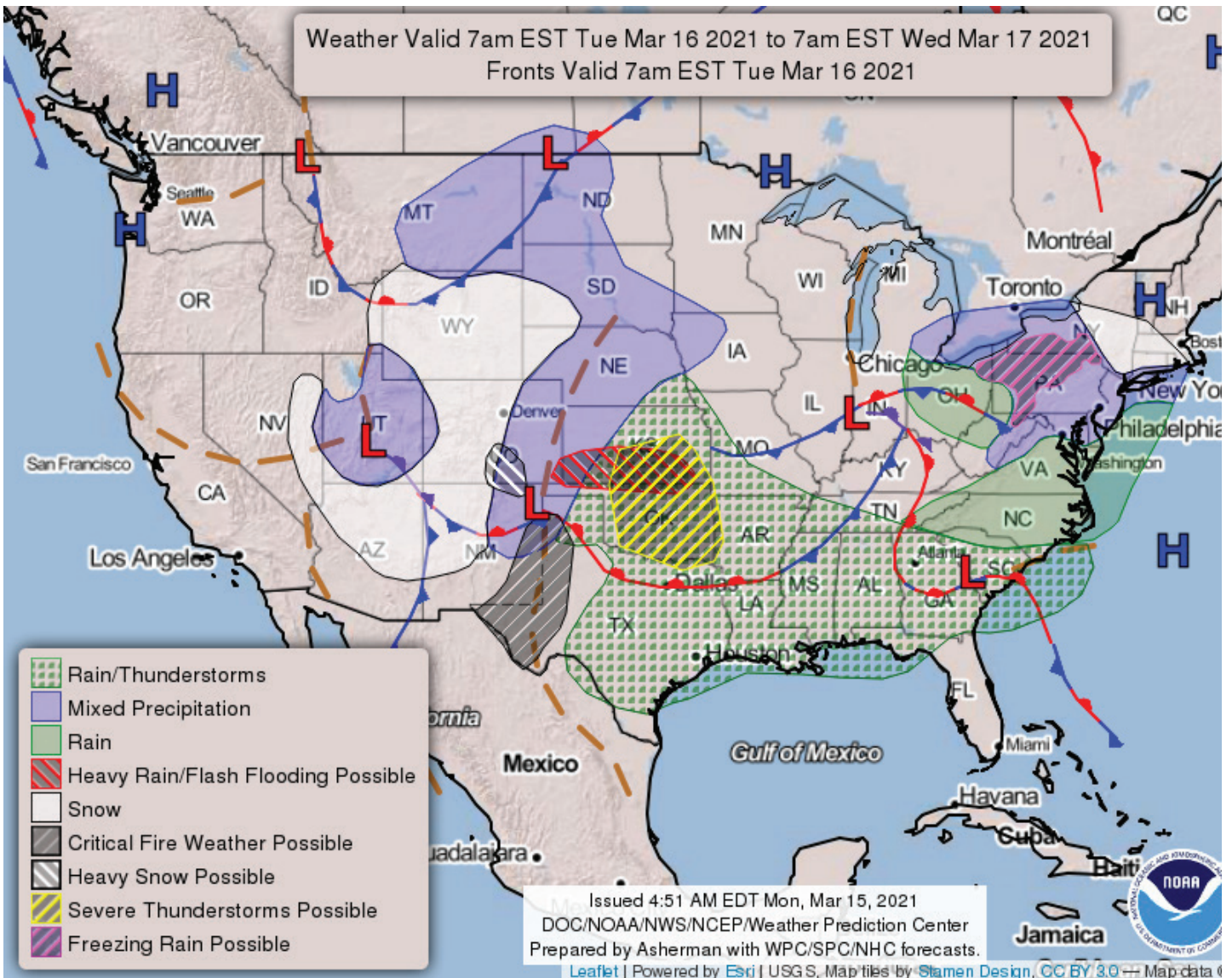
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 37 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 30 °F at 7:38 AM
Wind: 25 mph at 9:03 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 81° in 2012
Record Low: -17° in 1906
Average High: 40°F
Average Low: 20°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.47
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.35
Average Precip to date: 1.49
Precip Year to Date: 0.53
Sunset Tonight: 7:41 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42 a.m.



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NEED DIRECTIONS?

Life's journey is never simple, straight, certain, or serene. It is like a complicated maze that has sharp turns and sudden stops, steep climbs and quick drops. Getting from the beginning to the end is no easy task. Life is often like a "maze."

How blest we are to have the Lord who is personally interested in each of us, is willing to guide us, guard us and give us detailed instructions. But we must be willing to seek Him and trust in Him. Not only is God willing and able to rescue us when we ask Him, but He will guide us and guard us and give us what we need if we allow Him.

"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths," said David. He did not approach God asking for directions and say, "Lord, if You promise me an easy path I will follow it and cooperate with You." He went to God before he started his journey and said, "Show me – teach me," then I will make my next move. By voluntarily asking God for help before he started his journey, he could expect God to be with him and protect him on his journey. But he did not stop there.

He asked God to "teach him His path."

When he asked God to show him his way, he wanted more than directions. He wanted God to be his teacher – his guide through life – explaining His world and His ways to him so life made sense. It is easy to ask God to show us where to go and what to do. But, it is difficult for us to open our hearts and allow Him to teach us His ways!

What a beautiful picture of surrender! Show me where to go, God, and teach me what I need to learn so that I may understand what You are doing in my life. Please? Thanks!

Prayer: Lord, fill us with an attitude of humility and trust and help us look to You as our Leader and Teacher. May we set aside our pursuits and seek Yours. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Psalm 25:4

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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
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
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

2 vehicles strike 3 pedestrians, killing 1 on Rushmore Road

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say three people walking on Mount Rushmore Road during snowy weather Monday morning were struck by separate vehicles, leaving one person dead and another seriously injured.

Rapid City police say the three pedestrians were walking in the middle of the southbound lanes about 6:25 a.m. when the crashes happened. A car had slowed down for the walkers when a pickup swerved to the right to avoid a rear-end collision and hit one of the pedestrians.

The two other pedestrians were hit by an SUV as they walked over to their friend and the pickup, police said. The first pedestrian hit by the pickup refused medical transport. One of the walkers hit by the SUV died and the other is hospitalized with serious injuries, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"You're not expecting pedestrians to be in the roadway" and "you've got to consider it's 6:30 in the morning" so it's still dark out, Rapid City police spokesman Brendyn Medina said of the crashes.

Officials drop community spread rating for Pennington County

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Department of Health officials have dropped the rate of community spread of the coronavirus from substantial to moderate in Pennington County, which includes the Rapid City area.

The county's spread had been classified as substantial, which is the highest level, since May 2020. There have been a total of 13,022 positive tests in the county, including two in Monday's daily report.

Statewide, health officials reported 26 new COVID-19 cases, for a total of 114,540 positive tests since the start of the pandemic. The number of deaths remained unchanged at 1,912.

Hospitalizations stayed the same for the second straight day at 64. Thirteen of those patients are being treated in intensive care units and six are on ventilators.

The update showed that the state has administered 307,059 doses of vaccine, with 34% of residents receiving at least one shot.

The COVID Tracking Project reports there were about 249 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks 17th in the country for new cases per capita. One in every 853 people in the state tested positive in the past week.

Rapid City woman enjoys freedom after commutation from Trump

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota woman whose prison sentence was commuted on Donald Trump's last day in office says the missed experiences included spending time with her children and grandchildren — and learning to use a smartphone.

LaVonne Roach, of Rapid City, was set free in January after spending 23 years locked in three federal prisons for selling methamphetamine. She was among 144 people and seven South Dakotans who received pardons or commutations from Trump.

Roach, a Lakota mother of three, said she "broke down" when told she was getting out.

"Finally I can hug my daughters, finally I can see my grandkids and hug them and not worry about them having to be quiet if they're visiting, like they're little prisoners," she said, holding her new smartphone during the interview. "Finally I get to drive in the car and I can do whatever, go and buy a soda, or some chips or whatever I wanted."

Roach "had an exemplary prison record and has tutored and mentored other prisoners" and "has a strong family support system to help her transition back into the community," the Trump administration said in a news release. Roach said she deserved to do time but not 30 years, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"It felt like finally that what I've done with myself and my time made a difference, or that somebody

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recognized it," she said.

Roach was 33 in 1997 when she was sentenced. Now 56, she will be on supervised release for five years and plans to work in a field where she can help prevent teens from going down the road she did.

"I want to dedicate my life to my church, my family, helping the youth and the women," she said.

A member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Roach attended schools in Rapid City but dropped out in seventh grade. She began using marijuana at a young age but hadn't heard of meth until the early 1990s, when her boyfriend asked if she could help him sell some. He eventually began giving Roach meth to use for herself.

"Eventually the addiction was just horrible and I wanted to get away from him but I was scared. The addiction is what kept me with him. Sometimes I felt strong enough to walk away, and I would, but then he would threaten me, tell me he was going to kidnap my kids," Roach said.

Roach said she only believes in prison for people such as mass murderers and child molesters. She said while she turned her life around in prison, many people don't and end up recidivating. She said it would be more effective for drug dealers to have to attend a treatment program and then give back to the community in some way.

South Dakota ethanol plant surpasses 1 billion-gallon mark

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota ethanol plant says it has surpassed 1 billion gallons of production.

Dakota Ethanol LLC began production at the facility near Wentworth in September 2001. It started with a capacity of 40 million gallons per year and now produces 90 million gallons annually. It has more than 1,000 members.

The company says the ethanol is produced from 30 million bushels of locally grown corn each year. The plant also provides a variety of distillers grains products for livestock feed, as well as corn oil, the Madison Daily Leader reported.

"The work we do here at Dakota Ethanol uplifts our local ag economy and supports area farmers who helped build this industry from the ground up," said Scott Mundt, Dakota Ethanol CEO.

Rockies snowstorm shifts east to northern Plains

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A winter storm that hit the Rockies over the weekend moved eastward Monday.

The storm was expected to hit hardest in a band across South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota, with the National Weather Service issuing a winter storm warning for the area.

School was canceled Monday in Sioux Falls, where 5 1/2 inches of snow had fallen, and no travel was advised in southern and western South Dakota.

Three to 5 inches of snow was expected in southeastern Minnesota.

Baby bottle craze sweeps Gulf Arab states, sparks backlash

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Cafes across several Gulf Arab states started selling coffee and other cold drinks in baby bottles this month, kicking off a new trend that has elicited excitement, confusion — and backlash.

The fad began at Einstein Cafe, a slick dessert chain with branches across the region, from Dubai to Kuwait to Bahrain. Instead of ordinary paper cups, the cafe, inspired by pictures of trendy-looking bottles shared on social media, decided to serve its thick milky drinks in plastic baby bottles.

Although the franchise was no newcomer to baby-themed products — a milkshake with cerelac, the rice cereal for infants, is a long-standing bestseller — the unprecedented fervor over the feeding bottles came as a bit of a shock. All the stress and anxiety over the coronavirus pandemic appears to have spurred some to find an outlet in the strange new craze.

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"Everyone wanted to buy it, people called all day, telling us they're coming with their friends, they're coming with their father and mother," Younes Molla, CEO of the Einstein franchise in the United Arab Emirates, told The Associated Press this week. "After so many months with the pandemic, with all the difficulties, people took photos, they had fun, they remembered their childhood."

Lines clogged Einstein stores across the Gulf. People of all ages streamed onto sidewalks, waiting for their chance to suck coffee and juice from a plastic bottle. Some patrons even brought their own baby bottles to other cafes, pleading with bewildered baristas to fill them up.

Pictures of baby bottles filled with colorful kaleidoscopes of drinks drew thousands of likes on Instagram and ricocheted across the popular social media app TikTok. A cure for the world's uncertainty? A response to some primal instinct? Either way, a trend was born.

Soon, however, online haters took note — the baby bottle drinkers and providers faced a barrage of nasty comments.

"People were so angry, they said horrible things, that we were an 'aeb,' to Islam and the Muslim culture," said Molla, using the Arabic term for shame or dishonor.

Last week, the anger reached the highest levels of government. Dubai authorities cracked down. Inspection teams burst into cafes where the trend had taken off and handed out fines.

"Such indiscriminate use of baby bottles is not only against local culture and traditions," read the government statement, "but the mishandling of the bottle during the filling could also contribute to the spread of COVID-19," an apparent reference to those bringing their used bottles to other cafes.

Authorities, the statement added, had been "alerted to the negative practice and its risks by social media users."

Backlash also came from Kuwait, where the government temporarily shut down Einstein Cafe, and from Bahrain, where the Ministry of Commerce sent police armed with live cameras into cafes and warned all dining establishments that serving drinks in feeding bottles "violates Bahraini customs and traditions."

Oman urged citizens to report baby bottle sightings to the Consumer Protection Authority hotline. Saudi Twitter users and media personalities condemned the trend in the harshest terms, with popular news website Mujaz al-Akhbar lamenting that the kingdom's "daughters have suffered from a loss of modesty and religion."

It's not the first time that the guardians of local customs in Gulf Arab countries have focused their ire on social media phenomena. Vague laws across the region lend authorities broad power to stamp out public immorality and indecency. Emirati officers last spring, for instance, arrested a young expat for posting a video on TikTok in which he sneezed into a banknote, accusing him of "harming" the UAE's reputation and its institutions.

Britain's Prince Philip leaves hospital after treatment

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's Prince Philip left a London hospital on Tuesday after being treated for an infection and undergoing a heart procedure.

Philip, 99, the husband of Queen Elizabeth II, had been hospitalized since being admitted to the private King Edward VII's Hospital in London on Feb. 16, where he was treated for an infection.

He was later transferred to a specialized cardiac care hospital, St. Bartholomew's, for a short stay, before returning to King Edward VII's.

Photographers standing outside the door of the private hospital captured his departure in the back of a black car. Buckingham Palace has not yet commented on the matter.

Philip's illness is not believed to be related to the coronavirus. Both Philip and Elizabeth received COVID-19 vaccinations in January and chose to publicize the matter to encourage others to also take the vaccine.

Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, retired in 2017 and rarely appears in public. Before his hospitalization, he had been isolating at Windsor Castle, west of London, with the queen.

His illness comes as the royal family has been rocked by an interview with Meghan, Duchess of Sussex,

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and Prince Harry. In the explosive broadcast, Meghan, who is biracial, said the palace had failed to help her when she had suicidal thoughts and that an unidentified member of the royal family had raised "concerns" about the color of her baby's skin when she was pregnant with her son, Archie.

The interview, conducted by Oprah Winfrey, divided people around the world. While many say the allegations demonstrate the need for change inside a palace that hasn't kept pace with the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, others have criticized Harry and Meghan for dropping their bombshell while Philip was hospitalized.

The longest-serving royal consort in British history, Philip married the then-Princess Elizabeth in 1947. He and the queen have four children, eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Israeli experts announce discovery of new Dead Sea scrolls

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli archaeologists on Tuesday announced the discovery of dozens of new Dead Sea Scroll fragments bearing a biblical text found in a desert cave and believed hidden during a Jewish revolt against Rome nearly 1,900 years ago.

The fragments of parchment bear lines of Greek text from the books of Zechariah and Nahum and have been dated around the 1st century AD based on the writing style, according to the Israel Antiquities Authority. They are the first new scrolls found in archaeological excavations in the desert south of Jerusalem in 60 years.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of Jewish texts found in desert caves in the West Bank near Qumran in the 1940s and 1950s, date from the 3rd century B.C. to the 1st century A.D. They include the earliest known copies of biblical texts and documents outlining the beliefs of a little understood Jewish sect.

The roughly 80 new pieces are believed to belong to a set of parchment fragments found in a site in southern Israel known as the "Cave of Horror" — named for the 40 human skeletons found there during excavations in the 1960s — that also bear a Greek rendition of the Twelve Minor Prophets, a book in the Hebrew Bible. The cave is located in a remote canyon around 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Jerusalem.

The artifacts were found during an operation in Israel and the occupied West Bank conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority to find scrolls and other artifacts to prevent possible plundering. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 war, and international law prohibits the removal of cultural property from occupied territory. The authority held a news conference Tuesday to unveil the discovery.

The fragments are believed to have been part of a scroll stashed away in the cave during the Bar Kochba Revolt, an armed Jewish uprising against Rome during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, between 132 and 136 AD. Coins struck by rebels and arrowheads found in other caves in the region also hail from that period.

"We found a textual difference that has no parallel with any other manuscript, either in Hebrew or in Greek," said Oren Ableman, a Dead Sea Scroll researcher with the Israel Antiquities Authority. He referred to slight variations in the Greek rendering of the Hebrew original compared to the Septuagint — a translation of the Hebrew Bible to Greek made in Egypt in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC.

"When we think about the biblical text, we think about something very static. It wasn't static. There are slight differences and some of those differences are important," said Joe Uziel, head of the antiquities authority's Dead Sea Scrolls unit. "Every little piece of information that we can add, we can understand a little bit better" how the Biblical text came into its traditional Hebrew form.

Alongside the Roman-era artifacts, the exhibit included far older discoveries of no lesser importance found during its sweep of more than 500 caves in the desert: the 6,000 year-old mummified skeleton of a child, an immense, complete woven basket from the Neolithic period, estimated to be 10,500 years old, and scores of other delicate organic materials preserved in caves' arid climate.

In 1961, Israeli archaeologist Yohanan Aharoni excavated the "Cave of Horror" and his team found nine parchment fragments belonging to a scroll with texts from the Twelve Minor Prophets in Greek, and a scrap of Greek papyrus.

Since then, no new texts have been found during archaeological excavations, but many have turned up

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on the black market, apparently plundered from caves.

For the past four years, Israeli archaeologists have launched a major campaign to scour caves nestled in the precipitous canyons of the Judean Desert in search of scrolls and other rare artifacts. The aim is to find them before plunderers disturb the remote sites, destroying archaeological strata and data in search of antiquities bound for the black market.

Until now the hunt had only found a handful of parchment scraps that bore no text.

Amir Ganor, head of the antiquities theft prevention unit, said that since the commencement of the operation in 2017 there has been virtually no antiquities plundering in the Judean Desert, calling the operation a success.

"For the first time in 70 years, we were able to preempt the plunderers," he said.

Once held in Iranian jail, ex-Marine fights espionage claims

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After Amir Hekmati was released from Iranian custody in a 2016 deal trumpeted as a diplomatic breakthrough, he was declared eligible for \$20 million in compensation from a special U.S. government fund.

But payday never arrived, leaving Hekmati to wonder why.

The answer has finally arrived: Newly filed court documents reviewed by The Associated Press reveal FBI suspicions that he traveled to Iran to sell classified secrets — not, as he says, to visit his grandmother. Hekmati vigorously disputes the allegations, has never faced criminal charges and is challenging a special master's conclusion that he lied about his visit to Iran and is therefore not entitled to the money.

The FBI investigation helps explain the government's refusal for more than two years to pay Hekmati and muddies the narrative around a U.S. citizen, Marine and Iraq war veteran whose release was championed at the U.S. government's highest levels, including by Joe Biden, then the vice president, and John Kerry, then the secretary of state. The documents offer radically conflicting accounts of Hekmati's purpose in visiting Iran and detail the simmering, behind-the-scenes dispute over whether he is entitled to access a fund that compensates victims of international terrorism.

Hekmati said in a sworn statement that allegations he sought to sell out to Iran are ridiculous and offensive. His lawyers say the government's suspicions, detailed in FBI reports and letters from the fund's special master denying payments, are groundless and based on hearsay.

"In this case, the U.S. government should put up or shut up," said Scott Gilbert, a lawyer for Hekmati. "If the government believes they have a case, indict Amir. Try Amir. But you, the U.S. government, won't do that because you can't do that. You don't have sufficient factual evidence to do that."

Gilbert declined to make Hekmati available for an interview while Hekmati's lawsuit seeking compensation is pending.

The FBI and Justice Department declined to comment, but details from the investigation emerge in hundreds of pages of documents filed in the case.

The documents show the FBI opened an espionage investigation into Hekmati as far back as 2011, the same year he was detained in Iran on suspicion he was spying for the CIA.

Hekmati, who was raised in Michigan and served as an infantryman and interpreter in Iraq before being honorably discharged from the Marines in 2005, says he went to Iran to visit an ailing grandmother after a brief, unsatisfying stint as a Defense Department contractor conducting intelligence analysis in Afghanistan.

But the FBI concluded that he went there intent on selling Iran classified information, according to an unsigned five-page summary of their investigation.

The assessment is based partly on accounts from four independent but unnamed witnesses who say Hekmati approached Iranian officials offering classified information, as well as the fact he abruptly resigned his contracting position before his contract was up and left for Iran without telling friends and colleagues, the FBI says. An FBI computer forensics search concluded that while in Afghanistan, he accessed hundreds of classified documents on Iran that agents believe were outside the scope of his job responsibilities, the

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documents say.

Hekmati, the son of Iranian immigrants, says he researched Iran openly to cultivate an expertise on Iranian influence in Afghanistan. "Everyone knew" about the work he was doing, he said at a hearing last year, and supervisors didn't place restrictions. He says he'd already quit his job when he left for Iran and therefore wasn't obligated to tell colleagues of his trip. At no point in Iran, he said, did he meet with any Iranian officials or tried to sell government secrets.

Hekmati's lawyers say the FBI's suspicions are impossible to square with the treatment he endured in prison, which they say included torture and being forced to record a coerced but bogus confession. Were he actually spying for Iran, Gilbert said, "You'd think the guy would have been a valuable asset, they actually would have wanted to do something with him" rather than abuse him.

He was initially sentenced to death, but the punishment was ultimately cut to 10 years.

Hekmati enjoyed support from senior-level officials, including Kerry, who demanded his release, and Biden, who met with his family in Michigan. In January 2016, after four-and-a-half years behind bars, he was freed with several other American citizens, including Washington Post journalist Jason Rezaian, as the Obama administration entered its final year eager for signs of improving relations after the controversial nuclear deal with Iran.

Months later, Hekmati sued Iran over his torture. A federal judge in Washington entered a \$63.5 million default judgment after Iran failed to contest the claims. Hekmati subsequently applied to collect through a Justice Department-run fund for terror victims financed by assets seized from U.S. adversaries. He was awarded the statutory maximum of \$20 million, his lawyers say.

The fund's special master then was Kenneth Feinberg, renowned for overseeing payments to victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. In December 2018, he authorized an initial payment of more than \$839,000.

But for months, no money came. After Hekmati's lawyers warned they'd have to sue, the Justice Department cryptically indicated it was seeking a reconsideration of the award.

In January 2020, Feinberg formally revoked Hekmati's eligibility for the fund, saying his application contained errors and omissions and that information from the Justice Department supported the conclusion that Hekmati visited Iran with the intent of selling classified information.

A second letter last December didn't repeat that precise allegation, but said Hekmati had given "evasive, false and inconsistent statements" during three FBI interviews, failed to "credibly refute" that most of the classified information he accessed related to Iran and "traveled to Iran for primary purposes other than to visit his family."

Feinberg declined to comment, saying his decision "speaks for itself."

The correspondence had been secret until January when Hekmati's lawyers filed it in the Court of Federal Claims in Washington as part of its lawsuit. Hundreds of additional pages of documents have since been filed outlining the investigation.

The documents include summaries of FBI interviews from 2016 in Germany, on Hekmati's way home from Iran, and in Michigan that show FBI agents grilling him with increasing suspicion.

One summary says Hekmati refused to answer when asked if he'd ever accessed classified information on Iran and replied the FBI could figure it out itself. In a follow-up interview, an agent confronted Hekmati with the FBI's assessment that he went to Afghanistan to obtain classified information that he could sell to Iran. After a long back-and-forth, Hekmati told the FBI that he accessed the material to become a subject matter expert on the topic.

Hekmati and his lawyers state the FBI interviews shouldn't be considered credible in part because he was suffering from the effects of post-traumatic stress at the time.

The status of any investigation is unclear, as are Hekmati's prospects of ever receiving payment. But Gilbert, Hekmati's lawyer, says he hopes the decision gets a fresh look by the new Justice Department.

"I am hopeful that we will see the appropriate outcome here and be able to put this saga to bed."

Sex abuse allegations pile up against Israeli rescue chief

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — For decades, Yehuda Meshi-Zahav was one of Israel's most recognizable faces, widely respected for founding an ultra-Orthodox rescue service that cared for victims of Palestinian attacks and bridged the divide between religious and secular Israelis.

But in recent days, Meshi-Zahav has faced a growing list of accusers who say he committed horrendous acts of sexual abuse of men, women and children over several decades.

The scandal has all but destroyed the reputation of a man who just weeks ago received the Israel Prize, the country's highest civilian honor, for his lifetime achievements. It also has shined a light on the scourge of sexual abuse in the insular world of Israel's ultra-Orthodox community.

"When it comes to the ultra-Orthodox in particular, there is a very strong code of silence," said Manny Waks, an advocate for victims of sex abuse in Jewish communities and himself a survivor of abuse in his native Australia.

"There is a closed community mentality, us vs. them. Putting all those things together is a recipe for disaster, in the context of child sexual abuse in particular," he said.

While Meshi-Zahav has denied the allegations, his accusers have delivered similar accounts. They say Meshi-Zahav exploited his public prominence to molest and sexually exploit women, boys and girls alike, and that the ultra-Orthodox community shielded him with a wall of silence.

A victim identified by the letter "N" told the Yedioth Ahronot daily on Sunday that he first met Meshi-Zahav in 1996 when he was 16 and Meshi-Zahav was 20 years his senior.

"All the people close to him during those years knew that I was his escort boy. I turned into a prostitute in the full meaning of the word," he said.

Meshi-Zahav was once a member of a radical ultra-Orthodox sect that opposed Israel's existence, believing a Jewish state could only be established after the arrival of the Messiah. His views changed after a devastating 1989 bus attack near Jerusalem killed 16 people.

Meshi-Zahav joined volunteers who helped collect the remains of the victims, in line with the Jewish custom of honoring the dead. He has said the experience taught him that everyone's pain was equal.

Those efforts led to the formation in 1995 of ZAKA, whose volunteers helped identify the victims of disasters and suicide bombings and collected their remains for a Jewish burial. Over time, the group expanded to include first response paramedics and gained widespread respect in Israel.

Meshi-Zahav has received numerous honors and became a symbol of moderation in the often strained relations between Israel's secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews.

He was invited to light a ceremonial torch at Israel's Independence Day celebrations and recently implored fellow members of the ultra-Orthodox community to respect coronavirus safety precautions after both of his parents died of COVID-19. At the time, he said the rabbis who encouraged followers to ignore the safety rules had "blood on their hands."

Early this month, Meshi-Zahav, 61, was awarded the Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement. He broke down in tears as Education Minister Yoav Gallant delivered the news, saying the award belonged to ZAKA's thousands of volunteers.

That recognition appears to have been the trigger that has led his accusers to come forward after years of silence.

It began last Thursday, when the Haaretz daily published accounts from six alleged victims accusing Meshi-Zahav of rape, sexual molestation and harassment.

In response, Meshi-Zahav wrote a letter saying "these libels are baseless and appear more as gossip and closing of accounts against me." He said he was taking a break as director of ZAKA and relinquished the Israel Prize, but denied any wrongdoing.

Since then, the trickle of testimonies has turned into a torrent.

On Sunday, Israeli police announced its major crimes unit, Lahav 433, had opened a formal investigation.

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On Monday, Hebrew media reported the police had investigated similar allegations against him in 2013, but had closed the probe for lack of evidence.

ZAKA, meanwhile, issued a statement expressing "shock and astonishment," saying the allegations against Meshi-Zahav "arouse deep abhorrence, shock and disgust, light years away from the values that characterize the organization."

Statistics on sexual abuse in the ultra-Orthodox world are difficult to come by.

Waks, who leads the advocacy group VoiCSA, said the general estimate in Israeli society is that one in six boys and one in four girls has experienced sexual abuse. He said there is nothing to suggest the numbers are different in the ultra-Orthodox world.

"Many of us would argue that there are increased vulnerabilities which would translate to increased numbers of abuse," he said. These include the lack of sex education, the inability to keep close tabs on children because of large families and the general level of trust among adults in the tight-knit communities.

He called the allegations against Meshi-Zahav "shocking but not surprising," and said he hoped they would encourage other alleged victims to come forward. He also urged Israel to abolish the statute of limitations in such cases.

The current statute of limitations for sex abuse in the family or with a close community member, such as a teacher or doctor, is set at 20 years from the time the victim turns 18. For other instances, the statute of limitations for molestation is three to five years, and 10 years in cases of rape.

In a landmark case that shined a light on abuses in the ultra-Orthodox world, Israel in January extradited Malka Leifer, an ultra-Orthodox former teacher wanted on 74 counts of child sex abuse, to Australia after a protracted legal battle.

Shana Aaronson, executive director of Magen for Jewish Communities, an Israeli advocacy group for survivors of sexual abuse, said at least six people have approached the organization about Meshi-Zahav. She said the first inklings of accusations surfaced about six years ago.

"The person was unwilling to discuss it anymore, go to the police or anything of that nature," she said.

She said the spectrum of complaints that have surfaced against Meshi-Zahav "paints a picture of a certain personality of someone who was unbelievably confident in the fact that he was just going to get away with this."

Israel's Education Ministry, which bestows the Israel Prize, has yet to comment on Meshi-Zahav. But Miriam Peretz, a member of the prize committee and Israel Prize laureate, has spoken out.

"All of us members of the committee categorically condemn this entire horrible thing," she told Israeli public broadcaster Kan.

EXPLAINER: What is the impact of racially diverse juries?

By MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Questions around race have been central to the murder case against the former Minneapolis police officer who leaned on George Floyd's neck while the Black man pleaded for air.

Of the six men and three women selected through Monday for Derek Chauvin's jury, five are white, one is multiracial, two are Black and one is Hispanic. They range in age from their 20s to their 50s.

Scholars, courts and legal groups have increasingly advocated for greater jury diversity — not just of race, but of gender and socioeconomic backgrounds — as a way to make trials fairer.

DOES THE U.S. CONSTITUTION REQUIRE DIVERSE JURIES?

Not directly. But the Constitution does guarantee a trial "by an impartial jury," widely interpreted to mean juries that reflect the community where the alleged crimes occurred rather than just a narrow segment of it.

The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized the value of jury diversity for decades, even if the ideal in practice has often been elusive. In the 1940 decision *Smith vs. Texas*, the high court ruled unanimously that the Constitution prohibits racial discrimination in the selection of grand juries, finding it "at war with our basic concepts of a democratic society and a representative government."

WHY ARE DIVERSE JURIES MORE LIKELY TO DELIVER FAIRER VERDICTS?

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Alan Tuerkheimer, a Chicago-based jury consultant who advises lawyers nationwide, said when a jury shares the same ethnic background, gender and overall outlook, the panel's members are less likely to question their own biases and preconceptions heading into deliberations.

"With diverse juries, there are more vantage points," he said. "They are not all going to have the same assumptions. That makes for a richer deliberation."

Diversity can serve jurors well during deliberations as they sort through evidence and assess trial testimony.

"Jurors from different cultures may have different BS meters," Tuerkheimer said. "That is a stepping stone to getting a verdict right."

DOES DATA SUPPORT THE IDEA THAT SINGLE-RACE JURIES ACT DIFFERENTLY?

Research on the subject is notoriously difficult, in part because each criminal case is unique.

A leading researcher on the subject, Samuel R. Sommers, found in a 2006 study based on mock trials that all-white juries are more prone to convict Black defendants. But the study also found whites on a jury readily became more thorough and more conscientious when non-whites were added.

"Being in a diverse setting has a motivational influence on the white jurors; it gets them scrutinizing information more carefully knowing that they're going to have to discuss it with a diverse group," Sommers told Science magazine at the time about his findings.

His study did not look at whether the same phenomenon occurred in panels made up entirely of Black jurors, but he suspected the results would be similar.

Whites also appeared more willing to discuss the relevance of race to a case when there were non-whites on the panel, Sommers found. Other studies have found similarly positive effects on juries, even if just one or two non-white jurors are included with a mostly white jury.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER PITFALLS OF LARGELY HOMOGENEOUS JURIES?

A significant one is a loss of public faith in the system of justice, often a perception that the deck is stacked against minority groups.

One example was a mostly white jury's acquittal in 1992 of the white police officers charged with beating Black motorist Rodney King. The verdict angered members the city's African American community, prompting street protests and undercutting trust in the jury system.

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

Children among victims of jihadi rebels in Mozambique

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Northern Mozambique's humanitarian crisis is growing rapidly, with nearly 670,000 people displaced by the Islamic extremist insurgency in Cabo Delgado province, international aid groups said Tuesday.

Children as young as 11 are being beheaded by the rebels, according to workers for Save the Children, who interviewed grief-stricken families.

The number of displaced has dramatically increased by more than 500,000 in the past year and nearly 1 million people are in need of food aid, according to the U.N. A high number of the displaced are dependent upon the generosity of already poor families, with shortages of water, food, and sanitation widespread.

More than 2,600 people have died in the conflict since it started in 2017, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

In response to the deteriorating security situation in Cabo Delgado, the United States this week sent military specialists to train the Mozambican army to battle the extremists.

The extremists have held the port town of Mocimboa da Praia since August, and in recent months they have attacked several villages and made it unsafe to travel to other centers by road. The extremists are allied with the Islamic State group but are known locally as al-Shabab, although they have no known ties

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to the extremist rebels in Somalia who go by that name.

The conflict is in a resource-rich area where huge deposits of liquified natural gas have been discovered and the French gas firm Total has embarked on a multibillion-dollar investment.

Families fleeing the violence hike for days and nights on paths through the jungle, coming across the remains of those who died on the perilous journey or who were killed by the insurgents, according to Save the Children workers who interviewed survivors.

The rapidly increasing numbers of displaced people come as Cabo Delgado province is still recovering from severe cyclones in 2019.

"Reports of attacks on children sicken us to our core," said Chance Briggs, Save the Children's country director in Mozambique. "Our staff have been brought to tears when hearing the stories of suffering told by mothers in displacement camps. This violence has to stop, and displaced families need to be supported as they find their bearings and recover from the trauma."

Last week the Biden administration designated Mozambique's extremist rebels as a "foreign terrorist organization," imposing wide-ranging sanctions on the group.

War crimes have been committed by all sides fighting in Mozambique's conflict, including the jihadi rebels, government forces and a South African mercenary outfit that provides helicopter support to government troops, according to international rights group Amnesty International.

The U.S. military specialists will conduct a two-month training program with Mozambican marines "to prevent the spread of terrorism and violent extremism," the U.S. embassy in Mozambique's capital, Maputo, said in a statement Monday.

In addition to training, the U.S. government will also provide medical and communications equipment, said the statement.

Following the reports of abuses in the Mozambican conflict, the short U.S. statement emphasized that the trainers will promote human rights.

"The United States prioritizes the respect for human rights, protection of civilians, and engagement with civil society in all security assistance," said the statement. "The United States is committed to supporting Mozambique with a multifaceted and holistic approach to counter and prevent the spread of terrorism and violent extremism."

Tom Bowker in Uzes, France, contributed to this report.

Biden to join road show promoting relief plan with Pa. visit

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, JONATHAN LEMIRE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — President Joe Biden is joining top messengers already crisscrossing the country to highlight the benefits of his massive COVID-19 rescue plan, in his case by promoting aid for small businesses.

Biden is set to visit a small business in suburban Philadelphia on Tuesday, his initial trip outside Washington for the "Help is here" tour that got underway Monday. Vice President Kamala Harris dropped in on a COVID-19 vaccination site and a culinary academy in Las Vegas while first lady Jill Biden toured a New Jersey elementary school.

"We want to avoid a situation where people are unaware of what they're entitled to," Harris said at the culinary academy. "It's not selling it; it literally is letting people know their rights. Think of it more as a public education campaign."

The White House is wasting no time promoting the \$1.9 trillion relief plan, which Biden signed into law last week, looking to build momentum for the rest of his agenda and anxious to avoid the mistakes of 2009 in boosting that year's recovery effort. Even veterans of Barack Obama's administration acknowledge they did not do enough then to showcase their massive economic stimulus package.

"Hope is here in real and tangible ways," Biden said Monday at the White House. He said the new government spending will bankroll efforts that could allow the nation to emerge from the pandemic's twin crises, health and economic.

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"Shots in arms and money in pockets," the president said. "That's important. The American Rescue Plan is already doing what it was designed to do: make a difference in people's everyday lives. We're just getting started."

Biden said that within the next 10 days, his administration will clear two important benchmarks: distributing 100 million stimulus payments and administering 100 million vaccine doses since he took office. To commemorate those milestones, Biden and his top representatives are embarking on their most ambitious travel schedule of his young presidency, visiting a series of potential election battleground states this week.

The sales pitch was leaving Republicans cold.

Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell dismissed the target of doses that Biden set when he took office as "not some audacious goal" but just the pace that he inherited. And he mocked Biden's talk of Americans working toward merely being able to gather in small groups by July 4th as "bizarre."

The Biden plan cleared Congress without any backing from Republicans, despite polling that found broad public support. Republicans argued the bill was too expensive, especially with vaccinations making progress against the virus, and included too many provisions not directly linked to the pandemic.

After beginning the sales campaign with high-profile speeches, Biden will head to Pennsylvania on Tuesday and then join Harris in Georgia on Friday. Others on his team are visiting the electorally important states of Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico and New Hampshire. The trip Monday marked Harris' first official journey in office and included an unscheduled stop at a vegan taco stand as well as a coffee stand at the Culinary Academy Las Vegas.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said, "We want to take some time to engage directly with the American people and make sure they understand the benefits of the package and how it is going to help them get through this difficult period of time."

The White House has detailed a theme for each day, focusing on small businesses, schools, home evictions and direct checks to most Americans. Jill Biden was joined by New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy on a tour Monday of Samuel Smith Elementary School in Burlington, where she highlighted steps the school took to reopen.

But her tour revealed the challenges ahead: In one classroom she visited, only two students were in attendance for in-person learning while the other 17 were virtual. The first lady sat down at a computer to say hello to the remote learners.

"I just I love being here at a school again: Educators, parents and students, the entire school has come together to bring kids back to the classroom," she said. "But even with your best efforts, students can't come, they can't come in every day, which means that their parents are still having to take time off of work, or figure out childcare solutions. And this school like schools across this country can't fully reopen without help."

The president on Monday also announced that he had chosen Gene Sperling, a longtime Democratic economic policy expert, to oversee the massive stimulus package, the role Biden himself had played for the 2009 economic rescue package. The goal, Biden said, is to "stay on top of every dollar spent."

"I learned from my experience implementing the Recovery Act just how important it is to have someone who can manage all the moving parts with efficiency, speed and integrity and accountability," said the president.

The plan's key features include direct payments of \$1,400 for most single taxpayers, or \$2,800 for married couples filing jointly, plus \$1,400 per dependent — a total of \$5,600 for a married couple with two children. The payments phase out for people 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 provisions.

Restaurants and bars that were forced to close or limit service can 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 rent and mortgage payments.

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Harris' husband, Doug Emhoff, joined his wife for the Western trip, visiting a food relief organization Monday in Las Vegas and participating 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 went first, touring a UPS distribution center in Landover, Maryland, on Monday that also delivers vaccines in the Washington area.

Miller reported from Washington. Lemire reported from New York. Associated Press writer Hope Yen in Washington contributed.

Sweden is latest country to stop using AstraZeneca vaccine

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Sweden on Tuesday became the latest country to pause use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine as European regulators review safety data following reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients.

The company and international regulators continue to say the vaccine is safe, however, and many countries elsewhere in the world are forging ahead with their vaccination campaigns.

The European Medicines Agency plans to meet Thursday to review experts' findings on the vaccine and decide whether action needs to be taken. The agency has so far said that the benefits of receiving the shot outweigh the risk of side effects.

The Swedish Public Health Agency said Tuesday that it would suspend use of the AstraZeneca vaccine pending the results of the EMA meeting. Germany, France, Italy and Spain were among countries that suspended use of the vaccine on Monday.

"The decision is a precautionary measure," Sweden's chief epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, said in a statement.

Also Tuesday, the German government said it would postpone until after the EMA meeting a virtual summit of state governors called to review the country's vaccination efforts. The summit had been scheduled for Wednesday,

AstraZeneca's vaccine is one of three authorized for use on the European continent. But escalating concern about the shot has created another setback for the European Union's vaccination drive, which has been plagued by shortages and other hurdles and is lagging far behind the efforts in Britain and the U.S.

AstraZeneca said there is no evidence the vaccine carries an increased risk of blood clots. There have been 37 reports of blood clots among the more than 17 million people who have received the vaccine across the EU and Britain, the company said.

"This is much lower than would be expected to occur naturally in a general population of this size and is similar across other licensed COVID-19 vaccines," AstraZeneca said.

Much of Asia has shrugged off concerns about the AstraZeneca jab, with Thailand's prime minister receiving a shot Tuesday as the country started rolling out the vaccine.

"There are people who have concerns," Prayuth Chan-ocha said after his vaccination. "But we must believe doctors, believe in our medical professionals."

Thailand was the first country outside Europe to temporarily suspend use of the AstraZeneca vaccine. But health authorities later decided to go ahead with it, with Prayuth and members of his Cabinet receiving the first shots.

Indonesia suspended use of the vaccine on Monday, saying it was waiting for a full report from the World Health Organization regarding possible side effects.

AP reporters around the world contributed to this report.

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Advocates seek Biden push on gun bills, but prospects iffy

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After President Joe Biden's giant COVID-19 relief bill passed Congress, he made a prime-time address to the nation and presided over a Rose Garden ceremony.

But there wasn't so much as a statement from the White House after the House passed legislation that would require background checks for gun purchases, a signature Democratic issue for decades.

Biden's views on gun regulation have evolved along with his party — at one point reluctant to impose too many restrictions that blue-collar Democrats opposed — to a near-unanimous call to do something about gun violence after a spate of mass shootings.

In the early months of Biden's presidency, even popular proposals like background checks are lower on his list of priorities and their prospects in the Senate cloudy.

The two bills that passed the House last week would expand background checks on gun purchases, the first significant movement on gun control since Democrats took control of both chambers of Congress and the White House.

They are among a number of major bills House Democrats have pushed through in recent weeks, including legislation to expand voting rights and support union organizing, that now face an uncertain fate in the Senate. Supporters of the background check bills are hoping to see Biden become more actively involved.

"I hope and I expect that President Biden will be willing to get engaged in hand to hand advocacy in the Senate on background checks," said Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who has led the push for gun control in the Senate.

While Biden was more conservative on gun issues early in his Senate career, in the mid-1990s he helped pass the Brady bill, which mandated federal background checks for gun purchases, and he wrote the 1994 crime bill that included a 10-year assault weapons ban.

During his presidential campaign, Biden embraced an expansive gun-control agenda, backing an assault weapons ban and buyback program that was once seen as highly controversial and won't see action in a divided Congress.

On the third anniversary of the Parkland, Florida, school shooting last month, Biden issued a statement reiterating his support for such measures, prompting the National Rifle Association to label him "increasingly hostile" towards gun rights.

"Today, I am calling on Congress to enact commonsense gun law reforms, including requiring background checks on all gun sales, banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and eliminating immunity for gun manufacturers who knowingly put weapons of war on our streets," Biden said in the statement.

But the bills that just passed the House received meager GOP support there and face a much tougher road in the Senate, where 10 Republicans would have to join all 50 Democrats and independents for them to move toward passage.

Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., who sponsored one of the bills, suggested Democrats would have to eliminate the 60-vote threshold for passing legislation to move them along.

"I think it's about time for us to get rid of the filibuster," Clyburn said in an interview.

But multiple Democrats have expressed opposition to reforming the filibuster, as has Biden himself. That leaves gun-control advocates hoping that the politics of gun control have shifted enough that more Republicans may be open to legislation that advocates argue is widely popular with the American public.

With Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., promising to give the background check bills a vote on the floor, Democrats are hopeful Republicans will step up when they're put on the spot.

They're also heartened by the declining influence of the NRA, which filed for bankruptcy this year after being outspent by gun-control groups for the first time during the 2018 election.

"I think the implosion of the NRA, the growing support among the American people and the inevitability

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of increased support gives us an opportunity we haven't had before," Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said last week. He added: "What's changed is we now have a president who can put pressure on our colleagues."

While much of Biden's gun-control agenda is unlikely to win passage in an evenly divided Senate, some of his proposals can be achieved by prioritizing resources within the federal government. Biden has proposed, for instance, directing the FBI to ensure state and local law enforcement agencies are notified if someone who tries to buy a gun fails a background check. He has also said he'll ask his attorney general to look for ways to better enforce gun laws.

But the Biden administration has yet to signal how the president himself will get engaged. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden is looking forward to working with Congress "to advance priorities, including repealing gun manufacturers' liability shields." She added that he "will look for opportunities to be engaged" on the background check bills.

Democrats still face political headwinds. A Gallup poll last November found that while 57% of Americans want stricter gun laws, that marked the lowest number in favor since 2016. And gun sales hit a new record high in January, continuing a surge over the past year.

Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania and Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a moderate, have worked together for years to find compromise on background checks.

In a statement, Toomey's office said the senator remains supportive of a previous bipartisan proposal with Manchin but believes "progress is only possible on this issue if the measure in question is narrow and protects the rights of law-abiding gun owners."

Still, advocates say with a largely unified Democratic Party and the president on their side, they hope to finally see some movement.

John Feinblatt, president of Everytown USA, pointed in particular to Democratic wins in the 2018 midterms while running openly for gun control as evidence the politics are changing.

"Democrats are in control of the White House and both chambers of Congress. The NRA is in the weakest shape it's ever been," he said. "It's become clear that gun-safety laws aren't only good life-saving policies, they're good politics."

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

N Korea warns US not to 'cause a stink' before Seoul meeting

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — In North Korea's first comments directed at the Biden administration, Kim Jong Un's powerful sister on Tuesday warned the United States to "refrain from causing a stink" if it wants to "sleep in peace" for the next four years.

Kim Yo Jong's statement was issued as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Asia to talk with U.S. allies Japan and South Korea about North Korea and other regional issues. They have meetings in Tokyo on Tuesday before speaking to officials in Seoul on Wednesday.

"We take this opportunity to warn the new U.S. administration trying hard to give off (gun) powder smell in our land," she said. "If it wants to sleep in peace for coming four years, it had better refrain from causing a stink at its first step."

Kim Yo Jong, a senior official who handles inter-Korean affairs, also criticized the U.S. and South Korea for holding military exercises. She also said the North would consider abandoning a 2018 bilateral agreement on reducing military tensions and abolish a decades-old ruling party unit tasked to handle inter-Korean relations if it no longer had to cooperate with the South.

She said the North would also consider scrapping an office that handled South Korean tours to the North's scenic Diamond Mountain, which Seoul suspended in 2008 after a North Korean guard fatally shot a South Korean tourist.

The North "will watch the future attitude and actions of the (South Korean) authorities," before deter-

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mining whether to take exceptional measures against its rival, she said in her statement published in Pyongyang's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper.

Challenges posed by North Korea's nuclear arsenal and China's growing influence loom large in the Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster U.S. influence and clam concerns about the U.S. role in Asia following four years of President Donald Trump's "America first" approach.

A senior official from the Biden administration said Saturday that U.S. officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since last month, but had yet to receive a response. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the diplomatic outreach and spoke on condition of anonymity.

"This is Kim Yo Jong continuing to be the tip of the wedge North Korea tries to drive between South Korea and its U.S. ally," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul. "North Korea's latest threats mean the allies have precious little time to coordinate their approaches on deterrence, sanctions and engagement."

Biden's presidency begins as Kim Jong Un faces perhaps the toughest moment of his nine-year rule. His country's battered economy has decayed further amid pandemic border closures while his summits with Trump failed to lift crippling sanctions.

While Kim in recent political speeches has vowed to strengthen his nuclear weapons program, he also has said the fate of U.S. relations depends on Washington's actions.

The 2018 military agreement, which had been the most tangible outcome from the three summits between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, requires the countries to take steps to reduce conventional military threats, such as establishing border buffers in land and sea and no-fly zones.

But inter-Korean relations have lain in ruin amid the stalemate in the nuclear diplomacy between Washington and Pyongyang.

The South Korean and U.S. militaries began annual military exercises last week that continue through Thursday. The drills are command post exercises and computerized simulation and don't involve field training. They said they held the downsized drills after reviewing factors like the status of COVID-19 and diplomatic efforts to resume the nuclear talks with North Korea.

But Kim Yo Jong said even the smaller drills are an act of hostility toward the North. In the past, the North has often responded with U.S.-South Korea drills with missile tests.

"(War drills) and hostility can never go with dialogue and cooperation," she said.

Boo Seung-chan, a spokesperson from South Korea's Defense Ministry, said the combined drills were defensive in nature and called for the North to show a more "flexible attitude" that would be constructive to stabilizing peace on the Korean Peninsula. He said the South's military wasn't detecting any unusual signs of military activity from the North.

Thai PM gets AstraZeneca jab, 1 Asian country suspends

By PATRICK QUINN Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's prime minister received a shot of the COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by AstraZeneca on Tuesday, as much of Asia shrugged off concerns about reports of blood clots in some recipients in Europe, saying that so far there is no evidence to link the two.

Many countries using the vaccine also said the benefits from inoculation far outweighed possible risks, even as parts of Europe suspended it pending investigation of potential side effects.

AstraZeneca has developed a manufacturing base in Asia, and the Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine maker, has been contracted by the company to produce a billion doses of the vaccine for developing nations. Hundreds of millions more are to be manufactured this year in Australia, Japan, Thailand and South Korea.

"There are people who have concerns," Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said after he received the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine. "But we must believe doctors, believe in our medical professionals."

Thailand last week was the first country outside Europe to temporarily suspend using the AstraZeneca

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vaccine. Indonesia followed on Monday, saying it was waiting for a full report from the World Health Organization regarding possible side effects.

But Thailand's health authorities decided to go ahead with AstraZeneca, with Prayuth and members of his Cabinet receiving the first shots.

A large number of European countries — including Germany, France, Italy and Spain — suspended use of the AstraZeneca vaccine Monday over reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients, though the company and international regulators say there is no evidence the shot is to blame.

The EU's drug regulatory agency called a meeting for Thursday to review experts' findings on the AstraZeneca shot and to decide whether action needs to be taken.

Other countries in the Asia-Pacific region also said they would press ahead with vaccination programs.

In the Philippines, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said his country would not suspend usage because the benefits outweighed any risks. The country has so far received 525,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine under the World Health Organization's COVAX arrangement and has administered 12,788 doses so far. Several million more doses have been ordered by the government and private companies.

"There is still no clear data that shows that the blood clotting was caused by AstraZeneca. If such data will come out, maybe we will also stop the use of AstraZeneca," Roque said. "As of now, our experts are saying again that the benefits we get from using AstraZeneca are larger than the side effects of this vaccine."

Australian Health Minister Greg Hunt said his country would not suspend vaccinations. Australia has vaccinated about 200,000 people so far and plans to import and manufacture 70 million vaccine doses from AstraZeneca.

"The government clearly, unequivocally, absolutely supports the AstraZeneca rollout, clearly, unequivocally, absolutely. And the reason why is very simple — it will help save lives and protect lives, and it's done so on the basis of the medical advice," Hunt told Parliament.

Australia's chief medical officer, Paul Kelly, said there was no evidence so far that the vaccine causes blood clots.

"Blood clots happen, they happen in Australia fairly commonly," he said. "But, from my perspective, I do not see that there is any specific link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clots, and I'm not alone in that opinion."

By far the largest user of the AstraZeneca vaccine is India.

India is using two vaccines — the AstraZeneca shot made by Serum Institute of India, and another one by Indian vaccine maker Bharat Biotech — to immunize its vast population. Of the more than 25.6 million people in India who have received at least one shot of a vaccine, over 23.4 million have received the AstraZeneca shot, according to government data.

Health officials told the Press Trust of India news agency on Saturday that a total of 234 adverse events, including 71 deaths, had been reported after receiving either vaccine — but that no causal link had been found. The government is now reviewing the cases for a final assessment.

Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine maker, has been contracted by AstraZeneca to make a billion doses of vaccine for developing nations. By March 4, India had exported over 48.1 million doses of vaccine, including 11.9 million doses to COVAX and 28.8 million doses as commercial exports, according to government data.

Meanwhile, health activists and medical ethics experts in India have warned that India's systems for monitoring any harmful side effects are too lax.

With the exception of a few countries, such as Singapore and India, Asian nations have been quite slow in getting their populations vaccinated. Most of the nations, including Australia, New Zealand and Thailand, have been relatively successful in containing the spread of COVID-19.

Thailand has ordered just enough vaccine from AstraZeneca and China to cover about half its population this year and has so far managed to inoculate around 50,000 people in high-risk groups.

Associated Press journalists Chalida Ekvitthayavechnukul in Bangkok, Jim Gomez in Manila, Rod McGuirk

in Canberra, Australia, Moussa Moussa in Sydney, Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia, Aniruddha Ghosal in New Delhi, Kim Tong-hyung in Seoul, South Korea, and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report

Researchers study impact of pandemic cancer screening pause

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer

John Abraham's colonoscopy was postponed for several months because of the pandemic. When he finally got it, doctors found a growth too big to be removed safely during the scope exam. He had to wait several weeks for surgery, then several more to learn it had not yet turned cancerous.

"I absolutely wonder if I had gotten screened when I was supposed to have, if this would have been different" and surgery could have been avoided, said Abraham, a mortgage banker in Peoria, Illinois.

Millions of colonoscopies, mammograms, lung scans, Pap tests and other cancer screenings were suspended for several months last spring in the United States and elsewhere as COVID-19 swamped medical care.

Now researchers are studying the impact, looking to see how many cancers were missed and whether tumors found since then are more advanced.

Already, there are hints of trouble. University of Cincinnati researchers found that when CT scans to check for lung cancer resumed in June, 29% of patients had suspicious nodules versus 8% in prior years.

Multiple studies suggest that fewer cancers were diagnosed last year, likely because of less screening. About 75 cancer organizations recently urged a return to prepandemic screening levels as soon as safely possible.

But tumors take years to develop, and some reports suggest that a few months' delay in screening for certain types of cancer may not have been as bad as feared. For example, researchers in the Netherlands found that a lapse in that country's mammography program did not lead to more cancers being found at a late stage after screening resumed.

The pandemic also bred some creative solutions, such as wider use of tests that can be done at home. In Philadelphia, a large church partnered with local doctors and used its drive-thru flu shot program to also pass out stool tests for colon cancer screening.

"We're not afraid to try anything as it relates to health and wellness," said the Rev. Leroy Miles of Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church. "The women were encouraging men to get the screening, saying, 'I got my mammogram.' And I'm saying, 'ma'am, you have a colon too.'"

SCREENING'S MERITS

Screening tests differ in their risks and benefits, and health experts have long debated who should get which ones and how often. The pandemic lapse may serve as a "natural experiment" to see their value in modern times versus what's known from studies done long ago.

Any difference in deaths may not be seen for years, and early detection is only one factor in survival. Treatment also matters and it was hurt by pandemic delays too.

Dr. Ned Sharpless, director of the U.S. National Cancer Institute, estimates there could be nearly 10,000 excess deaths over the next decade because of delayed detection and treatment of breast and colon cancers. Postponing care "was prudent at one time" because of the risks of COVID-19 exposure, but deferring for too long "may turn one public health crisis into many others," he wrote in the journal *Science*.

Based on what's known about breast cancer deaths from past years in the United States, about 10% "could have been prevented if women were getting routine screening," but 20% to 25% could have been prevented with appropriate treatment, said Dr. Otis Brawley, a Johns Hopkins University professor and former chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society.

"That's not to say screening is not important, but many people think that cancer screening saves more lives than it actually does," Brawley said.

A short-term delay may not hurt mortality much if screening resumes quickly, as it needs to do, he said.

Some reassuring news came at a recent American Association for Cancer Research conference from Sabine Siesling of the Netherlands Comprehensive Cancer Organization. That country offers women ages

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50 to 74 a mammogram every two years but stopped in mid-March because of COVID-19. After it resumed in late summer, results "did not show any shift" to more advanced tumors, she reported.

Researchers from Massachusetts General and Brigham and Women's Hospital analyzed their screening tests for lung, cervical, colon, prostate and breast cancer. Screening dropped dramatically from March through June but the portion that found cancer or a precancer was higher than usual, suggesting that those who did get screened were at higher risk. When screening returned to near-normal from June to September, the number of potentially "missed" cancers was lower than expected.

GETTING CREATIVE

When 43-year-old actor Chadwick Boseman died of colon cancer last summer, Miles feared for the 12,000 members of his Philadelphia church. Black people are more likely to die of the disease than other groups, and there was limited access to colonoscopies, which can find and remove growths before they turn cancerous.

Miles, who has drawn more than 1,000 church members to other health events, called the University of Pennsylvania and said, "we know how to get people to come if you're willing and able to set something up."

Dr. Carmen Guerra had a federal grant to increase screening in racially diverse communities and realized that home tests could help. Studies show these tests, which look for blood in stool, help save lives. People put a tiny stool sample in a tube and mail it to a lab or, in this case, use a drop box at the church. If blood is found, the next step is colonoscopy.

Doctors passed out kits in the parking lot during a drive-thru flu shot event in October. Church members had to watch a video about colon cancer in advance and register to ensure they qualified for screening.

So far, 154 kits have been returned. Stacy Hill was among the 13 who tested positive. The 48-year-old Philadelphia woman had just lost her job and health insurance. Her colonoscopy revealed two growths that, like Abraham's, were caught before they turned cancerous.

"I was shocked," Hill said. "I'm a proactive-type person so I was glad to know."

The doctors also helped her enroll in Medicaid, "so now I have medical insurance" and can continue getting cancer screenings, she said.

The church hopes to offer the home tests again during blood pressure and diabetes screening events this spring.

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New wave of bars creates buzz without the booze

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

There's something missing from a new wave of bars opening around the world: Alcohol.

Aimed at the growing number of people exploring sobriety, the bars pour adult drinks like craft cocktails without the booze. At 0% Non-Alcohol Experience, a futuristic bar in Tokyo, patrons can sip a mix of non-alcoholic white wine, sake and cranberries from a sugar-rimmed glass. On a recent evening at Sans Bar in Austin, Texas, customers gathered at outdoor tables, enjoying live music, bottles of alcohol-free IPA and drinks like the watermelon mockarita, which is made with a tequila alternative.

Sober bars aren't a new phenomenon. They first appeared in the 19th century as part of the temperance movement. But while previous iterations were geared toward non-drinkers or people in recovery, the newer venues welcome the sober as well as the curious.

"A lot of people just want to drink less," said Chris Marshall, Sans Bar's founder.

Marshall, who has been sober for 14 years, opened the bar after serving as an addiction counselor. But he estimates 75% of his customers also drink alcohol outside of his bar.

"It's just easier," said Sondra Prineaux, a regular customer at Sans Bar. "I don't have to worry about leaving my car here and getting an Uber home. I'll wake up without a headache."

Abstinence challenges like Dry January — which began in 2013 — and a growing interest in health and

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wellness are behind the trend, said Brandy Rand, chief operating officer for the Americas at IWSR Drinks Market Analysis.

Last year, alcohol consumption in 10 key markets — including the U.S., Germany, Japan and Brazil — fell 5%, IWSR said. Consumption of low- and no-alcohol drinks rose 1% in that same time period.

Alcohol still far outsells low- and no-alcohol drinks. Drinkers in those key markets consumed 9.7 billion 9-liter cases of alcohol in 2020, compared to 292 million 9-liter cases of low- and no-alcohol beverages. But Rand notes that global consumption of low- and no-alcohol beer, wine and spirits is growing two to three times faster than overall alcohol consumption.

An explosion of new products is also fueling sales. There are drinks from smaller makers like Chicago's Ritual Zero Proof — which opened in 2019 and makes no-alcohol whiskey, gin and tequila — and big companies like Anheuser-Busch, which introduced alcohol-free Budweiser Zero last year.

"I have the wonderful problem of too many great options," said Douglas Watters, who opened Spirited Away, a New York shop that sells non-alcoholic beer, wine and spirits, in November.

Watters said the pandemic lockdown caused him to rethink his usual pattern of ending each day with a cocktail. He started experimenting with non-alcoholic beverages, and by August he had decided to open his store. Many of his customers are sober, he said, but others are pregnant or have health issues. Some are training for marathons; others just want to cut back on alcohol.

"There are a lot of people, this past year more than ever, thinking more critically about what they're drinking and how it's making them feel," he said.

Joshua James, a veteran bartender, had a similar realization during the pandemic. After a stint at Friendship House, a substance abuse treatment center, he recently opened Ocean Beach Cafe, an alcohol-free bar in San Francisco.

"I wanted to destigmatize the words addiction, recovery and sober," he said. "There's a thousand reasons to not want to drink as much."

The coronavirus, James said, "warp-speeded" the change in many people's drinking habits. But it has also hurt the nascent non-alcoholic bar scene.

Some bars, like The Virgin Mary Bar in Dublin and Zeroliq in Berlin, have temporarily closed their doors due to regulations. Getaway, a non-alcoholic bar in New York, transitioned into a coffee shop to weather the pandemic. Owner Sam Thonis has added outdoor seating and hopes to reopen the bar this spring.

Billy Wynne, the co-owner of Awake in Denver, is also selling coffee and bottles of non-alcoholic spirits out of a carryout window for now. But he plans to open the doors to a non-alcoholic bar next month.

Wynne says the price of drinks will be comparable to a regular bar. Alcohol is cheap, he said, and the process for extracting it from some beverages makes them more expensive.

Alcohol delivery site Drizly charges \$33 for a 700 ml bottle of Seedlip Spice 94, a non-alcoholic spirit. That's slightly more than a 750 ml bottle of Aviation Gin, which sells for \$30. But Wynne thinks customers are willing to pay for the craft that goes into a cocktail or a flavorful wine whether it has alcohol or not.

He said his customers tend to be in their 30s or 40s, and the majority are women. Some tell him they've have waiting their whole lives for a bar like his to open.

"This type of thing, it's not a fad," he said. "People don't wake up to the negative impact alcohol is having on their life and then change their mind."

AP Video Journalists John Mone in Austin, Texas, and Haven Daley in San Francisco contributed. On Twitter, follow @deeanndurbin_ap.

Canada lags in vaccinations but expects to catch up quickly

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canada once was hailed as a success story in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, faring much better than the United States in deaths and infections because of how it approached lockdowns.

But the trade-dependent nation has lagged on vaccinating its population because it lacks the ability to

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manufacture the vaccine and has had to rely on the global supply chain for the lifesaving shots, like many other countries.

With no domestic supply, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government bet on seven different vaccines manufactured elsewhere and secured advance purchase agreements — enough to get 10 doses for each of Canada's 38 million people. Regulators have approved the Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. While acquiring them has proven difficult, that gamble appears to be about to pay off.

Although Canada's economy is tightly interconnected with the U.S., Washington hasn't allowed the hundreds of millions of vaccine doses made in America to be exported, and Canada has had to turn to Europe and Asia.

"Our best friend and neighbor, the United States, has a Pfizer vaccine plant in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I can shoot a puck from Kalamazoo and hit Ontario, yet we're not getting our Pfizer vaccine from them," said Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious disease scientist at the University of Toronto.

The vaccine supply chain difficulties have forced Canada to extend the time between the first shot and the second by up to four months so that everyone can be protected faster with the primary dose. The hope is to get all adults at least one shot by the end of June.

"It's not just Canada that is experiencing turbulence. The entire globe is undertaking the largest mass vaccination campaign in its history with completely new supply chains," Procurement Minister Anita Anand said in an interview with The Associated Press.

According to the World Health Organization, nearly 80% of the vaccines manufactured so far have been administered in only 10 countries.

Canada ranks about 22nd in the number of doses administered, with about 8% of the population getting at least one shot. That compares with 36% in the U.K, 21% in the U.S. and 8% in the EU. Chile, which like many countries has turned to China, has vaccinated 25% with at least one dose.

The "insatiable global demand" for vaccines has forced the competition against bigger economies like the EU, the U.K. and the U.S., Bogoch said, "and on top of that you are also competing in an environment where there's protectionist laws."

Overall, Canada has weathered the pandemic better than most countries in per capita deaths and infections. More than 530,000 Americans and 125,000 U.K. citizens have died, compared with just over 22,000 in Canada. But not having rapid access to vaccines could be costly amid a surge in variant COVID-19 cases. The financial capital of Toronto largely remains on lockdown.

"There will be a fair amount of envy as Canadians wait and watch Americans with substantially more freedoms," said Dr. Andrew Morris, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Toronto.

Amr Bannis, 69, of Toronto, blamed the government for driving pharmaceutical companies from the country. But he also understands why they would U.S. focus on its own, saying the problem there "is much more serious than ours."

Added Jim Vlahos, 45, also of Toronto: "I don't fault America for looking out for their citizens first, but if they want to open the border, we can't be at such a huge disadvantage with supply."

He said "it would go a long way to mend fences between our countries if America looked to Canada first to assist with supply of vaccines."

Elizabeth Harris, 83, of Fenelon Falls, Ontario, had been scheduled for a second shot April 7, but she and her husband have been told by the health department it will be another four months.

"I'm a little annoyed because I'll be 84 and I was looking forward to having my second shot," Harris said. "It's ridiculous because we're over 80 and we're among the most vulnerable, but we have to wait four months."

The elderly in long term care homes have received two shots, but the vast majority in the general population haven't.

President Joe Biden said he wanted to ensure that "Americans are taken care of first, but we're then going to try to help the rest of the world." Biden has directed that all U.S. states make all adults eligible for doses by May 1 and expects to have enough supply for every adult American by the end of May.

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The White House has said that once U.S. citizens are vaccinated, the next step is ensuring Canada and Mexico are able to manage the pandemic so the borders can reopen. That could mean more vaccines for Canada in June and a shorter wait for second doses.

Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization had recommended the four-month delay between doses after data from the U.K. and Quebec showed a good level of protection offered by the first shot. The U.K. has instituted a similar delay.

In the meantime, deliveries have begun to ramp up in Canada. Based on a new schedule, it will receive at least 1 million Pfizer doses a week from Europe from March 22 to May 10, Trudeau said Friday.

"That's going to make a big difference," he said.

By the end of March, Canada will have received up to 8 million doses overall, up from 6 million, he said, and it expects to have more than 36.5 million doses by July.

Part of Canada's slow start was because Pfizer's plant in Belgium reduced its shipments in January and February, and halted deliveries entirely for a week at one point as it upgraded the facility to scale up production. That delay took a toll on Trudeau's popularity.

Earlier this month, a shipment of more than a quarter million AstraZeneca doses destined for Australia was blocked from leaving the EU. Anand, the procurement minister, said Canada has been assured by the bloc that Pfizer and Moderna deliveries won't be disrupted.

She said the "vaccine nationalism" in Europe and the U.S. contributed to the competitive global environment and instability in the supply chain, but noted the "accelerated pace that Canada is going to be traveling now."

"In our initial agreements with our vaccine suppliers, we were very conscious to diversify the supply chains at the time," Anand said.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford expressed irritation with Washington's refusal to ship vaccines north of the border, saying he'd hoped for a change of stance from former President Donald Trump but it remains "every person for themselves." Ford had asked Biden for 1 million doses from the Pfizer facility in Michigan.

Canada also has not been getting any supplies from Russia and China, which have used their domestically-produced shots for strategic diplomatic leverage.

Beijing has pledged roughly half a billion doses to more than 45 countries, according to a tally by the AP. None are going to Canada, with relations between the two countries strained after Canada arrested a senior Chinese technology executive on a U.S. extradition request.

Once Canada has fully vaccinated its citizens, Anand said excess supplies will be donated to developing countries.

In the meantime, residents like Bannis said he is OK with the delay of the second dose.

"Tactics to expand coverage but targeting the high-risk population should prove successful," he said.

OxyContin maker Purdue proposes \$10B plan to exit bankruptcy

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Purdue Pharma, which helped revolutionize the prescription painkiller business with its drug OxyContin, is proposing a \$10 billion plan to emerge from bankruptcy that calls for it to be transformed into a different kind of company funneling profits into the fight against the nation's intractable opioid crisis.

Those efforts would include a significant boost — more than \$4 billion — from members of the Sackler family who own the Connecticut-based pharmaceutical giant.

The plan, filed late Monday night in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in White Plains, N.Y., after months of negotiations, marks the company's formal offer to settle more than 2,900 lawsuits from state and local governments, Native American tribes, hospitals and other entities.

"Purdue has delivered a historic plan that can have a profoundly positive impact on public health by directing critically-needed resources to communities and individuals nationwide who have been affected by the opioid crisis," Steve Miller, chairman of Purdue's Board of Directors, said in a statement.

Most of the parties in the case are on board with the plan. But attorneys general representing 23 states

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and the District of Columbia issued a statement saying the offer “falls short of the accountability that families and survivors deserve.” They want more money from the Sackler family members and for Purdue to wind down in a way that “does not excessively entangle it with states.”

The group includes most of the Democratic attorneys general across the U.S. and Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden, a Republican.

“The Sacklers became billionaires by causing a national tragedy. Now they’re trying to get away with it,” Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey said in a statement. “We’re going to keep fighting for the accountability that families all across this country deserve.”

The true size of the family’s fortune is unclear. An earlier court filing said family members received transfers of \$12 billion to \$13 billion from Purdue over the years, though a lawyer said much of that went to taxes or was reinvested in the company. In letters to the U.S. House Oversight Committee last week, the two branches of the family that own the company said the family members who were board members had net assets of far less — about \$1.1 billion.

Most of Purdue’s plan is similar to what the company proposed a year and a half ago when it first sought bankruptcy protection, a move that halted lawsuits against both the company and Sackler family members, who would continue to be insulated from legal claims under the plan.

In its proposal, the company said the Sackler family members would contribute nearly \$4.3 billion over a decade, the company would kick in \$500 million upfront, and its sales would generate another \$1 billion through the end of 2024, when the plan is to sell or otherwise transform the company again. It says additional money would come from insurance claims.

Purdue said it will also provide overdose antidotes and anti-addiction drugs that would have a value of more than \$4 billion.

The company replacing Purdue would be indirectly owned by two new trusts — one representing state and local governments’ interests and one representing Native American tribes. Future profits would go to the government entities and to pay for monitoring the health of children born in opioid withdrawal. Governments would be required to use their share for treatment, drug education and other opioid abatement programs.

Individual victims and their families would share \$700 million to \$750 million over time. With nearly 135,000 such claims, that would work out to average payments under \$5,600. Personal injury payments are expected to range from \$3,500 to \$48,000.

Parties with claims against Purdue have until later this year to vote on whether to accept the new plan, which also calls for the creation of a public repository of the company’s documents.

Purdue began selling OxyContin 25 years ago, encouraging doctors to drop long-held reservations about opioids and focus more on easing the pain of patients. Court documents show company officials continued to push to maintain sales even as it became clear the drug was being abused.

More than 470,000 deaths in the U.S. since 2000 have been linked to opioids, including both prescription drugs and illegal ones such as heroin and fentanyl. The U.S. topped 50,000 opioid-related overdose deaths for the first time in 2019, and several states last year reported a record pace of overdose deaths due to all drugs.

Complicated litigation is playing out in courts across the country in efforts to hold the drug industry accountable, including in thousands of cases filed in federal court being overseen by one Cleveland-based judge. Purdue was removed from those cases and others when it filed for bankruptcy protection.

Trials in state and federal cases are scheduled to begin this year in California, New York, Ohio and West Virginia.

Separately, Purdue has pleaded guilty to federal criminal charges and settled civil complaints. The company’s federal agreement is valued at more than \$8 billion. But the U.S. said the company had to pay it only \$225 million as long as company funds are used to abate the opioid crisis; the plan filed Monday appears to comply.

In a separate federal deal announced at the same time, Sackler family members agreed to pay \$225 million to the federal government but admitted no wrongdoing.

Follow Mulvihill at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>

Schools weighing whether to seat students closer together

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

BOSTON (AP) — U.S. guidelines that say students should be kept 6 feet apart in schools are receiving new scrutiny from federal health experts, state governments and education officials working to return as many children as possible to the classroom.

Even as more teachers receive vaccinations, the distancing guidelines have remained a major hurdle for schools as they aim to open with limited space. But amid new evidence that it may be safe to seat students closer together, states including Illinois and Massachusetts are allowing 3 feet of distance, and others including Oregon are considering it.

Debate around the issue flared last week when a new study suggested that, if masks are worn, students can be seated as close as 3 feet apart with no increased risk to them or teachers. Published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, it looked at schools in Massachusetts, which has backed the 3-foot guideline for months.

Asked about it Monday, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the agency is now exploring whether children can be seated closer together than was previously recommended. The 6-foot spacing guideline is “among the biggest challenges” schools have faced in reopening, she said.

The CDC included the larger spacing limit in its latest school guidelines, which were issued in February and concluded that schools can safely operate during the pandemic with masks, distancing and other precautions. It suggested 6 feet and said physical distancing “should be maximized to the greatest extent possible.”

Other organizations have issued more relaxed guidelines, including the World Health Organization, which urges 1 meter in schools. The American Academy of Pediatrics says to space desks “3 feet apart and ideally 6 feet apart.”

Dan Domenech, executive director of AASA, a national superintendents group, said he expects to see more states and schools move to the 3-foot rule in coming weeks. With the larger guideline, he said, most schools only have the space to bring half of their students in at a time. Moving to 3 feet could allow about 75% at a time, he said.

“There are districts that have been doing 3 feet for quite some time without experiencing any greater amount of infection,” he said.

In Illinois, health officials said last week that students can be seated 3 feet apart as long as their teachers are vaccinated. Before, state officials required the CDC’s larger requirement.

With the state’s blessing, the Barrington district near Chicago plans to reopen its middle schools Tuesday using the smaller spacing rule. Any student will be allowed to attend in-person at the two middle schools, although the district expects roughly 30% to continue with remote learning.

“I’m glad that our public health officials allowed us to move forward by looking at the data and research,” said superintendent Brian Harris.

Questions around spacing have led to a battle in Massachusetts, where teachers and some schools are opposing a state plan to bring younger students back five days a week starting next month. The plan calls on schools to space students 3 feet apart, although many schools have been using the CDC’s guideline.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association, a statewide union, argues that seating students closer will increase the risk for everyone in the classroom. It also poses a problem for districts that have agreed to contracts with teachers adopting the 6-foot rule as a requirement.

“They can’t just throw 6 feet out the window. They can’t throw away what has been agreed upon,” said Merrie Najimy, president of the union. “If they can’t make it work, then they’re going to have to come to a new agreement.”

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In Boston's public schools, desks will be spaced at least 3 feet apart but teachers and staff will be asked to keep 6 feet from students and other staff when feasible, said Xavier Andrews, the district's spokesperson. Schools will also use larger rooms and outdoor spaces to keep students at a safe distance, he said.

"BPS remains committed to working with our union partners and is excited to continue our safe return this month for thousands of additional students," Andrews said in a statement.

In Ohio, Cincinnati's school board got an earful from parents and others last month when it proposed resuming in-person learning at the crowded Walnut Hills High School under a model that called for distancing of only 3 feet there while its other schools would use 6 feet.

The critics included Walnut Hills teacher Brandon Keller, who said the plan was foolish and dangerous. He warned the board: "Your decision will have a body count."

Board members backed off on reopening that school, then weeks later narrowly voted for a plan that included a phased reopening, but also warned the physical distancing might not be as much as 6 feet. Students also have options to continue learning virtually.

Seven superintendents in central Oregon sent a letter to Gov. Kate Brown last week asking the state to relax some of its social distancing rules — including the state's 6-foot barrier — so that more students can return to class full time.

Oregon's Crook County School District, which has had students in classrooms most of the school year, has found that what's most effective in combating the virus are masks, contact tracing and sending home students when they're showing symptoms, said district spokesperson Jason Carr.

"It goes back to what we know works," he said. "The 6-foot rule doesn't make as much sense as the other safety measures."

"What may have made sense two months ago or at the beginning of the year might not now," he said.

Associated Press writers Philip Marcelo, John Seewer and Kantele Franko contributed to this report.

The road show begins: VP Harris, Jill Biden promote aid plan

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, JONATHAN LEMIRE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — From a vaccination site in the desert West to a grade school on the Eastern seaboard, President Joe Biden's top messengers — his vice president and wife among them — led a cross-country effort Monday to highlight the benefits of his huge COVID relief plan.

Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and their spouses have launched an ambitious tour this week to promote the \$1.9 trillion plan as a way to battle the pandemic and boost the economy.

The road show — dubbed the "Help is here" tour by the White House — began with Harris visiting a COVID-19 vaccination site and a culinary academy in Las Vegas and first lady Jill Biden touring a New Jersey elementary school. Biden himself heads out Tuesday.

"We want to avoid a situation where people are unaware of what they're entitled to," Harris said at the culinary academy. "It's not selling it; it literally is letting people know their rights. Think of it more as a public education campaign."

The White House is wasting no time promoting the relief plan, which Biden signed into law last week, looking to build momentum for the rest of his agenda and anxious to avoid the mistakes of 2009 in boosting that year's recovery effort. Even veterans of Barack Obama's administration acknowledge they did not do enough then to showcase their massive economic stimulus package.

Biden stayed back in Washington for a day, declaring that "hope is here in real and tangible ways." He said the new government spending will bankroll efforts that could allow the nation to emerge from the pandemic's twin crises, health and economic.

"Shots in arms and money in pockets," Biden said at the White House. "That's important. The American Rescue Plan is already doing what it was designed to do: make a difference in people's everyday lives. We're just getting started."

Biden said that within the next 10 days, his administration will clear two important benchmarks: distributing 100 million stimulus payments and administering 100 million vaccine doses since he took office. To

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commemorate those milestones, Biden and his top representatives are embarking on their most ambitious travel schedule of his young presidency, visiting a series of potential election battleground states this week.

The sales pitch was leaving Republicans cold.

Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell dismissed the target of doses that Biden set when he took office as "not some audacious goal" but just the pace that he inherited. And he mocked Biden's talk of Americans working toward merely being able to gather in small groups by July 4th as "bizarre."

The Biden plan cleared Congress without any backing from Republicans, despite polling that found broad public support. Republicans argued the bill was too expensive, especially with vaccinations making progress against the virus, and included too many provisions not directly linked to the pandemic.

After beginning the sales campaign with high-profile speeches, Biden will head to Pennsylvania on Tuesday and then join Harris in Georgia on Friday. Others on his team are visiting the electorally important states of Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico and New Hampshire. The trip Monday marked Harris' first official journey in office and included an unscheduled stop at a vegan taco stand as well as a coffee stand at the Culinary Academy Las Vegas.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said, "We want to take some time to engage directly with the American people and make sure they understand the benefits of the package and how it is going to help them get through this difficult period of time."

The White House has detailed a theme for each day, focusing on small businesses, schools, home evictions and direct checks to most Americans. Jill Biden was joined by New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy on a tour Monday of Samuel Smith Elementary School in Burlington, where she highlighted steps the school took to reopen.

But her tour revealed the challenges ahead: In one classroom she visited, only two students were in attendance for in-person learning while the other 17 were virtual. The first lady sat down at a computer to say hello to the remote learners.

"I just I love being here at a school again: Educators, parents and students, the entire school has come together to bring kids back to the classroom," she said. "But even with your best efforts, students can't come, they can't come in every day, which means that their parents are still having to take time off of work, or figure out childcare solutions. And this school like schools across this country can't fully reopen without help."

The president on Monday also announced that he had chosen Gene Sperling, a longtime Democratic economic policy expert, to oversee the massive stimulus package, the role Biden himself had played for the 2009 economic rescue package. The goal, Biden said, is to "stay on top of every dollar spent."

"I learned from my experience implementing the Recovery Act just how important it is to have someone who can manage all the moving parts with efficiency, speed and integrity and accountability," said the president.

The plan's key features include direct payments of \$1,400 for most single taxpayers, or \$2,800 for married couples filing jointly, plus \$1,400 per dependent — a total of \$5,600 for a married couple with two children. The payments phase out for people 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 provisions.

Restaurants and bars that were forced to close or limit service can 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 rent and mortgage payments.

Harris' husband, Doug Emhoff, joined his wife for the Western trip, visiting a food relief organization Monday in Las Vegas and participating 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 went first, touring a UPS distribution center in Landover, Mary-

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land, on Monday that also delivers vaccines in the Washington area.

Miller reported from Washington. Lemire reported from New York. Associated Press writer Hope Yen in Washington contributed.

Stanford tops NCAA women's field; NC State gets No. 1 seed

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

UConn is in its normal spot with a No. 1 seed for the women's NCAA Tournament. Familiar territory for Stanford and South Carolina, too.

It's a brand new day for North Carolina State. And the Huskies, while used to their position in the bracket, are facing some uncertainty after coach Geno Auriemma tested positive for the coronavirus.

N.C. State is a No. 1 seed for the first time, joining Stanford, South Carolina and Connecticut on the top lines for the San Antonio-themed regions for the women's tourney. The Cardinal earned the overall No. 1 when the field was revealed Monday night.

"The No. 1 seed is a great honor, obviously," N.C. State coach Wes Moore said. "Y'all know me, I'd rather just stayed a No. 2 and laid low."

Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer downplayed being the top choice.

"What I really tell our team is seeds do not matter," she said. "It's not like you get any extra points when you show up at the gym."

VanDerveer said being healthy and excited to play was most important. Teams basically will be locked down in hotels except to head to practice or games as part of the stringent COVID-19 safety protocols.

Auriemma's Texas arrival will be delayed. He will remain in isolation for 10 days and can rejoin the team on March 24. The other members of UConn's travel party have tested negative for COVID-19.

Auriemma will miss the Huskies' opening game against High Point — one of four first-timers in the NCAAs — and a potential second-round matchup against either Syracuse or South Dakota State.

"I'm an innocent bystander right now. I'm going to sit back and watch them do their thing," he said. "(Assistant coach Chris Dailey) is undefeated in tournament play. I don't think you can get a coach who has a better record in the tournament than she does."

While the coronavirus caused many disruptions to the schedule throughout the regular season, it looks as if most of the teams in the field made it to the tournament healthy.

Stanford, which will open against Utah Valley, had quite the odyssey this season because of the coronavirus. It had to play on the road for nine weeks after Santa Clara County health officials announced they were prohibiting all contact sports in late November.

The Cardinal, who are looking for their third national championship, are the top seed in the Alamo region. The Hemisfair, Mercado and River Walk are the other region names.

For the past few years, earning one of the top 16 seeds would put a team at home in the tournament's first two rounds, but that's not the case this March. Every game will be played in the San Antonio area because of the pandemic, with the last four rounds tipping off at the Alamodome.

This could be one of the most wide-open tournaments, with a dozen teams capable of winning the title. There were five No. 1 teams in The Associated Press women's basketball poll this year, including the Huskies, who finished the season at No. 1.

The national semifinals take place on April 2, and the championship game will be held April 4.

Tennessee continued its streak of making the NCAA Tournament all 39 years. Joining High Point as NCAA rookies are Stony Brook, Utah Valley and Bradley.

Notre Dame's run of 24 straight NCAA appearances came to an end. The Irish were one of the first four teams out of the tournament. They were joined just outside the field by Houston, DePaul and Oklahoma.

Even without Notre Dame, the ACC is well represented with eight teams. The SEC and the Big Ten each had seven schools. The Pac-12 had six, and the Big 12 had five.

With no tournament played last season because of the virus, Baylor is still the defending champion. Coach

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Kim Mulkey's team is very different from the one that won the title, but still is quite talented, winning the Big 12 regular season and conference tournaments.

The Lady Bears are a No. 2 seed in UConn's region.

Like Baylor, the other three two seeds — Louisville, Texas A&M and Maryland — at some point were in consideration for the one line.

"We did have a lot of teams, a lot of discussion around who are the four who were just right for the one line," NCAA selection committee chair Nina King said.

More AP women's college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-college-basketball>

Haaland OK'd at Interior, 1st Native American Cabinet head

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Monday confirmed New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland as interior secretary, making her the first Native American to lead a Cabinet department and the first to lead the federal agency that has wielded influence over the nation's tribes for nearly two centuries.

Haaland was confirmed by a 51-40 vote, the narrowest margin yet for a Cabinet nomination by President Joe Biden. Four Republicans voted yes: Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

Democrats and tribal groups hailed Haaland's confirmation as historic, saying her selection means that Indigenous people — who lived in North America before the United States was created — will for the first time see a Native American lead the powerful department where decisions on relations with the nearly 600 federally recognized tribes are made. Interior also oversees a host of other issues, including energy development on public lands and waters, national parks and endangered species.

"Rep. Haaland's confirmation represents a gigantic step forward in creating a government that represents the full richness and diversity of this country," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

"Native Americans for far too long have been neglected at the Cabinet level and in so many other places," Schumer said.

Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo and a 35th-generation resident of New Mexico, thanked hundreds of supporters at a virtual party hosted by Native American organizations.

Her confirmation shows that tribal members are "visible" and being taken seriously, Haaland said after the vote. "And no, it should not have taken more than 200 years for a Native person to take the helm at Interior, or even be a Cabinet secretary for that matter."

Haaland said she was "ready to roll up my sleeves" so Interior can play its part in Biden's plan to "build back better" and "responsibly manage our natural resources to protect them for future generations."

Haaland's nomination has been closely watched by tribal communities across the country, with some virtual parties drawing hundreds of people to watch her two-day confirmation hearing last month.

Supporters projected a photo of Haaland, a two-term congresswoman who represents greater Albuquerque, on the side of the Interior building in downtown Washington with text that read "Our Ancestors' Dreams Come True."

Many Native Americans see Haaland, 60, as someone who will elevate their voices and protect the environment and tribes' rights. Her selection breaks a two-century pattern of non-Native officials, mostly male, serving as the top federal official over American Indian affairs. The federal government often worked to dispossess tribes of their land and, until recently, to assimilate them into white culture.

"It is long past time that an American Indian serve as the secretary of the Interior," said Fawn Sharp, president of the National Congress of American Indians, the nation's oldest and largest tribal organization.

"The nation needs her leadership and vision to help lead our response to climate change, to steward our lands and cultural resources and to ensure that across the federal government, the United States lives up to its trust and treaty obligations to tribal nations and our citizens," Sharp said.

Jonathan Nez, president of the Navajo Nation in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, called Haaland's confir-

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mation "an unprecedented and monumental day for all first people of this country. Words cannot express how overjoyed and proud we are to see one of our own confirmed to serve in this high-level position."

Haaland's confirmation "sets us on a better path to righting the wrongs of the past with the federal government and inspires hope in our people, especially our young people," Nez added.

Not everyone was celebrating. Some Republican senators have criticized Haaland's views on oil drilling and other energy development as "radical" and extreme, citing her opposition to the Keystone XL oil pipeline and her support for the Green New Deal, a sweeping, if mostly aspirational, policy to address climate change and income inequality.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the top Republican on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said Haaland's "extreme views" and support of "catastrophic legislation" such as the Green New Deal would make her confirmation as interior secretary disastrous, harming America's energy supply and economy.

"American jobs are being sacrificed in the name of the Biden agenda, and Rep. Haaland couldn't defend it," Barrasso said last week, referring to decisions by Biden to reject the Keystone XL pipeline and impose a moratorium on new oil and gas leases on federal lands.

Barrasso also faulted Haaland's support for continued protection for grizzly bears in the Yellowstone region of the Rocky Mountains, despite a recommendation by the Fish and Wildlife Service that about 700 bears in parts of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho no longer need protections.

"Rep. Haaland has chosen to ignore the science and the scientists of the very department that she is now nominated to lead," Barrasso said, calling on Interior to remove protections for the grizzly under the Endangered Species Act.

Barrasso and several other Western senators missed the vote, citing a severe winter storm that dumped 3 feet of snow on parts of Colorado and Wyoming, causing multiple flight cancellations. Fellow Wyoming Republican Cynthia Lummis and Democratic Sens. Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper of Colorado also missed the vote.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., said she appreciates Haaland's leadership in the House on a range of issues, adding that Haaland's status as a Native American "will give us an extra advantage on (tribal) issues that are so important to Indian Country overall."

Murkowski said she had "some real misgivings" about Haaland because of her views on oil drilling and other energy issues, but said Native Alaskans, an important constituency in her rural state, had urged her to back Haaland.

"Quite honestly, we need (Haaland) to be a success," Murkowski said.

Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., said he was disappointed at the rhetoric used by Barrasso and other Republicans. Heinrich, who lives in Haaland's district, called her confirmation historic and said she "always has an open door and an open mind" to a range of views.

Fellow New Mexico Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, who presided over the Senate during the vote on Haaland's nomination, said she brings "a unique and long-overdue perspective" to the Interior Department's mission to protect natural resources and honor responsibilities to tribes and other native people.

"I have no doubt that Secretary Haaland will leave an indelible mark on the Department of Interior, and I look forward to continuing to work with her to make a difference for the people of New Mexico," he said.

Associated Press writers Felicia Fonseca in Flagstaff, Ariz., and Matthew Brown in Billings, Mont., contributed to this story.

Brazil's Bolsonaro picks 4th health minister as COVID rages

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Monday picked his fourth health minister since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, amid the worst throes of the disease in the country yet and after a series of errors decried by public health experts.

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Marcelo Queiroga, the president of the Brazilian Society of Cardiology, will replace Eduardo Pazuello, an active-duty army general with expertise in logistics who landed the position last May despite having no prior health experience.

Earlier Monday, Pazuello acknowledged in a press conference that Bolsonaro aimed to replace him. The first candidate for the job, cardiologist Ludhmila Hajjar, rejected it.

Pazuello's departure means ushering in Brazil's fourth health minister during the pandemic, although he has presided over the ministry for the longest period of the three to date. The revolving door signals the challenges for the government of Latin America's largest nation to implement effective measures to control the virus' spread -- or even agreeing which measures are necessary.

Pazuello's two predecessors left the position amid disagreements with Bolsonaro, who criticized broad social distancing and supported the use of an unproven anti-malarial drug to treat the disease. He continues to hold those positions, despite health experts' admonishments and studies showing the drug has no effect on COVID-19.

Pazuello proved more compliant. Immediately after taking the job his ministry backed use and distribution of the malaria pill. On several occasions, he said that his boss tells him what to do, and he obeys.

"The conversation (with Queiroga) was excellent. I already knew him from a few years back. He has everything it takes to do nice work, continuing what Pazuello has done up until today," Bolsonaro told supporters at the entrance of the presidential residence in Brasilia, adding there will be a transition period of up to two weeks with the outgoing and the incoming minister.

"Pazuello's work was well done in the management part. Now we are in a phase that is more aggressive in the fight against the virus," Brazil's president said.

Brazil has recorded almost 280,000 deaths from the virus, almost all of which were on his watch. The toll has been worsening lately, with the nation currently averaging more than 1,800 deaths each day. Health care systems of major cities are at the brink of collapse, and lawmakers allied with Bolsonaro have proposed suitable replacements for Pazuello, while threatening to step up pressure for an investigation into his handling of the crisis.

The country's top court is also investigating Pazuello for alleged neglect that contributed to the collapse of the health care system in Amazonas state earlier this year. That probe will now be sent to a low court judge.

Weeks later, in a particularly embarrassing episode, his ministry accidentally dispatched a shipment of vaccines intended for Amazonas state to neighboring Amapa state, and vice versa, after confusing the abbreviations for each state.

Finally, Pazuello has faced intense criticism for Brazil's slow vaccine rollout. According to Our World in Data, an online research site that compares official government statistics, only 5.4% of Brazilians have been vaccinated. Almost all were shots from Chinese biopharmaceutical firm Sinovac, which Bolsonaro repeatedly cast doubt upon.

Pazuello's health ministry also delayed its decision to purchase the vaccine from Sao Paulo state's government until it was left with no other option to start immunization in January.

The only vaccine deal Pazuello had signed at the time, for 100 million doses of the AstraZeneca jab, has brought few shots to the arms of Brazilians so far. His ministry has since scrambled to cobble together agreements with other suppliers, recently concluding deals to acquire the Pfizer and Sputnik V shots.

Pazuello said in the press conference that he would not resign, and insisted there will be continuity with whomever assumes his position.

Cardiologist Hajjar had already revealed that Bolsonaro interviewed her to replace Pazuello. She told television channel Globo News that science has already ruled against treatments Bolsonaro and his legions of supporters continue to champion, like drugs to fight malaria and parasites, and that the country needs to adopt more restrictive measures on activity. She said she declined the position.

"He needs to choose someone he trusts, who is aligned with him, his ideas, his vision, and with the government's desire. And I'm certainly not that person," she said.

Hajjar forecast between 500,000 and 600,000 total deaths, not to mention long-term consequences, unless Brazil changes course.

Queiroga has already called Bolsonaro "a great Brazilian." His social media channels have not made any criticism of the president's handling of the pandemic and pushed for a quick vaccine rollout.

AP journalist David Biller contributed to this report from Rio de Janeiro.

3 die when car hits 9 people in San Diego homeless camp

By JULIE WATSON and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A driver plowed through a sidewalk homeless encampment Monday in downtown San Diego, killing three people and injuring six others, authorities said.

Craig Voss, 71, was heading through a tunnel underneath a community college campus when he drove his Volvo station wagon up on the sidewalk shortly after 9 a.m., San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit.

Voss was arrested at the scene. He faces three counts of vehicular manslaughter, five counts of causing great bodily harm and a felony DUI, Nisleit said, adding that Voss did a field sobriety test by a drug recognition expert. He did not elaborate or identify whether Voss was under the influence of alcohol or other substance. He said additional charges may be coming.

It wasn't immediately known if Voss had a lawyer who could speak on his behalf.

The deadly crash highlights the inherent risks to the homeless population in California, where their tents and tarps line not only downtown sidewalks but are near ramps where cars accelerate as they enter freeways.

More than 150,000 people are homeless statewide. The number has increased during the coronavirus pandemic that has upended the economy.

Mayor Todd Gloria said most, if not all of the nine people who were struck were homeless.

"They were there because they felt like they had nowhere else to go," Gloria said. "This crash this morning did not have to be so devastating. Let me state it very clearly, a street is not a home."

Three people died at the scene. Five of the six others who were injured were taken to hospitals. Two were in critical condition. San Diego Fire Chief Colin Stowell said both were "awake, alert and answering questions."

The mayor, who took office in December, said the encampment had been there awhile. More people Monday might have gone to the short tunnel under the San Diego City College campus because the cement bridge provided cover on a rainy day.

On a typical weekday morning it is a busy area with students walking by, but classes have been online during the coronavirus pandemic.

Gloria said the city needs to act now to address its homeless problem, and it was starting by offering shelter Monday to the other homeless people who were in the tunnel and escaped injury. A handful accepted. The city also sent mental health professionals to help.

"We want to make sure that they did not die in vain," Gloria said of those who were killed.

But he added that the city is facing a shortage of beds at its shelters and he pledged to talk to state and federal officials to get more help, calling the current situation "not acceptable."

"It's not humane or safe to keep allowing our unsheltered neighbors to sleep under bridges, in alleys or in canyons," he said.

Lisa Brotzman said she was peering out of a window in her tent just as the car swerved to the right shoulder, "spun out of control" and jumped onto the sidewalk in the tunnel where people were waiting out the rain.

"Someone was screaming, 'Ahhh! Ahhhh!'" Brotzman told The San Diego Union-Tribune. "Two or three people were yelling and screaming. It was scary."

The driver got out of his car and tried to help people before identifying himself to police, Nisleit said.

"He was cooperative, (and) did not try to run away," the chief said, correcting earlier reports from police

that he had tried to flee.

Ambulances, five fire engines, a helicopter and more than 60 first-responders responded to the scene. "Our crews found, obviously, a tragic incident under the bridge," the fire chief said.

Andrew Cuomo accuser speaks with investigators for 4 hours

By MARINA VILLENEUVE and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

As New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo tried to return to the business of governing Monday, one of his sexual harassment accusers met via Zoom for more than four hours with investigators working for the state attorney general's office.

During the interview, Charlotte Bennett revealed new details about Cuomo's behavior and what she said was a "sexually hostile work environment," according to her lawyer, including a claim the governor frequently made suggestive remarks about the size of his hands.

"One piece of new information that came to light today was the Governor's preoccupation with his hand size and what the large size of his hands indicated to Charlotte and other members of his staff," her lawyer, Debra Katz, said in a statement.

Bennett also provided investigators with 120 pages of records to corroborate her accusations, according to Katz.

Bennett, 25, is one of a number of women who have accused Cuomo of workplace harassment. Some have said Cuomo demeaned them with pet nicknames or objectifying remarks about their appearance, subjected them to unwanted kisses and touches or asked them about their sex lives. A few, including Bennett, said they believed the governor was probing their interest in a sexual relationship.

Cuomo also faces an allegation that he groped a female staff member under her shirt after summoning her to the governor's mansion in Albany late last year.

The claims have led to a chorus of Cuomo's fellow Democrats demanding his resignation, including, on Friday, both of New York's U.S. senators.

Even as he remained overshadowed by scandal, Cuomo has tried to press on and project normalcy.

Monday he appeared at a vaccination site on Long Island and talked about the importance of getting a new state budget done by an April 1 deadline — one he said was critical to getting the state back on its feet.

That's a process that normally involves intense negotiations and deal-making between Cuomo and the two top leaders in the Legislature.

This year, though, Cuomo is having to negotiate with people who have demanded that he step down. More than 130 state lawmakers have said Cuomo should resign, including Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins. The state Assembly has opened up an impeachment investigation.

"The majority of the Legislature has called for his impeachment or resignation," Baruch College political science professor Doug Muzzio said. "So I mean, you know, how can you work with a legislature that is composed of his antagonists? It doesn't work."

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said he would try.

"I'm going to proceed as if it's a normal negotiation," he said.

Sen. John Liu, a Queens Democrat on the Senate finance committee, said the allegations surrounding Cuomo have distracted him and lawmakers. He said Democrats who now have veto-proof supermajorities are hoping Cuomo will support long-stalled efforts to legalize marijuana and raise taxes on New Yorkers making more than a million dollars.

"The governor is clearly distracted and that's not going to help his position," Liu said. "At the very minimum, he's facing serious investigations as well as calls for his resignation. None of that adds to his negotiating position."

Sen. Brad Hoylman, a Democrat of Manhattan, said budget discussions with Cuomo's staff are ongoing and called the overall dynamic "awkward to say the least."

"It's not everyday that you and your colleagues demand the head of your party to step down and pro-

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ceed with a negotiation," Hoylman, who chairs the Senate's judiciary committee and sits on its finance committee, said. "I also think it speaks to why so many of us are concerned with these swirling scandals and the ability for the executive to manage this situation."

The attorney general, James, last week named a former federal prosecutor, Joon Kim, and employment discrimination attorney Anne Clark to lead the Cuomo investigation. They have full subpoena power and will document their findings in a public report.

Cuomo, a Democrat, has said he'll "fully cooperate." His office didn't immediately comment Monday when asked about Bennett's interview with investigators.

The attorney general's investigation is on top of scrutiny that Cuomo is facing from federal prosecutors who are scrutinizing how his administration handled data on COVID-19 outbreaks at nursing homes.

John Jay College of Criminal Justice professor Daniel Feldman, who served as a state lawmaker from 1981 to 1998, said the governor is in the tough position of needing political support from a Legislature that's increasingly said he's lost his ability to lead.

He pointed to former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer, who quit in 2008 after admitting he paid for sex with prostitutes.

"It was said at that time, that had Spitzer maintained cordial relations with a majority of the Legislature, he would not have resigned and if he was impeached he wouldn't have been convicted," Feldman said.

Cuomo has insisted he won't let himself be distracted and he won't resign.

At his event at the Long Island vaccination site Monday, from which reporters were barred, ostensibly because of COVID-19 restrictions, the governor didn't address the scandal but did speak generally of comebacks in the face of adversity.

"Sometimes, God comes and he knocks you on your rear end for one reason or another, or life comes and knocks you on your rear end for one reason or another," Cuomo said in a comment that was intended to reference the state's situation, but could also apply to his personal troubles.

"The question is what you do when you get knocked on your rear end. And New Yorkers get up, and they get up stronger, and they learn the lesson."

'I don't need the vaccine': GOP worries threaten virus fight

By JILL COLVIN and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

FRONT ROYAL, Virginia (AP) — In this rural swath of Virginia's Shenandoah valley, former President Donald Trump remains deeply admired, with lawn signs and campaign flags still dotting the landscape. The vaccines aimed at taming the coronavirus, however, aren't so popular.

Laura Biggs, a 56-year-old who has already recovered from the virus, is wary of taking the vaccine. Reassurances from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration have done little to ease her alarm that the vaccine could lead to death.

"The way I feel about it is: I don't need the vaccine at this point," she said. "And I'm not going to get the vaccine until it is well established."

That sentiment demonstrates the challenge ahead for public health officials as the U.S. intensifies its efforts for widespread vaccinations that could put an end to a devastating pandemic that has left more than 530,000 dead. The campaign could falter if it becomes another litmus test in America's raging culture wars, just as mandates for mask-wearing were a point of polarization at the onset of the virus.

While polls have found vaccine hesitancy falling overall, opposition among Republicans remains stubbornly strong. A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 42% of Republicans say they probably or definitely will not get the shot, compared with 17% of Democrats — a 25-point split.

While demand for vaccinations still far outstrips the available supply in most parts of the country, there are already signs in some places of slowing registration. And the impact is expected to grow when supply begins to surpass demand by late April or early May, said Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health.

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"This is going to be the big issue," he said. "And if we get stuck at 60 or 65% vaccinated, we are going to continue to see significant outbreaks and real challenges in our country, and it's going to be much, much harder to get back to what we think is normal unless we can get that number higher."

Ron Holloway is an example of the hurdles facing health officials. The 75-year-old Forsyth, Missouri, resident and his wife, who is 74, are at a higher risk of contracting the virus. But he was steadfast in insisting that they "don't do vaccinations."

"This whole thing is blown way out of proportion and a bunch of nonsense," he said of the virus. "We still haven't lost 1% of our population. It is just ridiculous."

Biggs is a Virginia conservative who voted for Trump. She said partisan differences were obvious among her friends and family in all aspects of the pandemic, including vaccine acceptance.

"Family members who lean left have not left home for a year," she said, while she and her husband "went everywhere. We traveled more in 2020 than I have in any year of our whole life.... I just think that there was a hysteria about it. And people put themselves in boxes, so to speak."

For Holloway, who works in real estate, the opposition runs even deeper. He is very skeptical of vaccines in general, along with government and pharmaceutical companies. He believes the virus was exaggerated to deny Trump, whom he supported, a second term.

"I just don't believe we need vaccinations. I don't think it is the way God intended for us to be," said Holloway. "The majority of my friends and the people that I associated with, the people that we go to church with, we don't wear masks, we don't get the shots. I don't know why people are so terrified of this. It is nothing worse than a flu." COVID 19 is, in fact, far more lethal.

Republicans have been skeptical of the pandemic all along. AP-NORC polls have shown they worry less than Democrats about infection and voice more opposition to restrictions and mask-wearing. In interviews over the last several days, many wondered why they should be early adopters of vaccines with potential side effects when they weren't worried about the virus and had already moved on.

But the resistance to vaccines has worried GOP pollster Frank Luntz, who convened a focus group on Saturday with 20 vaccine-skeptical Trump voters to try to figure out what kinds of messages might persuade them to take the shots. Participating in the session were Republican congressional leaders, including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, and former CDC director Thomas Frieden.

"The overarching message from this session is it's going to be very, very hard," he said. "The people who voted for Trump and don't want to take the vaccine are committed in their opposition. They don't trust the science. They don't believe the media and they think everything is politicized."

In order to change their minds, "you have to start with the facts and then you layer over it the emotion." "You have to recognize and empathize with their hesitations and concerns," he said.

Some have placed blame on Trump, who spent much of the pandemic minimizing the dangers posed by the virus, even after he was hospitalized and had to be given supplemental oxygen and experimental treatments. Trump did receive the vaccine before leaving office, but did so privately and secretly, declining to disclose the fact until this month.

And though he urged Americans to be vaccinated in a recent speech, he has done nothing else to promote the efforts and is notably absent from an ad campaign that features former Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, along with their wives.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, said Sunday that Trump using his "incredible influence" with Republicans would "make all the difference in the world" when it comes to overcoming hesitancy.

But Luntz said he thinks it's too late. In his focus group, an ad featuring the past presidents made participants less likely to want to get vaccinated. And participants said they trusted their doctors much more than the former president.

"My advice to politicians is step aside and let your medical professional take over," he said.

Meanwhile, Biden administration officials and others say numerous outreach efforts are underway that

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target Republicans, particularly those who identify as evangelical Christians. President Joe Biden has urged local doctors and ministers and priests to talk about vaccines in their communities.

"We need to think about how to reach the people that are maybe more hesitant," said Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

Still, others are eager for shots as soon as it's their turn.

Lenton Lucas, 51, who lives in Arlington, Virginia, works for his brother's restaurants in Front Royal and has spent much of the pandemic delivering meals to those too scared to venture out. Lukas, who is Black and a Republican, voted for Trump, but said that where he lives, there is far more concern about vaccine access than hesitancy, with people desperate to get shots, despite a long history of racism and distrust.

And while he says he'd like to know more about the vaccines because "there's pros and cons to everything," he's eager to take his so he can spend more time with his family and his 70-year-old mother.

"In order for her to be comfortable, I have to do what I have to do," he said. "It has to be done."

___ Hollingsworth reported from Kansas City. Associated Press writers Emily Swanson and Zeke Miller in Washington, Michelle R. Smith in Providence, Rhode Island and Anila Yoganathan in Atlanta contributed to this report.

Immigrant teens to be housed at Dallas convention center

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The U.S. government plans to house up to 3,000 immigrant teenagers at a convention center in downtown Dallas as it struggles to find space for a surge of migrant children at the border who have strained the immigration system just two months into the Biden administration.

American authorities encountered people crossing the border without legal status more than 100,000 times in February — a level higher than all but four months of Donald Trump's presidency. The spike in traffic poses a challenge to President Joe Biden at a fraught moment with Congress, which is about to take up immigration legislation, and has required the help of the American Red Cross.

The Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center will be used for up to 90 days beginning as early as this week, according to a memo obtained by The Associated Press that was sent Monday to members of the Dallas City Council. Federal agencies will use the facility to house boys ages 15 to 17, according to the memo, which describes the soon-to-open site as a "decompression center."

The Health and Human Services Department is rushing to open facilities across the country to house immigrant children who are otherwise being held by the Border Patrol, which is generally supposed to detain children for no more than three days. The Border Patrol is holding children longer because there is next to no space in the HHS system, similar to the last major increase in migration two years ago.

A tent facility operated by the Border Patrol in Donna, some 500 miles (804 kilometers) south of Dallas, is holding more than 1,000 children and teenagers, some as young as 4. Lawyers who inspect immigrant detention facilities under a court settlement say they interviewed children who reported being held in packed conditions in the tent, with some sleeping on the floor and others not able to shower for five days.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Saturday directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help manage and care for children crossing the border.

"I am incredibly proud of the agents of the Border Patrol, who have been working around the clock in difficult circumstances to take care of children temporarily in our care," Mayorkas said in a statement. "Yet, as I have said many times, a Border Patrol facility is no place for a child."

Asked about housing migrant teens at the convention center, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that the administration has been looking for additional facilities for unaccompanied children but that she would have to look into the specifics of the arrangement in Dallas.

"Certainly we would ensure that we're meeting the standard that we have set out," Psaki said.

The growing number of child arrivals comes at politically charged moment, with Congress taking up immigration legislation this week. Biden has delighted pro-immigration advocates by backing a bill to offer a path to citizenship to all of the estimated 11 million people in the U.S. illegally. He also suspended several

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Trump-era policies to deter asylum, including one that forced them to wait in Mexico for court hearings in the U.S.

Republicans have seized on the numbers to portray a border spinning out of control.

"This crisis is created by the presidential policies of this new administration," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said Monday while leading a large congressional delegation to El Paso, Texas. "There's no other way to claim it than a Biden border crisis."

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued a similar statement, blaming Biden's policies for "a humanitarian crisis for unaccompanied minors coming across the border."

Democrats criticized large camps set up in Tornillo, Texas, and Homestead, Florida, to house children during previous emergencies, including in 2018 when the Trump administration separated thousands of immigrant families.

Biden has kept pandemic-related powers in place that allow him to immediately expel people who enter the country without legal status, denying them an opportunity to seek asylum. Biden aides have yet to say when the administration may lift that authority. It does not extend to children who cross the border alone.

U.S. authorities encountered children traveling alone 9,457 times in February, nearly double the number in January and the highest since May 2019, when the figure neared 12,000 during the peak of a Trump-era surge.

The memo sent to Dallas City Council members says the Federal Emergency Management Agency and HHS will "be responsible for providing shelter management and contracts" for food, security, cleaning, and medical care at the convention center. Dallas previously offered space to HHS during the 2014 surge of crossings of immigrant children.

Dallas City Manager T.C. Broadnax said in a statement that "collective action is necessary, and we will do our best to support this humanitarian effort." He referred questions to HHS, which did not respond to requests for comment Monday.

HHS also has said it will house immigrant youths in Midland. Teenagers began arriving Sunday at a converted camp for oilfield workers where volunteers from the American Red Cross will care for them. BuzzFeed News first reported the opening of the Midland facility.

The Red Cross has sent about 60 volunteers to the facilities in Midland and Dallas and expects to deploy more in the coming days, said Greta Gustafson, a spokeswoman for the group.

The surge at the U.S.-Mexico border has presented a major test for Biden's administration, which promised to break from the more restrictive measures against migrants enacted by Trump. Biden has left in place some Trump policies, notably the expulsions of immigrant adults and families under a public-health declaration citing the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden declined to reinstate public-health expulsions of children, and his administration has also been unable to expel many families in South Texas due to policy changes in Mexico's Tamaulipas state, across from the Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Border agents are apprehending more than 400 children a day on average, far more than the number of children that HHS is processing and releasing to sponsors. The Biden administration has announced several policy changes to try to expedite releases, but experts and immigration lawyers say the government could do more to speed up the process, particularly of releasing children to their parents in the U.S.

Merchant reported from Houston.

LGBTQ Catholics stung by Vatican rebuff of same-sex unions

By DAVID CRARY and LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

The Vatican's declaration that same-sex unions are a sin the Roman Catholic Church cannot bless was no surprise for LGBTQ Catholics in the United States — yet it stung deeply nonetheless.

Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA, said her organization's membership includes same-sex couples who have been together for decades, persevering in their love for one another in the

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face of bias and family rejection.

"The fact that our church at its highest levels cannot recognize the grace in that and cannot extend any sort of blessing to these couples is just tragic," she said.

She was responding to a formal statement Monday from the Vatican's orthodoxy office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, saying Roman Catholic clergy may not bless such unions since God "cannot bless sin." It was approved by Pope Francis.

"Having sin be explicitly included in this statement kind of brings us back to zero," said Ross Murray, who oversees religious issues for the LGBTQ rights group GLAAD.

He expressed dismay that "the ability for us to live out our lives fully and freely is still seen as an affront to the church or, worse yet, an affront to God, who created us and knows us and loves us."

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, which advocates for greater LGBTQ acceptance in the church, said that if those priests who have already been blessing same-sex unions now stop doing so, lay Catholics could be moved take their place.

"If priests and pastoral ministers no longer feel they can perform such a blessing, the Catholic laity will step in and perform their own rituals," DeBernardo said. "The toothpaste is out of the tube, and it can't be put back inside."

The Rev. Bryan Massingale, an openly gay Catholic priest and professor of theology and social ethics at Fordham University, said priests who want to engage in pastoral outreach to the gay and lesbian community "will continue to do so, except that it will be even more under the table ... than it was before."

For Catholics in same-sex relationships, he said, the Vatican's new message will hurt.

"Every human being is born with this innate desire to love," he said. "For those who are oriented toward members of the same sex ... to have it being described as inherently or innately sinful without any qualification, that is crushing."

The Rev. James Martin, another priest who advocates for greater LGBTQ inclusion in the Catholic church, said in a post on Twitter that he received dozens of messages from LGBTQ people on Monday saying they were discouraged by the Vatican's pronouncement. He urged them not to despair.

"Besides, what is the alternative?" he asked. "To live in fear of the future that God has in store for us?... To doubt that Jesus is on the side of those who feel in any way marginalized?"

Vatican doctrine holds that gays and lesbians should be treated with dignity and respect, but that gay sex is "intrinsicly disordered" and that same-sex unions are sinful.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee, a professor of religious studies at Manhattan College, said those teachings, put together, are problematic.

"It boggles the mind that the hierarchy can affirm that LGBTQ+ persons are made in the image of God but that their unions are a sin," she said via email. "Are they made in God's image with the exception of their hearts? With the exception of their abilities and inclinations to love?"

Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of the U.S.-based NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, said she was relieved the Vatican statement wasn't harsher.

She interpreted it as saying, "You can bless the individuals (in a same-sex union), you just can't bless the contract."

"So it's possible you could have a ritual where the individuals get blessed to be their committed selves."

The Vatican's pronouncement was welcomed by some church conservatives, however, such as Bill Donohue, president of the New York-based Catholic League.

"There will be no recognition of homosexual unions or marriage by the Catholic Church. It is non-negotiable. End of story," he said.

"Pope Francis has been under considerable pressure by gay activists, in and out of the church, to give the green light to gay marriage," Donohue added, calling Monday's statement "the most decisive rejection of those efforts ever written."

Francis has endorsed providing legal protections for same-sex couples, but that is in the civil sphere and not the church.

Juan Carlos Cruz, a Chilean advocate for sex-abuse victims who is gay, reported in 2018 that when he

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met with Francis, the pope had told him, "God made you like this, and he loves you."

On Monday, Cruz said the Vatican officials who issued the new statement "are completely in a world of their own, away from people and trying to defend the indefensible."

He called for a change in the leadership of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, saying it was undermining efforts by Francis to create a more inclusive church.

"If the church and the CDF do not advance with the world ... Catholics will continue to flee," he said.

In Francis' homeland of Argentina, LGBTQ activist Esteban Paulon said earlier statements by the pontiff conveying empathy and understanding for gays and lesbians were mere gestures, lacking any official weight.

"They were not institutional pronouncements," said Paulon, executive director of the Institute of Public Policies LGBT+. "Saying that homosexual practice is a sin takes us back 200 years and promotes hate speech that unfortunately in Latin America and Europe is on the rise."

Chile's largest LGBTQ rights group, the Movement for Homosexual Integration and Liberation, condemned the decree as a "homophobic and anti-Christian action" from the Catholic hierarchy.

Spokesman Oscar Rementería contrasted the Vatican's stern rhetoric against same-sex marriage with the many documented cases of Catholic leaders covering up child sex abuse committed by clergy.

Associated Press writers Eva Vergara in Santiago, Chile; Almudena Calatrava in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Nicole Winfield in Rome and Mariam Fam in Cairo contributed to this report.

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2 charged in assault of Capitol officer who died after riot

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials have arrested and charged two men with assaulting U.S. Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick with bear spray during the Jan. 6 riot, but they do not know yet whether it caused the officer's death.

George Tanios, 39, of Morgantown, West Virginia, and Julian Khater, 32, of Pennsylvania, were arrested Sunday on an array of charges, including assaulting a federal officer with a dangerous weapon, conspiracy and other offenses. The idea that Sicknick died after being sprayed by a chemical irritant has emerged in recent weeks as a new theory in the case.

The arrests are the closest federal prosecutors have come to identifying and charging anyone associated with the deaths that happened during and after the riot. Five people died, including a woman who was shot by a police officer inside the Capitol. But many rioters are facing charges of injuring police officers, who were attacked with bats, sprayed with irritants, punched and kicked, and rammed with metal gates meant to keep the insurrectionists from the Capitol.

Investigators initially believed that Sicknick was hit in the head with a fire extinguisher, based on statements collected early in the investigation, according to two people familiar with the case. But as they've collected more evidence, the theory of the case has evolved and investigators now believe Sicknick may have ingested a chemical substance — possibly bear spray — that may have contributed to his death, officials have said.

Sicknick and other officers were standing guard behind metal bicycle racks as the mob descended on the Capitol on Jan. 6.

"Give me that bear shit," Khater said before he reached into Tanios' backpack, according to court papers. Tanios told Khater "not yet" because it was "still early," but Khater responded that "they just f---ing sprayed me." Khater was then seen holding a can of chemical spray, prosecutors say.

Khater walked through the crowd toward the bike rack barrier. Rioters began pulling on one of the racks, and Khater was seen with his arm in the air and the canister in his hand while standing just 5-to-8 feet from the officers, authorities said.

Video footage shows the officers reacting one by one — bringing their hands to their face and rushing

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to find water to flush out their eyes — after they were hit with the spray, according to court papers.

Another officer eventually spotted Khater deploying the substance and sprayed Khater himself, authorities said.

The men each made brief court appearances from jail via videoconference on Monday and will remain locked up pending future hearings. A detention hearing was scheduled for Thursday for Tanios.

An email seeking comment was sent to Tanios' lawyer. A person who answered the phone at the office of Khater's lawyer said they had no comment.

In a statement Monday, Capitol Police Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman called the attack on the Capitol and its officers "an attack on our democracy."

"Those who perpetrated these heinous crimes must be held accountable, and — let me be clear — these unlawful actions are not and will not be tolerated by this Department," Pittman said.

The FBI had obtained video of the incident and released photos of both of the men, but did not indicate in wanted posters that they were being sought in connection with Sicknick's death. A former colleague identified Khater and the FBI received a tip from Tanios' former business partner, who also alleged he embezzled hundreds of thousands of dollars from their business, court papers said.

Tanios operates a greasy spoon called Sandwich U in Morgantown, home of West Virginia University.

On social media, he has referred to himself as the "Sandwich Nazi" and has tangled with customers and former employees in online comments. In 2019 on Instagram, he gleefully promoted a one-star Google review that said, "If donald trump was a restaurant manager, this is who he would be."

A photo at the Capitol cited in his charging document shows him wearing a sweatshirt with the logo of his restaurant.

Sicknick died after defending the Capitol against the mob that stormed the building as Congress was voting to certify Joe Biden's electoral win over Donald Trump. It came after Trump urged supporters on the National Mall to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat.

The circumstances surrounding Sicknick's death remain unclear, and a final cause of death has not been determined. Capitol Police have said he died after he was injured "while physically engaging with protesters" and the agency's acting chief said officials consider it a line-of-duty death.

Sicknick collapsed later on and died at a hospital on Jan. 7. The Justice Department opened a federal murder investigation into his death, but prosecutors are still evaluating what other specific charges could be brought in the case and the probe continues, officials have said.

The medical examiner's report on Sicknick's death is incomplete and no cause of death has been made public. Capitol Police say they are awaiting toxicology results.

The FBI has already released about 250 photos of people being sought for assaulting federal law enforcement officers during the riot. Some have already been arrested, and the Justice Department said about 300 people have been charged with federal offenses related to the riot.

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press writers Colleen Long and Cuneyt Dil contributed to this report.

This story has been clarified to show it was Khater who responded he was sprayed by police.

Major European nations suspend use of AstraZeneca vaccine

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A cascading number of European countries — including Germany, France, Italy and Spain — suspended use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine Monday over reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients, though the company and international regulators say there is no evidence the shot is to blame.

AstraZeneca's formula is one of three vaccines in use on the continent. But the escalating concern is another setback for the European Union's vaccination drive, which has been plagued by shortages and other hurdles and is lagging well behind the campaigns in Britain and the U.S.

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The EU's drug regulatory agency called a meeting for Thursday to review experts' findings on the AstraZeneca shot and decide whether action needs to be taken.

The furor comes as much of Europe is tightening restrictions on schools and businesses amid surging cases of COVID-19.

Germany's health minister said the decision to suspend AstraZeneca shots was taken on the advice of the country's vaccine regulator, the Paul Ehrlich Institute, which called for further investigation into seven cases of clots in the brains of people who had been vaccinated.

"Today's decision is a purely precautionary measure," Jens Spahn said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said his country will likewise stop dispensing the vaccine until at least Tuesday afternoon. Italy also announced a temporary ban, as did Spain, Portugal and Slovenia.

Other countries that have done so over the past few days include Denmark, which was the first, as well as Ireland, Thailand, the Netherlands, Norway, Iceland, Congo and Bulgaria. Canada and Britain are standing by the vaccine for now.

In the coming weeks, AstraZeneca is expected to apply for U.S. authorization of its vaccine. The U.S. now relies on Pfizer's, Moderna's and Johnson & Johnson's shots.

AstraZeneca said there have been 37 reports of blood clots out of more than 17 million people vaccinated in the 27-country EU and Britain. The drugmaker said there is no evidence the vaccine carries an increased risk of clots.

In fact, it said the incidence of clots is much lower than would be expected to occur naturally in a general population of this size and is similar to that of other licensed COVID-19 vaccines.

The World Health Organization and the EU's European Medicines Agency have also said that the data does not suggest the vaccine caused the clots and that people should continue to be immunized.

"Many thousands of people develop blood clots annually in the EU for different reasons," the European Medicines Agency said. The incidence in vaccinated people "seems not to be higher than that seen in the general population."

The agency said that while the investigation is going on, "the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing COVID-19, with its associated risk of hospitalization and death, outweigh the risks of side effects."

Blood clots can travel through the body and cause heart attacks, strokes and deadly blockages in the lungs. AstraZeneca reported 15 cases of deep vein thrombosis, or a type of clot that often develops in the legs, and 22 instances of pulmonary embolisms, or clots in the lungs.

The AstraZeneca shot has become a key tool in European countries' efforts to boost their sluggish vaccine rollouts. It is also pillar of a U.N.-backed project known as COVAX that aims to supply COVID-19 vaccines to poorer countries. That program continues unaffected by the European suspension.

Pfizer's and Moderna's vaccines are also used on the European continent, and J&J's one-shot vaccine has been authorized but not yet delivered.

Dr. Michael Head, a senior research fellow in global health at the University of Southampton in England, said there is no data yet to justify suspending the AstraZeneca vaccine and called the decision "baffling."

"Halting a vaccine rollout during a pandemic has consequences," Head said. "This results in delays in protecting people, and the potential for increased vaccine hesitancy, as a result of people who have seen the headlines and understandably become concerned."

Spahn, the German health minister, defended the country's decision, saying, "The most important thing for confidence is transparency." He said both first and second doses would be suspended.

Germany has received slightly over 3 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, and about half of those have so far been administered, compared with almost 7 million of the Pfizer shot and about 285,000 from Moderna.

German authorities have encouraged anyone who feels increasingly ill more than four days after receiving the shot — for example, with persistent headaches or dot-shaped bruises — to seek medical attention.

The head of the Spanish Medicines Agency, Maria Jesús Lamas, said Spain detected its first case of clots on Saturday. She said the ban was "not an easy decision" because it further slows the nation's vaccination

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campaign, but it was the "most prudent" approach.

Almost 940,000 people in Spain have received the AstraZeneca shot.

Some European countries, meanwhile, have begun reimposing restrictions in a bid to beat back a resurgence in infections, many of them from variants of the original virus.

In Italy, 80% of children nationwide couldn't attend classes after stricter rules in more regions took effect on Monday. In Poland, bolstered restrictions were applied to two more regions, including Warsaw. Paris could go into lockdown in a matter of days because intensive care units are getting swamped with COVID-19 patients.

And calls are growing in Germany to "pull the emergency brake" in regions where cases are rising.

Sylvie Corbet in Paris, Maria Cheng in London, Jamey Keaten in Geneva and Frances D'Emilio in Rome contributed to this report.

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A by-the-numbers look at a year of Oscar diversity, firsts

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A look, by the numbers, at notable facts, figures and trivia from the nominations for the 93rd Academy Awards:

11 — First-time acting nominees. With the pandemic prompting Hollywood to hold back most of its major motion pictures in 2020, pulling big stars from the competition, newbies became the norm in the four acting categories. First-timers include Amanda Seyfried for "Mank," Andra Day for "The United States vs. Billie Holiday" and Paul Raci for "Sound of Metal." The best director category has even fresher faces, with only one repeat nominee, David Fincher, among the five up for the coveted Oscar.

10 — Nominations for "Mank," the most of any film this year, with nods for best picture, best director for Fincher, best actor for Gary Oldman and best supporting actress for Seyfried.

9 — Actors of color nominated, a record. They include Steven Yeun, whose nod for "Minari" makes him the first Asian American to be nominated for best actor, and Riz Ahmed, who became the first person of Pakistani descent to be nominated in an acting category with his own best actor nod for "Sound of Metal."

8 — Career nominations for Glenn Close, who is up for best supporting actress this year for "Hillbilly Elegy." Her first was for "The World According to Garp" in 1983. She has never won an Oscar.

7 — Actors who have been nominated for Oscars after their deaths, now that Chadwick Boseman has received a posthumous nomination for best actor for "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." The tragic honor puts him in elite company that includes James Dean, Spencer Tracy, Massimo Troisi and Peter Finch, who became the only man to win best actor posthumously, for "Network" in 1977. In the best supporting actor category, Heath Ledger and Ralph Richardson were nominated, with Ledger winning for "The Dark Knight" in 2009. Boseman died in August after a long and largely secret battle with colon cancer.

6 — Black actors nominated, Boseman, Day, Viola Davis, Daniel Kaluuya, Leslie Odom Jr. and LaKeith Stanfield, after only one, Cynthia Erivo, was nominated last year.

5 — African nations that have received nominations for best international feature, now that Tunisia has its first nominee, "The Man Who Sold His Skin." Those five nations have combined for 10 nominated films. Along with Tunisia's one, Algeria has had five, South Africa has had two, and Ivory Coast and Mauritania have had one apiece.

4 — Nominations received by "Nomadland" director Chloé Zhao, a record for a woman in a record year for women. An unprecedented 70 women received 76 nominations, led by Zhao, who was nominated for director, adapted screenplay, editing, and best picture as a producer. That tops Sofia Coppola and Fran

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Walsh, who each got three nominations in 2003. Zhao, who is also the first woman of color to be nominated for best director, is joined by "Promising Young Woman" director Emerald Fennel in the category, making it the first time two women have been nominated.

3 — Career nominations for Sacha Baron Cohen, thanks to Abbie Hoffman and Borat. Baron Cohen is nominated for best supporting actor for playing Hoffman in "The Trial of the Chicago 7." And just as he was for the first "Borat" film in 2007, he is nominated for best adapted screenplay this year for "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm."

2 — Career nominations for Olivia Colman, whose nod for "The Father" follows 2019's for "The Favourite." She is one-for-one after winning best actress, and is nominated for best supporting actress this year.

1 — Man nominated for both best actor and best original song. Odom, who came to fame singing and acting in "Hamilton," has become the first man nominated for both in the same year for "One Night in Miami," in which he plays singer Sam Cooke. Three women have done it, all very recently: Mary J. Blige for "Mudbound" in 2018, Lady Gaga for "A Star is Born" in 2019, and Cynthia Erivo for "Harriet" in 2020. Barbra Streisand was the first to be nominated for both, but for different films in different years.

0 — Nominations for director Spike Lee or actor Delroy Lindo, whose "Da 5 Bloods" was among Monday's biggest snubs. The film received just one nomination, for best score.

This story has been corrected to reflect that Olivia Colman won best actress in 2019, not 2020, and that three women, not four, have been nominated for acting and song in the same year.

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/andyjamesdalton>

Automakers embrace electric vehicles. But what about buyers?

By TOM KRISHER and DAVID MCHUGH Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The world's major automakers have made something abundantly clear: They believe electric vehicles will dominate their industry in the years ahead.

Yet for that to happen, they'll need to sell the idea to people like Steve Bock.

When Bock recently replaced his family's 2013 Honda Pilot SUV, he considered — and then dismissed — the idea of buying an electric vehicle. An EV with enough room to carry his two dogs would cost too much, he decided. And he'd worry about driving long distances with too few charging stations.

"I would consider it if the prices would come down," Bock said, though leaving open the possibility of buying an electric vehicle next time.

Instead, Bock, of suburban Raleigh, North Carolina, settled on a Subaru Outback. Like nearly every other vehicle sold in the United States, it runs on gasoline.

Opinion polls show that a substantial majority of Americans are aligned with Bock. An EV might be on their shopping list if it cost less, if more charging stations existed and if a wider variety of models were available. In other words, the time isn't right.

It adds up to a significant risk for the largest automakers. With governments across the globe intensifying efforts to reverse climate change, the automakers are staking their futures on the notion that consumers will soon be ready to buy vehicles that run not on the internal combustion engines that have powered cars and trucks for more than a century but on electricity stored in a battery pack.

General Motors, Ford and Volkswagen plan to spend a combined \$77 billion developing global electric vehicles over the next five years, with models from pickup trucks to small SUVs. GM has gone so far as to announce a goal of ending gasoline- and diesel-fueled passenger vehicles entirely by 2035 — and to become carbon-neutral by 2040.

For the automakers, the risk is as hazardous as it is simple: What if American consumers reject electric vehicles for many years to come?

Companies would have no choice but to discount them and hope, in the meantime, that their profits from gas vehicles would still cover their costs — at least until large proportions of buyers gravitated toward EVs.

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If they don't, the financial blow could be heavy. For now, EVs make up less than 2% of U.S. new-vehicle sales and about 3% worldwide.

"It's still a sector that doesn't have a mass appeal to the entire population," said Jeff Schuster, president of global vehicle forecasting for LMC Automotive, a consulting firm. "It could be a financial drain if consumers do not buy at the same level."

Yet in contrast to the United States, sales of EVs have taken off in Europe and China, largely because of much more far-reaching pollution regulations and government incentives. Those tighter environmental regulations are forcing the industry to sell more electric vehicles.

In Europe, carmakers unveiled a slew of new electric models ahead of lower EU limits on average emissions of carbon dioxide, the primary greenhouse gas blamed for climate change, that took full effect at the start of this year. Government-backed incentives can cut the cost to near that of an internal combustion vehicle.

The result: Nearly 730,000 battery vehicles were sold in Europe in 2020 — more than 300,000 of them in the final three months of the year. The market share of electric vehicles — battery-only and plug-in hybrids — jumped from 3% to 10.5%. By December, their share had reached nearly one in four.

Among the new owners is Kerstin Griese of Essen, Germany, who bought a battery-powered Peugeot 208 after having driven electric cars in the motor pool at work. Griese found that they supplied the acceleration necessary to merge safely onto the highway for her 40 kilometer (25 mile) commute to the public works department in the town of Solingen.

"I said to myself, when they cost around 30,000 euros (\$36,263) and have more than 300 kilometers of range, and when the incentives are set high, then I'm there. And that happened last year."

After a government subsidy of 6,000 euros and the carmaker's 3,000 euro share, her new car will cost around 24,000 euros (\$29,000). The car can use fast-charging stations along highways, where she can recharge in a half hour when she takes longer trips, such as shopping excursions to the neighboring Netherlands, about 65 kilometers (40 miles) away.

"I found that very appealing," she said.

In China, which accounts for about 40% of global EV sales, purchases have accelerated because of limits on the number of internal combustion cars that can be registered in six major cities, said Arndt Ellinghorst, an analyst at the research firm Sanford C. Bernstein.

Automakers, including startups Lucid, Bollinger, Rivian and Workhorse, plan to introduce 22 new EV models in the U.S. this year after having rolled out six last year, according to LMC.

Tighter regulations — and, perhaps with it, higher sales of EVs — might be coming to the United States, too, if the Biden administration succeeds in its promotion of electric vehicles as part of a broad plan to fight climate change.

Still, it could prove an uphill battle. Only 260,000 fully electric vehicles were sold last year in the United States. That's out of a total new-vehicle market of 14.6 million. In fact, Americans are still spurning cars, in general, in favor of less-fuel-efficient trucks and SUVs.

Two polls late last year offered a glimpse of Americans' appetite for electric vehicles. One, by Consumer Reports, showed that only 4% of adults with a driver's license planned to acquire an EV the next time they buy a vehicle. An additional 27% said they would consider one. About 40% express some interest — but not for their next purchase. About 29% don't want an EV at all.

Likewise, when J.D. Power surveyed people who intend to buy or lease a new vehicle in the next 18 months, only about 20% said they were likely to buy an EV. Roughly 21% were unlikely. The rest were undecided.

"For every new-vehicle shopper seriously considering (battery electric vehicles), there's another at the opposite end of the spectrum," said Stewart Stropp, senior director of automotive retail at J.D. Power.

For one thing, Stropp said, most buyers are unfamiliar with electric vehicles and haven't ridden in one. Those who have, though, are roughly three times as likely to consider them, he said. People want as many chargers as gas stations, Stropp said, but don't seem to realize that most charging can be done at home.

The task of breaking down the American public's hesitance to invest in a fully electric vehicle could prove problematic. And the automakers clearly recognize it. Last year, General Motors planned a major public

campaign featuring test drives and engineers to answer customer questions at events around the country. The viral pandemic, though, forced it to scrap the plan.

GM is making experts available virtually this summer as it starts selling a Chevrolet Bolt small electric SUV for just under \$34,000, its first electric entry into the most popular segment of the U.S. market. But Tony Johnson, marketing director for Chevy electric vehicles, acknowledges that there's no substitute for "putting seats in seats."

Johnson notes optimistically that surveys done for GM show that the number of people who would consider an EV is far higher than it was five years ago. GM is keeping the price of the revamped Bolt hatchback to under \$32,000, he said, and is offering free home charging stations.

Schuster foresees U.S. sales rising this year to 359,000, taking off in 2022 and reaching over 1 million the next year. By 2030, LMC predicts U.S. sales of over 4 million EVs. Yet even that would represent only one-quarter of the overall market.

Still, encouraging signs emerged in February, when EV sales rose 55% from a year ago to 18,969, according to Edmunds.com. Helping boost sales, Schuster said, was the variety of models, plus added incentives and the expectation of stricter pollution limits from the Biden administration. Biden favors expanding a tax credit for buying EVs and has pledged to help build 500,000 more charging stations and increase fuel economy requirements.

Currently, a \$7,500 federal tax credit is phased out after an automaker hits 200,000 EV sales. GM and Tesla have both exceeded that level, and Nissan is close. A bill from Democrats would raise the cap to 600,000. Such a move would clearly help Tesla, the world leader in EV sales, which is facing increased competition as other automakers try to catch up.

The market will tip toward EVs, Schuster predicts, when all these forces line up.

"There are more choices, competitive pressure," he said. "A new generation of technology will drive prices down. We're getting there."

McHugh reported from Frankfurt, Germany.

How well do COVID vaccines protect after organ transplant?

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

A new study raised questions about how well COVID-19 vaccines protect organ transplant recipients — and what precautions people with suppressed immune systems should take after the shots.

Vaccines rev up the immune system to recognize the virus, something that's harder to do if someone's immune cells aren't in good working order. Transplant recipients take powerful immune-suppressing drugs to prevent organ rejection, which also increases their risk from the coronavirus — but excluded them from vaccine studies.

Specialists say the shots appear safe for transplant recipients and any protection is better than none. But how much protection do they get?

On Monday, researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported a first attempt to find out. They tested 436 people who had received new organs in recent years and were getting the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. A few weeks after the first dose, 17% of the transplant recipients had developed antibodies against the coronavirus, said Dr. Dorry Segev, a Hopkins transplant surgeon who co-authored the study.

Segev acknowledged transplant recipients may fare better after the needed second dose — he'll also check that — but prior studies show the first shot is enough to kickstart antibody production in just about everybody with a well-functioning immune system.

Of most concern, people whose transplant medications include a type called an anti-metabolite were far less likely to respond to the shot than those who don't require that kind of drug, the team reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The findings come after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said fully vaccinated people can relax some, but not all, of the masking and distancing precautions against the coronavirus.

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Segev called on CDC to consider a more nuanced message.

"From what we know, transplant patients cannot assume that they are safe after being vaccinated," Segev said. They may need post-vaccination blood tests to be sure, he added.

The CDC didn't immediately comment.

Dr. David Mulligan, Yale University's chief of transplant surgery and immunology, said Monday's report is a disappointment but not a surprise, because people with weak immune systems don't respond as well to other vaccines.

Some transplant groups, including the American Society of Transplantation, already have issued cautions about that.

Yale's Mulligan urged patients to check in with their transplant center for advice. Those waiting for a life-saving organ transplant might be able to get vaccinated first. He said some people who've already had a transplant might be good candidates to temporarily cut back on certain immune-suppressing drugs. And the immune-compromised should be sure to get both vaccine doses for the best chance at protection.

"Our patients are already calling" for advice, Mulligan said. "Until you've had your antibodies checked and you know, boy, I've got a vigorous immune response — or we've got better data," the immune-compromised shouldn't let down their guard against the virus.

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Down from mountain, Japanese internee's remains 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

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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, arriving 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

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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.

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 because she feared he would stop to paint and get lost, Lori's Aunt Kazue recalled. Ito forbade him from taking his art supplies but he managed to bring them anyway.

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

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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 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

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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.

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 Zenshuji 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.

Brazil's Bolsonaro moves to arm base, alarming gun experts

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Katia Sastre was walking her 7-year-old to class in Suzano, a violent city near Sao Paulo, when she saw a young man draw a pistol on other parents standing by the school's front door.

Within seconds, she pulled the .38 special she carried in her purse.

The off-duty police officer's three shots killed the mugger on that morning in May 2018 and kicked off her transformation into a beacon for champions of looser gun control. Security camera footage produced medals, social media star power and a congressional run in the same conservative wave that lifted pro-gun lawmaker Jair Bolsonaro from the fringes to the presidency.

Now a lawmaker herself, she is backing Bolsonaro's push to deliver a gun to every Brazilian who wants one, and dismisses public security experts' concerns about the president's four recently issued gun decrees. They will take effect next month -- unless Congress or courts intervene.

"Brazilians want assurances for self-defense because they feel insecure about criminality," Sastre told The Associated Press, blaming a 2003 disarmament law for heightened violence and more than 65,000 violent deaths in Brazil in 2017. "The guns used in those killings weren't in the hands of citizens; they came illegally from traffickers and criminals."

Sastre is in the minority of Brazilians, almost three-quarters of whom want stricter gun laws, according to the most recent poll. Yet the unpopular proposal is among Bolsonaro's top priorities for deploying

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his recently replenished political capital, even in Brazil's worst throes of the pandemic, with about 1,800 people dying per day.

Anti-gun activists, a former defense minister and high-ranking former police officers, including an ex-national public security secretary, warn the decrees will only add to the body count.

The two decrees causing most controversy would boost the number of guns average Brazilians can own -- to six, from four currently -- and enable them to carry two simultaneously. Policemen, core supporters of the president, could have eight firearms if the decrees stand.

Ilona Szabó, director at the security-focused Igarape Institute in Rio de Janeiro, has pushed back against Bolsonaro's attempts to get more guns to Brazilians. Nominated to a national security council, she faced a deluge of threats from Bolsonaro devotees and had to flee the country. From abroad, she's urging lawmakers and the country's Supreme Court to strike down the measures.

Court justices are expected to rule within weeks on the first of at least 10 challenges to the decrees.

"There is no technical justification for those decrees; it is evident that they make policing harder and could end up favoring criminal organizations," Szabó said.

The number of deaths from gunshots rose by 6% a year from 1980 to 2003, when the disarmament law passed. After that, the rate fell to 0.9% through 2018, when it was fully implemented, according to government research institute IPEA's Violence Atlas. That shows fewer guns translates into fewer deaths, Szabó said.

And although homicides increased in the years leading up to 2017, they plunged in 2018 -- before any measures to loosen gun control.

Bolsonaro's pro-gun position was a trademark of his seven terms as a lawmaker. In July 2018, he shocked adversaries by teaching a toddler how to make the finger-gun sign that came to represent his presidential campaign.

When he took office in Jan. 2019, a person could own two guns, but had to submit to an onerous process checking criminal record, employment, psychological and physical fitness, and also write a statement explaining one's need for a weapon.

Decrees from May 2019 allowed rural landowners carry guns across their properties, increased annual ammunition allowances and let registered shooters and hunters transport weapons from their homes to ranges.

Last month, Igarape and the Sou da Paz Institute, which researches violence, said there were almost 1.2 million legal guns in Brazilians' hands, up 65% from the month before Bolsonaro's term began.

Bolsonaro, a former Army captain who expresses nostalgia for Brazil's three decades of military rule, has said he wants to arm citizens to prevent a dictatorship from taking hold. He has suggested armed citizens could counter local government restrictions on activity during the pandemic.

"An armed populace will end this game of everybody needs to stay home," the president said on Christmas Eve.

The decrees also empower local councils of psychologists to grant shooting range members permission to own guns, rather than experts chosen by Brazil's Federal Police. And they wrest from the Army control over sales of several caliber bullets, which makes them harder to track, and boost annual ammunition allowances by as much as fivefold.

These are welcome prospects to people like Eduardo Barzana, president of a shooting club in Americana, a city in Sao Paulo state's countryside. Before a practice session, while uncasing semi-automatic assault rifles and preparing his protective glasses, he explained why he cheers Bolsonaro's moves to loosen controls.

"Guns are like cellphones; it's the person behind them who matters," said Barzana. "What the government is doing is benefiting our sport and giving average citizens the right to defend themselves."

Former public security secretary José Vicente da Silva acknowledges the decrees would help responsible owners, but says they also will facilitate guns falling into the wrong hands. One month after Sastre was sworn in as a lawmaker, students at the school she once attended were targeted in a shooting; the assailants used guns purchased online.

"No one needs six or eight guns for protection, and there's no evident reason to give so many guns

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to shooters and hunters," said da Silva, who retired from Sao Paulo state police after three decades of service. "The decrees make it almost impossible for police to track bullets or weapons. If this goes ahead, we will have weapon stockpiles, many of which bought by organized crime."

Some analysts have expressed fear that the riot at the U.S. Capitol in January may inspire an armed uprising of Bolsonaro supporters should he fail to win a second term in next year's election.

Bolsonaro's lawmaker son, Eduardo, a fellow die-hard gun rights supporter and former federal police officer, visited the White House on the eve of the riot. He later denied any tie to the invasion.

On March 8, Eduardo Bolsonaro told newspaper O Estado de S.Paulo during a visit to Jerusalem that if rioters in the U.S. had been organized, they would have been able to take the Capitol and make their demands heard, and had "a minimum of bellicose power" to avoid casualties on their side. In 2018, he said it would take just two soldiers to shut down the Supreme Court.

Statements like those prompt Igarape's Szabó and other analysts warn risks for Brazil's democracy are higher than in the U.S..

"This rhetoric of politicization of the issue, with the president saying he will arm citizens against lockdowns or electoral fraud is the Trump model," Szabo said. "We saw what happened at the Capitol invasion, with deaths. It could have been worse."

In the U.S, gun sales hit a historic high in January after the riot, and continued the record-setting surge that began as the pandemic took hold. Gun sales often spike during election years amid worries a new administration could change gun laws. U.S President Joe Biden has supported gun control measures like a ban on "assault weapons."

In Brazil, both the speaker of the house and the Senate's president won their positions last month with Bolsonaro's backing. Congressional analysts say it is unlikely either will cross the president on an issue his base holds so dear. The opposition isn't strong enough to whip the votes needed to strike down the decrees.

Caravans of Bolsonaro supporters drove the streets of major cities on Sunday. Pictures that went viral on social media showed some holding guns near their car windows.

"We are operating beyond public security here; this is the terrain of politics, which is really serious," said Raul Jungmann, a former minister of defense and public security. "Arming populations is always done at the service of coups, massacres, genocides and dictatorships."

Extent of COVID-19 vaccine waste remains largely unknown

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — As millions continue to wait their turn for the COVID-19 vaccine, small but steady amounts of the precious doses have gone to waste across the country.

It's a heartbreaking reality that experts acknowledged was always likely to occur. Thousands of shots have been wasted in Tennessee, Florida, Ohio and many other states. The reasons vary from shoddy record-keeping to accidentally trashing hundreds of shots. However, pinning down just how many of the life-saving vials have been tossed remains largely unknown despite assurance from many local officials the number remains low.

To be sure, waste is common in global inoculation campaigns, with millions of doses of flu shots trashed each year. By one World Health Organization estimate, as many as half of vaccines in previous campaigns worldwide have been thrown away because they were mishandled, unclaimed or expired.

By comparison, waste of the COVID-19 vaccine appears to be quite small, though the U.S. government has yet to release numbers shedding insight on its extent. Officials have promised that may change soon as more data is collected from the states.

In the interim, state health agencies are much more inclined to tout how fast they've administered the shots while keeping mum on the number of doses that end up in the trash.

Ohio's Department of Health resisted the use of the term "wasted" when asked by The Associated Press for a total number of tossed doses. Instead a spokesperson for the agency said that the state tracks

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“unusable” vaccines reported by state providers.

“With 3.2 million doses administered as of March 9, 2021, the 3,396 unusable doses reported by state providers make up about 0.1% of the doses administered — less than the CDC expectation of 5% of unusable doses,” Alicia Shoults, an Ohio Department of Health spokesperson, said in an email.

According to a log sheet provided by the department, Ohio providers reported almost 60 incidents where doses were unused. The largest incident occurred earlier this year, when a pharmacy responsible for distributing the vaccine to nursing homes failed to document storage temperatures for leftover shots, resulting in 890 doses being wasted.

In Tennessee, wasted, spoiled or unused doses aren’t publicly disclosed on the state’s online COVID-19 vaccine dashboard. However, after nearly 4,500 of Tennessee’s doses were ruined in February, the state’s Department of Health scrambled to find answers.

It started with nearly 1,000 doses reported missing in eastern Tennessee’s Knox County, where emotional local leaders told reporters that a shipment was accidentally tossed by an employee who believed the box contained dry ice.

Shortly after, a little more than 2,500 doses were reported wasted in Shelby County — which encompasses Memphis. A state investigation concluded the eye-opening spoilage occurred over multiple incidents due to substandard pharmacy practices, a lack of standard operating procedures for storage and handling, disorganized record-keeping and deficient management of soon-to-expire vaccine doses.

A separate 1,000 doses were then reported spoiled in middle Tennessee after a school district reported a storage error.

Despite the recent string of wasted vaccine incidents, the health agency stressed that the number represents just a sliver of the nearly 1.9 million doses the state has received since December.

“We don’t believe there is a systemic issue statewide, but we’re ramping up our efforts for compliance just to be sure,” state Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey told reporters earlier this month.

Piercey said Tennessee will soon conduct a review of the state’s vaccine distribution efforts to prevent future waste, and eventually hire a separate company to conduct the quality checks.

Meanwhile, in Florida, Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees recently called for an audit after more than 1,000 doses of vaccine were reported damaged last month in Palm Beach County. When asked for the review of that audit, the state said this week it would provide those documents through a request for public records — which it was still compiling.

Like other states, Florida doesn’t regularly publish how many doses don’t end up in arms, but a spokesperson for the state health department said 4,435 doses had been reported wasted as of Monday.

In Louisiana, health officials give updated totals of wasted doses to reporters at the governor’s weekly COVID-19 briefing. Out of 1.2 million vaccine doses administered thus far, fewer than 1,500 had been wasted as of Tuesday, said Dr. Joe Kanter, the governor’s chief public health adviser.

Ohio’s health department reported 2,349 doses wasted or spoiled as of February. Officials stress the wasted amount is extremely low compared to the total doses that ended up in arms. However, they note, that doesn’t make the situation any less upsetting.

“Here’s the bottom line: This stuff is gold,” said Julie Willems Van Dijk, deputy secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. “I think every vaccinator who touches a bottle of Pfizer, Moderna or J&J knows it. ... I’ve talked to people with these wasted vaccine and they are heartbroken.”

The federal government has also held off releasing numbers of spoiled or unusable doses, though it says states should report such waste in its vaccine tracker.

“We are working to figure out how to provide this data online in the future when the data is more complete,” Kristen Nordlund, a spokesperson for the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, said in an email.

Associated Press writers Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee, Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin, Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Andrew Welsh-Higgins in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

US astronaut launching next month may spend year in space

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA may soon chalk up another one-year space mission thanks to an out-of-this-world Russian movie-making deal.

Astronaut Mark Vande Hei learned just last week that he'll launch April 9 on a Russian rocket to the International Space Station. The former station resident suspected that might happen and had been training just in case.

In a news conference Monday from cosmonaut headquarters in Star City, Vande Hei said he may have to give up his return Soyuz seat in the fall to a Russian space tourist who's interested in filming up there. If that happens, he and possibly one of his two Russian crewmates would have to wait for the next Soyuz ride home — most likely in spring 2022.

"Honestly, for me, it's just an opportunity for a new life experience," he told reporters. "I've never been in space longer than about six months, so if someone tells me I've got to stay in space for a year, I'll find out what that feels like. I'm really enthusiastic about it."

The movie is planned by Russia's Channel One and a TV film studio. Tentatively titled "Vyzov," challenge in English, it's meant to highlight Russian space activities and glorify the cosmonaut profession, according to a news release.

Five years have passed since now retired astronaut Scott Kelly completed a 340-day space station mission, a U.S. record. Astronaut Christina Koch came close to that a year ago.

NASA is eager for more extra-long missions to study the human body's adaptation to weightlessness, especially as it looks ahead to Mars expeditions of at least a few years. Space station missions typically last six months.

Vande Hei was added to the next Soyuz crew — bumping a Russian — in order to keep a U.S. presence on the space station in the event SpaceX's next astronaut flight experiences a major delay. SpaceX is targeting no earlier than April 22. Until the private company began providing rides last year, Russia provided the only lift for space station crews once NASA's shuttles stopped flying.

Operations on the U.S. side of the orbiting lab would be hampered if no Americans — only Russians — were on board, according to Vande Hei. It's also a symbolic issue after 20 straight years of U.S. astronauts in space, he noted. The astronauts there now are due to leave in April and May.

The good news is that NASA managed to launch his clothes up there. Otherwise, the retired Army colonel would have been stuck wearing much bigger outfits meant for someone else.

Vande Hei expects to get his second COVID-19 vaccine this week. He remains vigilant about wearing masks, even when he and his Russian crewmates are training in spacesuits.

"It's not very comfortable, but it's the right thing to do," he said.

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Myanmar junta orders martial law in large area of Yangon

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's ruling junta has declared martial law in a wide area of 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.

The United Nations said at least 138 peaceful protesters have been killed in Myanmar since the Feb. 1 military coup, including at least 56 killed over the weekend.

The developments were the latest setback to hopes of resolving the crisis that started with the military's seizure of power that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. A grassroots movement has sprung up across the country to challenge the takeover with almost daily protests that the army has tried to crush with increasingly deadly violence.

State broadcaster MRTV said Monday that the Yangon townships of North Dagon, South Dagon, Dagon

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Seikkan and North Okkalapa have been put under martial law. That was in addition to two others — Hlaing Thar Yar and neighboring Shwepyitha — announced late Sunday.

More violence was reported around the country on Monday, with at least eight protesters in four cities or towns killed, according to the independent broadcaster and news service Democratic Voice of Burma. Photos and videos posted on social media showed long convoys of trucks entering Yangon.

At least 38 people were killed Sunday, the majority in the Hlaing Thar Yar area of Yangon, and 18 were killed on Saturday, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The total includes women and children, according to the figures from the U.N. human rights office.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres “strongly condemns this ongoing violence against peaceful protesters and the continuing violation of the fundamental human rights of the people of Myanmar,” Dujarric said.

The U.N. chief renews his call on the international community, including regional countries, “to come together in solidarity with the people of Myanmar and their democratic aspirations,” the spokesman said.

Earlier Monday, U.N. Special Envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener earlier condemned the “continuing bloodshed,” which has frustrated calls from the Security Council and other parties for restraint and dialogue.

“The ongoing brutality, including against medical personnel and destruction of public infrastructure, severely undermines any prospects for peace and stability,” she said.

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

Mobile data service had been used to stream live video coverage of protests, often showing security forces attacking demonstrators. It previously 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 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 coup, and have been charged with several criminal offenses that their supporters believe are politically motivated to keep them locked up.

Since the takeover, Myanmar has been under a nationwide state of emergency, with 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 handling of security by the military instead of police.

Sunday’s announcement said the junta, formally called 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 Sunday’s deaths were in Yangon. At least 22 occurred in Hlaing Thar Yar township, an industrial area with many factories that supply the garment industry, a major export earner for Myanmar. Several of the factories, many of which are Chinese-owned, were set aflame Sunday by unknown perpetrators.

The torching earned protesters a rebuke from the Chinese Embassy, which in turn received an outpouring of scorn on social media for expressing concern about factories but not mentioning the dozens of people killed by Myanmar’s security forces.

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

Protesters in the past week in response to increased police violence have begun taking a more aggressive approach to self-defense, burning tires at barricades and pushing back when they can against attacks.

A statement issued Sunday by the Committee Representing Pyihtaungsu Hluttaw, the elected members of Parliament who were not allowed to take their seats, announced that the general public has the legal right to self-defense against the junta’s security forces.

The group, which operates underground inside the country and with representatives abroad, has estab-

lished itself as a shadow government that claims to be the sole legitimate representative body of Myanmar's citizens. It has been declared treasonous by the junta.

A small respite from the latest violence came before dawn Monday, when several dozen anti-coup protesters in southern Myanmar held candlelight vigils with calls for the end of the military government and a return to democracy.

In Kyae Nupyin village, in Launglone township, villagers read Buddhist texts and prayed for the safety and security of all those risking their lives in the face of the increasingly lethal response of the security forces.

The area around the small city of Dawei has become a hot spot for resistance to the military takeover. On nearby country roads, a long convoy of motorcyclists carried the protest message through villages.

In Dawei itself, demonstrators built barricades out of rocks to hinder police on the main roads. There were marches, both in the morning and the afternoon, to try to keep up the momentum of weeks of resistance to the takeover.

AP Writer Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: Why countries are halting the AstraZeneca shot

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — At least a dozen countries including Germany, France, Italy and Spain have now temporarily suspended their use of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine after reports last week that some people in Denmark and Norway who got a dose developed blood clots, even though there's no evidence that the shot was responsible.

The European Medicines Agency and the World Health Organization say the data available don't suggest the vaccine caused the clots and that people should continue to be immunized. Here's a look at what we know — and what we don't.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Denmark was the first country to halt its use of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine last week after reports of blood clots in some people, including one person who developed multiple clots and died 10 days after receiving at least one dose. Danish health authorities said the suspension would last for at least two weeks while the cases were investigated, even as they noted that "it cannot be concluded whether there is a link between the vaccine and the blood clots."

Norway, Iceland, Bulgaria, Thailand, and Congo soon followed suit. On Saturday, Norwegian authorities reported that four people under age 50 who had gotten the AstraZeneca vaccine had an unusually low number of blood platelets. That could lead to severe bleeding. Ireland and the Netherlands then announced that they too, were stopping their use of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

"We must always err on the side of caution, which is why it is sensible to press the pause button now as a precaution," said Hugo de Jonge, the Dutch health minister.

After saying last week they would continue with the vaccine, German officials said Monday they would suspend its use after fresh reports of new problems. French President Emmanuel Macron said France too would suspend its use until at least Tuesday afternoon, followed by announcements by Italy and Spain that they too would halt the vaccine for now.

In response to the suspensions of its vaccine, AstraZeneca said it had carefully reviewed the data on 17 million people who received doses across Europe and found there were 37 cases of people who developed blood clots. It said there was "no evidence of an increased risk" of blood clots in any age group or gender in any country.

"This is much lower than would be expected to occur naturally in a general population of this size and is similar across other licensed COVID-19 vaccines," the company said.

IS THERE ANY PROOF THE VACCINE IS RESPONSIBLE?

No. The European Medicines Agency says there is "no indication that vaccination has caused these con-

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ditions.” The EU regulator said its investigation was continuing and was conducting a “rigorous analysis” of all data. It said while its review was ongoing, the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine outweighed the potential side effects.

The EMA said it was convening its expert safety committee Tuesday and would hold another meeting on Thursday to decide on any necessary actions.

In Britain, where 11 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine have been administered — more than any other country — there have been reports of about 11 people who developed blood clots after getting a shot. None were proven to have been caused by the vaccine.

Some doctors pointed out that since vaccination campaigns started by giving doses to the most vulnerable people, those now being immunized are more likely to already have health problems. Experts say that could make it difficult to determine whether a vaccine is responsible.

Blood clots that form in the arms, legs or elsewhere can sometimes break free and travel to the heart, brain or lungs, causing strokes, heart attacks or a deadly blockage of blood flow.

SO WHY DID THEY STOP VACCINATION?

Any time vaccines are rolled out widely, scientists expect some serious health issues and deaths to be reported — simply because millions of people are receiving the shots and problems would be expected to occur randomly in a group so large. The vast majority of these end up not being connected to the vaccine, but because COVID-19 vaccines are still experimental and there is no long-term data, scientists must investigate every possibility that the shot could have unforeseen side effects.

WHO’s chief scientist, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, said officials at the U.N. health agency “don’t want people to panic” amid the reports. She noted that of the 300 million doses of coronavirus vaccines have been given to people globally, “there is no documented death that has been linked to a COVID vaccine.”

IS THIS A CONCERN WITH OTHER COVID-19 VACCINES?

The EMA is currently examining whether COVID-19 shots made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna Inc. and AstraZeneca might be causing low levels of blood platelets in some patients, a condition that could lead to bruising and bleeding.

HAS ASTRAZENECA RUN INTO OTHER TROUBLE?

The vaccine has been approved for use in adults in more than 50 countries and has been proven to be safe and effective in research done in Britain, Brazil and South Africa. But there have been concerns raised about how the vaccine data have been released, and some European leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, have questioned the vaccine’s effectiveness in older people, citing a lack of information.

Britain first authorized the vaccine based on partial results that suggested the shots were about 70% effective. But those results were clouded by a manufacturing mistake that led some participants to get just a half dose in their first shot — an error the researchers didn’t immediately acknowledge. When it recommended the vaccine be licensed, the EMA estimated the vaccine’s efficacy to be about 60%.

The data on whether the vaccine protected older adults were also incomplete, leading some European countries to initially withhold the shot from older people.

In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration suspended a study in 30,000 Americans for an unusual six weeks, as frustrated regulators sought information about some possible side effects reported in Britain.

“All the data we have seen about the AstraZeneca vaccine suggests it’s very safe and is saving people from dying of COVID,” said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia. “But this may be more of a perception problem because every time there is a vaccine issue, we hear the name ‘AstraZeneca’ soon after.”

SO WHAT ARE EXPERTS TELLING PEOPLE TO DO?

The WHO and the EMA — as well as regulators in several countries — say people should continue to be

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immunized and that the small risks of getting vaccinated far outweighs any potential harm.

"The safety of the public will always come first," said Britain's drug regulator. "People should still go and get their COVID-19 vaccine when asked to do so."

Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed to this report.

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Vatican bars gay union blessing, says God 'can't bless sin'

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The Vatican declared Monday that the Catholic Church won't bless same-sex unions since God "cannot bless sin."

The Vatican's orthodoxy office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a formal response to a question about whether Catholic clergy have the authority to bless gay unions. The answer, contained in a two-page explanation published in seven languages and approved by Pope Francis, was "negative."

The note distinguished between the church's welcoming and blessing of gay people, which it upheld, but not their unions. It argued that such unions are not part of God's plan and that any sacramental recognition of them could be confused with marriage.

The note immediately pleased conservatives, disheartened advocates for LGBT Catholics and threw a wrench in the debate within the German church, which has been at the forefront of opening discussion on hot-button issues such the church's teaching on homosexuality.

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, which advocates for greater acceptance of gays in the church, predicted the Vatican position would be ignored, including by some Catholic clergy.

"Catholic people recognize the holiness of the love between committed same-sex couples and recognize this love as divinely inspired and divinely supported and thus meets the standard to be blessed," he said in a statement.

The Vatican holds that gay people must be treated with dignity and respect, but that gay sex is "intrinsically disordered." Catholic teaching says that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and woman, is part of God's plan and is intended for the sake of creating new life.

Since gay unions aren't intended to be part of that plan, they can't be blessed by the church, the document said.

"The presence in such relationships of positive elements, which are in themselves to be valued and appreciated, cannot justify these relationships and render them legitimate objects of an ecclesial blessing, since the positive elements exist within the context of a union not ordered to the Creator's plan," the response said.

God "does not and cannot bless sin: He blesses sinful man, so that he may recognize that he is part of his plan of love and allow himself to be changed by him," it said.

Francis has endorsed providing gay couples with legal protections in same-sex unions, but that was in reference to the civil sphere, not within the church. Those comments were made during a 2019 interview with a Mexican broadcaster, Televisa, but were censored by the Vatican until they appeared in a documentary last year.

While the documentary fudged the context, Francis was referring to the position he took when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires. At the time, Argentine lawmakers were considering approving gay marriage, which the Catholic Church opposes. Then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio instead supported providing legal protections for gays in stable unions through a so-called "law of civil cohabitation."

Francis told Televisa: "Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God."

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Speaking of families with gay children, he said: "You can't kick someone out of a family, nor make their life miserable for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered."

In the new document and an accompanying unsigned article, the Vatican said questions had been raised about whether the church should bless same-sex unions in a sacramental way in recent years, and after Francis had insisted on the need to better welcome gays in the church.

It was an apparent reference to the German church, where some bishops have been pushing the envelope on issues such as priestly celibacy, contraception and the church's outreach to gay Catholics after coming under pressure by powerful lay Catholic groups demanding change.

In a statement, the head of the German bishops' conference, Bishop Georg Bätzing, said the new document would be incorporated into the German discussion, but he suggested that the case was by no means closed.

"There are no easy answers to questions like these," he said, adding that the German church wasn't only looking at the church's current moral teaching, but also the development of doctrine and the actual reality of Catholics today.

Bill Donohue, president of the conservative Catholic League, praised the decision as a decisive, non-negotiable "end of story" declaration by the Vatican.

"The Vatican left nothing on the table. The door has been slammed shut on the gay agenda," Donohue wrote on the League's website, calling the document "the most decisive rejection of those efforts ever written."

In the article, the Vatican stressed the "fundamental and decisive distinction" between gay individuals and gay unions, noting that "the negative judgment on the blessing of unions of persons of the same sex does not imply a judgment on persons."

But it explained the rationale for forbidding a blessing of such unions, noting that any union that involves sexual activity outside of marriage cannot be blessed because it is not in a state of grace, or "ordered to both receive and express the good that is pronounced and given by the blessing."

And it added that blessing a same-sex union could give the impression of a sort of sacramental equivalence to marriage. "This would be erroneous and misleading," the article said.

Esteban Paulon, president of the Argentine Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals, said the document was proof that for all of Francis' words and gestures expressing outreach to gays, the institutional church wouldn't change.

"Saying that homosexual practice — openly living sexuality — is a sin takes us back 200 years and promotes hate speech that unfortunately in Latin America and Europe is on the rise," Paulon said. "That transforms into injuries and even deaths, or policies which promote discrimination."

A similar note of exasperation was echoed in the Philippines, Asia's largest Roman Catholic nation, where gay rights leader Danton Remoto said it simply wasn't worth it to fight an old institution. "I keep on telling LGBTQIs to just have their civil unions done," Remoto said. "We do not need any stress anymore from this church."

Other critical commentators noted the Catholic Book of Blessings contains blessings that can be bestowed on everything from new homes and factories to animals, sporting events, seeds before planting and farm tools.

Juan Carlos Cruz, a Chilean survivor of sexual abuse who is gay and close to Francis, said the document was out of step with Francis' pastoral approach and was tone deaf to the needs and rights of LGBT Catholics.

"If the Church and the CDF do not advance with the world ... constantly rejecting and speaking negatively and not putting priorities where they should be, Catholics will continue to flee," he warned.

In 2003, the same Vatican office issued a similar decree saying that the church's respect for gay people "cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions."

Doing so, the Vatican reasoned then, would not only condone "deviant behavior," but create an equivalence to marriage, which the church holds is an indissoluble union between man and woman.

Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of the U.S.-based NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

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and an advocate for greater LGBTQ inclusion in the church, said she was relieved the Vatican statement wasn't worse.

She said she interpreted the statement as saying, "You can bless the individuals (in a same-sex union), you just can't bless the contract."

"So it's possible you could have a ritual where the individuals get blessed to be their committed selves."

AP writers David Crary in New York, Kirsten Grieshaber in Berlin, Almudena Calatrava in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Jim Gomez in Manila, Philippines, contributed to this report.

US prison guards refusing vaccine despite COVID-19 outbreaks

By NICOLE LEWIS of The Marshall Project and MICHAEL R. SISAK of The Associated Press
A Florida correctional officer polled his colleagues earlier this year in a private Facebook group: "Will you take the COVID-19 vaccine if offered?"

The answer from more than half: "Hell no." Only 40 of the 475 respondents said yes.

In Massachusetts, more than half the people employed by the Department of Correction declined to be immunized. A statewide survey in California showed that half of all correction employees will wait to be vaccinated. In Rhode Island, prison staff have refused the vaccine at higher rates than the incarcerated, according to medical director Dr. Justin Berk. And in Iowa, early polling among employees showed a little more than half the staff said they'd get vaccinated.

As states have begun COVID-19 inoculations at prisons across the country, corrections employees are refusing vaccines at alarming rates, causing some public health experts to worry about the prospect of controlling the pandemic both inside and outside. Infection rates in prisons are more than three times as high as in the general public. Prison staff helped accelerate outbreaks by refusing to wear masks, downplaying people's symptoms, and haphazardly enforcing social distancing and hygiene protocols in confined, poorly ventilated spaces ripe for viral spread.

This story is a collaboration between The Associated Press and The Marshall Project exploring the state of the prison system in the coronavirus pandemic. Nicole Lewis, Beth Schwartzapfel and Tom Meagher reported for The Marshall Project.

The Marshall Project and The Associated Press spoke with correctional officers and union leaders nationwide, as well as with public health experts and doctors working inside prisons, to understand why officers are declining to be vaccinated, despite being at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Many employees spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared they would lose their jobs if they spoke out.

In December and January, at least 37 prison systems began to offer vaccines to their employees, particularly front-line correctional officers and those who work in health care. More than 106,000 prison employees in 29 systems, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons, have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to data compiled by The Marshall Project and The Associated Press since December. And some states are not tracking employees who get vaccinated in a community setting such as a clinic or pharmacy.

Still, some correctional officers are refusing the vaccine because they fear both short- and long-term side effects of the immunizations. Others have embraced conspiracy theories about the vaccine. Distrust of the prison administration and its handling of the virus has also discouraged officers from being immunized. In some instances, correctional officers said they would rather be fired than be vaccinated.

The resistance to the vaccine is not unique to correctional officers. Health care workers, caretakers in nursing homes and police officers — who have witnessed the worst effects of the pandemic — have declined to be vaccinated at unexpectedly high rates.

The refusal of prison workers to take the vaccine threatens to undermine efforts to control the pandemic both inside and outside of prisons, according to public health experts. Prisons are coronavirus hot

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spots, so when staff move between the prisons and their home communities after work, they create a pathway for the virus to spread. More than 388,000 incarcerated people and 105,000 staff members have contracted the coronavirus over the last year. In states like Michigan, Kansas and Arizona, that's meant 1 in 3 staff members have been infected. In Maine, the state with the lowest infection rate, 1 in 20 staff members tested positive for COVID-19. Nationwide, those infections proved fatal for 2,474 prisoners and at least 193 staff members.

"People who work in prisons are an essential part of the equation that will lead to reduced disease and less chance of renewed explosive COVID-19 outbreaks in the future," said Brie Williams, a correctional health expert at the University of California, San Francisco, or UCSF.

At FCI Miami, a federal prison in Florida, fewer than half the facility's 240 employees had been fully vaccinated as of March 11, according to Kareen Troitino, the local corrections officer union president. Many of the workers who refused had expressed concerns about the vaccine's efficacy and side effects, Troitino said.

In January, Troitino and FCI Miami warden Sylvester Jenkins sent an email to employees saying that "in an act of solidarity," they had agreed to get vaccinated and encouraged staff to do the same. "Even though we recognize and respect that this motion is not mandatory; nevertheless, with the intent of promoting staff safety, we encourage all staff to join us," the Jan. 27 email said.

Only 25 employees signed up as a result of the email. FCI Miami has had two major coronavirus outbreaks, Troitino said: last July, when more than 400 prisoners out of 852 were suspected of having the disease, and in December, when about 100 people were affected at the facility's minimum-security camp.

Because so many correctional officers and prisoners haven't been vaccinated, there are fears that could happen again. "Everybody is on edge," Troitino said. Though he's gotten the shot, he's worried about another outbreak and the impact on already stretched staffing at the prison.

The pandemic has strained prisons already struggling with low staffing rates and subpar health care. Low vaccination rates among officers could push prisons to their breaking point. At the height of the outbreak behind bars, several states had to call in the National Guard to temporarily run the facilities because so many staff members had called out sick or refused to work.

At FCI Miami, officers are constantly shuttling sick and elderly prisoners to the hospital, Troitino said. As a result, a skeleton crew of staff is left to operate the prison. Unvaccinated staff only compound the problem as they run the risk of getting sick when outbreaks crop up in the prisons.

"A lot of employees get scared when they find out, 'Oh, we had an outbreak in a unit, 150 inmates have COVID,'" Troitino said. "Everybody calls in sick."

Part of the resistance to the vaccine is widespread misinformation among correctional staff, said Brian Dawe, a former correctional officer and national director of One Voice United, a policy and advocacy group for officers. A majority of people in law enforcement lean right, Dawe said. "They get a lot of their information from the right-wing media outlets," he said. "A lot of them believe you don't have to wear masks. That it's like the flu." National polls have shown that Republicans without college degrees are the most resistant to the vaccine.

Several correctional officers in Florida, speaking on the condition of anonymity because they are not permitted to talk to the press, said many of their colleagues believe that the vaccine could give them the virus. Some have latched onto debunked conspiracy theories circulating on social media, the officers said, believing the vaccine contains tracking devices produced by former Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, who has donated to coronavirus treatment research. (The vaccine does not contain tracking devices.) Others believe the vaccine was hastily produced without enough time to understand the long-term side effects.

"I wouldn't care if I worked in a dorm with every inmate having COVID, I still wouldn't get (vaccinated)," said a correctional sergeant who has worked for the Florida Department of Corrections for more than a decade. "If I'm wearing a mask, gloves, washing my hands and being careful — I'd still feel better working like that than putting the vaccine in my body."

Officer attitudes about the vaccine are so widespread that researchers at UCSF have created a frequently asked questions flyer for the incarcerated that includes: "I heard the guards/officers ... at my facility are refusing to get the vaccine. If they aren't getting it, why should I?" The researchers encourage the incar-

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cerated to learn as much as they can about the vaccine and to make their own decision "regardless of what other people are doing."

Public health experts have urged states to prioritize vaccinations in prisons and jails but cautioned against prioritizing staff over prisoners. Though numbers aren't available from many states, at least 15 began vaccinating staff before the incarcerated, The Marshall Project and Associated Press found. "We know they have anti-vax ideations and attitudes," said Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein, who leads the COVID Prison Project, which tracks correction officials' responses to the pandemic. "We have said again and again, we shouldn't have this two-tier system."

But guards' refusal to be vaccinated has been a blessing for some incarcerated people. The vaccines have a short shelf life after being thawed out, so officials have offered the leftover vaccines to prisoners instead of letting them go to waste. Julia Ann Poff is incarcerated at FMC Carswell, a federal prison in Texas for women with special medical and mental health needs, for sending bombs to state and federal officials. She said she received her first shot in mid-December, after several officers declined.

"I consider myself very blessed to have received it," she wrote, using the prison's email system. "I have lupus and a recent diagnosis of heart disease, so there was no way I could afford to let myself get (sick)."

Misinformation and conspiracy theories aside, some officers in federal prisons say they are refusing the vaccine because they do not trust the prison administration. The Federal Bureau of Prisons has come under fire by employees and the incarcerated for its response to the coronavirus. Among the criticisms: a lack of masks and soap in the pandemic's early days, broken thermometers at one facility and sick prisoners who say they were bunched together without social distancing.

At FCI Mendota, a medium-security federal prison near Fresno, California, officials closed off the main employee entrance in January, funneled the employees through a visiting room turned vaccination clinic and forced them to decide on the spot whether to get vaccinated. Employees weren't allowed to proceed to their posts without either getting vaccinated or signing a form declaring they refused the vaccine.

Aaron McGlothlin, a local corrections officers' union president, said he refused the vaccine citing medical issues, adding that he doesn't trust prison officials' motives.

Employers cannot mandate that staff get vaccinated. So correctional officers' refusal puts incarcerated people at risk as they have no way of protecting themselves from unmasked and unvaccinated officers. By December, 1 in 5 incarcerated people had contracted the coronavirus, according to data compiled by The Marshall Project and The Associated Press.

Correctional officers can bring the virus home from work and infect family members, too. In extreme cases, those family members themselves become seriously ill or even die. At least five family members of correctional employees have died of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, according to the online memorial Mourning Our Losses, which tracks COVID-19 deaths among those who live and work in prisons and jails. In one instance, a Florida correctional officer and his wife died in side-by-side intensive care rooms on the same day.

For some officers, these life and death experiences are a wake-up call. At FCI Miami, where Troitino leads the local officers' union, several employees contracted the virus or were hospitalized for COVID-19 after officials encouraged them to get vaccinated in late January but they refused. Some of those employees have expressed a change of heart about the vaccine.

"They have called me begging to have the vaccine reserved for them upon their return," Troitino said. "A few faced life and death and are totally devastated by their experience."

Push to prevent next meat shortage hits big obstacle

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

MAXWELL, Iowa (AP) — Sudden meat shortages last year because of the coronavirus led to millions of dollars in federal grants to help small meat processors expand so the nation could lessen its reliance on giant slaughterhouses to supply grocery stores and restaurants.

Like shortages of protective clothing for health care workers, hospital equipment and even toilet paper,

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the reality of empty meat counters was a shock to many Americans unaccustomed to scarcities. But where most other supply gaps are being addressed by changing how the U.S. acquires key items, the money flowing to small slaughterhouses shows no sign of solving the meat problem.

The meat industry has been consolidating for decades, and 80% or more of meat is slaughtered by just a few companies, whose operations were crippled last year when the virus began spreading among workers.

"Even a significant increase in processing capacity in those small and mid-size processors, that's a small amount in the grand scheme of things," Iowa Agriculture Secretary Mike Naig said. "Yes, it provided some relief but no, it's not at the level that will rival the big processors."

Or as Terry Houser, a meat processing expert at Iowa State University, put it, "Small plants cannot replace the big plants when they go down."

The problem illustrates the difficulty of creating more sources of supply in an industry that is trending in the opposite direction.

There's little doubt the grants will help small processors and in turn provide sorely needed rural jobs, but the economics of meat now centers on large, highly efficient slaughterhouses, not smaller plants whose numbers have been decreasing sharply.

The number of smaller operations that meet local demand plunged by 42% to 1,910 between 1990 and 2016, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

When the coronavirus sickened thousands of workers at the big slaughterhouses, forcing some to close temporarily, output dropped to 60% of normal. Many producers suddenly had nowhere to take their animals for slaughter, and the small processors who remained, who mostly provide meat for local groceries and farmers markets, couldn't take up the slack.

Later, Iowa was among at least 16 states that used some of the billions of dollars in federal COVID-relief aid to provide grants to small meat processors, enabling them to replace equipment and expand. In Iowa, the state awarded \$4 million to help 109 small meat and poultry plants increase production, with some of the funding also going toward marketing and education.

Likewise, Arkansas awarded \$5 million in federally funded grants, Indiana divvied up \$4 million and Montana used \$2 million to fund grants of up to \$150,000.

Most of the money went to small town businesses, which have withered as larger plants opened that could daily process thousands of cattle and up to 20,000 hogs. Small processors typically slaughter only 10 or 20 animals a week.

When the larger plants began closing last spring, some hog farmers ended up killing and burying thousands of animals.

Jeff Hodges, who owns a small processor in the tiny northwest Iowa city of Minden, said he was overwhelmed with business last spring and is still scheduling a year into the future as demand for locally raised meat remains strong.

"At first it was a giant nightmare," Hodges said. "Now you're used to the norm of your being maxed out and you pray everybody shows up for work."

Hodges has received a \$33,000 grant to buy a splitting saw, grinder and other equipment, but he'd need to spend closer to \$750,000 to substantially increase production. That's a big investment for a business he bought in the mid-1990s for \$90,000.

The key to lessening dependence on the big processors is to make larger grants and loans available to mid-sized processors, said Rebecca Thistlethwaite, a rancher and director of the Oregon-based Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network. That's an expensive proposition, with such plants costing \$20 million or so.

Even if the government offers more money, expansion in an industry with low profit margins could be slow, she said.

"A lot of people think that by changing policy, all of a sudden a bunch of new entrepreneurs are going to come into the space, and that's not going to happen," she said. "You don't have a bunch of people sitting on a bunch of money who are saying, 'Oh, I just can't wait to start a meat processing plant.'"

Some farmers, like the owners of Vaughn Farms near the small central Iowa community of Maxwell,

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say their chance of building their specialty cattle operation could depend on small processors expanding. With processors already booking out into next year, farmers must schedule space for cattle that aren't born yet.

"That's hard because animals grow at different rates, just like people," Jalane Vaughn said. "To try to gauge when something is going to be 1,200 pounds or the optimal weight for harvest has been a struggle."

Co-owner Jerilyn Hergenreder said she hopes the government's sudden interest in building up small processors makes a difference.

"I'm happy for the small processors that they have become relevant again and they're definitely trying to handle the demand," Hergenreder said.

Follow Scott McFetridge on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/smcfetridge>

Much of Europe tightens anti-pandemic rules as virus surges

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Tighter restrictions aimed at reining in surging coronavirus infections took hold in much of Italy and parts of Poland on Monday, while in France, Paris risks being slapped with a weekend lockdown as ICUs near saturation with COVID-19 patients.

In line with an Italian government decision late last week, 80% of schoolchildren, from nursery through high schools, were locked out of classroom starting on Monday. Ever-mounting numbers of ICU beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, steadily rising daily caseloads and infection transmission predominantly driven by a virus variant first discovered in Britain have combined to make Italian Premier Mario Draghi's new government apply "red zone" designation on more regions, including, for the first time since the color-tiered system was created last fall, on Lazio, the region including Rome.

In red-zone regions, restaurants and cafes can do only takeout or delivery, nonessential shops are shuttered and residents must stick close to home, except for work, health or shopping for necessities. Over the weekend, many hair salons extended hours to handle last-minute customers, and crowds thronged shopping streets, parks and seaside promenades before the crackdown took effect.

On Monday, reality sunk in.

In a country, where coffee is taken, properly, at a cafe counter or table, and not in some take-out paper cup, Alessandra Lorisa took off her mask and sipped hers in a Rome piazza. "By now, it's become part of our routine," she said. "It's a lot more American, if we can say so," she added, expressing hope that after Easter "we can see some improvements, to get back to the routines that we were used to."

Draghi on Friday promised a quick infusion of pandemic aid to shuttered businesses.

Beyond the commercial aspects, parents voiced concern for children shut out of classrooms. "They have little interaction now with their friends, they have to celebrate their birthdays alone," said Marco Pacciani as he strolled through a Rome park with his young son.

In Poland, amid a sharp spike in the number of new infections and of hospitalized COVID-19 patients, restrictions were tightened in two more regions, including the capital, Warsaw, and a western province that borders Germany. Two other provinces were already under restrictions.

Under the heightened measures, hotels and shopping malls have to remain closed, as do theaters, cinemas, fitness clubs and sports facilities. Schoolchildren ages 6-9 will have a combination of in-class and remote instruction.

An inexorable climb in the numbers of patients being treated in French hospital ICUs, particularly in the Paris region, is increasing pressure on the government of President Emmanuel Macron. As is the case elsewhere in Europe, virus variants are suspected of fueling increases in serious cases in France. Macron's government has been trying to stave off another punishing nationwide lockdown in 2021, instead opting for a 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. nationwide curfew.

Expected to be decided in a few days is whether the Paris region and its 12 million inhabitants will be locked down on weekends.

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Last week, countries in the Western Balkans announced a tightening of measures amid a surge in cases in Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro.

As they received first vaccines on Wednesday, doctors in Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo, warned that the virus has exploded in the past several days. Bars, restaurants and nonessential shops in the Sarajevo canton will be shut for the upcoming weekend.

In Serbia, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic criticized the holding in past days of two concerts by a popular band at a Belgrade hall. The country of 7 million has vaccinated more than 1.5 million people, which is among the highest rates in Europe.

On the western edge of the continent, Portugal stood out as an outlier. It was emerging Monday from a two-month pandemic lockdown, with the country gradually reopening over the next seven weeks, barring setbacks.

Primary and nursery schools, hair salons and bookshops were among the places reopening Monday. Prime Minister António Costa said in a tweet Monday that the process must be "very prudent, gradual and piecemeal."

AP reporters across Europe contributed to this report.

'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

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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 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.

Follow AP's coverage of the 10th anniversary of the Arab Spring uprisings at <https://apnews.com/hub/arab-spring>

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 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.

Most performances took place at the Los Angeles Convention 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

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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.

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.

This story has been corrected to show the ceremony was held at the Los Angeles Convention Center, not Staples Center.

March Madness: 68 teams punch ticket; the hard part awaits

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-wracking 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 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.

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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.

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>

Today in History

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 16, the 75th day of 2021. There are 290 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On March 16, 1945, during World War II, American forces declared they had secured Iwo Jima, although pockets of Japanese resistance remained.

On this date:

In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson signed a measure authorizing the establishment of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York.

In 1926, rocket science pioneer Robert H. Goddard successfully tested the first liquid-fueled rocket at his Aunt Effie's farm in Auburn, Massachusetts.

In 1935, Adolf Hitler decided to break the military terms set by the Treaty of Versailles (vehr-SY') by ordering the rearming of Germany.

In 1968, the My Lai (mee ly) massacre took place during the Vietnam War as U.S. Army soldiers hunting for Viet Cong fighters and sympathizers killed unarmed villagers in two hamlets of Son My (suhn mee) village; estimates of the death toll vary from 347 to 504. Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1972, in a nationally broadcast address, President Richard Nixon called for a moratorium on court-ordered school busing to achieve racial desegregation.

In 1984, William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut, was kidnapped by Hezbollah militants (he was tortured by his captors and killed in 1985).

In 1987, Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1991, a plane carrying seven members of country singer Reba McEntire's band and her tour manager crashed into Otay Mountain in southern California, killing all on board. U.S. skaters Kristi Yamaguchi, Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan swept the World Figure Skating Championships in Munich, Germany.

In 1994, figure skater Tonya Harding pleaded guilty in Portland, Oregon, to conspiracy to hinder prosecution for covering up an attack on rival Nancy Kerrigan, avoiding jail but drawing a \$100,000 fine.

In 2003, American activist Rachel Corrie, 23, was crushed to death by an Israeli military bulldozer while trying to block demolition of a Palestinian home in the Gaza Strip.

In 2004, China declared victory in its fight against bird flu, saying it had "stamped out" all its known cases.

In 2006, Iraq's new parliament met briefly for the first time; lawmakers took the oath but did no business and adjourned after just 40 minutes, unable to agree on a speaker, let alone a prime minister.

Ten years ago: Pakistan abruptly freed CIA contractor Raymond Allen Davis, who had shot and killed two men in a gunfight in Lahore, after a deal was reached to pay \$2.34 million to the men's families.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland to take the seat of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who had died the previous month; Republicans pledged to leave the seat empty until after the presidential election and said they wouldn't even hold confirmation hearings. Frank Sinatra Jr., 72, who carried on his famous father's legacy with his own music career, died while on tour in Daytona Beach, Florida.

One year ago: Global stocks plunged again, with Wall Street seeing a 12% decline, its worst in more than 30 years; the S&P 500 was down 30% from its record set less than a month earlier. The White House released a set of guidelines for the next 15 days; Americans were urged not to gather in groups of more than 10 people and older Americans were told to stay home. President Donald Trump acknowledged that the pandemic could send the economy into a recession; he suggested that the nation could be dealing with the virus until "July or August." Canada closed its borders to non-citizens; Americans were exempted. (The two countries agreed two days later to close their shared border to nonessential travel.) Ohio called off its presidential primary just hours before polls were to open, but Arizona, Florida and Illinois went ahead with their plans.

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Today's Birthdays: Country singer Ray Walker (The Jordanares) is 87. Game show host Chuck Woolery is 80. Country singer Robin Williams is 74. Actor Erik Estrada is 72. Actor Victor Garber is 72. Country singer Ray Benson (Asleep at the Wheel) is 70. Bluegrass musician Tim O'Brien (Hot Rize; Earls of Leicester) is 67. Rock singer-musician Nancy Wilson (Heart) is 67. World Golf Hall of Famer Hollis Stacy is 67. Actor Clifton Powell is 65. Rapper-actor Flavor Flav is 62. Rock musician Jimmy DeGrasso is 58. Actor Jerome Flynn is 58. Folk singer Patty Griffin is 57. Movie director Gore Verbinski is 57. Country singer Tracy Bonham is 54. Actor Lauren Graham is 54. Actor Judah Friedlander (FREED'-lan-duhr) is 52. Actor Alan Tudyk (TOO'-dihk) is 50. Actor Tim Kang is 48. R&B singer Blu Cantrell is 45. Actor Brooke Burns is 43. Actor Kimrie Lewis is 39. Actor Brett Davern is 38. Actor Alexandra Daddario is 35. R&B singer Jhene Aiko is 33. Rock musician Wolfgang Van Halen is 30.