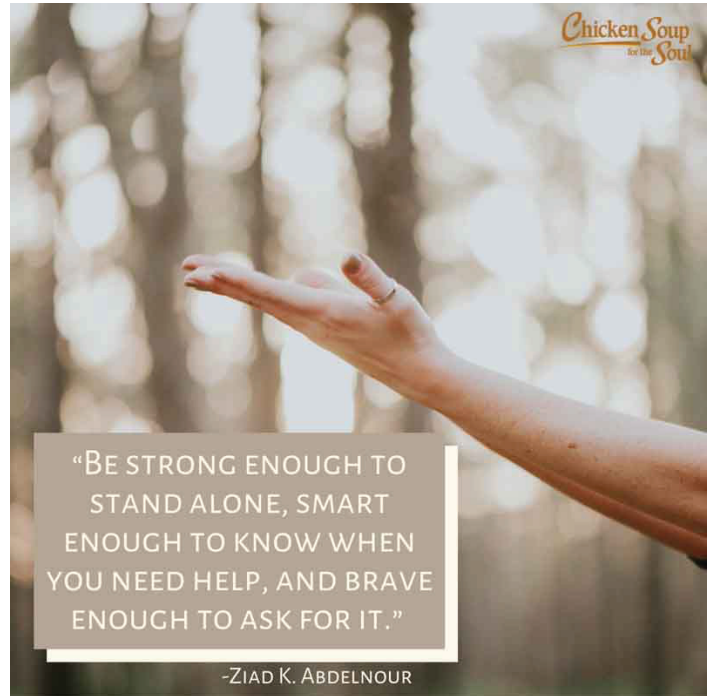


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Church Services

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church: Worship in the church at 8:30 a.m. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/215332349572015/>)

Groton Christian & Missinary Alliance Church: Worship in the church at 10:30 a.m.: (<https://www.facebook.com/GrotonCMA/>)

St. John's Lutheran Church: Worship in the church at 9 a.m. (<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnsgroton/>)

Emmanuel Lutheran Church - Worship inside at 9 a.m.

(<https://www.facebook.com/Emmanuel-Lutheran-Church-GrotonSD-ELCA-636505039852208/>)

United Methodist Church: Worship, at 11 a.m. inside (<https://www.facebook.com/grotonsdumc>)

Buffalo Lake Lutheran Church, rural Eden, 10:30 a.m. Worship inside or stay in vehicle and listen on the FM.

Heaven Bound Ministries of Pierpont has worship on Saturdays at 5:30 p.m. in the basement.

Heaven Bound Ministries of Pierpont / Buffalo Lake Lutheran Church, rural Eden - will have a podcast posted. <https://anchor.fm/paul-irvin-kosel>



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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United Methodist Church

Groton and Conde

Sunday, March 21, 2021

Newsletter Items Due

9 a.m.: Conde Worship

NO Sunday School (Spring Break)

11 a.m.: Groton Worship in person following CDC

Guidelines

Monday, March 22, 2021

7 p.m.: Groton Lenten Small Group

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

10 a.m.: Bible Study Using Social Distancing in Fellowship Hall

6 p.m.: Conde Lenten Small Group

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

7 p.m.: UMYF

Thursday, March 25, 2021

7 p.m.: PPR Meeting

Sunday, March 28, 2021

9:00 AM: Conde Worship

10:00 AM: Sunday School

11:00 AM: Groton Worship in person following CDC Guidelines

Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, March 21

9am Worship/Communion

Monday, March 22

6:30 am Bible Study

Wednesday, March 24

6pm Confirmation

7pm Lenten Service

Sunday, March 28

9am Worship

Milestones 4yr old's & Juniors

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton &

St. Joseph Catholic

Groton and Turton

Weekend Mass Schedule

Saturday 4:30pm Groton

Sunday 8:30am Groton & 11:00am Turton

Weekday

Tues 5:00pm Turton, W-F 8:30am Groton

Sat 10am Newman Center

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Each morning before Weekday Mass at 7:15am

Tues 3:45pm Turton

Confessions:

Sat. 3:45-4:15pm & Sun. 7:45am to 8:15am (G)

Sun. 10:30-10:45am (T)

Heaven Bound Ministries

Pierpont

Buffalo Lake Lutheran

Rural Eden

Saturday, March 20: Worship at Pierpont, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 21: Worship at Buffalo Lake 10:30 a.m.

Saturday, March 27: Worship at Pierpont, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 28: Worship at Buffalo Lake 10:30 a.m.

To submit your monthly or weekly church calendar, email to news@grotonsd.net

Coming up on
GDILIVE.COM

Worship Jesus Night!

Sunday, March 21

6:30 p.m.

United Methodist Church

Fr. Hartman leaving Groton-Turton Parish

Posted by Father Hartman on Facebook

BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY

Some of you may have heard the news that the Bishop has appointed me the Pastor of St. Michael's Parish in Sioux Falls, SD. This not only took discernment on his part to appoint me, but it also took discernment on my part to agree to this new assignment. According to Canon Law, I was given a pastorate of 6 years here at SEAS and St. Joseph, so I had the right to refusal. So how did I discern that God was calling me to this new assignment?

As I reflected on my last two years here, I really experienced what I call the perfect size family. Everything about it was like the parents who desire to have 1 boy and 1 girl and to live the reality in the peacefulness of this quaint reality. If I stayed 6 years and had been able to continue to develop as a pastor in this peaceful reality, I'm sure we would've continued to grow together.

The problem was that I've encountered families who were living in the tension of the call of God to "Be Fruitful and Multiply". Where instead of molding a family to their ideal, they choose to cooperate with God's plan. This often means larger families, more chaos, more stress, and an obvious requirement to learn to be less selfish.

Here was my tension. If I stayed, I would be perfectly happy, but God's call was to be fruitful and multiply. I didn't want to practice in a sense a spiritual type of birth control, but to live by the church's teaching of cooperating with God's plan. My SEAS and St. Joseph Parish Family, will always be like my first two children, but God has called me to be a Father to a much bigger family. Please pray for me as I will be living in that tension, pray that I will be less selfish, but know I am eternally grateful to have been called your Father.

In light of that change, Fr. Gregory Tschakert will be the pastor here beginning on July 1st, 2021. Fr. Tschakert has served multiple roles in our diocese, including the Tribunal and Vicar of Clergy and is currently at St. Katherine Drexel Parish in Sioux Falls. He grew up in Florence and has family in this Northeast corner. Fr. Tschakert will bring such a wealth of knowledge, strong leadership, and love as a pastor. Enjoy the blessing of having him as your spiritual father.

God bless you all, and know I'm still looking forward to being with you till July. You are and have been such a blessing.

Fr. Tom Hartman

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Call now to get your ADT security system starting at \$19.99/mo.*

Plus get \$100 off installation† when you call today!



*Requires 36-month monitoring contract for intrusion only with a minimum charge of \$28.99 after the 12 month term. Equipment shown requires ADT Secure or higher. Early term. and installation fees apply. Taxes add'l. For full terms and pricing see below.

†Requires minimum purchase of \$449.



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DF-CD-NP-Q121

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April 15, 2021

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***\$19.99/month + †\$100 off Installation:** Requires 36-month monitoring contract with a minimum charge of \$28.99/mo. (before instant savings) (24-month monitoring contract in California, total fees from \$695.76 (before instant savings) and enrollment in Easy Pay. Service and installation charges vary depending on system configuration, equipment and services selected. Offer includes (i) \$9.00 instant savings per month applicable only towards monthly monitoring charge for the first 12 months of initial contract term (total value of \$108.00) and (ii) \$100 instant savings on installation with minimum purchase of \$449 after promotion is applied. Traditional Service Level requires landline phone. Excludes ADT's Extended Limited Warranty. Upon early termination by Customer, ADT may charge 75% of the remaining monthly service charges for the balance of the initial contract term. Limit one offer per new ADT customer contract. Not valid on purchases from ADT Authorized Dealers. Expires 4/15/2021.

Interactive Services: ADT Command Interactive Solutions Services ("ADT Command") helps you manage your home environment and family lifestyle. Requires purchase of an ADT alarm system with 36 month monitoring contract ranging \$45.99-\$57.99/mo with QSP (24-month monitoring contract in California, total fees ranging \$1,103.76-\$1,391.76), enrollment in ADT Easy Pay, and a compatible device with Internet and email access. These interactive services do not cover the operation or maintenance of any household equipment/systems that are connected to the ADT Command equipment. All ADT Command services are not available with all interactive service levels. All ADT Command services may not be available in all geographic areas. You may be required to pay additional charges to purchase equipment required to utilize the interactive service features you desire.

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DF-CD-NP-Q121



Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

After tough 2020, S.D. tourism industry hopes for big bounce back in 2021

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News watch

South Dakota tourism officials and operators are happy to see a tough 2020 in the rearview mirror, and even happier to look forward to what could be a banner year for visitors and spending in 2021.

Aside from some pockets of unexpected prosperity in 2020 — in tourist activities focused on the outdoors and at accommodations located in wide-open or wilderness settings — the South Dakota tourism industry suffered significant reductions in visitors and revenues last year.

The state saw about 12.6 million visitors to the state in 2020, a decrease of 13% over 2019, and spending by tourists is estimated at \$3.4 billion in 2020, a drop of 18% or about \$700 million over the prior year.

Early in the pandemic, the tourism industry shed about 15,000 jobs due to a decline in tourist visits, said South Dakota Secretary of Tourism James Hagen. Arrivals at airports in Sioux Falls and Rapid City fell by 48% to only 408,000 in 2020, he said.

Yet tourism officials and operators in South Dakota and elsewhere are almost certain the worst is behind them.

Recent surveys appear to indicate that losses suffered in the pandemic-plagued 2020 tourism season will be offset by a spike in the number of new and returning visitors in 2021 and a sizable increase in the amount of money they will spend in South Dakota.

A rise in vaccinations against coronavirus, a falling number of COVID-19 cases and a simmering desire among tourists to travel after a year many stayed home are expected to converge and result in a potentially record-setting year for tourism in South Dakota.



James Hagen

“From every indicator we’re looking at, every survey that’s been done, 2021 is shaping up to be a strong year when it comes to travel and tourism,” said Hagen. “There’s no question that there is a ton of pent up demand and people are ready to travel.”

South Dakota ranked third best in domestic bookings in 2020 and fared better than most of the nation, which saw tourism spending fall by 45% during the year.

A state-sponsored questionnaire posed to residents in neighboring states shows that July 2021 will be a particularly busy month for tourism in South Dakota, and much of the travel will be done by families, Hagen said.

Recent national surveys have shown that 84% of Americans say they plan to travel within the next six months, that 39% are planning a vacation of a week or more, and that the top six destinations will be large metro areas, small towns or rural areas, beaches, state or regional parks, national parks and mountain settings.

“Of the top six, South Dakota checks four of those boxes, which is outstanding for us,” Hagen said.

One key indicator of visitor interest in the state, visits to the website travelsouthdakota.com, has shown a 45% jump in

“2021 is shaping up to be a strong year when it comes to travel and tourism ... there’s no question that there is a ton of pent up demand and people are ready to travel.”

-- James Hagen, South Dakota Secretary of Tourism

site traffic in 2021 compared with 2020, and a similar rise in visits compared with 2019.

Hagen said the state tourism industry shed more than 15,000 jobs, or about 35% of its workforce, during the early stages of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. But after Memorial Day, tourism picked back up and most of those lost jobs returned, he said.

Still, "there's no question some businesses were lost for good," he said.

Hagen said people in the tourism industry learned several lessons from the pandemic, which he hopes will remain top of mind moving forward.

Businesses must remain vigilant and plan ahead in case another pandemic or other major industry interruption occurs by making sure financials are in order, he said. In addition, he said the pandemic revealed the importance for businesses and employees to focus on maintaining high standards of cleanliness and hygiene to make guests feel comfortable and safe.

"Visitors are going to expect a certain level of safety from here on out, and I don't think that's a bad thing," he said.

Despite the dips in visits and spending, industry officials say 2020 could have been much worse, and note that South Dakota did much better in tourism than most other U.S. states.

Hagen and others credit the strong showing in part to the decision by Gov. Kristi Noem not to enact a statewide mask mandate or require business closures during the pandemic, and a coordinated "open for business" advertising campaign to attract visitors from other states to South Dakota.

Hagen said he does not believe that the efforts to encourage tourists to visit South Dakota during the pandemic caused or exacerbated spikes in COVID-19 cases in the state, which at times led the nation in per-capita infections and deaths in 2020.

"I don't necessarily agree that it was visitors spreading Covid," Hagen said. "The whole Midwest was having a wave of cases at times, and different parts of the country were hitting that wave at different points."

Hagen said the industry's approach was to welcome visitors but then ensure they felt safe once they arrived.

"We said, 'We're open,' so now we have the responsibility of taking care of these visitors and making sure we have those health and hygiene protocols

DATA POINTS: THE HURTFUL AND THE HOPEFUL

South Dakota fared better than most other states for tourism visits and spending in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic still took a major toll on the industry in the state. Looking ahead, many signs point to a rebound.

A tough year in the rearview mirror...

— 13%, the decline in visitors to South Dakota in 2020 compared to 2019 (12.6 million visitors in 2020)

— 18%, the decline in visitor spending in 2020 (\$3.4 billion spent in 2020)

— 35%, the decline in tourism jobs in South Dakota at one point during 2020 (about 15,000 jobs lost)

— 48%, the decline in airport arrivals in Sioux Falls and Rapid City (about 408,000 arrivals)

A recipe for a rebound...

— 84% of Americans say they plan to travel in the next six months

— 58% of American tourists believe it will be safe to travel over the next six months

— 44% of American travelers plan to travel more in 2021 compared to 2020

— 57% increase in online searches related to South Dakota tourism in first three months of 2021

— 14% rise in tourists requesting materials about visiting South Dakota so far in 2021 compared to 2020

— "Excited" is the word most Americans use when considering travel in 2021

Source: South Dakota Department of Tourism

in place," he said.

One state, two different outcomes



Teri Schmidt

The potential loss in tourism dollars was undoubtedly offset largely by the nature of South Dakota itself, with its spread-out population, its myriad outdoorsy recreational activities and strong stock of accommodations that allowed for easy social distancing.

As a result, a significant disparity in number of visitors and tourism spending in 2020 showed up in data from the eastern half of the state compared with the west.

The shift to outdoor activities amid the pandemic led 2 million people to visit Custer State Park in 2020, setting a new attendance record. Visits to state parks overall jumped by 31% over 2019 to about 8 million visitors in 2020.

But with a tourism economy based more on conventions, hotel stays and large music and entertainment events that did not allow for social distancing, the Sioux Falls tourism industry saw a 40% decline in spending in the local market in 2020 over 2019, compared with only a 10% decline in spending in the Black Hills & Badlands region.

Teri Schmidt, executive director of Experience Sioux Falls, the city's tourism-promotion agency, said she did not yet have final figures for 2020 but noted that at one point early in the pandemic the city saw a drop in tourism revenues of 46% over the prior year.

Many big events were canceled outright in 2020, she said.

"It was millions and millions of dollars in economic loss, we do know that," she said.

Schmidt said her group, funded by a tax on nightly hotel stays, had to cut \$900,000 from its budget in 2020, leading to one position cut, elimination of some marketing programs and other spending reductions that included dropping office janitorial services. The agency did receive some funding assistance from the state and city to offset losses, Schmidt said.

Sioux Falls businesses did see an unexpected bump in tourism spending during 2020 after families and groups of friends came to the city to escape strict mask mandates in neighboring Minnesota, Schmidt said.

The city also received a boost when a few groups that typically held events in states that were locked down due to the pandemic moved events to eastern South Dakota, including from New York, Michigan and Arizona, Schmidt said. She thinks it is unlikely those will become permanent additions



Many events that attract local residents and visitors were cancelled in South Dakota in 2020, including the Fall River County Fair in Edgemont, shown here in a non-pandemic year. Photo: News Watch file

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to the Sioux Falls market, however.

Yet Schmidt has seen signs of optimism, including the planned return of many local festivals and new arrivals such as a youth wrestling tournament that relocated from Minnesota and will bring nearly 5,000 new visitors to Sioux Falls in April.

"We really want to be excited and we are excited, but we're cautious because it's been such a tough year," Schmidt said. "All indications are that we know people are shopping and planning; now we've just got to see them come."

Schmidt said tourism officials across the state remain cautious that the pandemic or some other interruption could again upset their industry.

"If a variant would take over, then what?" she said. "We're trying to be very realistic about what could yet happen, while at the same time, we're really excited."

Michelle Thomson, president and CEO of the Black Hills & Badlands Tourism Association, also expresses great optimism that 2021 will be a bounce-back year.

Thomson said the tourism industry in West River fared better than much of the state and most of the nation in 2020.

Anchored by outdoor activities that allowed for social distancing, estimated visitor spending in the group's footprint that includes much of West River and part of eastern Wyoming in 2020 was down about 10%, from \$1.48 billion in 2019 to \$1.33 billion last year. Taxable sales in the tourism industry in the region fell to about \$400 million in 2020, a 10% decrease from 2019.

Hotel occupancy took a bigger hit, falling 16.4% in the group's coverage area.

Like other tourism officials in South Dakota, Thomson said the drop-off could have been more severe.

"Overall we were very happy we were not down nearly as much as other areas of the country," Thomson said. "We had sectors of the tourism industry that did really, really well because we have so many outdoor activities and wide-open spaces, and those were the sort of things people were really looking for in 2020."

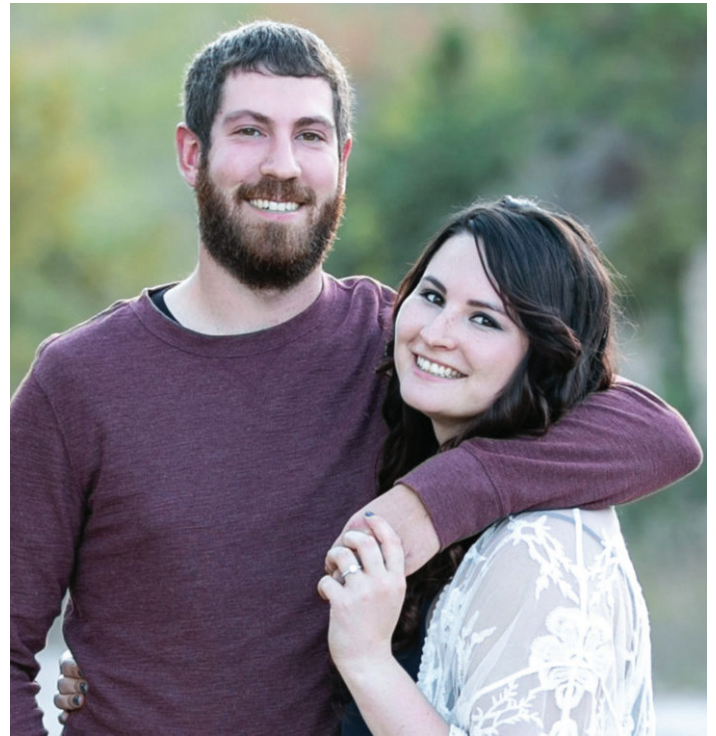
Thomson also credited the national media coverage about South Dakota being open for business and not having a mask mandate with attracting interest and visits by tourists from other states, including atypical sources such as New York, New Jersey and California. She hopes the momentum created among that new set of visitors will carry over into the upcoming season.

"From the very start of the pandemic, we started getting calls from visitors wanting to come and experience South Dakota because of the freedom we were able to have here," Thomson said. "We had people looking at South Dakota who maybe would have never looked at us before."

Attracted to the outdoors

Many hotels and restaurants across South Dakota suffered big losses in 2020 as tourists avoided indoor spaces where COVID-19 can spread.

In all, about 725 businesses that self-identify as accommodations or food service applied for federal COVID-19 relief grants issued by the state, receiving a combined \$45.6 million, according to the South Dakota Bureau of Finance and Management.



Joe and Heidi Perdue, owners of Black Hills Cabin Rentals in Lead, South Dakota, had a surprisingly strong year for business in 2020 and are expecting even better results in 2021. Photo: Courtesy Heidi Perdue

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Les Wulf, owner of The Outpost Lodge near Pierre, and his fiancée Barb Leesman, celebrate a successful outing on Lake Oahe. Wulf is seeing strong early bookings at his lakeside resort for 2021. Photo: Courtesy Les Wulf

However, accommodations offered in stand-alone cabins or rental homes showed strong outcomes across the state in 2020, with more than 880,000 bookings for Airbnb or Homeaway properties, a 22% jump over the prior year, state officials said.

And as vaccinations increase and coronavirus cases fall, that trend is expected to continue in 2021.

The strong sense of wanderlust among some tourists has resulted in more early bookings in 2021 for cabins in the northern Black Hills, according to Heidi Perdue, co-owner of the Black Hills Cabin Rentals booking firm.

Visitors who arrange accommodations for large gatherings, such as family reunions or wedding parties, typically book cabin rentals months in advance, Perdue said. But this year, the firm is seeing many smaller cabins being booked far earlier than usual, she said.

"Instead of waiting until May to book for a June rental, they're booking for the summer as early as January or February, so we're filling up a lot faster than normal," Perdue said. "People are excited about the idea of future travel when they didn't get to last year, or they're planning on being vaccinated, so they're just making sure it's lined up."

The rental service, based in Lead, manages bookings for about 60 privately owned properties. Prices vary widely, depending on cabin size and amenities.

A cabin near Terry Peak, known as "Sleepin' Bear" and now promoted on the firm's website, has three bedrooms and two bathrooms and rents for \$175 a night.

After suffering many cancellations in March and April 2020, the firm rebounded in the summer and enjoyed a particularly strong fall rental season to close out the year ahead of prior years, said Perdue, who runs the business with her husband Joe.

The fall uptick was due in part, she said, to families who wanted to travel and were able to either educate their children remotely or work remotely from a cabin that has internet access. In general, cabin rentals were seen as a safer destination for travelers during the pandemic, Perdue said.

"When you rent out a property, you have the entire property to yourself, and unlike a hotel, you don't have to be around anyone if you don't want to," she said. "There's also a lot of outdoor recreation, and a lot of things you can do if you want to avoid bigger crowds."

Other businesses dependent on the tourism trade, including hotels and restaurants where direct human interaction is unavoidable, did not fare as well.

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Outdoor recreation became a go-to activity for many South Dakotans and for visitors to the state, said Les Wulf, owner of The Outpost Lodge, a fishing resort with a hotel and restaurant located on the shores of Lake Oahe about 17 miles north of Pierre.

"We just had a ton of people who wanted to go fishing," Wulf said. "What better way is there to distance yourself than in your own boat on 240 miles of open water?"

Early in the pandemic, Wulf saw numerous cancellations of reservations, including annual outings by large groups representing law enforcement officers, rural electric and water providers and highway superintendents. Wulf said early signs point to those groups returning for summer 2021.

Wulf also noted that the cancellations in the spring of 2020 were offset by an unexpected population of guests he welcomed in summer 2020 and which he expects will again dominate resort bookings in 2021: American anglers who typically travel to Canada to fish but were blocked by closed border crossings between the two countries.

"They're used to going up there for five, six or seven days, and they couldn't go last year and they couldn't go this year," Wulf said. "We were and are still seeing a lot of reservations from people who would have gone to Canada."

Lake Oahe serves those new guests well, Wulf said, with a strong population of walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass and catfish.

The new guests helped ease a poor showing during the annual fall pheasant hunt, and Wulf said his 2020 revenues ultimately exceeded those from 2019.

Now, with vaccinations rising and COVID-19 cases falling, he is already seeing major bookings for late spring and summer 2021. Many of his annual customers are returning after staying home in 2020, he said.

"We're just about totally booked up in June already, and for July, we're starting to get booked up," Wulf said. "We're turning people away right now ... I'm helping my competitors out by referring these people to other resorts."

ABOUT BART PFANKUCH



Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is the content director for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal and also worked at newspapers in Florida. Bart has spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and writing coach.

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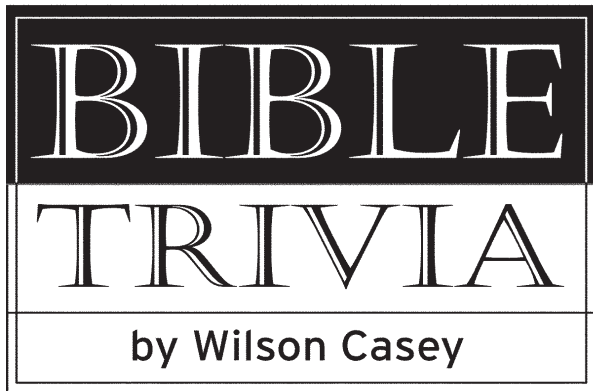
THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

*Is not God in the height of heaven?
And see the highest stars, how lofty they are!
And you say, What does God know?
Can He judge through the deep darkness?*

JOB 22:12,13

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Rhubarb-Orange Dumplings

When you combine two old-time favorites (rhubarb and dumplings) in a new-time cooking convenience, you create magic!

3/4 cup unsweetened orange juice
Sugar substitute to equal 14 tablespoons sugar
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
3 cups finely chopped fresh or frozen rhubarb
1 1/3 cups reduced-fat biscuit baking mix
2 tablespoons chopped walnuts

1. In an 8-by-8-inch glass microwavable baking dish, combine 1/4 cup orange juice, sugar substitute to equal 3/4 cup sugar and flour. Stir in rhubarb. Microwave on HIGH (100% power) for 5 to 6 minutes or until mixture is thickened, stirring after 3 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, combine baking mix, remaining sugar substitute to equal 2 tablespoons sugar and remaining 1/2 cup orange juice. Drop batter by tablespoonfuls into hot mixture to form 6 dumplings. Evenly sprinkle walnuts over top. Cover and microwave on HIGH for 4 to 6 minutes or until dumplings are no longer doughy. Let set for 2 to 3 minutes. Evenly divide into 6 servings.

* Each serving equals: 151 calories, 3g fat, 3g protein, 28g carb., 312mg sodium, 2g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 1 1/2 Starch, 1/2 Fruit.

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1. Is the book of Gethsemane in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. What signal or mark did Judas use to betray Jesus to the religious leaders of the day? *Marked Jesus with ash, Pointed to Him, Gave Jesus a kiss, Washed Jesus' feet*

3. In John 11:45-53, who was the high priest who called for Jesus' death? *Elionus, Joazar, Simon Cantharas, Caiaphas*

4. When Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" came upon the risen Jesus, who did He ask them to inform? *Priests, Disciples, No one, Villagers*

5. From John 20, which disciple doubted Jesus had risen unless he could see the wounds? *Peter, Andrew, Thomas, Thaddeus*

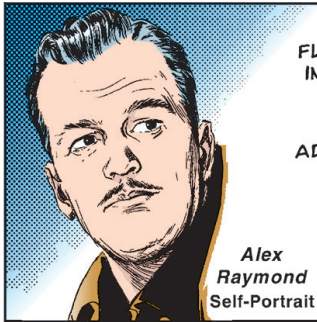
6. How long did Jesus remain after His resurrection before He ascended into heaven? *Instantaneously, 1 hour, 7 days, 40 days*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither; 2) Gave Jesus a kiss; 3) Caiaphas; 4) Disciples; 5) Thomas (called Didymus); 6) 40 days (Acts 1:3)

Sharpen your understanding of scripture with Wilson's Casey's latest book, "Test Your Bible Knowledge," available in bookstores and online.

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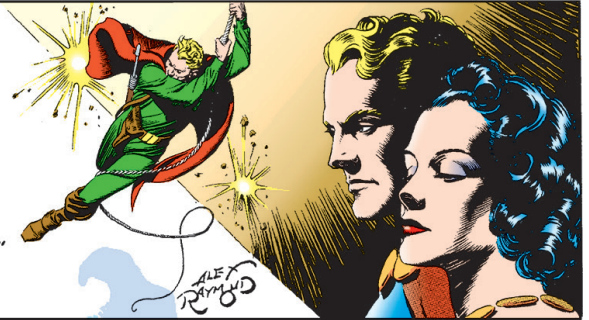


Alex Raymond
Self-Portrait

CREATED BY ALEX RAYMOND, FLASH GORDON FIRST APPEARED IN PAPERS ON JANUARY 7, 1934.

THE STRIP'S POPULARITY WOULD EVENTUALLY PRODUCE COUNTLESS ADAPTATIONS ON RADIO, IN BOOKS AND ON FILM.

ITS INFLUENCE WOULD BE FELT FOR GENERATIONS TO FOLLOW. GEORGE LUCAS HAS EVEN CITED THE CLASSIC MOVIE SERIAL "FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE" AS THE DIRECT INSPIRATION FOR HIS OWN SPACE OPERA... "STAR WARS".



ALEX RAYMOND

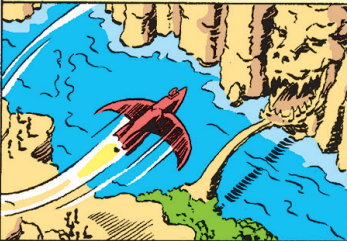
FLASH GORDON

By JIM KEEFE

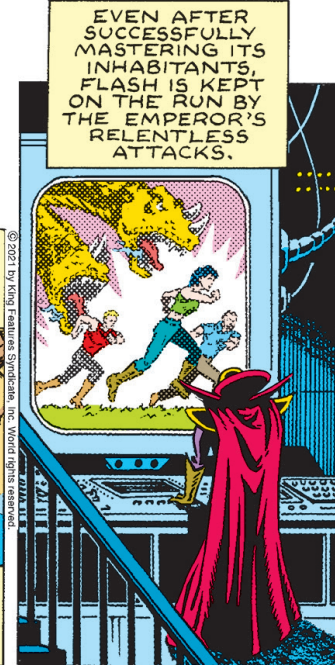
3-14

FLASHBACK:

HAVING WON DALE'S HAND IN MARRIAGE IN THE TOURNAMENTS OF MONGO, FLASH'S VICTORY IS TRANSIENT AT BEST...



...FOR THEIR UNION IS FORESTALLED UNTIL FLASH CONQUERS KIRA, THE INHOSPITABLE SAVAGE KINGDOM OF CAVES.



EVEN AFTER SUCCESSFULLY MASTERING ITS INHABITANTS, FLASH IS KEPT ON THE RUN BY THE EMPEROR'S RELENTLESS ATTACKS.



ESCAPING MING'S CLUTCHES, THE MAROONED FUGITIVES' BRAVERY AND COURAGE RALLIES OTHERS.

UNITING UNDER FLASH'S LEADERSHIP, THE OPPRESSED PEOPLE OF MONGO RISE UP, BREAKING MING'S REIGN OF TERROR!



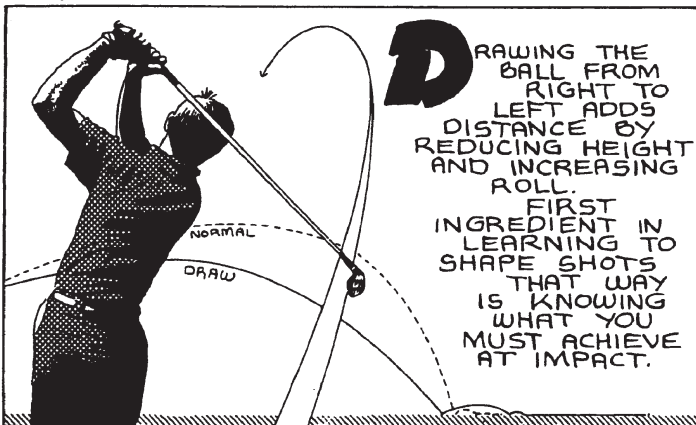
ELUDING JUSTICE, MING WAGES A NEVER-ENDING BATTLE TO REGAIN THE THRONE...

...AND EXACT REVENGE ON THE EARTHLINGS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS RUIN!

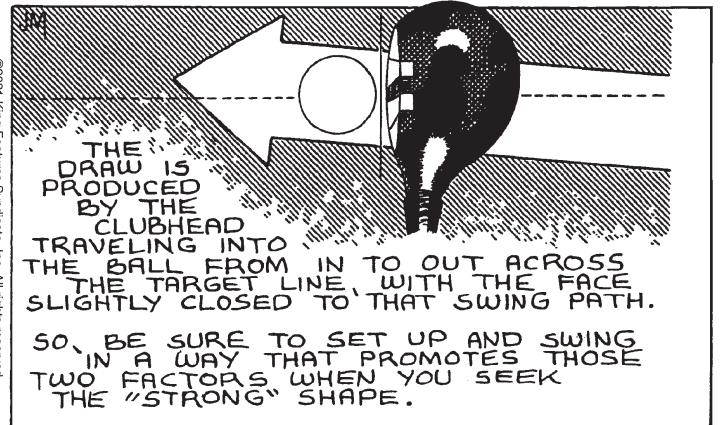
ORIGIN SEQUENCE DEDICATED TO FLASH'S CREATOR, ALEX RAYMOND

TO BE CONT'D

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



DRAWING THE BALL FROM RIGHT TO LEFT ADDS DISTANCE BY REDUCING HEIGHT AND INCREASING ROLL. FIRST INGREDIENT IN LEARNING TO SHAPE SHOTS THAT WAY IS KNOWING WHAT YOU MUST ACHIEVE AT IMPACT.



THE DRAW IS PRODUCED BY THE CLUBHEAD TRAVELING INTO THE BALL FROM IN TO OUT ACROSS THE TARGET LINE, WITH THE FACE SLIGHTLY CLOSED TO THAT SWING PATH. SO, BE SURE TO SET UP AND SWING IN A WAY THAT PROMOTES THOSE TWO FACTORS WHEN YOU SEEK THE "STRONG" SHAPE.

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Why Such Frequent Bathroom Visits?



DEAR DR. ROACH: I'm a 91-year-old male who makes frequent visits to the bathroom to urinate. I am in good health and I wonder what causes this. Where does all that liquid come from? -- A.R.N.

ANSWER: What goes in must come out. All the liquid you urinate came from fluid you consumed when drinking and eating food.

But it may be more about perception than volume. Frequent urination is extremely common in both men and women, and although some causes are the same, such as an overactive bladder, men have an additional anatomical structure that can lead to urinary problems as they get older: the prostate, a normally walnut-sized gland that may increase in size as

men age. It is through the prostate that the urethra, and thus all the urine, has to flow. If the prostate is enlarged, the urinary flow slows down.

As the prostate obstruction becomes worse, men may have trouble emptying the bladder completely. This has the effect of making men go to bathroom more frequently, since the bladder has less functional size. In this case, you aren't urinating any more volume than before, just more often in smaller amounts.

Treatment needs to be directed at the underlying cause. Overactive bladder and enlarged prostate have similar symptoms and different treatments.

It is possible that you really are having excess volume, however. Diabetes is the biggest concern here, and you should be tested if you have truly large volumes of urine.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I read an article about a study the Mayo Clinic did using 20 mg tablets of sildenafil for pulmonary arterial hypertension and that it improved walking distance by 75%. Is there an upper age limit for a person using this medication for pulmonary hypertension? -- D.L.

ANSWER: Pulmonary hypertension is different from regular or systemic high blood pressure. It's not the kind that is measured with a blood pressure cuff.

In pulmonary hypertension, the elevated pressures are inside the lungs. There are five general classes of pulmonary hypertension, and people must undergo extensive diagnostic testing to determine which subclass they have. The goal is to find a cause that has a specific treatment. For example, subclass 2 is pulmonary hypertension due to heart disease of the left side of the heart, such as heart failure or valvular heart disease. Treating those can make the pulmonary hypertension better.

However, many people do not have a treatable underlying cause that can be identified, so doctors rely on general treatments to improve symptoms. One such is sildenafil, which is called Revatio when used for pulmonary hypertension, but it is the same drug as Viagra. It prolongs the effect of nitric oxide, a chemical in the blood that relaxes blood vessels in the lungs and reduces pressure. Sildenafil, like other drugs in the same class, significantly improved the distance a person could walk in six minutes. The 75% increase you noted is higher than most studies showed, however.

The study included subjects up to 81 years old. I do not think age alone would be a reason not to use these kinds of medications. These medicines should not be used in people taking nitrates (such as nitroglycerine) or those with very low systemic blood pressure.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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It's officially spring! But depending on where you are in our lovely nation, you could be experiencing decidedly un-springlike weather — False Spring, Second Winter or even The Pollening, which is where I am now, covered in a fine yellow dust. The plants and flowers are waking up from their slumber and getting ready to put on a show. If you're not there yet, here are a few movies featuring delightful greenery to help put you in the mood.

Greenfingers — Very loosely based on a true story, this little British gem centers around the unlikely tale of Colin Briggs (Clive Owen), a close-mouthed lad serving out his sentence in a minimum-security prison. He accidentally discovers he's quite successful at raising flowers, and is assigned to be supervisor of the prison garden, along with his cellmate Fergus (David Kelly). Their collective success gets them noticed by local celebrity (Helen Mirren) and a bid at the Hampton Court Flower Show.

A Little Chaos — As King Louis XIV's chosen architect for the gardens of Versailles, Andre La Notre (Matthew Schoenaerts) wants something spectacular. He finds it in the designs of Sabine De Barre, a female gardener and designer, played by Kate Winslet. The pair overcome court intrigue and their own personal demons to create life and emotion and magic from earth and plants and water.

Edward Scissorhands — Johnny Depp plays the titular Edward, a humanoid creation of the Inventor (Vincent Price). Tragically, the Inven-

tor dies before he can fix Edward's hands, which are made from many pairs of scissors. But Edward is wholly innocent and sweet, so when he is discovered in a Gothic mansion and brought into suburban America, he uses his scissor hands to, among other things, trim the neighborhood hedges into elaborate topiaries.

The Karate Kid — It's a rough move from New Jersey to Reseda, California, and Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio) sets out to make friends the best way he can. Unfortunately, the local dojo is populated with no-good bullies, who make a beeline for Daniel. Enter Mr. Miyagi (Pat Morita), who not only takes Daniel under his wing and teaches him self-defense (and self-respect), but has an unforgettable, Okinawa-flavored oasis parked in the middle of what looks like a junkyard, where Daniel gets to train and work.



Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Helen Mirren in "Greenfingers"

The Secret Garden — "If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden," or so says Mary, the main character of this delightful story. Ten-year-old Mary comes to her uncle's house in Yorkshire as a spoiled orphan who stifles her vulnerability in favor of being a self-centered brat. But at this manor, she uncovers her late aunt's locked garden and sets about restoring it. In turn, her own soul and the souls of her relatives are restored.

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2. It was a 1931 Scottish Christian hymn only 45 seconds long. Stevens had to use an acoustic demo piece to pad the song to the standard song length.
3. Sam Cooke, in 1962. The backup group for the recording session had 18 instruments, including 10 string instruments.
4. The Go-Go's. They were recently nominated for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.
5. "North to Alaska," by Johnny Horton in 1960. The song was used in the film of the same name, the first time a title song was ever used during the opening to a film. Horton died a few months after the song came out.

1. Which songwriter-artist released an album with the title "School's Out."
2. Where did Cat Stevens' "Morning Has Broken" originally come from?
3. Who wrote and released "Bring It on Home to Me"?
4. Name the all-girl band that released "Vacation" in 1982.
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "I'd trade all the gold that's buried in this land for one small band of gold to place on sweet little Jenny's hand."

Answers

1. Alice Cooper, in 1972. Others have covered the song, including Krokus in 1986, Daphne and Celeste in 2000 and Gwar 2006.

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Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps

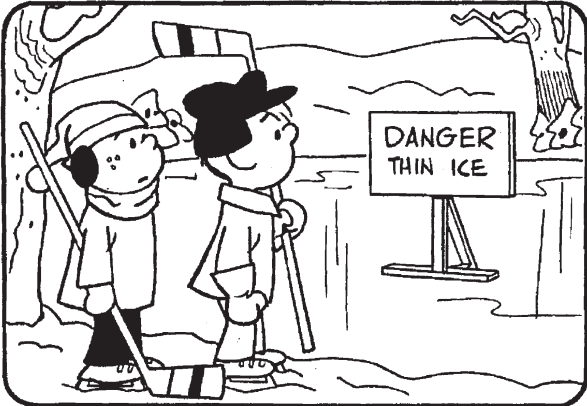
BEFORE YOU BEGIN, JUST KNOW I'VE JUST SPENT THE WEEKEND WITH MY IN-LAWS AND AM NO LONGER CAPABLE OF POLITE SMALL TALK.



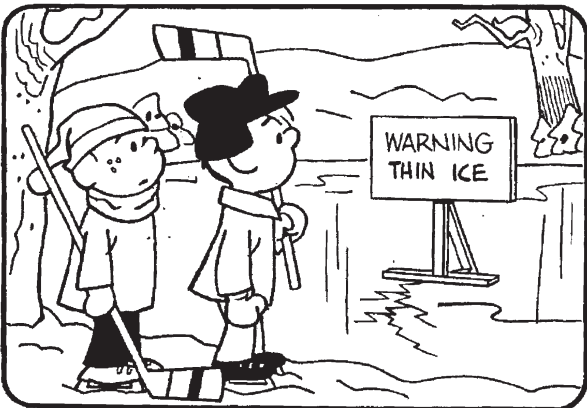
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



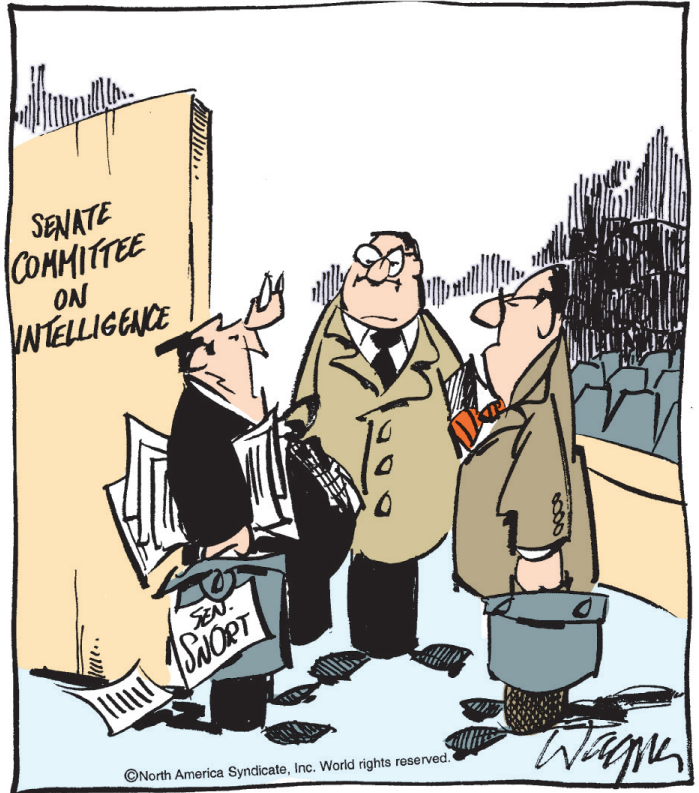
Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Sign is different. 2. Stick is shorter. 3. Earmuffs are gone. 4. Mitten is shorter. 5. Skates are different. 6. Cracks in ice are added.

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}



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"We've concluded our intelligence investigation and found none."



- Buff out small scratches in glass with toothpaste. Apply a small dab and rub in circles lightly, then wipe away.

- “Establish a family lost and found for small items that are discovered in places where they don’t belong. It can be as simple as socks or hairbrushes to money and electronics.” — *P.O. in Virginia*

- If an egg spills on the floor, sprinkle it with salt. Egg can be very slippery, and the salt will help keep it in place so that it is easier to clean up.

- Give your garbage disposal some love and clean her out! Add a handful of baking soda and some crushed ice, then a cup of vinegar or lemon juice and follow up with hot water.

- “Label storage bins on all sides so that no matter how you stack them, or which direction you shove them in, you can always see at a glance which are which.

Recently, I went searching through my attic for a particular box, and several boxes were moved out of the way. I had to spend much more time turning them to face the right way so that the labels would be visible.” — *R.F. in Ohio*

- If a glass breaks, here’s a tip to get up those tiny glass shards that are impossible to pick up or sweep up: Use the inside of a slice of white bread, wadded up. No bread? You also can use a blob of play dough.

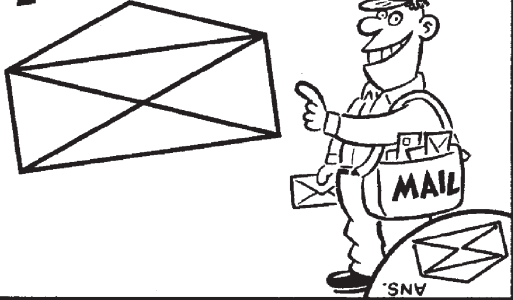
Send your tips to Now Here’s a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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PUZZLE CARD



Junior Whirl

by Charles Barry Townsend

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1. DO _
2. DO _ _
3. DO _ _ _
4. DO _ _ _ _
5. DO _ _ _ _ _
6. DO _ _ _ _ _ _
7. DO _ _ _ _ _ _ _

DO-AS-I-DO STEPWORDS

PROFESSOR Wordsworth has a word test for you. He wants you to find seven progressively longer words all beginning with DO (see left).

The following definitions should help you pass this quiz:

1. A four-legged pet.
2. Gloomy.
3. Heads, in slang.
4. Golf course feature.
5. Type of tree.
6. Game played with 28 blocks.
7. Places for boats.

Time to beat: 5 minutes.

1. ne. Answer: 1. Dog, 2. Dour, 3. Domes.
4. Dogleg, 5. Dogwood, 6. Domes.
7. Dockyards.

PUZZLE CARD: Postman Pete challenges you to draw the above envelope using one continuous line that never crosses itself at any point.

TWO QUICKIES! (1) The gym teacher wanted the boys and girls to line up as follows: Behind each boy would be a girl and behind each girl would be a boy. What is the smallest number of children needed to do this? (2) What two-digit number is equal to twice the product of its digits?

Answers: (1) Two. One girl and one boy standing back to back. (2) 36. The product of its digits (3 times 6) is 18. Two times 18 equals 36.

ANIMAL PAIRS: In the diagram at right we have 14 words that we want you to pair to form seven two-syllable words of varying lengths. The words on the left provide the first syllable and the ones on the right the second syllable.

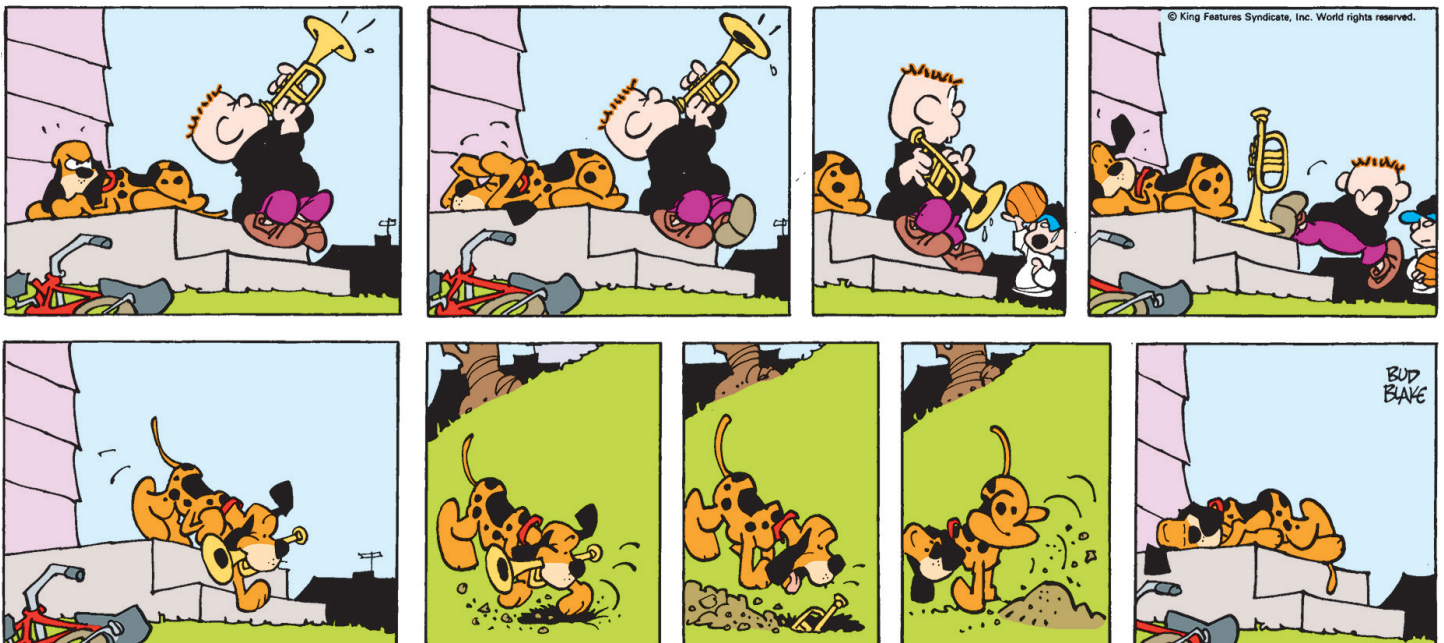
A good way to start is to take the top word at the left, find a compatible word at the right and draw a line connecting the two. Move to the second word, etc.

- | | |
|---------|------|
| 1. CAT | MAN |
| 2. BIRD | SKIN |
| 3. DOG | CALL |
| 4. FISH | FLY |
| 5. BEAR | TROT |
| 6. DEER | EYE |
| 7. FROG | SHOT |

Illustrated by David Coulson

TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



BUD
BLAKE

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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Actress Farrow
- 4 Carries
- 9 "Blue Bloods" network
- 12 Fireplace residue
- 13 WWII sub
- 14 "2001" computer
- 15 William and Kate's daughter
- 17 Lawyers' org.
- 18 Cato's 502
- 19 Noah's landfall
- 21 Summaries
- 24 Garr of "Tootsie"
- 25 Berliner's cry
- 26 Hog haven
- 28 Quartet doubled
- 31 Ella's style
- 33 Congeal
- 35 iPhone voice
- 36 King of Judea
- 38 Dazzle
- 40 Right angle
- 41 "I've Got — in Kalamazoo"
- 43 Sneaky sort
- 45 Secret matters
- 47 Request
- 48 Perched
- 49 Fraud
- 54 Candle count

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12				13						14		
15			16							17		
			18				19		20			
21	22	23					24					
25				26		27		28			29	30
31			32		33		34		35			
36				37		38		39		40		
		41			42		43		44			
45	46						47					
48				49		50				51	52	53
54				55						56		
57				58						59		

- 55 Violin piece
- 56 Bird (Pref.)
- 57 Standard
- 58 Wimp
- 59 Poke
- DOWN**
- 1 Buddy
- 2 Somewhat (Suff.)
- 3 "Caught ya!"
- 4 Dutch exports
- 5 Woodwind players
- 6 Youngster
- 7 Really annoy
- 8 Sound system
- 9 Donor's beneficiaries
- 10 Rum cake
- 11 Venetian-blind part
- 16 Vitamin stat
- 20 Story lines
- 21 Impetuous
- 22 Caesar's "Behold!"
- 23 Role
- 27 Evergreen tree
- 29 Perry's creator
- 30 Cash drawer
- 32 Forum wear
- 34 In the direc-
- tion of
- 37 Does the mambo
- 39 "Blade" actor Snipes
- 42 Christine of "Chicago Hope"
- 44 Alias abbr.
- 45 Now, in a memo
- 46 Sitar music
- 50 Ger. neighbor
- 51 Mahal pre-ceder
- 52 Gardner of film
- 53 Pen tip

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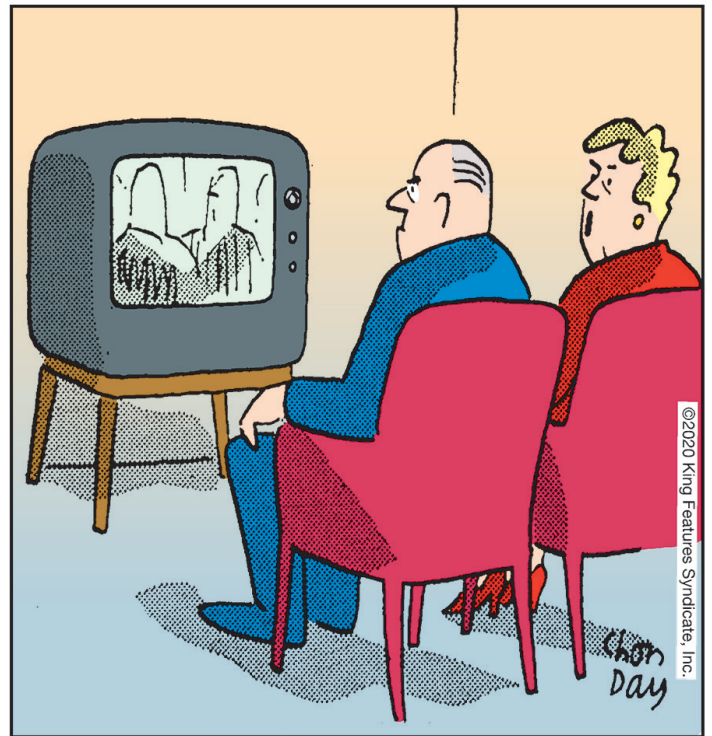
— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 22 mins.

M	I	A		T	O	T	E	S		C	B	S
A	S	H		U	B	O	A	T		H	A	L
C	H	A	R	L	O	T	T	E		A	B	A
			D	I		A	R	A	R	A	T	
R	E	C	A	P	S		T	E	R	I		
A	C	H		S	T	Y		O	C	T	E	T
S	C	A	T		S	E	T		S	I	R	I
H	E	R	O	D		W	O	W		E	L	L
		A	G	A	L		W	E	A	S	E	L
A	R	C	A	N	A		A	S	K			
S	A	T		C	H	A	R	L	A	T	A	N
A	G	E		E	T	U	D	E		A	V	I
P	A	R		S	I	S	S	Y		J	A	B

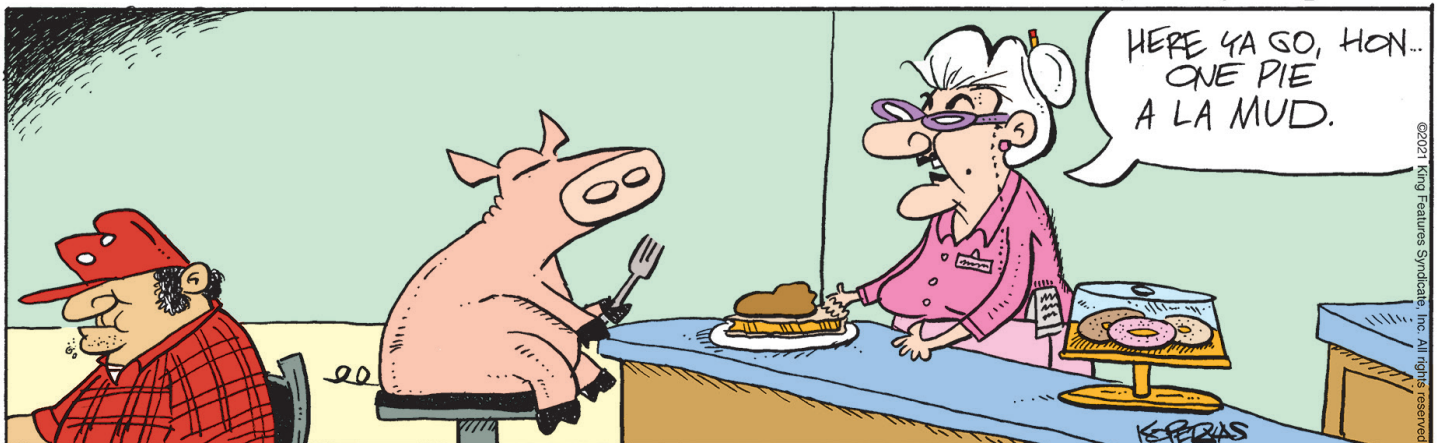
LAFF - A - DAY



"I don't see why you have to be so old-fashioned!
Other people can talk and watch TV at the same time!"

Out on a Limb

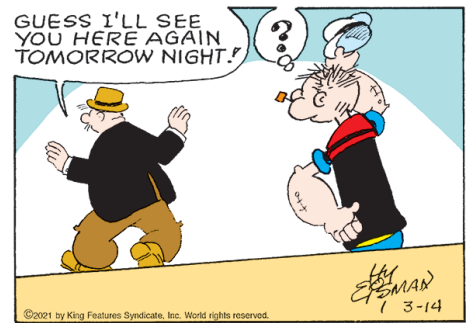
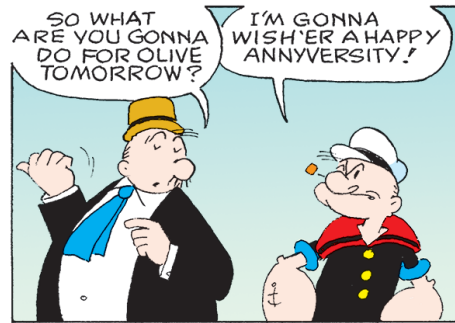
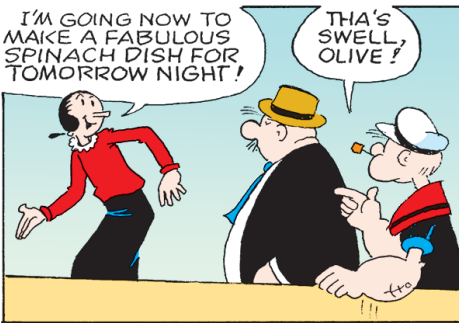
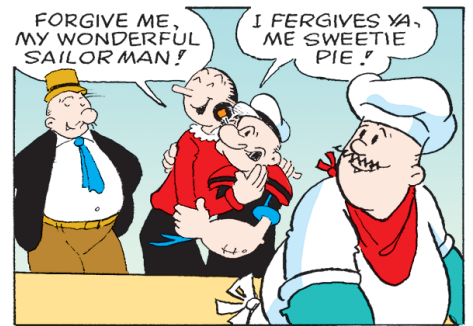
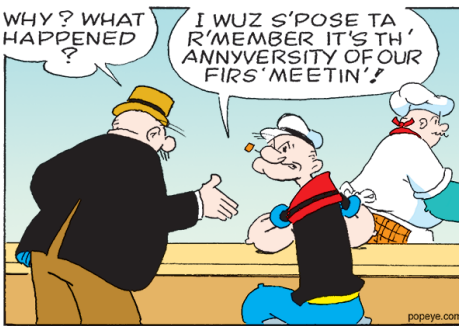
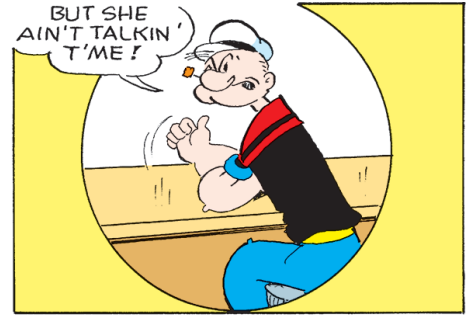
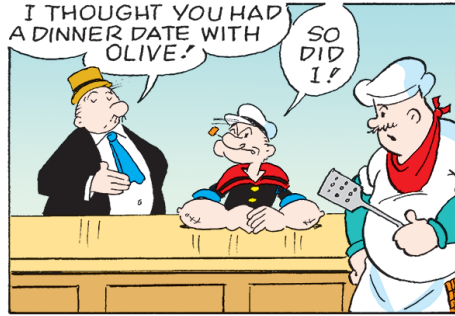
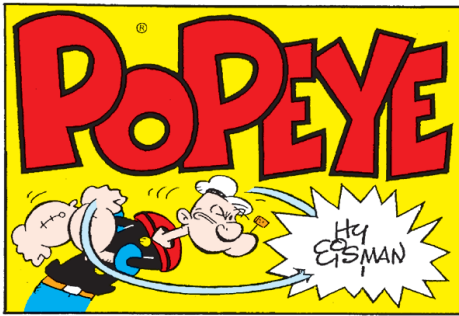
by Gary Kopervas



HERE YA GO, HON...
ONE PIE
A LA MUD.

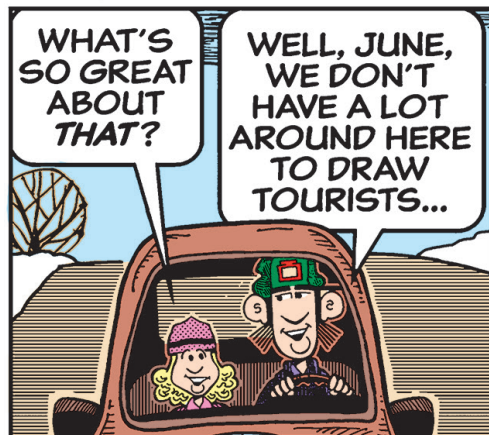
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R.F.D.

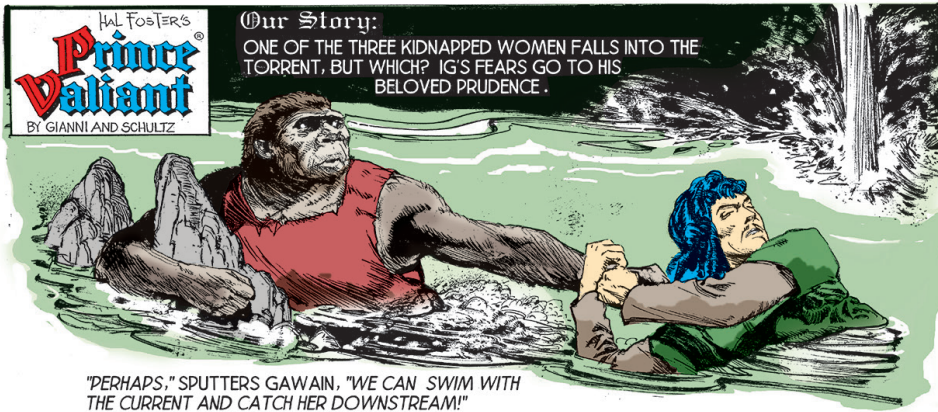
by Mike Marland



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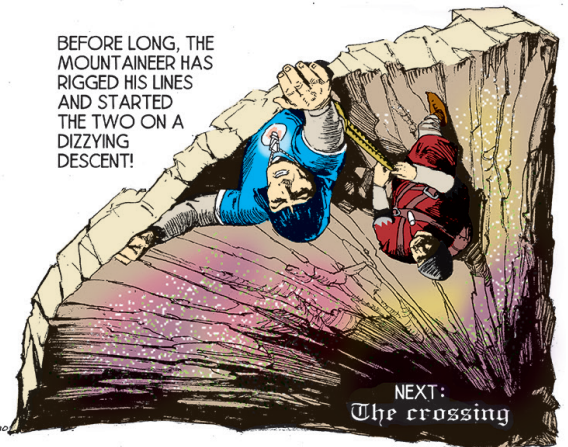
"GOOD PLAN," AGREES IG, AS HE YANKS THE KNIGHT IN TOW. NEITHER NOTICES THAT A DIM PHOSPHORESCENCE LIGHTS THEIR WAY.



"... WE MUST CROSS THIS CHASM AND CONTINUE OUR PURSUIT!" GULPS VAL.
"THAT," RESPONDS TROLLEBERG, "IS WHY I AM HERE."



BEFORE LONG, THE MOUNTAINEER HAS RIGGED HIS LINES AND STARTED THE TWO ON A DIZZING DESCENT!



The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Senior Center Closed? Meet Up in Parking Lot

Is your senior center still closed? Most of them are, which means that we haven't experienced our typical routines for a very long time.

Mostly it's the social aspect we miss. A show of hands: How many of us, if given the opportunity, would show up at the senior center for an in-person gathering even if it was held outside? In the parking lot?

It's being done in some parts of the country, even in cold weather, so it's possible if those who run your senior center are willing to do the work of spacing chairs 6 feet apart and making coffee in thermoses so it stays hot and pushing around a trolley of cookies.

With spring officially here, chances are that if you and others approach the staff of the senior center to express interest, social gatherings like these could be made to happen. An hour once a week would go a long way toward reconnecting with friends and checking in with others to see — in person — how they're really doing.

Besides the loss of social interaction, it's the classes many of us miss: budgeting for living on Social Security, cooking for one, journaling ... and especially the hands-on classes about electronic devices. Those device classes are the very classes we need now that could help us to interact with others on video calls.

To their credit, some senior centers have figured out that, if nothing else, they can show video exercise classes we can follow from home. And many of them have stepped forward with volunteers who can help get us signed up online to get the COVID vaccine.

From what I hear, though, it's the in-person social interactions that we seniors miss the most. Even a once-a-week gathering, in a parking lot, would be very welcome.

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1. Jacksonville Jaguars punter Chris Hanson was injured by what object used as a motivational tool in the locker room during the 2003 season?

2. What team selected Michigan's Chris Webber with the No. 1 overall pick in the 1993 NBA Draft and immediately traded him to the Golden State Warriors?

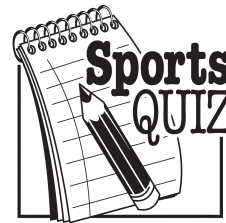
3. What 1983 NASCAR Cup Series Rookie of the Year won the Daytona 500 in 1994 and 1995?

4. In 1982, South Korean boxer Duk Koo Kim collapsed and later died after a 14-round loss to what light-weight champion?

5. What NBA shot-blocking legend had his No. 53 jersey retired by the Utah Jazz?

6. In January 2001, the New York Giants defeated what team 41-0 in the NFC Championship Game?

7. Sebastian the Ibis is the official mascot of what university's athletic teams?



by Ryan A. Berenz

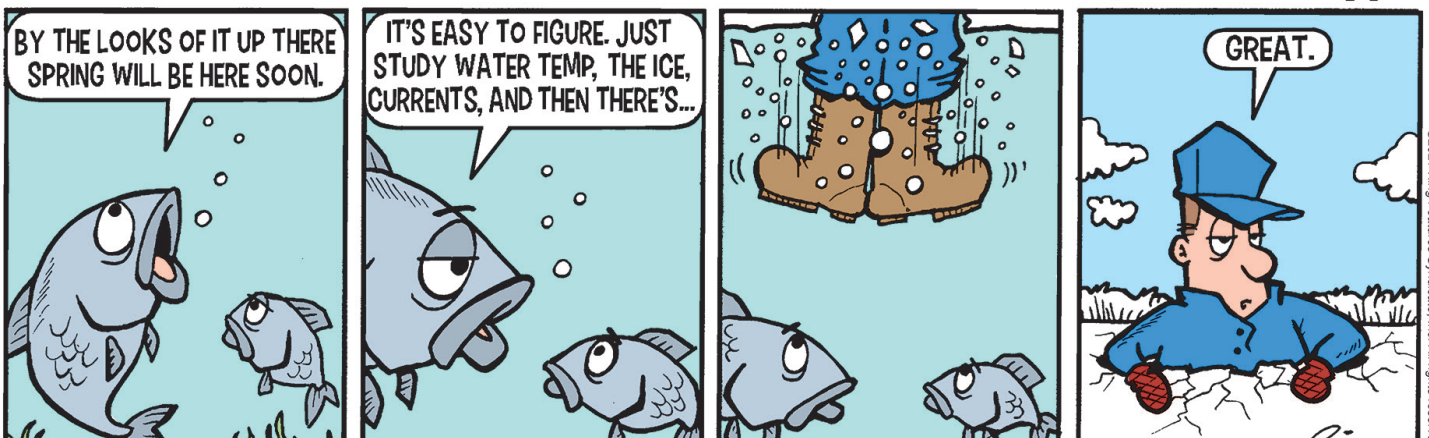
1. An ax.
2. The Orlando Magic.
3. Sterling Marlin.
4. Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini.
5. Mark Eaton.
6. The Minnesota Vikings.
7. The University of Miami Hurricanes.

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Answers

Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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A Runner's Plea to Dog Owners

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I witnessed an incident on my morning run that illustrated the reason why dogs need to be on a leash at all times in residential areas. A runner ahead of me on the side of the road approached a dog owner and his Collie ambling along the sidewalk. The owner had unfastened the dog's leash so that it could explore ahead.

The dog seemed calm, but as the runner drew near to them, it suddenly bristled, snarled and then leaped at the runner. Before the owner could grab the dog's collar, the runner was bitten on her cheek and hand. The injuries were serious enough to require stitches.

There is no excuse for an owner to allow their dog off the leash except where it's expressly permitted, such as dog parks. Even when an owner

has trained their dog to respond to verbal commands, the command might not be given fast enough to stop the dog.

Runners are attractive targets to many dogs. As we run past, a dog may take our movements as a signal to chase.

I have two dogs myself. They're both too old to run with me now, but in their younger days, I frequently took them with me — both on a leash. They've always responded quickly to verbal commands, but I do not rely on those alone to keep them from darting into traffic or annoying other runners.

Please tell your readers to keep the leashes on their dogs. It keeps others safe, it keeps the dogs safe, and it protects owners from legal issues. It's also the law. — *Rick in Dracut, Massachusetts*

DEAR RICK: You told them, and I thank you. Readers, take heed and keep your dogs on a leash and under your control when outdoors.

Send your tips, comments and questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* One dung beetle can drag 1,141 times its own weight.

* Italian banker Gilberto Baschiera was a modern-day Robin Hood. Over a period of seven years, he secretly diverted 1 million euros from wealthy clients to poorer ones so they could qualify for loans. He made no profit from these dealings and avoided jail in 2018 with a plea bargain.

* In 2006, a Coca-Cola employee offered to sell Coca-Cola secrets to Pepsi. Pepsi took the high road and responded by notifying Coca-Cola.

* Ever wonder why there's no period in "Dr Pepper"? It was removed because the old logo font made it look like "Di: Pepper."

* Wildlife technician Richard Thomas took the famous tongue twister, "How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" and calculated a rough estimate of the actual answer. It came out to around 700 pounds!

* For years your dentist has no doubt advised you to be sure to floss. But the benefits extend beyond your teeth. Researchers have discovered that flossing can also help your memory. It prevents gum disease, which prevents stiff blood vessels, which in turn cause memory issues.

* The future Queen Elizabeth II's wedding dress was entirely paid for with ration coupons.

* Red Solo cups have not only been honored in a song by country singer Toby Keith, they're a common souvenir to bring back from the U.S. The novelty comes from their appearance in numerous movie party scenes.

* American children are given an average of \$3.70 per lost tooth.

* To properly write adjectives in order, list them by amount, value, size, temperature, age, shape, color, origin and material.

Thought for the Day: "No matter what path you're on in this life, if that path isn't about love, you're on the wrong path." -- Lawrence Overmire

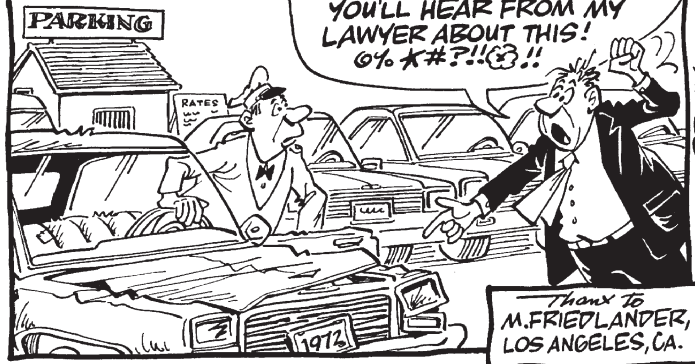
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THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

PARKING LOT HI-JINX—
IT'S THE GUY WITH THE
WORST BEAT-UP JALOP
WHO FINDS ALL THE
IMAGINARY DENTS...



Thank to
M. FRIEDLANDER,
LOS ANGELES, CA.

BY AL SCADUTO

ENOUGH TO MAKE A GROWN MAN CRY—
SITTING DOWN TO A MEAL AND DIPPING
YOUR \$40 SILK TIE INTO THE SOUP.....

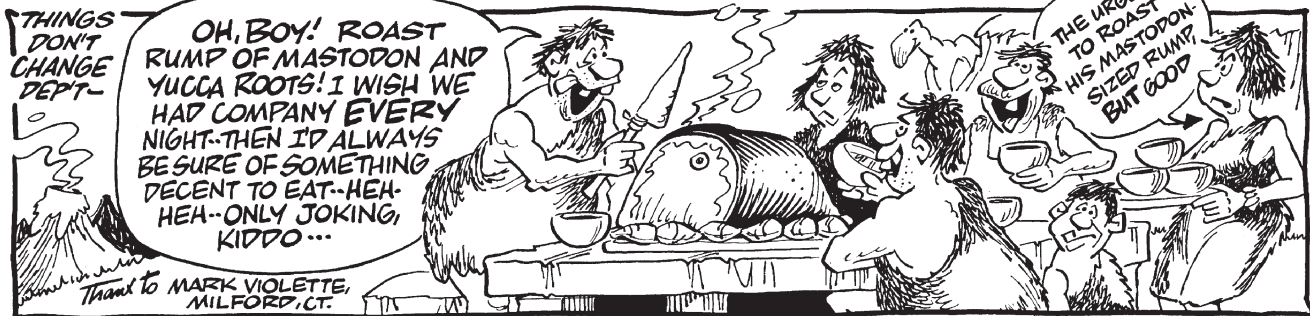


AL SCADUTO
4-25

Thank to
DEL BIXLER,
716 W. LAKE CIRCLE,
SARASOTA, FL.

THINGS
DON'T
CHANGE
DEPT--

OH, BOY! ROAST
RUMP OF MASTODON AND
YUCCA ROOTS! I WISH WE
HAD COMPANY EVERY
NIGHT--THEN I'D ALWAYS
BE SURE OF SOMETHING
DECENT TO EAT--HEH-
HEH--ONLY JOKING,
KIDDO...



Thank to
MARK VIOLETTE,
MILFORD, CT.



Spring-blooming perennials

- Bearded irises
- Basket-of-gold
- Astilbe
- Coral bells
- Pincushion flower
- Geraniums
- Baptisias
- Bleeding heart
- Goatsbeard
- Peonies

Baptisias

Source: www.hgtv.com

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

Yet Another VA Secretary

We have a new Department of Veterans Affairs secretary, the 10th acting or permanent VA secretary in the past 10 years.

Dennis McDonough has a degree in Foreign Service. He was an aide on the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Later he was a national security adviser and chief of the National Security Council. He's a public policy professor at Notre Dame's school on global affairs and was a fellow at Carnegie's International Affairs program under the International Peace endowment. He used to be President Barak Obama's White House chief of staff.

Those who inspired him in early life included a football coach who'd served in World War II, troops and wounded warriors he'd met, as well as his grandfather who'd been a Marine.

His wife co-founded Vets' Community Connections, a group that assists veterans and their families.

OK, I'm concerned.

I see a lot of security and international affairs in that bio. In multiple online versions of his bio, the word "veterans" doesn't come up once. Except for his wife's work, I'm not seeing any connections with veterans. There were visits to Iraq and Afghanistan, yes, plus visits to Walter Reed hospital. In Afghanistan and Iraq, he was there to talk to coalition partners and military leaders about security issues and draw down. Maybe he sat down to a meal with the troops.

But where's the real veteran experience? Where's the commitment to our country with a job that can take you into harm's way? Or an assignment where your family can't go? The bad pay? The person above you who can make or break your career? The bad decisions you remain silent about. The terrible duty stations?

Those are the hard, very real things I'm just not seeing in McDonough's history.

I wish him well ... for all our sakes. But excuse me if I withhold the kudos. At least for now.

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CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Policies Matter

Over the last two months there has been a growing crisis at the southern border.

Following decisions to end the Migrant Protection Protocols or the “remain-in-Mexico” policy and the reestablishment of catch-and-release policies, there has been a surge in illegal crossings at the border.

In February 2021, less than a month after President Biden took office, the number of illegal immigrants apprehended at the Southern Border tripled from the previous year. According to Customs & Border Protection, the number of migrants encountered at the border this February climbed to 100,441 – a more than 170% increase from the 36,687 encounters in February 2020.

Congress and the President have a responsibility to ensure our borders are safe and secure.

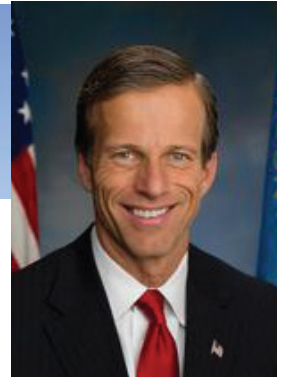
I toured the southern border in April 2019 when we were experiencing a similar crisis – I heard several stories of children being trafficked by drug cartels. Many of these children were paired with fraudulent “family units” and being recycled to get adults across the border. And right now, more than 6,000 family units are coming across the border illegally every week.

The last time our nation faced a border crisis of this magnitude, Congress and President Trump had to send \$4.5 billion in humanitarian aid to the border to alleviate the crisis. We must act now to avoid similar significant human and financial cost.

The data is clear, the border wall paired with new technologies significantly reduce illegal border crossings and human and drug trafficking at our southern border.

Immigration is a complex issue, but the administration needs to make it clear: if anyone wants to come to our country, they need to do it the right way, legally.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



One Family Farm Lost to the Death Tax is One Too Many

Last week I introduced a bill to permanently repeal the death tax. I've been pushing to repeal the death tax for a long time, because I've seen the consequences the tax can have for family farms and ranches and for family businesses. I'm proud that we protected a lot of family farms and businesses three years ago with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act by doubling the death tax exemption, but the death tax is still a big problem.

First, the change we made to the death tax in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act isn't permanent – the increased exemption level expires at the end of 2025. Second, Democrats – always eager to seize any possible revenue source – have proposed not merely returning the exemption to its previous level, but reducing it even further. That would be a big problem for a lot of family farms and businesses.

Every American, of course, has an obligation to pay what he or she owes in taxes, but there should be a limit to how many times the government can tax you. Death should not be a taxable event. The money you leave at your death has already been taxed by the government at least once, which makes the death tax double taxation.

People who support the death tax tend to talk as if the death tax only affects the fabulously wealthy, which isn't the case. Small and medium-sized businesses, family farms, and ranches spend a lot of time and money on estate planning to avoid being hit by this tax. Farmers and ranchers in my state know that without careful – and costly – planning, the federal government can come around after their death demanding a staggering 40 percent of their taxable estate, and their children won't have the money to pay without risking the farm or ranch.

Why? Well, farming and ranching is often a cash-poor business. A farmer might technically be worth several million dollars, but the vast majority of that is land and farming equipment, and only a small fraction of it is money in the bank. The Farm Bureau reports that over the past 10 years the value of farmland has increased by nearly 50 percent. It's completely possible that a farmer's land might have substantially increased in value over the past decade while his income has barely increased at all. In fact, it's perfectly possible that in a bad year, a farmer with several million dollars' worth of land might barely break even income-wise.

So what happens when a farmer dies? Well, the federal government will claim up to 40 percent of his taxable estate. But his liquid assets – in other words, the cash he has available – will likely not come close to covering the tax bill from the federal government. And so the only thing left for his children to do will be to start selling off farm equipment and land. In some cases they will be able to keep the farm – just a smaller version of it. In others, they may have to sell off the family farm entirely.

On top of all this, the death tax is an inefficient tax that raises a very small amount of revenue – while placing a very large burden on farmers and ranchers and small businessmen and women.

Repealing the death tax is an idea that has won bipartisan support in the past – including support from more than one sitting Democrat senator. I hope it will win bipartisan support in this Congress as well, and I will continue to fight to ensure that no family farm or business has to worry about this punishing tax.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: One family farm or business lost to the death tax is one too many.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

An Endowment for Our Future

I recently had the privilege of hearing from two impressive young South Dakota college students. Hattie Seten is the Students' Association President at South Dakota State University, and she was recently selected to be a Rhodes Scholar. Abuk Jiel is the President of the University of South Dakota Student Government Association. They're both hard-working, incredibly articulate, and both come from low-income families.

Hattie and Abuk told me their stories at a very special event: I had the privilege to sign SB 171, which funds \$50 million for the South Dakota Freedom Scholarship. These funds will work with \$150 in private donations (\$125 million have already been pledged!) to create an endowment for a needs-based scholarship in South Dakota.

Once established, this endowment will perpetually create opportunities for thousands of students like Hattie and Abuk to go to college. So many of these bright young South Dakotans just need an opportunity to succeed. I challenged the legislature to approve this funding so that we could provide just such an opportunity, and I am so glad that they followed through.

Let's be clear – this isn't a free handout. These students need to graduate, and then live and work in South Dakota for at least 3 years after their graduation. After that time, I am confident that many of these folks will decide to build their careers and raise their families in South Dakota. But until very recently, we've struggled with young talent leaving our state. This scholarship will help to reverse that trend.

With all of the new businesses flocking to South Dakota, we have a serious need for workforce development. Our unemployment rate is only 3.1%, which is incredible news! But a low unemployment rate means that it can be tough to find skilled workers to fill job openings. This scholarship will be a crucial part of training the workforce that South Dakota needs to staff up the businesses that are moving to our state.

So many people deserve thanks for their generosity in making this happen. T. Denny Sanford and the folks at First Premier Bank and PREMIER Bankcard helped get this project off the ground with the initial \$100 million pledge. The legislature stepped up with an additional \$50 million. And both Avera Health and Sanford Health pledged \$12.5 million apiece, bringing the total funding to \$175 million.

But we need \$200 million to make this endowment sustainable into the future, so we will continue to work hard to raise the final funds to make this project a reality. Our young South Dakotans deserve nothing less.



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Stephen Rodrick's South Dakota vacation...

Folks – I'm not old enough to remember when Rolling Stone was worth reading, so it came as no surprise when Stephen Rodrick and his editors outlined all the reasons why they don't like strong women.

Given the deafening silence on Cuomo's sexual harassment, why wouldn't Rolling Stone dedicate more than 7500 words attacking the only Governor in America who handled Covid appropriately? The sexist attacks on Governor Noem, either veiled or overt, are all the left has these days.

Would the same be true if Governor Noem was Gretchen Whitmer – a liberal Democrat eager to dictate to her people? Of course not. [At least the New York AG had the courage to investigate Cuomo for his nursing home policies; we can't say the same about Whitmer and the Michigan AG.] The radical left's press allies can't stand by while a thoughtful, principled conservative woman runs her state well... Cue the sexist attacks.

Rolling Stone thinks it's relevant to comment on Governor Noem's physical appearance and choices of clothing. Here are a couple of key facts for those of you who aren't judging her based on her gender or appearance.

South Dakota's rise in cases coincided with the wave that hit the Midwest. It wasn't Sturgis; it was geographical – just like every other wave that hit the country. We weren't unique when it arrived, and it had nothing to do with the media's beloved mitigation strategies. When are journalists going to look at the connection between a state's 85+ population and Covid spread?

Notably, Rodrick left out that Governor Noem has overseen one of the finest vaccination rollouts nationwide. To date, 34% of South Dakotans have received at least one shot of the vaccine (the only real way to move us past this pandemic).

Mollie Hemingway outlined why the Trump puppeteer caricature is laughable. The Governor believes in federalism. It works, and other governors should try it.

And it should be noted that left out of "activist" Nick Tilsen's story is the fact that he is facing 16 and a half years in prison because he assaulted a female National Guard soldier and stole a law enforcement officer's personal protective gear. That's a felony – as it should be.

On Monday, Professor Blessinger explained why South Dakotans are so special. It is why my family has chosen to make South Dakota our home, and why we're being joined by so many others. Rather than attack Governor Noem and the people of the great state of South Dakota, Rodrick – and America – would do well to learn about the policies she advanced this last year.

Empty, dishonest attacks like this grow less meaningful each time they're made, and eventually, like the boy who cried wolf, Americans are going to learn to ignore those who make them. We can help them along by focusing on what's true. To borrow a line from Gina Carano, they can't cancel us if we don't let them.

Stay well,
Maggie Seidel
Senior Advisor & Policy Director
Office of Governor Kristi Noem

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Lana's Annals, Final Week, House of Representatives

Greetings. We have finished legislative session over a week ago, and it may go down in history as being one of the most accomplished sessions in some ways. While we have not as of yet heard of signing or vetoing of some of the bills, we can be assured that our state won on the infrastructure level. It is rather easy to do this when large amounts of crf and state dollars are available.

The big winner was broadband at 100,000 million dollars (75m state funds and 25m crf funds). While much of the state is already set up for this, some areas are greatly lacking. Some West River areas are hopeful that they now will receive connectivity. While it sounds like a lot of money, it was pointed out that rocks are very expensive to drill through in the southwest area of the state. As one drives in the area north of here, it is also apparent that additional help is also needed around the Conde, Crocker, and Mellette areas. Let's hope that this was money well spent, and it is if people of our state reap the benefits. Also the state radio system improvements are going to be made.. Each year we try to allot money for this, but we are never able to have all problems areas reached.. It is my hope that our emergency groups will be helped with its approval of this.

SB69 provides for the new DEX building on the fairgrounds in Huron. You may remember the old burned down so the insurance money had 12 million dollars added to it to create a huge barn for different types horse and cow events throughout the year. It passed overwhelmingly, despite the messages we got that such a big building was not necessary. Huron has asked for very little in the past so perhaps by having this new building, more events can be held there, thus bolstering their local economy.

HB1156 provides for riparian buffer strip funding along the Big Sioux River to prevent additional water pollution. SB93 provides 6 million for improve the railway from Midland to Rapid City. Testimony stated that the lines are weak and worn, and trains have to travel at a snail's pace in some of this stretch. New track will need to be constructed if we want to continue product travel to western South Dakota. You may remember when many rail lines were considered archaic and unneeded. Because of increased demand for ethanol, as one example, we now must create a pathway to move the product. Coupled with the new bioprocessing plant at the Brookings Research Park(20 million dollars) and partnering with SDM&T, we may be able to find more uses for timber and mineral products just to name two. At that point, the rails may have even increased importance.

HB1239 commits over 3 million dollars toward road and bridge improvement. We may also be able to dedicate even more money toward this next year. It is not enough but is a start. The road to the new Veterans Cemetery near Sioux Falls also garnered 4.5 million. The Elm Lake Dam was allotted 5 million as it is about one crumble away from complete disaster, which would have a devastating effect on Aberdeen and the surrounding area. The National Guard Readiness Center in Sioux Falls will also receive 5 million state money and 15 million from federal funds. Major airports with additional funding may be able to add more routes as well as make improvements. Also we provided in excess of 700,000 dollars to remove Dakotah Hall and the root cellar from SDDC in Redfield as both are in decay and need to be eradicated for safety reasons.

After some discussion, we gave money to develop more meat processing capabilities. Those of you who have purchased meat may know that it is not a problem finding a seller, but the processing in some cases requires a few months for completion. Therefore we are trying to make this a quicker process.

One store owner said she ordered 4000 lbs. of burger and got 80 lb. That is just one example of meat shortages felt in our state.

SB171 allows for needs based scholarships to be given to students who attend an in state higher institution of learning. In order to qualify, one must be a resident of the state for one year and have a 2.5 GPA. In addition, upon graduation, the student must remain in state and work for a minimum of three years. If the recipient does not complete schooling, he or she will need to pay this back as a loan. Coupled with the 50 million the state is funding, another 50 million is being provided by other benevolent big business

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groups. It is my hope that students who are recipients see this as a positive opportunity to remain in school and pursue a career that is fulfilling in addition to addressing workforce shortages in some professions, such as healthcare, law enforcement, and business administration.

The above is just a partial list of some of the accomplishments of this legislative session. While we could not address all needs, we did research how we could best spend that which we had. I am proud that we provided for our healthcare workers, our teachers and emergency personnel. I want to thank all of you for your calls and messages that shared your thoughts and concerns as our session began and continued.

We spent much time and effort in setting up a good framework to have in place after voters passed medical and recreational marijuana. The best after session informational meetings gave those who attended some good direction and research about construction of a viable industry, sale areas, transporting, taxing, legal questions, medical use for minors, you name it. All that became of hours and hours of legislative planning and discussing were roadblocks....so frustrating. I know that I received far more constituent messages about this subject than any other topic. At the time of writing, all still seems in limbo. IM26 will go into law on July 1 with many unanswered questions.

With that, I want to express my gratitude for being able to represent you fine people. I hope that we can keep moving forward together to showcase our state, standing firm for those things we value most as residents of South Dakota.

May you be well and blessed.

Rep. Lana Greenfield

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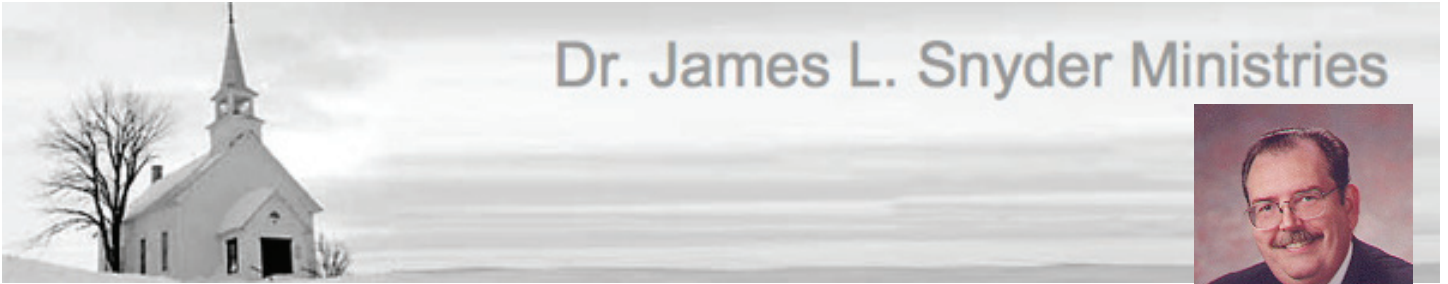
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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries



Be Careful What You Smile About

I am a student of smileology and have been just about all my life. If you can't smile at something, it's not worth thinking about.

Of course, certain things in life are serious, but not that many. Too many people take everything seriously and ruin their life. These are the kind of people I like to be around because they take things so seriously and because of that, the jokes on them.

When I see somebody that looks sad, I have an impulse to try to do something to make them laugh. It is that smile on our face that defines who we are.

There are times when I need to be careful about my smiling. I find so much to chuckle about, and to be truthful, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage has given me quite a bit to chuckle about. I don't know if she has taught me to chuckle or if I have taught her to chuckle. The result is the only thing that matters. We chuckle together, and that makes a good life.

We need to be careful about watching programs dealing with politicians because of the danger of dying laughing. Every politician has their role model as Charlie Chaplin.

When I told my wife this, she vehemently disagreed.

"Oh, no," she said most energetically, "their role model is the Three Stooges."

When she's right, she's right, and with this, she is absolutely right.

We enjoyed a long therapeutic session of chuckling.

Then a certain chapter in our life opened up. We were eating supper together, and my wife said, "Do you know that my friend was locked out of Facebook?"

I chuckled because I thought it was some kind of a joke.

"No," I said between chuckles, "what kind of nonsense did she do to deserve that?"

I responded, "Doesn't she know that her world does not revolve around Facebook? Tell her to go and get a life."

In the next week, I heard of several of my friends who have been locked out of their Facebook. These friends were good people, and I couldn't figure out why in the world Facebook would lock them out. They probably did something terrible. Why else would Facebook lock them out?

It seems every week I hear someone who is being locked out of Facebook, and I never could understand the reasons for that. I just laughed it off and thought perhaps they did something that was not right.

After all, Facebook is always right. (Or do they lean left?) I could never figure that out.

Whenever I hear of one being locked out, I would just smile and chuckle and forget about it.

I've learned a lesson, don't chuckle about something when you don't know the whole story.

One day this past week, I got up, got my coffee, and went to my chair to do a little reading, and then I picked up my iPad to check out my Facebook page.

I guess this is something automatic, and I don't think about it too much.

As I was opening my Facebook page, a message came up that said I had been locked out of Facebook. Evidently, according to them, and they never get it wrong, there have been things put on my Facebook that did not correlate with their standards.

Somebody hacked into my account and started putting on things I had no idea about.

When I told my wife about my lockout on Facebook, she just started chuckling.

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"What are you chuckling about?"

"Well," she said between chuckles, "you must've done something awful for Facebook to lock you out." Just to pause right here; I was not chuckling!

Then she reminded me of all the friends of ours locked out of Facebook and how much we laughed and chuckled.

"Yeah," I said mournfully, "but that had nothing to do with me. I'm locked out!"

She stared at me one of those stares of hers and just kept staring. I was getting to be a little unnerved by her staring. Then she finally said, "Your world does not revolve around Facebook. Go get a life."

At this time, I was not chuckling, but was beginning to do the opposite of chuckling. I can't tell you what that is right now.

The rest of the day, I was pondering my situation. I did not know how much time I spent on Facebook and how I depended upon it for specific information. I was disturbed by the thought that my world was beginning to revolve around Facebook. What a terrible development.

At this point, I am still locked out of Facebook. I'm not sure how long I'll be locked out; it could be a month or more. I don't know how these things work.

Although I thought it was a bad experience, I begin to realize that it was a good experience. Sometimes the best part of life flows out of the worst experiences we have. God delights to reveal himself in the dark shadows of our human experience.

I thought about a verse in the New Testament, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

(Philippians 4:4-5).

Every experience gives me a new opportunity to rejoice in the Lord. My joy certainly does not come from Facebook but from Christ.

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EARTHTALK ™

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From the Editors of E - The Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: Were frozen wind turbines the reason for Texas' historic power outages recently? If so, how can we make renewables more reliable moving forward?

-- G. S., Hartford, CT

As Winter Storm Uri wreaked havoc on the American Midwest this past February with bitter cold snow, entire power grids shut down and states like Texas faced a crisis like never before. Conservative politicians put the blame on renewable energy, particularly wind and solar. "Our wind and our solar got shut down, and they were collectively more than 10 percent of our power grid, and that thrust Texas into a situation where it was lacking power on a statewide basis," Governor Greg Abbot told Fox News.

Contrary to this argument, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) reports that renewable energy is responsible for less than a fraction of the state's power supply—with wind power making up a mere seven percent of energy losses. While issues such as frozen wind turbines did contribute to the widespread power grid failures, wind turbines tend to generate less power in the winter anyway, leaving the chief culprit of the statewide power shortages to natural gas.

Natural gas provides more than a third of Texas's power and heats over 40 percent of homes. The ERCOT reported that over 80 percent of the state's total winter capacity is generated by natural gas, coal and nuclear power. Natural gas power plants don't usually store fuel on site, and a lack of cold insulation because of the rarity of severe cold in Texas left most pipelines frozen and unable to maintain a continuous transferring of gas.

The ample evidence of fossil fuel energy failures behind Texas' electricity crisis points to the broader issue of climate change denial and its devastating consequences. "It is an extreme weather problem, not a clean power problem. If anything, it shows why we need to be investing in building out more renewable energy sources with better transmission and storage to replace outdated systems," says Heather Zichal, CEO of the American Clean Power Association.

Regardless, everyone is in favor of making renewable energy more reliable as well. One short-term solution is to modify wind turbines with anti-icing methods to withstand extreme temperatures, which Texas grid operators have yet to invest in. In the long run, however, the nation needs to drastically decrease its reliance on fossil fuels in order to make renewable energy more reliable. In the case of wind energy, the inconsistent demand of wind power makes wind power output fluctuate and thus less reliable. As more wind power is added to a localized grid, wind energy output is more easily predicted, decreasing wind variability and increasing the efficiency, flexibility and reliability of the grid.

In the end, the disastrous level of under-preparation resulting in a cascade of failures in Texas highlights the nation's dependence on fossil fuels and failure to build resilience by investing in a sustainable infrastructure. Though developing clean energy may come at a high cost, climate-linked disasters will only intensify and cause dangerous fallout. Let's hope that Winter Storm Uri can serve as the final wake-up call for our nation to begin a firm transition to renewable energy and fight for a habitable future.



Wind power provides a small fraction of electricity in Texas; frozen natural gas lines caused the state's power grid to go down recently. Credit:

Athena, pexels.

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#391 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

It's Saturday and a slow news day, so I'm giving myself a break tonight—just the numbers, a look back, and a couple of pieces of news. I may take another break tomorrow; we'll see how the day stacks up.

Things haven't changed much; deaths are down some, but I suspect this is weekend effect. There were 57,300 new cases reported today. We're at 29,804,100 total US cases so far in the pandemic, 0.2% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations were apparently not reported today; they hold at 40,568. And we're up to 541,469 deaths, which is 0.2% more than yesterday's total. There were 949 deaths reported today. Nothing much to see here.

March 20, 2020, one year ago today, was another terrible day. We had a 45 percent increase in cases to 17,836. New York was the hot spot with a 71 percent increase; almost 3000 of our 5500-case increase was in that state. Hospitals were strained, and the worst of the flush was yet to hit. There were three states with over 1000 cases, another five with over 400 and seven with over 200—so much worse, so fast. We were up to 238 deaths, over half of them in three states, Washington, New York, and California. Twenty-nine states total.

The entire states of California and Illinois issued stay-at-home orders. New York was within three weeks of running out of medical supplies; there were critical shortages of all kinds of equipment and tests. General Motors signed on to produce ventilators. Breweries and distilleries were beginning to make hand sanitizer for the public. Connecticut state non-essential employees were asked to stay home. 3M doubled its production of protective masks while US health care workers were using bandanas, sports goggles, and homemade masks.

There were almost 250,000 cases worldwide with nearly 10,000 deaths. It took over three months to reach 100,000 cases and 12 days to reach the second 100,000. Italy's death toll, at 3405 over one-third the world's total, had passed China's 3249; health care personnel were dying there. The country was shut down. Cases were at 41,035, 5322 more than the day before. Meanwhile, China reported no new cases at all for the first time since the pandemic began.

Cancellations and closures: Cuba; Yosemite National Park; part of Mar-a-Lago, similar to what we're seeing today; hotels in Miami Beach; Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers; the XFL season; jogging in Italy; Trump National Golf Club Los Angeles; the Florida Keys; British restaurants and pubs; federally held student loan payments; the National Spelling Bee. The US tax filing deadline was pushed back to July 15.

I talked about early approaches to therapeutics in this day's post with a liberal application of what-you-should-do-next in my Update #26, written on March 20 and posted in the early hours of March 21, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3445802342102814>.

Israel has vaccinated more of its population than anyone else so far, and so their data are particularly useful in assessing the overall effect of the vaccines. One piece of information that is interesting is the analysis that shows the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is 94 percent effective at preventing asymptomatic infection. This is important when we consider whether vaccinated people are a source of infection to others because the answer appears to be, for the most part, no. These data, collected two weeks after the second dose, are not yet peer-reviewed, but this is promising. People who did not receive vaccine were up to 44 times more likely to get sick and 29 times more likely to die from the infection. It should be noted that these results were in a population in which 80 percent of cases were with B.1.1.7. Means it's unlikely that variant will be an immune escape.

This isn't virus news, but it is virus-adjacent: The Tokyo Olympics is barring overseas spectators. Japan has made a decision not to grant entry to those kinds of numbers at the time of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the International Olympic Committee and International Paralympic Committee are accepting the decision. Some 600,000 of the 4.5 million tickets that have been sold for events went to people outside Japan; those folks will need to receive refunds, in itself an enormous undertaking. I'm guessing that's going to hurt the bottom line, particularly when we consider the costs have ballooned by some 22 percent due to the year-long postponement.

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There is still apparently a lot of angst in Japan around the idea of hosting such a large event this soon; NPR's Anthony Kuhn reported that, according to polling by broadcaster NHK, something like 80 percent of Japanese people do not think the Games should happen on schedule this summer. I'm one of the people who look forward to watching these events every two years; but I seriously hope this can happen safely. Japan has done well relative to many other developed countries through the pandemic: With about a third of our population, they've had less than half a million cases and not quite 9000 deaths; but it is clear that their population will not be close to fully vaccinated in time for the Opening Ceremony. Even without spectators from other countries, there will still be thousands of athletes, coaches, trainers, officials, and journalists from all over the world. Japan does not need a superspreader event on that scale at this late stage in the pandemic; neither does the rest of the world. The torch relay begins in Fukushima on Thursday.

Before I go, I thought you might enjoy a quick update on someone we talked about back in the fall. If you missed that one and are interested, check out my Update #203 posted September 13 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3968966579786385>. It is about high school history teacher, Cathy Cluck, who when faced with teaching the fall semester remotely, struck on the method of going on the road. She taught her AP history class from the actual places they were studying—Gettysburg, Colonial Williamsburg, and such. Cool teacher.

Someone else must have thought so too because Cluck was invited to participate in the recent presidential inauguration's Parade Across America, a series of vignettes from every one of the 50 states. Once she realized this was for real—no one was pranking her—she said, "This has been a hard year for everybody, and I am so impressed with my colleagues who are still putting everything into teaching." She characterized the selection of a teacher for the Parade as "a big deal." And, indeed, it is. If there's one thing this pandemic has taught us, it is the importance of education and of our schools. Be nice if this inspired us to take better care of them.

Stay safe. We'll talk tomorrow.

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	455	434	886	15	Minimal	6.3%
Beadle	2840	2731	6041	39	Substantial	14.9%
Bennett	385	371	1191	9	Minimal	3.1%
Bon Homme	1511	1481	2127	26	Minimal	1.5%
Brookings	3701	3574	12314	37	Substantial	3.7%
Brown	5238	5079	13008	90	Moderate	6.2%
Brule	700	684	1904	9	Minimal	3.2%
Buffalo	422	407	903	13	Minimal	8.3%
Butte	1006	977	3273	20	Moderate	6.7%
Campbell	131	127	262	4	Minimal	0.0%
Charles Mix	1328	1261	4020	21	Substantial	7.2%
Clark	391	370	964	5	Minimal	16.7%
Clay	1839	1795	5532	15	Substantial	6.2%
Codington	4133	3941	9852	79	Substantial	21.6%
Corson	474	460	1011	12	Minimal	9.1%
Custer	775	750	2771	12	Moderate	3.5%
Davison	3029	2911	6702	66	Substantial	13.4%
Day	681	643	1822	29	Moderate	3.6%
Deuel	487	465	1157	8	Minimal	5.0%
Dewey	1435	1406	3897	26	Substantial	6.9%
Douglas	437	425	932	9	Minimal	6.5%
Edmunds	488	470	1083	13	Minimal	14.8%
Fall River	558	536	2688	15	Substantial	4.5%
Faulk	363	348	707	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	993	935	2297	40	Moderate	5.0%
Gregory	566	516	1316	30	Moderate	4.0%
Haakon	260	246	546	10	Minimal	14.3%
Hamlin	737	683	1835	38	Moderate	4.3%
Hand	356	336	841	6	Moderate	9.1%
Hanson	374	364	744	4	Moderate	13.6%
Harding	92	91	187	1	Minimal	0.0%
Hughes	2345	2283	6719	36	Moderate	2.2%
Hutchinson	800	760	2432	26	Moderate	0.0%

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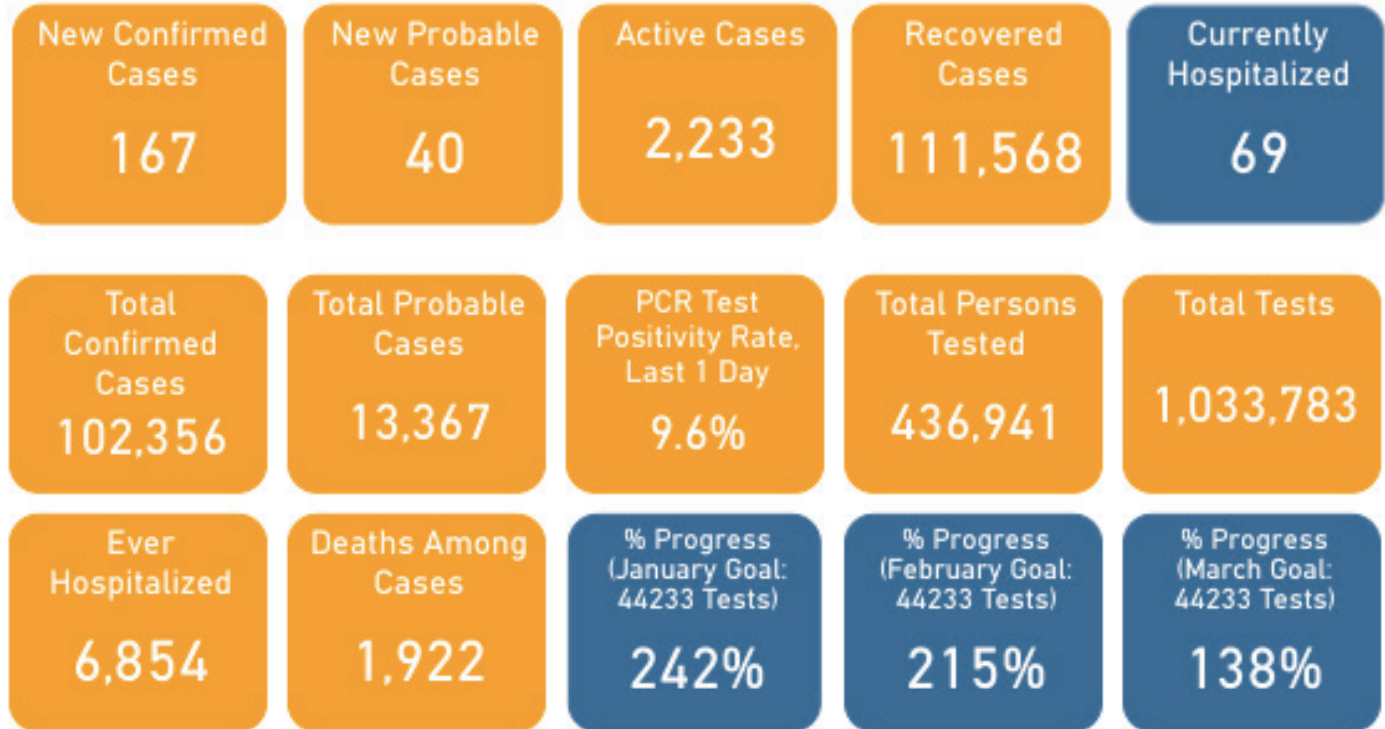
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Hyde	139	138	420	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	284	266	920	14	Minimal	9.1%
Jerauld	275	253	568	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	88	87	230	0	None	0.0%
Kingsbury	668	634	1705	14	Moderate	2.4%
Lake	1257	1185	3454	18	Substantial	12.7%
Lawrence	2879	2815	8635	45	Moderate	2.0%
Lincoln	8040	7773	20768	77	Substantial	10.5%
Lyman	610	592	1896	10	Moderate	6.5%
Marshall	359	325	1238	6	Substantial	10.0%
McCook	770	725	1681	24	Substantial	19.4%
McPherson	240	234	565	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2673	2600	7860	31	Moderate	7.4%
Mellette	255	248	747	2	Moderate	0.0%
Miner	282	261	591	9	Minimal	10.0%
Minnehaha	28983	27994	80148	340	Substantial	9.4%
Moody	622	602	1789	17	Minimal	0.0%
Oglala Lakota	2080	2008	6696	49	Moderate	9.2%
Pennington	13162	12810	40163	191	Moderate	6.2%
Perkins	349	333	831	14	Minimal	0.0%
Potter	384	375	854	4	Moderate	13.8%
Roberts	1284	1195	4240	36	Substantial	18.7%
Sanborn	335	328	703	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	818	777	2173	26	Moderate	9.4%
Stanley	339	337	958	2	Minimal	4.3%
Sully	137	134	325	3	None	0.0%
Todd	1221	1189	4176	29	Minimal	1.5%
Tripp	727	694	1510	16	Substantial	11.9%
Turner	1113	1023	2785	53	Substantial	20.8%
Union	2075	1959	6439	40	Substantial	11.3%
Walworth	740	708	1847	15	Moderate	12.8%
Yankton	2868	2779	9538	28	Moderate	9.0%
Ziebach	337	327	878	9	Minimal	0.0%
Unassigned	0	0	1923	0		

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South Dakota



RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
White, Non-Hispanic	86554	75%
Native American, Non-Hispanic	13653	12%
Unknown, Non-Hispanic	5569	5%
Hispanic	4200	4%
Black, Non-Hispanic	2567	2%
Other, Non-Hispanic	1690	1%
Asian, Non-Hispanic	1490	1%

COVID-19 Variant	# of Cases
B.1.1.7	3
B.1.351	0
B.1.427	0
B.1.429	0
P.1	0

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	60216	905
Male	55507	1017

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Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

2

New Probable Cases

3

Active Cases

69

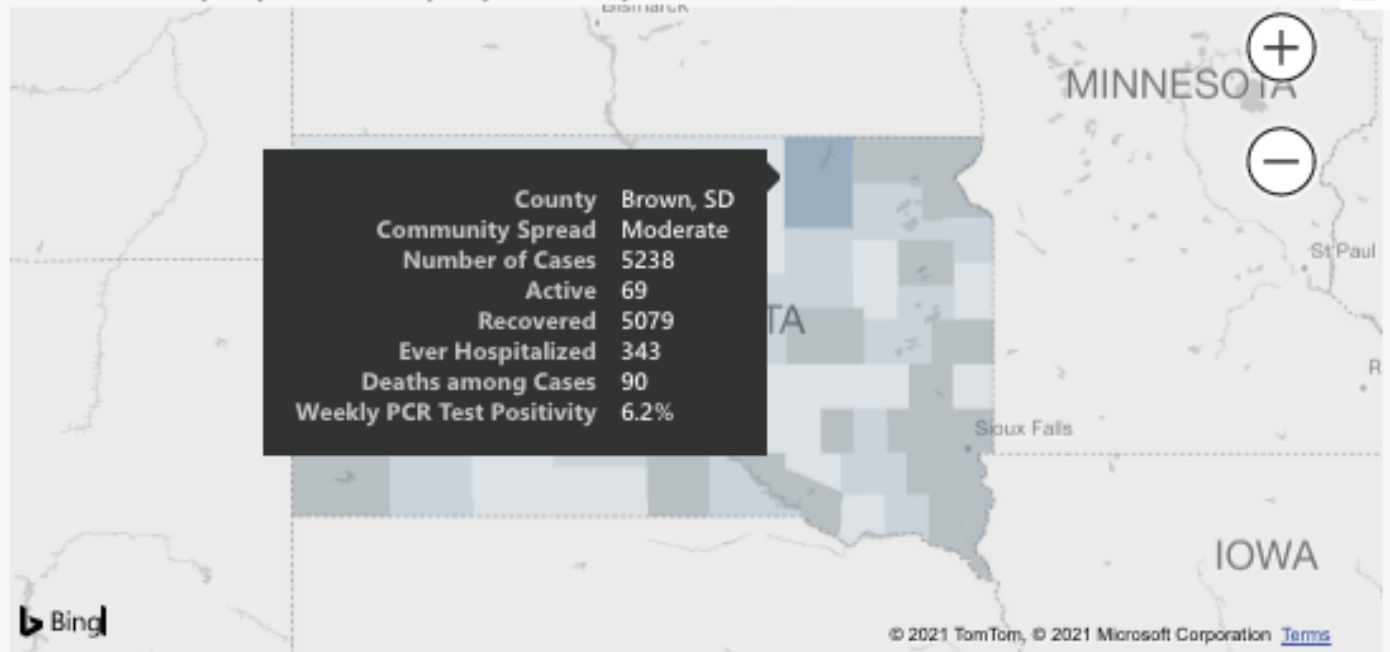
Recovered Cases

5,079

Currently Hospitalized

69

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

Total Confirmed Cases

4,654

Total Probable Cases

584

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

2.6%

Total Persons Tested

18,246

Total Tests

50,500

Ever Hospitalized

343

Deaths Among Cases

90

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

242%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

215%

% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)

138%

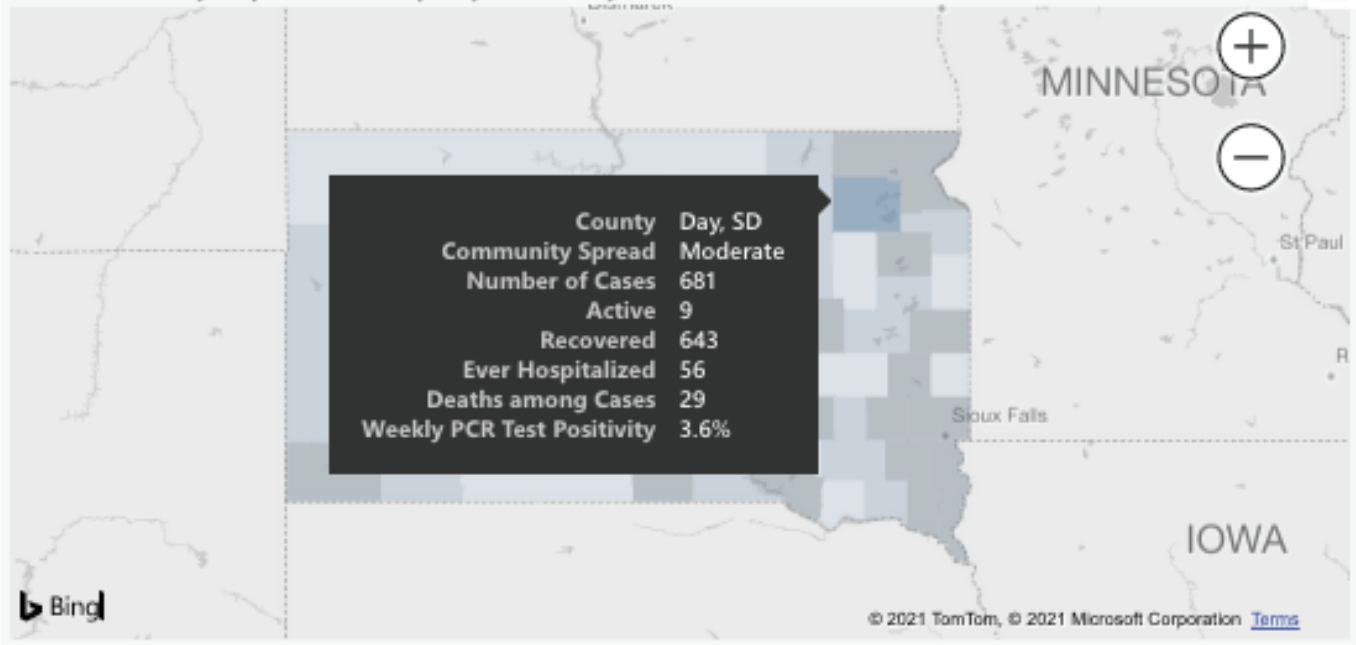
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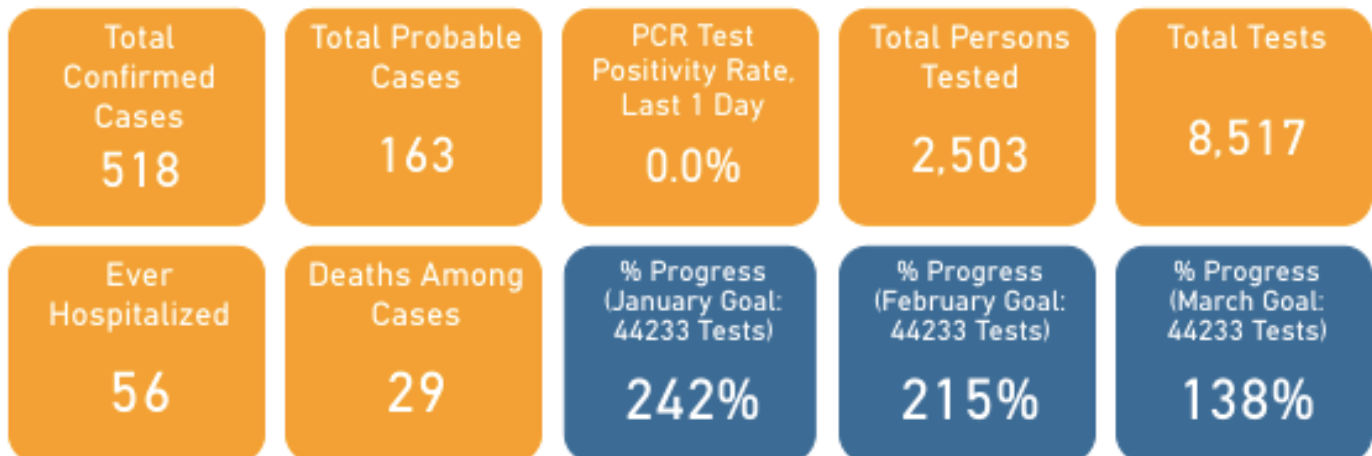
Day County



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

342,363

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	4,598
Moderna	165,906
Pfizer	171,859

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

214,284

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	4,598
Moderna - 1 dose	43,102
Moderna - Series Complete	61,402
Pfizer - 1 dose	38,533
Pfizer - Series Complete	66,663

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

37%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	36.69%
Series Complete	22.83%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,017	359	329	688
Beadle	7,184	2,072	2,555	4,627
Bennett*	485	131	177	308
Bon Homme*	4,003	875	1,564	2,439
Brookings	10,645	4,173	3,236	7,409
Brown	15,718	3,882	5,918	9,800
Brule*	1,982	494	744	1,238
Buffalo*	136	78	29	107
Butte	2,374	894	740	1,634
Campbell	1,154	168	493	661
Charles Mix*	3,527	1,165	1,181	2,346
Clark	1,407	457	475	932
Clay	5,481	1,891	1,795	3,686
Codington*	10,697	2,939	3,879	6,818
Corson*	313	71	121	192
Custer*	3,061	829	1,116	1,945
Davison	7,967	2,073	2,947	5,020
Day*	2,788	862	963	1,825
Deuel	1,681	501	590	1,091
Dewey*	388	64	162	226
Douglas*	1,352	370	491	861
Edmunds	1,476	418	529	947
Fall River*	2,748	648	1,050	1,698
Faulk	1,165	337	414	751
Grant*	2,880	1,066	907	1,973
Gregory*	1,903	585	659	1,244
Haakon*	568	148	210	358

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Hamlin	1,932	571	680	1,251
Hand	1,595	505	545	1,050
Hanson	514	155	179	334
Harding	117	51	33	84
Hughes*	8,622	1,972	3,325	5,297
Hutchinson*	3,834	949	1,442	2,391
Hyde*	585	163	211	374
Jackson*	431	117	157	274
Jerauld	996	304	346	650
Jones*	680	146	267	413
Kingsbury	2,723	957	883	1,840
Lake	4,537	1,543	1,497	3,040
Lawrence	9,066	3,100	2,983	6,083
Lincoln	27,866	5,663	11,100	16,763
Lyman*	882	258	312	570
Marshall*	1,870	500	685	1,185
McCook	2,335	589	873	1,462
McPherson	273	67	103	170
Meade*	6,859	1,831	2,514	4,345
Mellette*	52	14	19	33
Miner	942	256	343	599
Minnehaha*	87,594	19,109	34,240	53,349
Moody*	1,970	694	638	1,332
Oglala Lakota*	185	57	64	121
Pennington*	40,049	8,827	15,611	24,438
Perkins*	743	253	245	498
Potter	1,005	331	337	668
Roberts*	4,685	1,211	1,737	2,948
Sanborn	1,070	332	369	701
Spink	3,362	882	1,240	2,122
Stanley*	1,321	269	526	795
Sully	414	94	160	254
Todd*	177	43	67	110
Tripp*	2,205	471	867	1,338
Turner	3,916	793	1,561	2,354
Union	3,551	1,345	1,103	2,448
Walworth*	2,037	389	824	1,213
Yankton	10,788	2,096	4,346	6,442
Ziebach*	59	13	23	36
Other	6,421	1,749	2,336	4,085

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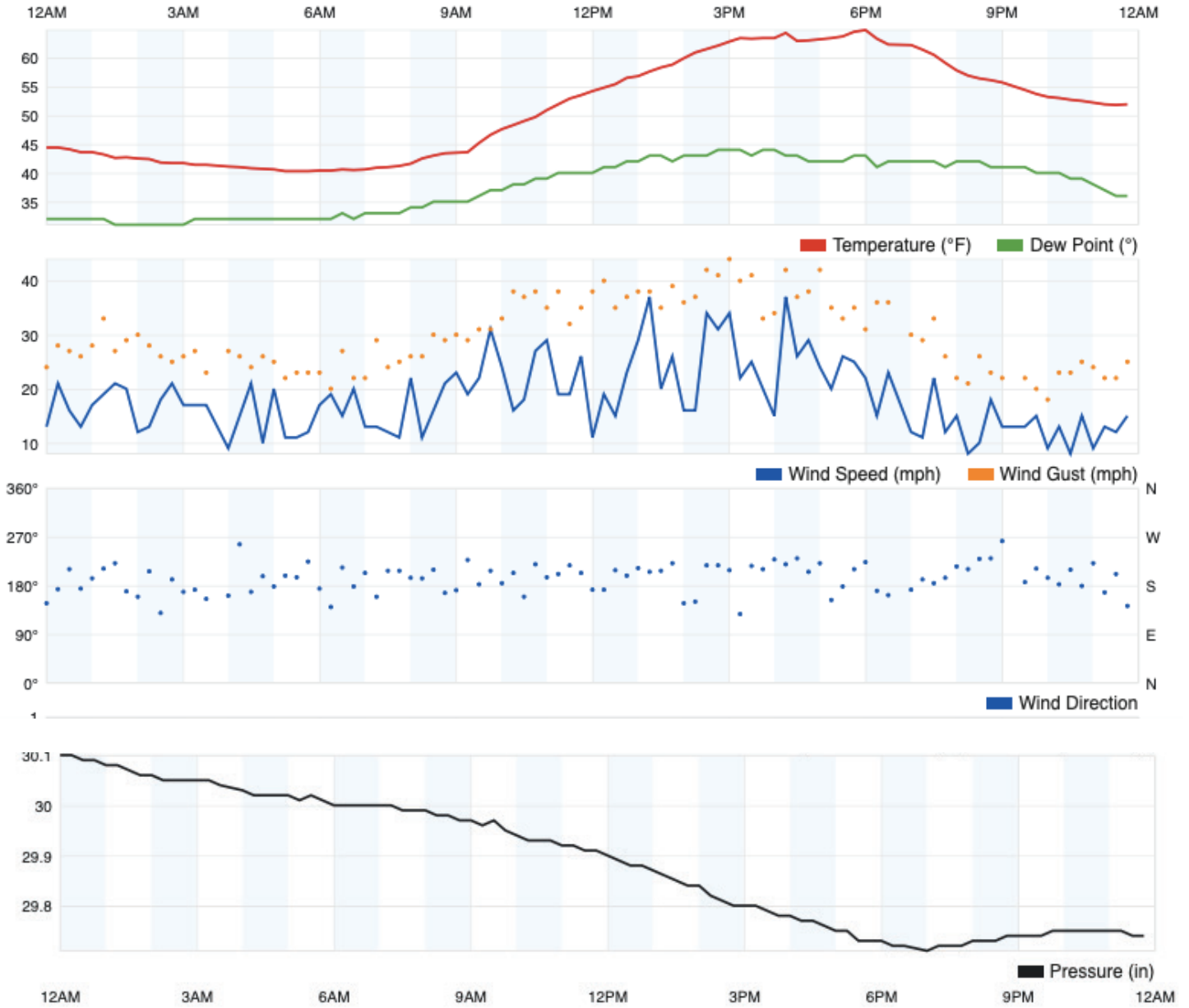
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



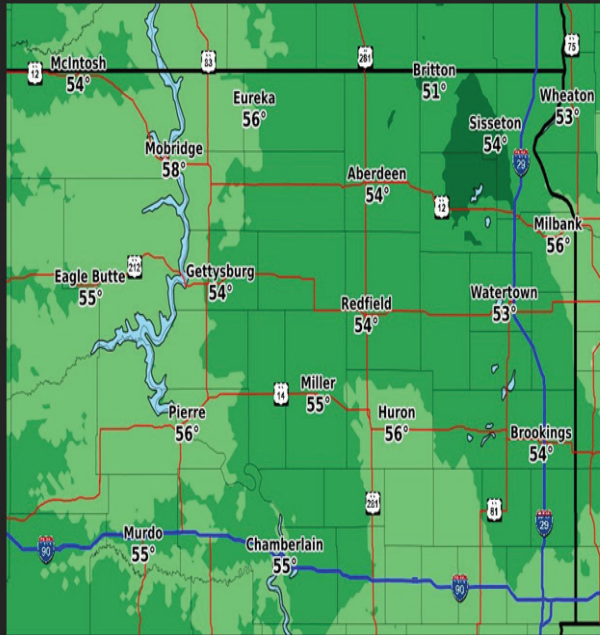
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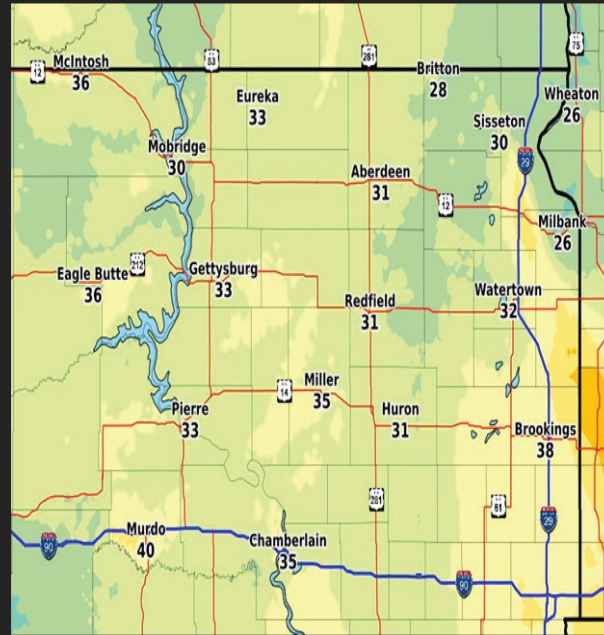
Today	Tonight	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
				
30% → 60%				20% 30%
Chance Rain then Rain Likely and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Increasing Clouds	Slight Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Rain and Breezy
High: 53 °F	Low: 28 °F	High: 52 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 49 °F

Breezy Again Today, Light Rain Possible

High Temperatures Today



Max Wind Gusts Expected



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Updated: 3/21/2021 4:31 AM Central

Breezy conditions are expected again today, along with a chance for some light rain showers as a frontal boundary makes its way across the region. Little to no accumulation is expected.

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Today in Weather History

March 21, 1997: As temperatures began to warm up towards the end of March, the near-record to record winter snowpack over central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota started to melt. The resulting runoff filled up ditches, lakes, creeks, streams, and low-lying areas. The massive amount of water swamped hundreds of sections of county and township roads as well as several state and federal highways. The inundated parts of roads were either broken up or washed out. Tens of culverts were blown out or damaged, and several bridges were either destroyed or washed out by chunks of ice and the high water flow. Road closures were extensive, with rerouting taking place for school buses, mail carriers, farmers, and ranchers. Many spillways and dams received some damage or were washed out. Also, thousands of acres of farmland and pastureland were underwater. Due to the high groundwater, a countless number of homes received water in their basements. A few towns were partially flooded, including Twin Brooks in Grant County, Corona in Roberts County, and Raymond in Clark County. The following week, in the early morning hours of March 27, water flowed into Raymond filling the basements of several homes. In rural areas, several farms were surrounded by water and were inaccessible, leaving some people stranded and livestock marooned. Many other residences and businesses, mainly across northeast South Dakota, received significant damage or were a total loss. As a result, several people had to be evacuated. At the time, many long-term residents said this was the most significant flooding they had seen in their lifetimes. The flooding continued into early to mid-April.

March 21, 2012: Several record high temperatures occurred across the region in March.

1801: The Jefferson Flood hit the Connecticut Valley. The flooding was the greatest since 1692. The Federalists named the flood for the new President, who they blamed for the disaster.

1876: More than 40 inches of snow stopped traffic in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Trains were delayed, and mail carriers resorted to snowshoes.

1932 - A tornado swarm occurred in the Deep South. Between late afternoon and early the next morning severe thunderstorms spawned 31 tornadoes in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Tennessee. The tornadoes killed 334 persons and injured 1784 others. Northern Alabama was hardest hit. Tornadoes in Alabama killed 286 persons and caused five million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1951: Antarctica is the windiest place in the world. Port Martin averaged 40 mph winds throughout the year. On this day, the winds averaged 108 mph.

1952 - Severe thunderstorms spawned thirty-one tornadoes across Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Mississippi, Alabama and Kentucky. The tornadoes killed 343 persons and caused 15 million dollars damage. Arkansas and Tennessee each reported thirteen tornadoes. The towns of Judsonia AR and Henderson TN were nearly wiped off the map in what proved to be the worst tornado outbreak of record for Arkansas. A tornado, one and a half miles wide at times, left a church the only undamaged building at Judsonia. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm in the Northern High Plains Region produced blizzard conditions in western South Dakota. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Rapid City SD, and snowfall totals ranged up to 20 inches at Lead SD. The high winds produced snow drifts six feet high. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Bitterly cold weather prevailed across the northeastern U.S. Portland ME reported their coldest spring day of record with a morning low of 5 above, and an afternoon high of just 21 degrees. Marquette MI reported a record low of 15 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Snow blanketed the northeastern U.S. early in the day, with six inches reported at Rutland VT. Morning and afternoon thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds from southwestern Mississippi to southwest Georgia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - The first full day of spring was a cold one for the eastern U.S. Freezing temperatures damaged 62 percent of the peach crop in upstate South Carolina, and 72 percent of the peach crop in the ridge area of South Carolina. Elkins WV, which a week earlier reported a record high of 82 degrees, was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 16 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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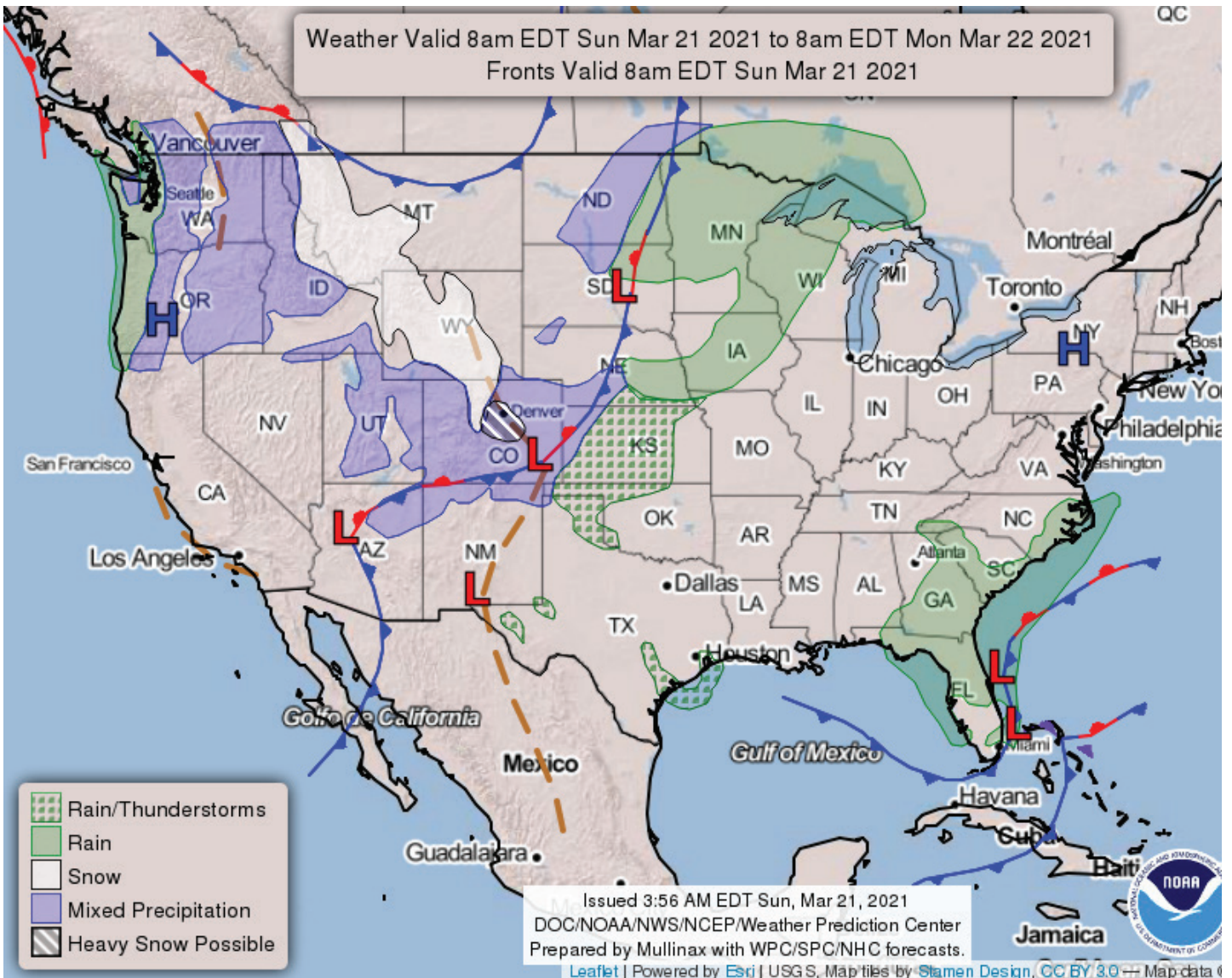
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 65 °F at 4:09 PM
Low Temp: 40 °F at 5:31 AM
Wind: 45 mph at 4:15 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 76° in 1910, 1926
Record Low: -12° in 1965
Average High: 42°F
Average Low: 22°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.67
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.35
Average Precip to date: 1.69
Precip Year to Date: 0.53
Sunset Tonight: 7:48 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:32 a.m.



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Christian Ehresmann took first place at Black Hills National Wrestling Tournament Saturday. He wrestled at 140 weight class.
(Photo fro Jo Anne Ehresmann's Facebook Page)

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LIFE'S CHOICES

Yogi Berra once said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." That seems to sum up the journey before all of us in one way or another. We are constantly faced with deciding which way we are to go when we come to the "forks in life's road."

Each morning when we begin the day's journey, there is no assurance that what we intend to do will unfold as we planned it. Interruptions come from every side and what may have been peaceful and calm ends up being frantic and beyond our control. So, we are confronted with two ever-present options: chose to have faith in God or be fearful of what is in us, in front of us, or around us. We are often faced with the only two choices life has to offer: faith or fear. So, what does faith in God have to offer us?

In Psalm 27 David describes his Lord as his light, salvation, and fortress. As his light, David knew that God would reveal His plan for him and dispel the darkness that might come over him. He also believed that God was his salvation. This meant that God would deliver him from anything, any time, or anywhere that would harm him and rescue him from tragedy when things went badly. He believed that the Lord was his strength – his personal stronghold or fortress – a place where he could take refuge and restore his soul when he was overwhelmed with life's demands.

No wonder he proclaimed with confidence: Why fear anything?

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for being our light, salvation, and strength. How desperately we need Your help to meet the challenges of life! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord is my light and my salvation - so why should I be afraid? Psalm 27:1

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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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Saturday:

Dakota Cash

06-09-21-29-34

(six, nine, twenty-one, twenty-nine, thirty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$80,000

Lotto America

01-02-18-37-47, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 2

(one, two, eighteen, thirty-seven, forty-seven; Star Ball: two; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$3.97 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$122 million

Powerball

01-06-22-42-61, Powerball: 4, Power Play: 3

(one, six, twenty-two, forty-two, sixty-one; Powerball: four; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$200 million

Arkansas women back in with NCAA mainstays in Alamo Region

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Arkansas coach Mike Neighbors had confidence when going home that the Razorbacks could be an NCAA Tournament team again, though he didn't have much of a recruiting pitch then for Chelsea Dungee.

"Faith is believing with lack of evidence. And we have kids that had faith in us because we did not have a lot of evidence to spread around that Chelsea should come here," Neighbors said. "Guess what, we're going to be picked 14th in the league. ... When you get here, we're going to load you up and it's going to be incredibly hard."

Led by SEC scoring leader and third-team AP All-American Dungee and San Antonio native Amber Ramirez, her former AAU teammate and another transfer, the Razorbacks (19-8) are in their first NCAA Tournament since 2015. It is Neighbors' fourth season at his alma mater since a Final Four and another Sweet 16 in four seasons at Washington.

Arkansas is the No. 4 seed in the Alamo Region, with Stanford and Louisville the top two seeds. It is the 34th NCAA appearance for both Stanford and third-seeded Georgia, second only to Tennessee making all 39 NCAA Tournaments.

Stanford (25-2) has its first No. 1 seed since 2013 for what is Tara VanDerveer's record 35th NCAA Tournament for a coach and 33rd in a row for the Cardinal. They open Sunday night in the Alamodome against NCAA first-timer Utah Valley (13-6), the WAC runner-up in with unbeaten California Baptist not yet eligible for the NCAA Tournament while making the transition from Division II.

The Razorbacks, who play Monday against Horizon League champion Wright State (18-7), have been tested by tournament teams all season. They beat both UConn and Baylor, the top two seeds in the River Walk Region, as well as Wake Forest and Florida Gulf Coast. They also played Maryland and are among seven SEC teams in the NCAA field.

Dungee, with 2,120 career points and averaging 22.2 a game this season, had to sit out Neighbors' first season at Arkansas in 2017-18 after transferring from Oklahoma. Ramirez had to redshirt the following year after coming from TCU.

The Razorbacks had lost four of five games before a hastily added January game against UConn. They

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are 8-2 since, including that 90-87 win.

"Somebody said it early in the year really well. This is a team that could lose in the first round or a team that can win, and could go really deep," Neighbors said. "We've just got to make sure that we're that second team."

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA NEIGHBORS

VanDerveer has mentored Jennifer Gross and even leaned on the mid-major coach from UC Davis three years ago to help install the Princeton offense at Stanford.

VanDerveer hardly expected to see her Northern California neighbor and Gross' Big West champion Aggies in the same region, given the structure of this year's NCAA Tournament not featuring host schools. UC Davis (13-2), the No. 12 seed in the Alamo Region, plays Missouri State (21-5) on Monday night.

"I'm really surprised that there was not more moving around of teams this year," said VanDerveer, who in December passed the late Pat Summitt to become the all-time winningest coach in women's basketball. "With the opportunity of everyone coming to the same place why not move Davis to play against East Coast teams and East Coast teams against us? That's the one biggest thing that surprised me about the whole bracket."

Stanford and UC Davis, separated by about 100 miles, played in the first round of the 2018 Tournament. The schools' scheduled Dec. 11 game got canceled — one of 13 consecutive games knocked off the Aggies' schedule following their season opener Nov. 25 through mid-January.

NOT AT HOME

Northwestern was set to host the first two rounds last season before the NCAA Tournament was canceled because of the pandemic. The Wildcats (15-8) instead will make their first NCAA appearance since 2014-15 as a No. 7 seed taking on UCF.

Coach Joe McKeown said his players have a chip on their shoulders wanting to prove how good they were last year (26-4).

"Obviously we were ready for it last year," said junior guard Veronica Burton, Northwestern's leading scorer at 16.9 points a game. "But just to finally be here, to finally see your work pay off, I think there'll be a lot of emotions. But we'll be excited and we'll use them to our advantage."

PAST FINAL FOURS

The Alamo Region has teams that were part of the last three Final Fours. None made it to the championship game.

Oregon was part of the last Final Four in 2019, while Louisville made it in 2018 and Stanford in 2017.

The sixth-seeded Ducks (13-8) have lost five of their last six games, and likely will still be without injured point guard Te-Hina Paopao against South Dakota (19-5).

Louisville (23-3), a No. 1 seed the last two tournaments, has never lost a first-round game in 11 appearances under coach Jeff Walz. The Cardinals, with AP All-American guard Dana Evans, a freshman on their Final Four team three years ago, play Marist (18-3) on Monday.

AP Sports Writer Janie McCauley contributed to this report.

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/Womenscollegebasketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

No. 6 South Dakota St rushes for 392 yards against No. 5 SIU

CARBONDALE, Ill. (AP) — Freshman Isaiah Davis rushed for 150 yards and three touchdowns, quarterback Mark Gronowski added 103 yards on the ground and two scores, and South Dakota State rushed for 392 yards in a 44-3 victory over Southern Illinois on Saturday.

Davis highlighted a 24-0 third quarter with a 45-yard touchdown run up the middle. He also had two short scoring runs of 1 and 3 yards, and reached the century mark for the second time this season.

Gronowski was also 7-of-11 passing for 63 yards for South Dakota State (4-1). Jordan Meachum added

88 yards on the ground and Jefferson Lee V had 45.

Joshua Manchigiah had an interception for the third week in a row as No. 6 South Dakota State forced No. 5 Southern Illinois into four turnovers. Don Gardner picked off a pass on the first play from scrimmage in the second half, and Logan Backhaus made his ninth career interception.

Four different players attempted a pass for Southern Illinois (4-2), combining for 14-of-25 passing for 92 yards and three interceptions.

It was the first time this season South Dakota State did not score on its opening drive of the game after its 43-yard field goal attempt was blocked.

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

Denny Sanford gifts \$300 million to Sanford Health

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A \$300 million donation to Sanford Health is intended to improve rural care across South Dakota, expand Sanford's graduate medical education, expand the sports complex in Sioux Falls and build a "virtual hospital of the future," officials said.

The donation comes from the health care system's namesake, Denny Sanford.

"I have a deep appreciation for the life-changing mission of Sanford Health and its work locally and around the globe, and my gift will ensure it continues to be a vital asset across our region for generations to come," Sanford said in a statement.

The donation and plans for expansion will bring "transformative health care" to the rural Midwest, said Bill Gassen, president and CEO of Sanford Health.

"This effort will position Sanford Health as a global leader in rural care delivery, allow us to bring top clinicians to our region and enhance the health and well-being of the communities we serve," Gassen said, the Argus Leader reported.

Sanford Health plans to create a virtual hospital to better reach rural areas of the Midwest for medical care.

Sanford made a \$400 million gift in 2007 that propelled the health care system from a small regional provider to one of the largest health systems in the nation. All total, Sanford has donated more than \$1 billion to Sanford Health.

Youngstown State pounds out 28-10 win over S. Dakota

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio (AP) — Mark Waid passed for one touchdown, ran for another and guided an offense that piled up 303 yards rushing as Youngstown State finally broke into the win column, defeating South Dakota 28-10 on Saturday.

Jaleel McLaughlin rushed for 166 yards on 28 carries, his third straight game with more than 100 yards rushing, and the Penguins (1-4) are 5-0 against South Dakota at Stambaugh Stadium.

South Dakota (1-3) has lost three in a row. Carson Camp passed for 214 yards, completing 21 of 30, but had no touchdowns, one interception and was sacked five times. The Coyotes netted 12 yards on the ground and lost two fumbles.

Waid ended Youngstown State's first possession — a 13-play, 69-yarder that ate up 6:33 — with a 10-yard touchdown pass to Christian Turner. A two-point conversion pass made it 8-0.

On the ensuing South Dakota possession, the Penguins Grant Dixon picked off Camp at the 21, ending a scoring threat and resulting in the first of two Colt McFadden field goals. Dixon, a grad transfer from Marist, also forced a fumble in the third quarter, stripping the ball from Kai Henry to end another Coyotes' threat.

Youngstown State led 11-3 at halftime, added three unanswered scores for a 28-3 lead early in the fourth. South Dakota's Travis Theis added a TD run from the 1 to end the scoring.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/tag/Collegefootball>

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3 additional COVID-19 deaths, 205 new infections

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — State health officials reported three new coronavirus deaths in South Dakota Saturday and 205 new infections.

Those who died were all over 80 years of age and included one man and two women from Davison, Grant and Minnehaha counties, according to the Department of Health.

The new infections bring the state's total to 115,723 with 2,233 of those still active cases.

There are 69 people hospitalized in South Dakota with 18 patients in intensive care and four on ventilators. In the Black Hills region hospitals, three patients are being treated for COVID-19 with one in ICU and no one on a ventilator.

Minnehaha County led the state with 63 new infections.

Defendant pleads not guilty in fatal Rapid City stabbing

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Box Elder man has pleaded not guilty to charges in a fatal stabbing in Rapid City last summer.

Barry Allman, 30, is charged in Pennington County with second-degree murder in the stabbing death of Lance Baumgarten.

Allman entered the plea Friday during his first court appearance, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Witnesses say Allman stabbed Baumgarten in the chest at a Rapid City apartment on Aug. 6 after becoming mad at him, according to an affidavit from the Rapid City Police Department.

They said Allman accused Baumgarten of faking his injuries, threatened to shoot him, threatened others with his gun and said he would dump Baumgarten in the Badlands if people didn't bring him to the hospital, according the affidavit.

Allman was arrested for the homicide near Wanblee the next day by Oglala Sioux tribal officers.

Federal judge says his successor should know Lakota culture

By ARIELLE ZIONTS Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The next federal judge serving western South Dakota should be culturally competent in Lakota culture and history, said retiring Judge Jeffery Viken.

"The history of Native people is critically important — in terms of what happened and the trauma and the beauty of the culture and all of these acts of Congress that diminished Native lands in South Dakota down to these nine reservations," Viken said from his chambers in the federal courthouse in downtown Rapid City.

"The history of that is critically important to understand how people function now and why the level of poverty is what it is, substandard education, substandard health care, problems with chemical dependency," he said. "There are reasons and roots for those issues that bring people to this court every day."

The South Dakota Democratic Party has submitted recommendations to President Joe Biden for Viken's replacement as well as for the U.S. Attorney and Marshal in South Dakota, Chair Randy Seiler.

We received an "overwhelming response" of South Dakotans interested in these positions, said Seiler, a former U.S. Attorney who ran against Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg in 2018.

U.S. Attorneys and Marshals are replaced when there's a new president. Federal judges have lifetime appointments but the western division of South Dakota needs a new one since Viken decided to retire on Oct. 1, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Candidates for these positions are usually selected by a U.S. senator or representative of the president's same party but all three members of South Dakota's delegation are Republicans, Seiler explained.

The next option is for the recommendations to be handled by a statewide election official of the same party — something else South Dakota doesn't have. That's how the responsibility fell to the state's Democratic Party, a situation seen in other states such as North Dakota.

Seiler said he and the party discussed potential recommendations with former South Dakota members

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of Congress, current state Democratic leaders and federal judges.

"The political aspects of this matter" in addition to how qualified and experienced they are for the job, Seiler said. He said he considered how engaged candidates have been with the Democratic Party and if they've ran for office.

All of the five full- and part-time federal judges in South Dakota — all nominated by Democratic presidents — were involved in the party in some way, Seiler said. Once people become federal judges, they can't be involved in any politics, Viken said.

The recommendations to the Biden team included multiple candidates for at least one of the three positions, Seiler said. He declined to name them.

There is no deadline for when Biden must announce his nominations, Seiler said. He noted that former U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson wasn't sworn in until nine months into Barack Obama's presidency.

Biden's nominations for federal judge and U.S. Attorney must be approved by the U.S. Senate.

"A Native person would be an extraordinary candidate for this job," Viken said.

The 68-year-old noted that there are few Indigenous federal judges, and there's never been one in South Dakota.

The state has had at least one Indigenous U.S. Marshal, Bob Ecoffey, the current police chief of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. It's also had at least two Indigenous U.S. Attorneys, Philip Hogen and Terry Pechota, who both maintain private practices in the Black Hills.

Biden released a memo making it clear that he wants to see judges with diverse identities and legal backgrounds, Viken said. The president is looking for people who've served as defense and civil rights lawyers, not just those who've worked as prosecutors and in corporate law firms.

Whether the new judge is Indigenous or not, Viken said, it's important for them to have "cultural competency" with Lakota history and culture since 50 to 60% of cases stem from the Pine Ridge Reservation.

"It's a very unique criminal docket ... because of the level of work we have under the Major Crimes Act in Indian Country," he said in reference to the law that says serious crimes on reservations are handled in federal instead of state court. "There are only two or three other jurisdictions in the country that have anything close to what we do."

A judge needs to "understand the historical trauma and dysfunction that results in the criminal case load that we have here," Viken said. "To embrace that and understand that is not to say that 'oh, we're here, we're so sympathetic, these crimes are just not serious.' That's not it at all. There are real victims in some of these cases. But I think somebody has to have the intellectual and the emotional capacity to take that in.

"If you just read the paper and follow the news, it seems like everybody coming off Pine Ridge is a criminal. Not true," said Viken, who was adopted decades ago into a Lakota family through a hunka ceremony. "Pine Ridge is a glorious culture and it's been misrepresented every which way by national publications and films, as well as locally."

After every trial involving a defendant from the reservation, Viken said, he tells the jury that "they're seeing the most difficult part of life, Pine Ridge is filled with wonderful people and families."

Viken said the new judge must know about treaty history, especially the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, a topic that often comes up in court.

The judge must also be familiar with civil law. Viken said unique civil issues to the division involve lawsuits related to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, Indian Health Service and public lands in the Black Hills.

Viken worked as a federal prosecutor, federal public defender and in private practice before President Barack Obama nominated him to be a federal judge in 2009.

"I may have, I don't know," Viken said about whether he would delayed retirement if Donald Trump had won the election. "I would have looked at it. I had some concerns about people who were being put forward for the district courts and the manner of their selection."

"I can't tell you the change in administration is the only reason I'm taking senior status, that's simply not true," he said. Viken said the "driving factor" is the fact that he's becoming eligible for retirement in August.

Viken, who's worked in law for 44 years, said he'd like to spend more time with his wife of 41 years, at-

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torney Linda Lea. He said they look forward to having more time for their hobbies — hiking in the Black Hills, international travel, collecting Native American artwork, cooking for and attending group dinner parties, spending time with their hunka family on the reservation, and supporting nonprofits related to the arts, education, women and children.

However, Viken is still interested in public service so he's retiring to senior status — where he will work at least a 25% caseload — instead of taking a full retirement.

He said he will be able to help the next judge adjust to their new role while helping to process a large case load. The Rapid City judge handles 100 cases more than the federal judges based in Pierre and Sioux Falls do each year.

Fleeing coup, Myanmar police refugees in India seek asylum

By ANUPAM NATH Associated Press

MIZORAM, India (AP) — Myanmar police officers who fled to India after they said they defied orders to shoot people protesting their country's military coup are urging India's government not to send them back and to grant them asylum on humanitarian grounds.

One of the officers who has sought refuge in a village in the northeastern Indian state of Mizoram along the border with Myanmar said they didn't want to return to their country until the problems there are solved.

That officer and others who spoke to The Associated Press did so on condition of anonymity out of concern for the safety of family members still in Myanmar.

Another officer who fled told AP that soldiers ordered them to "arrest, beat, torture the protesters" and said police were always sent to the front whenever there was protest. She said the officers had "no choice" but to leave Myanmar.

The security crackdown following Myanmar's Feb. 1 coup has forced scores of refugees over the border into India. India's state and federal authorities haven't given any figures, but some state ministers have said the number could be in the hundreds. One Indian village has given shelter to 34 police personnel and one firefighter who crossed into India over the last two weeks.

The AP has not been able to independently verify their claims that they were ordered to shoot protesters, though images and accounts of the security forces' crackdown inside Myanmar have shown intensifying violence against civilians. More than 200 people have been killed by security forces since the coup.

India's federal government and the state of Mizoram are at odds over the influx of refugees. Earlier, the Mizoram government had allowed refugees to enter and provided them with food and shelter.

But last week, India's Home Ministry told four Indian states bordering Myanmar, including Mizoram, to take measures to prevent refugees from entering India except on humanitarian grounds.

The ministry said the states were not authorized to accord refugee status to anyone entering from Myanmar, as India is not a signatory to the U.N. Refugee Convention of 1951 or its 1967 Protocol.

On Thursday, Mizoram's top elected official Zoramthanga wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said "India cannot turn a blind eye" to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in his state.

Zoramthanga, who uses one name, wrote in the letter that the people of his state, who share ethnic ties with the refugees from Chin communities in Myanmar, "can't remain indifferent to their plight." He urged the federal government to review its order and allow refugees into India.

Earlier this month, Myanmar asked India to return the police officers who crossed the border. India shares a 1,643-kilometer (1,020-mile) border with Myanmar, and is home to thousands of refugees from Myanmar in different states.

Oil giant Saudi Aramco sees 2020 profits drop to \$49 billion

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia's state-backed oil giant Aramco announced Sunday that its profits nearly halved in 2020 to \$49 billion, a big drop that came as the coronavirus pandemic roiled global energy markets.

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Saudi Arabian Oil Co. released its annual financial results a year after the pandemic sent the price of oil crashing to all-time lows as people stopped moving around the world to stem the spread of the virus. In recent weeks, however, the price has edged up as movement restrictions ease, commerce increases and more people get vaccinated against COVID-19. Still, analysts caution that a peak in demand may still be far off.

Despite the 44% drop in net income, Aramco said it would stick to its promise of paying quarterly dividends of \$18.75 billion — \$75 billion a year — due to commitments the company made to shareholders in the run-up to its initial public offering. Nearly all of the dividend money goes to the Saudi government, which owns more than 98% of the company. Aramco's policy to pay dividends significantly higher than its 2020 free cash flow of \$49 billion stands in sharp contrast to other oil giants that have cut payouts. Seeking a cash infusion to pay the billions of dollars in the face of dwindling revenue, Aramco recently has issued international bonds.

The public figures, obligatory ever since the mostly state-owned company listed a sliver of its worth on Riyadh's Tadawul stock exchange in 2019, offer valuable insight into the health of the region's largest economy. Despite Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to diversify the economy away from oil, the kingdom remains heavily dependent on oil exports to fuel government spending.

Saudi Aramco profit of \$49 billion in 2020 is down from \$88.2 billion in 2019 and \$111.1 billion in 2018. Still, Aramco remains one of the world's most valuable companies.

"In one of the most challenging years in recent history, Aramco demonstrated its unique value proposition through its considerable financial and operational agility," President and CEO Amin H. Nasser said in a statement. "As a result, our financial position remained robust."

The company produced the equivalent of 9.2 million barrels per day of crude oil over the course of the year, its annual results said. Capital expenditure was down in 2020 to \$27 billion compared to \$32.8 billion the year before. Aramco expects to spend \$35 billion this year, some \$5-10 billion lower than previous estimates.

Aramco facilities have come under increasing attack as Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels across the southern border target the kingdom's oil refineries and export terminals. In an interview with Saudi-owned al-Arabiya TV on Sunday, Nasser said an Aramco facility in the capital of Riyadh struck by drones days before "has started to return to service," adding that the company "has contingency plans to deal with any assault."

In recent months, oil prices have made a major comeback from April 2020, when the price of international benchmark Brent crude dipped below \$20 a barrel. For the first time in a year, the price of Brent surpassed \$60 a barrel last month and traded over \$64 a barrel Sunday.

The price increase has come as Saudi Arabia seems determined to curb output and support crude markets even as demand rises, with nations lifting lockdowns and accelerating vaccination campaigns.

Nasser struck an optimistic note about the year ahead, saying that Aramco is "seeing a pick-up in demand in Asia and also positive signs elsewhere."

"We remain confident that we will emerge on the other side of this pandemic in a position of strength," he added.

Earlier this month, the kingdom said it would extend its voluntary production cut of 1 million barrels a day through to April. Most OPEC oil cartel and allied countries likewise left their production cuts in place — in stark contrast to March of last year when a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia prompted the two oil giants to unleash an onslaught of crude on the market as demand dipped. Saudi officials have urged caution, arguing that global economic recovery may still be undermined by new coronavirus restrictions and fast-spreading virus variants.

Before December of 2019, when Aramco floated 1.5% of its shares on the stock exchange, the firm was owned directly by the Al Saud ruling family and didn't need to announce results. Initially, Aramco listed at 32 riyals (\$8.53) a share, becoming the world's most valuable listed company, with a market valuation of \$1.7 trillion. Since then, however, Aramco lost its stock exchange crown to Apple as its value declined. On

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Sunday it traded around 35 riyals (\$9.30) a share.

As oil prices fell and the virus coursed across the world, the Saudi economy has shown signs of strain. It shrank more than 4% last year, according to the government statistics agency. Despite spending cuts and efforts to ramp up non-oil revenue — including by tripling the value-added tax to 15% — the government deficit widened. Last year, Saudi Arabia needed an oil price of more than \$76 a barrel to balance its budget.

Grandparents in the pandemic: a lost year, but now some hope

By DAN SEWELL Associated Press

CINCINNATI (AP) — No sleepovers with popcorn and Disney movies. No dance recitals or holiday pageants, let alone any Grandparents' Day for visiting the kids' classrooms.

No hugs.

The first 12 months of the pandemic represent a lost year for many in the largest group of grandparents in U.S. history. Most of the nation's some 70 million grandparents are in the fourth quarter of their lives, and the clock has kept running.

"Working with older adults, I'm seeing a lot of depression, a lot of increases in loneliness," says Nick Nicholson, a nursing professor and researcher on aging at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut. "It's been really difficult ... the anxiety, the despair, the social isolation. Over time, there are so many adverse effects. The sooner we expand the bubble, the better, so people can start healing together."

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week offered some beginning steps forward for Year 2, saying fully vaccinated grandparents could visit in a single household with healthy children and grandchildren without masks or other special precautions.

Doris Rolark blew air kisses to her mask-wearing grandchildren and great-grandchildren when they dropped off presents on her 78th birthday last month. She resumed hugs last week after the CDC guidelines were announced.

"It was great. I'm getting excited to see the rest of them," says the Middletown, Ohio, woman, who has three grandchildren and 16 great-grandkids. "I hope it's going to be better now."

Joe and Nancy Peters had one of their 11 grandchildren over to visit last week as they began "cautiously returning to normal," he says. Both retired educators in their 70s, they were used to being heavily involved with the grandchildren, all living near them in suburban Cincinnati, before the pandemic and its safety restrictions hit.

It was especially tough losing time with the youngest.

"They're 3, 4, and 5 years old and a whole year has gone," Nancy Peters says. "They've changed a lot ... and Amelia would say each day to her Mom, 'I am going to have a sleepover at Grandma's when coronavirus is over.'"

"And now she isn't 3 anymore," she says.

Both Peters and Rolark have been fully vaccinated as the shot pace has picked up nationally in recent weeks, with an estimated 60% of those 65 and older getting at least one dose so far. But the CDC reports that only 10% of the population as a whole has been fully vaccinated and reminds that vulnerability increases with age. The CDC says eight of 10 people who have died in the United States from the virus were 65 or older.

Nicholson says that while some older adults are "just breaking down the door to get out" after a year of isolation, others remain apprehensive with variant strains and other unknowns ahead.

"They wonder: Is it safe?" he says.

PRESCRIPTION: CAUTION

Joaniko Kohchi, who heads the Institute for Parenting at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York, says grandparents and other family members need to be cautious as they try to return to something that passes for normalcy.

"There's going to be unquestionably a period of adjustment that will continue; planning and flexibility is really important," she says.

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Also unknown: how much some older adults have been hurt not only emotionally but mentally by losing in-person contacts and other activity outside their homes for a year.

"I think seeing the same two to three people all time, it can be really tough," says Arman Ramnath, whose India-born grandmother Vijaya Ramnath, 94, has lived with his parents in Columbus, Ohio, since before he was born. "It kind of ages you faster."

While many grandparents are keeping in touch by phone, text and video chats, others lack access or ability to use such technology. A study conducted last September and October found resilience among older Americans, but also signs of trouble, with many reporting decreased happiness and some reporting increased loneliness and depression heading into winter.

During good weather, the Peterses had gone on and received a lot of driveway visits, including a driveway one-person dance recital for them by a granddaughter. They went to dozens of outdoor events such as baseball and soccer games last year, but couldn't attend the grandkids' indoor basketball games.

"It's been pretty tough," says Joe Peters, who recounts gym-hopping Saturdays in previous years when they hit as many as eight kids' basketball games in a day.

Many grandparents actively help out their children by baby-sitting and school or daycare pickups, so pandemic barriers against that have made for "a lose-lose" situation for families, Nicholson says.

Rolark, of Middletown, Ohio, has always been active with the offspring. She raised three children as a divorced single woman, and two of her great-grandchildren lived with her through high school. Her progeny have been paying her back during the pandemic for all those years of her support when she was also working a full-time office job at a steelmaking company.

"I couldn't have made it without them," says Rolark, who says great-grandson Amarius Gates kept her driveway shoveled during the winter, while granddaughter Davonne Calhoun and others in her large family have run errands and helped her with house chores.

HOUSEHOLDS, FACILITIES STRUGGLE

Nursing homes and other assisted-care facilities, too, have faced challenges to keep grandparents connected as many cut off contact visits because of concerns about virus spread. "It's been lonely," says Deb McGlinch, a patient in Versailles Rehabilitation & Health Center in western Ohio.

She was used to frequent visits from her granddaughter, Kortaney Cattell, 20, to play card games such as Uno with her. She has been able to do video chats with Kortaney and seven other grandchildren, but has missed their card games. They recently resumed friendly competition at a distance with a virtual slot machine game.

McGlinch says that instead of just trading small talk by phone, now "we can have fun."

One in 10 U.S. grandparents now live in the same household with at least one grandchild. In some Asian cultures, that has long been common. In Ramnath's family, his India-born maternal grandmother, Saroja Seetharaman, rotates among her three children and their six grandchildren, in Dallas, Atlanta and his Columbus home.

Ramanth, 27, has been nervous about getting near his older grandmother, Vijaya, especially whenever he has just returned from Washington, where he is a Georgetown University Law School student. He is studying remotely but sometimes must visit school such as to pick up books.

Like the grandparents who lament time lost with their growing grandchildren, grandchildren can feel badly about missed opportunities with their aging loved ones.

Ramanth would have liked to have spent time with her in the past year learning more about the family's history. She once met Mohandas K. Gandhi, India's late famed leader and proponent of nonviolence. She attended a tea hosted by Queen Elizabeth II. And he's seen photos of her late husband, a high-ranking Indian Navy officer, with the late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

"This is a time when I wish I could talk to her more about her life, as she's getting older," says Ramanth, who hopes to have more contact soon now that she's been fully vaccinated. "At times it can be kind of sad. You don't get to spend as much time with someone even if they're living with you."

Dan Sewell, the AP's Cincinnati correspondent, and his wife Vickii have nine grandchildren. Follow him on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/dansewell>

The Latest: India reports biggest surge in cases in 4 months

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW DELHI — India has reported its highest number of coronavirus cases in four months amid a worrying surge that has prompted multiple states to return to some form of restrictions on public gathering.

The Health Ministry on Sunday reported 43,846 new cases in the past 24 hours, the worst single-day increase since mid-November.

The central Maharashtra state, home to India's financial capital Mumbai, accounts for more than half of the new infections. The state has imposed a lockdown in some districts until the end of the month and authorities in Mumbai city said they will roll out mandatory random coronavirus tests in crowded places.

According to the ministry, seven other states have been reporting a surge in new cases from the last week, leading some to reimpose containment measures, including focused lockdowns and restaurant and school closures.

India has so far reported more than 11.5 million cases of coronavirus infection, the world's third-highest total after the United States and Brazil. The cases had been falling steadily since a peak in late September, but experts say increased public gatherings and laxity toward public health guidance is leading to the latest surge.

The government has announced plans to inoculate 300 million people by August. But only 44 million have been vaccinated so far, 7.4 million of them partially.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- Pakistan Prime Minister Khan tests positive for coronavirus
- Germany: police clash with protesters against virus measures
- Half of UK adults have gotten one dose of COVID-19 vaccine
- As the coronavirus made an end-of-the-year surge across New York, few nursing homes escaped unscathed. But some proved especially helpless at stopping the spread of COVID-19, despite having nine months to stockpile protective equipment and refine preventative measures.

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

LAS VEGAS — The University of Nevada, Las Vegas is changing course and now plans in-person spring graduation ceremonies in May as the coronavirus outbreak slows.

UNLV President Keith Whitfield on Friday announced the change from plans announced in February to hold graduation virtually.

Whitfield said in a letter to students and staff that he firmly believes the university "can offer a traditional commencement while adhering to public health guidelines."

"Graduation is the culmination of a student's educational journey and is a significant milestone in their UNLV career. We need to make every effort to provide an experience our graduates so richly deserve," Whitfield wrote.

Whitfield said there would be two ceremonies for spring 2021 graduates at 8 a.m. on May 14 and May 15 and a third ceremony for 2020 graduates on May 14 at 6:30 p.m.

All three ceremonies will be held at Sam Boyd Stadium.

PHOENIX — Arizona on Saturday reported 735 additional confirmed coronavirus cases with 42 more deaths amid indications of continued slowing of the coronavirus outbreak.

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Arizona's pandemic totals rose to 835,765 cases and 16,733 deaths, according to the state's coronavirus dashboard.

Johns Hopkins University data showed the rolling average of daily new cases dropped from 1,265.1 on March 4 to 456.9 on Thursday while the rolling average of daily deaths declined from 62.2 to 24.6 over the same two-week period.

The state's dashboard reported that the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients occupying inpatient beds rose to 700 as of Friday, up from 686 as of Thursday, but remained far below the Jan. 11 high of 5,082.

BRAZZAVILLE, Republic of Congo — The leading opposition presidential candidate in Republic of Congo was receiving oxygen at a private hospital after being diagnosed with COVID-19, a family member said, casting Sunday's election into doubt on the eve of the vote.

Guy Brice Parfait Kolelas, 61, had skipped his final campaign event on Friday after telling some reporters a day earlier that he feared he had malaria. A relative who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter said plans were underway for Kolelas to be evacuated abroad for further treatment.

A video circulating on social media dated Friday showed Kolelas wearing an oxygen mask and with a blood pressure cuff on his arm as he lay in a hospital bed.

"My dear compatriots, I am in trouble. I am fighting death," the candidate says in a weak-sounding voice after removing his oxygen mask. "However, I ask you to stand up and vote for change. I would not have fought for nothing."

A campaign spokesman confirmed the authenticity of the video and Kolelas' hospitalization. Two people at the hospital who had seen the Kolelas' test results confirmed to the AP late Saturday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus.

LONDON — The U.K. says half of the country's adults have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. The National Health Service has put shots in the arms of 26.9 million people, or 51% of the adult population, according to the latest government statistics. The NHS passed the halfway point on Friday by delivering 589,689 doses.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Saturday that's the highest daily total since the mass vaccination program began in early December.

The celebration comes amid growing concerns about the failure of wealthy countries to share scarce vaccine supplies with developing nations. The director of a London-based health policy think tank says while Britain should be proud of the success of its vaccination drive, it's time to start thinking about the rest of the world. Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of Wellcome, says the country has the rights to enough doses to vaccinate its entire population twice.

He says ensuring the world is vaccinated is a scientific and economic imperative: "Science has given us the exit strategy, but it will only work if its benefits can reach the maximum number of people around the world."

SANTIAGO, Chile — Chile has reported its highest daily count of 7,084 coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic despite widespread restrictions and progress on vaccinations.

The government on Saturday reported cases topping the previous record in June. It says coronavirus has become the country's leading cause of mortality, causing 26% of deaths this year.

Chile has given at least one vaccine shot to more than 29% of the population and both doses to 15% — far more than in other nations in the region. But Health Minister Enrique Paris says people should remain cautious since population-level immunity isn't likely until about 80% are vaccinated, probably by the end of June.

Officials say hospital bed usage has reached 94%, with rising numbers among those below 60 as older Chileans have been inoculated.

The government has imposed restrictions on three quarters of the country's municipalities. Officials say

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Saturday they are tightening limits on people entering from abroad, especially from Brazil.

DENVER — Colorado's health department is moving to relax its statewide mask mandate and limits on gathering capacity.

Health officials say the state's role in determining COVID-19 restrictions will lessen in favor of more local control as vaccination eligibility is extended.

For the majority of the state, masks will be required for indoor public places with 10 or more people, and the capacity restrictions remain in place.

The proposal would allow local authorities and "private entities" in the counties with the lowest coronavirus infection rates to determine whether masks would be required. It would end most restrictions on capacity for restaurants, retailers and outdoor events.

There are currently only two Level Green counties where this applies — the rural Crowley and Otero counties in southern Colorado — which means they have fewer than 15 cases per 100,000 people in a week.

Most of the state is in the next risk level up, while the Denver metro area is two levels higher than the least restrictive designation.

WARSAW, Poland — Poland reported more than 25,000 coronavirus cases Saturday, compared to less than 15,000 in early March.

Health Minister Adam Niedzielski blamed the increase on the British variant of the virus, which he described as "extremely infectious and vicious." He urged Poles to observe restrictions that were reintroduced Saturday, closing hotels, shopping malls, theaters, galleries and sports centers.

Poland's authorities have urged people to get vaccinated, saying they're speeding up registration of more age groups for the inoculation. They use Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines.

Unlike many European countries, Poland never discontinued using the AstraZeneca vaccine, insisting it was medically approved and safe. However, many Poles were not turning up for their AstraZeneca inoculation and authorities blamed that on "panic" in other countries.

So far, more than 5 million doses of various COVID-19 vaccines, including some 1.8 million second doses, have been administered in the nation of 38 million.

ZAGREB, Croatia — Several thousand people in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro rallied against anti-virus measures on Saturday, despite a rise in daily infections in the past weeks.

Protests in Croatia were held in the capital Zagreb and several smaller towns. Local media say participants refused to wear face masks or keep distance among themselves, while holding banners reading "Enough tyranny," or "Give us back the flu."

In Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, several hundred people protested after the Serbian government kept bars, restaurants and non-essential shops and businesses closed this week.

The state Montenegrin RTCG television reported about one hundred people came out in the rain to protest anti-virus rules. The report says that police urged them to respect distancing.

BERGAMO, Italy — Promises to vaccinate all Italians over 80 by the end of March have fallen woefully short, amid well-documented interruptions of vaccine supplies and organizational shortfalls.

Just one third of Italy's 7.3 million vaccine doses administered so far have gone to people in that age group. The new government of Premier Mario Draghi has pledged to accelerate the vaccination campaign. It is aiming to vaccinate 80% of the population by September.

On Friday, Draghi said Italy aimed to administer 500,000 shots a day by next month, from a current daily level of about 165,000.

Italy has recorded more than 104,000 confirmed deaths, the sixth-highest tally in the world. As of early March, two thirds of Italy's virus-related deaths were among those over 80.

Wary Philippines says 200 Chinese vessels at disputed reef

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The Philippine government expressed concern after spotting more than 200 Chinese fishing vessels it believed were crewed by militias at a reef claimed by both countries in the South China Sea, but it did not immediately lodge a protest.

A government body overseeing the disputed region said late Saturday that about 220 Chinese vessels were seen moored at Whitsun Reef on March 7. It released pictures of the vessels lying side by side in one of the most hotly contested areas of the strategic waterway.

The reef, which Manila calls Julian Felipe, is a boomerang-shaped and shallow coral region about 175 nautical miles (324 kilometers) west of Bataraza town in the western Philippine province of Palawan. It's well within the country's exclusive economic zone, over which the Philippines "enjoys the exclusive right to exploit or conserve any resources," the agency said in a statement.

The large numbers of Chinese boats are "a concern due to the possible overfishing and destruction of the marine environment, as well as risks to safety of navigation," it said, although it added that the vessels were not fishing when sighted.

When asked if the Philippines would file a protest, Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. tweeted, "only if the generals tell me."

Chinese Embassy officials did not immediately issue any comment. China, the Philippines and four other governments have been locked in a tense territorial standoff over the resource-rich and busy waterway for decades.

Critics have repeatedly called out President Rodrigo Duterte, who has nurtured friendly ties with Beijing since taking office in 2016, for not standing up to China's aggressive behavior and deciding not to immediately seek Chinese compliance with an international arbitration ruling that invalidated Beijing's historic claims to virtually the entire sea. China has refused to recognize the 2016 ruling and continues to defy it.

The arbitration body also ruled that China had breached its duty to respect the traditional fishing rights of Filipinos when Chinese forces blocked them from Scarborough Shoal off the northwestern Philippines in 2012. The Philippines, however, could also not deny Chinese fishermen access to Scarborough, according to the ruling. The decision did not specify any other traditional fishing areas within the Philippines' exclusive zone where fishermen from China and other countries could be allowed to fish.

"When Xi says 'I will fish,' who can prevent him?" Duterte said two years ago as he defended his non-confrontational approach, referring to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"If I send my marines to drive away the Chinese fishermen, I guarantee you not one of them will come home alive," Duterte said then, adding that diplomatic talks with Beijing allowed the return of Filipinos to disputed fishing grounds where Chinese forces had previously shooed them away.

Duterte has sought infrastructure funds, trade and investments from China, which has also donated and pledged to deliver more COVID-19 vaccines as the Philippines faces an alarming spike in coronavirus infections.

Filipino troops kill rebel commander, rescue last hostage

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Philippine troops killed an Abu Sanyaf rebel commander blamed for years of ransom kidnappings and on Sunday rescued the last of his four Indonesian captives, the military said.

Marines wounded Amajan Sahidjuan in a gunbattle Saturday night and he later died from loss of blood on Kalupag Island in the southernmost province of Tawi Tawi. Two other militants managed to flee and dragged along the last of four Indonesian hostages but troops finally rescued him on Sunday, regional military commander Lt. Gen. Corleto Vinluan Jr. said.

On Thursday night, three Indonesian men were rescued by police who also captured one of their Abu Sanyaf captors along the shores of South Ubian town in Tawi Tawi.

The military said the Abu Sanyaf militants led by Sahidjuan were fleeing assaults in nearby Sulu province

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when their speedboat was lashed by huge waves and overturned off Tawi Tawi.

A military officer said the militants were attempting to cross the sea border to Tambisan Island in neighboring Malaysia's Sabah state to release the captives in exchange for a ransom of at least five million pesos (\$104,000), but the Philippine military got wind of the plan and launched covert assaults.

The officer, who has a keen knowledge of anti-Abu Sayyaf operations, spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to speak publicly.

Vinluan said the rescue of the Indonesian men, the last known hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf, would allow government forces to finish off the ransom-seeking rebels.

"It will just be relentless in a massive and focused military operation because, now, we would not worry about kidnap victims getting hit," Vinluan told reporters by telephone.

Vinluan said there were about 80 Abu Sayyaf gunmen left in Sulu and outlying island provinces. One of their remaining elderly leaders, Radulan Sahiron, has fallen ill and was wounded in a recent offensive in Sulu, he said.

Sahidjuan, who uses the nom de guerre Apuh Mike, has been blamed for carrying out ransom kidnappings since the early 1990s. He was reportedly among Abu Sayyaf militants who attacked the southern largely Christian town of Ipil in 1995, where they killed more than 50 people after robbing banks and stores and burning the town center in one of their most audacious raids.

The Abu Sayyaf is a small but violent group that has been separately blacklisted by the Philippines and the United States as a terrorist organization for bombings, ransom kidnappings and beheadings. Some of its factions have aligned themselves with the Islamic State group.

The militants have been considerably weakened by years of military offensives, surrenders and battle setbacks but remain a national security threat. They set off a security alarm in the region in recent years after they started venturing away from their jungle encampments in Sulu, a poverty wracked Muslim province in the largely Roman Catholic nation, and staged kidnappings in Malaysian coastal towns and targeted crews of cargo ships.

The Latest: Every seed except 16 has a team in second round

By The Associated Press undefined

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The Latest on the first round of the NCAA Tournament (all times Eastern):

12:50 a.m.

Abilene Christian's win over Texas means each seed line from 1 through 15 in this NCAA Tournament will have at least one team in the round of 32. The Wildcats were the first 14 seed to advance this year.

This has only happened three times previously since the tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1985. In 2016, 2013 and 1991, seed lines 1-15 all had a team reach the second round. That 1991 tournament was the first time a 15 seed beat a 2, when Richmond knocked off Syracuse.

UMBC in 2018 is still the only 16 seed to make the round of 32, but no 15 seed won that year.

The loss by Texas spoiled the Big 12's attempt to stay undefeated. The league is 6-1 so far. The Big Ten also put six teams in the second round despite exits by second-seeded Ohio State and fourth-seeded Purdue.

The Pac-12 is undefeated still after putting all five of its tournament entries into the round of 32. That includes UCLA, which had to start in a First Four matchup with Michigan State, and Oregon, which advanced when its matchup with Virginia Commonwealth was called off for coronavirus-related reasons. The Pac-12 didn't have a team seeded higher than fifth.

8:00 p.m.

Don't expect a track meet when Villanova and North Texas play in the second round of the South Region on Sunday.

The matchup between the fifth-seeded Wildcats and 13th-seeded Mean Green features two of the most

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deliberately paced teams in the NCAA Tournament.

Villanova ranks No. 331 in kenpom.com's advanced metrics that looks at adjusted tempo. North Texas checks in at No. 350. The Wildcats are 11-0 this season when giving up fewer than 70 points in a game and haven't faced many teams with a slower pace.

Villanova coach Jay Wright says his Wildcats don't get caught up in tempo as much as they probably talk about it, and he figures when the opportunity presents itself the Mean Green will play fast.

5:30 p.m.

The NCAA Tournament's single-elimination format creates plenty of emotional scenes in virtually each game as the losing teams cope with the reality that the season is over.

St. Bonaventure guard Jaren Holmes spoke eloquently on that subject while discussing teammate and good friend Kyle Lofton, who was in tears at the end of a 76-61 loss to LSU.

"The quote is like men don't cry, but I believe real men cry," Holmes said "Real men show emotion, and that's the true showing of a man, one who wears their heart on his sleeve. He does that every time he goes on the court and every time he's in the locker room with us.

"It's a tough loss, but we're going to become better from it ... and we're going to remember this for the rest of our lives, sharing this moment together. We'll probably laugh about it 20 years from now ... about how we were crying."

The loss came nearly three weeks after university president Dennis DePerro died from complications of COVID-19.

4:10 p.m.

Michigan standout Isaiah Livers wore a shirt with #NotNCAAProperty written on it at the top-seeded Wolverines' NCAA Tournament opener against Texas Southern.

The hashtag is part of a social media effort to raise awareness about inequities in college sports.

Livers, who is out with a foot injury, is one of a few prominent Big Ten players leading the movement. Players have pushed for the NCAA to change rules banning college athletes from earning money for things like endorsements, sponsorship deals and personal appearances.

The National College Players Association released a statement Wednesday detailing the players' goals, which included meetings with NCAA President Mark Emmert and the opportunity to meet with lawmakers who are working on passing laws that could set parameters for the association's rules on name image or likeness.

3:40 p.m.

Colorado forward Jabari Walker had his mind set at ease by some sage advice from a longtime NBA player who just so happened to be his father.

Samaki Walker told his son to simply go have some fun.

This would definitely count as fun: Jabari Walker went 5 for 5 from 3-point range and finished with 24 points as the fifth-seeded Buffaloes rolled past Georgetown 96-73.

"He called me and said, 'I'm not going to fill your ear with nothing. Just tell you to play your game and play stress-free,'" Walker recounted. "That's what I went out there and did."

Samaki Walker played at Louisville before embarking on a 10-year NBA career that included a championship with the 2002 Los Angeles Lakers.

More advice from dad: "He just told me that it was a big platform, and not to come out here with any pressure. Just do what I'm supposed to do, play the game I play. Nothing special. Do the little things like I always do and eventually everything will work itself out."

3:10 p.m.

Florida State advanced with a 64-54 win over UNC Greensboro despite being only the eighth team since

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2009 to not make a 3-pointer in an NCAA Tournament game.

The Seminoles missed all nine attempts from beyond the arc. Prior to Saturday, the last team not to make a 3-pointer was Kentucky in its first-round win over Davidson in 2018.

Teams are 5-3 since 2009 in NCAA games when they don't make a 3-pointer. Kansas has done it twice and won both games.

The last time Florida State didn't hit from the perimeter in any game was a 2018 loss at North Carolina State.

3:00 p.m.

Florida guard Tyree Appleby "seems fine, seems normal" after suffering a head laceration in the opening round, but coach Mike White said he will be a game-time decision against 15th-seeded Oral Roberts on Sunday in the South Region.

Appleby took an inadvertent elbow early in the second half while playing defense against Virginia Tech and ended up bleeding all over the court. He wobbled to the locker room and returned to the bench area in overtime to see the No. 7 seed Gators pull out a 75-70 victory at Hinkle Fieldhouse. The 6-foot-1 junior finished with six points and five rebounds in 22 minutes.

White said Saturday that Appleby had a "happy smile on his face" and a bandage over his forehead.

White offered less information about suspended forward Omar Payne, who sat out the NCAA opener because of an "in-house situation."

Payne was ejected from the SEC Tournament quarterfinals early in the second half for a flagrant-2 foul against Tennessee's John Fulkerson. Fulkerson suffered a concussion and facial fracture and did not play in Tennessee's opening-round loss to Oregon State.

White declined to say if Payne's suspension was related to elbowing Fulkerson.

2:40 p.m.

NCAA spokesman David Worlock says in a tweet that Colorado's Jabari Walker is the 16th player in NCAA Tournament history to shoot 100% from 3-point range in a game while making at least five attempts. Walker was 5 of 5 from long range in a 23-point, first-round win over Georgetown.

UNC Wilmington's John Goldsberry holds the record for most 3-point attempts without a miss in an NCAA Tournament game. He made all eight tries in a 75-73 loss to Maryland on March 21, 2003.

2:25 p.m.

Georgetown's late-season surge is over. Fifth-seeded Colorado took command with 11 3-pointers in the first half and cruised to a 96-73 win over the Hoyas in the East Region.

Freshman Jabari Walker had a career-high 24 points to lead Colorado, which went 16 for 25 from long range — that's 64% — was 34 of 56 from the floor. Colorado also had 27 assists. D'Shawn Schwartz had 18 points and made four of his five 3s in the first half to put Colorado into cruise control.

Coached by former star Patrick Ewing, Georgetown made March Madness with a four-wins-in-four-days streak through the Big East Tournament but was no match for the Buffaloes.

12:45 p.m.

The second full day of the NCAA Tournament is underway. Georgetown started it by kneeling during the national anthem.

The Hoyas locked arms and took a knee during "The Star-Spangled Banner" ahead of their opening game against Colorado.

Coached by former star Patrick Ewing, Georgetown is a 12 seed after making March Madness with a four-wins-in-four-days streak through the Big East Tournament.

No. 1 seeds Gonzaga and Michigan will also be in action Saturday.

Friday's action featured three big upsets — pulled off by No. 12 Oregon State, No. 13 North Texas and

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No. 15 Oral Roberts. Two of the upset victims — Ohio State and Purdue — were from the Big Ten.

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

Positive virus tests bounce VCU from NCAAs; Oregon advances

By AARON BEARD and EDDIE PELLIS AP Sports Writers

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — VCU was kicked out of the NCAA Tournament hours before its first-round game Saturday because multiple players tested positive for COVID-19, an outbreak that imperiled the 68-team event and underscored, once again, the delicate nature of staging such a spectacle amid a pandemic a year after it was canceled entirely.

The NCAA announced the cancellation — officially declaring a “no contest” — about three hours before the No. 10 seed Rams were scheduled to tip off against No. 7 seed Oregon in the West Region.

VCU’s players got the news after they had finished their pregame meal.

“It was devastating. It was heartbreaking. No dry eyes. This is what you dream of as a college player and a coach. To get it taken away like this, it’s just a heartbreaking moment in their young lives,” VCU coach Mike Rhoades said. “It just stinks. There’s no way I can sugarcoat it.”

VCU athletic director Ed McLaughlin declined to say which players tested positive, citing privacy concerns. There were multiple positive tests over two days, which is why the Rams had to forfeit, while other schools were able to play first-round games after a single COVID-19 case.

Oklahoma, for example, was in action on Saturday despite guard De’Vion Harmon’s positive test and beat Missouri. Georgia Tech lost to Loyola Chicago on Friday after ACC player of the year Moses Wright tested positive.

“I just shake my head to think we did all the right things all the way through,” McLaughlin said. “I want to make clear that this is not something where our team broke protocol and did the wrong thing. We don’t know how this happened, but it certainly wasn’t because of bad behavior.”

Virginia Commonwealth University, based in Richmond, is a member of Atlantic 10 Conference and best known in men’s basketball for a surprising run to the 2011 Final Four as an 11th seed.

A year after the tournament was scrapped altogether in the early days of the pandemic, the NCAA was hoping to get cleanly through the 19-day basketball festival known as March Madness, reducing arena capacities to 22% or lower and basing the whole thing in Indiana instead of sprinkling games around the country.

The governing body of college sports made all players return seven negative COVID tests before arriving, then placed all of the teams in downtown hotels and restricted their movements.

It created what it called a “controlled environment,” essentially limiting teams to the hotel, the nearby convention center for practices and the minor league baseball stadium across the street for a chance to get some fresh air.

All teams were declared healthy at Tuesday night’s deadline for allowing schools to be replaced in the bracket. Once that passed, however, there were no substitutes allowed.

The NCAA had said it would allow a team that showed up with as few as five players to take the floor. In VCU’s case, NCAA spokesman David Worlock wrote in an email to The Associated Press: “With potential risks to all involved in the game, we could not guarantee or be comfortable that five or more players would be available without risk.”

That means Oregon’s path got a bit easier; the Ducks now only would need to win five games, instead of the usual six, to cut down the nets and celebrate a title. Waiting on Monday will be Iowa, the West’s No. 2 seed.

“This isn’t the way we wanted to advance, but we are excited to be moving on,” Oregon coach Dana Altman said.

During one 26-day stretch this season, his team had just five practices and a single game because of

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the sorts of coronavirus issues that interrupted so many aspects of life.

And, yes, this edition of the NCAAs already had seen signs of trouble before Saturday.

In the days leading up to the tournament, a half-dozen referees who went to dinner together before checking into their hotel were all sent home because one tested positive.

Last week, Virginia and Kansas — proud programs with past national championships — both pulled out of their conference tournaments. Virginia didn't arrive in Indianapolis until Friday, making it the last team to get there, because it needed to clear quarantine protocols back home, and the unusual preparation couldn't have helped the fourth-seeded Cavaliers, who were upset by Ohio on Saturday.

The first full day of action went off without a hitch Friday. Then Day 2 was well underway when a terse news release arrived: "The NCAA and the committee regret that VCU's student-athletes and coaching staff will not be able to play in a tournament in which they earned the right to participate."

The NCAA said it made the decision to drop VCU from the competition in consultation with the local health department.

This wasn't the first coronavirus issue of the season for the Rams: A positive test in January forced them to halt basketball activities and postpone a game against Davidson. But VCU resumed practice two days later and made it through the rest of the regular season without problems.

The Rams lost the Atlantic 10 title game but made it into the tournament as an at-large team. They were 19-7 heading into Saturday.

Now their postseason is over, without the chance to actually play in the Big Dance.

"It's a reminder that we just have to stay safe," Southern California coach Andy Enfield said after his team's win over Drake. "And sometimes, the COVID takes twists and turns. They're unexpected. And so I'm very sorry to hear that."

Kansas coach Bill Self, whose team also won Saturday, called the situation "high anxiety for everything."

"It doesn't matter if it's 2 o'clock in the morning, (as) soon as we get a text message from the (testing) company we'll get group texts going," Self said. "I'm getting messages from the trainer at 2 o'clock, and I'm awake, getting ready to get the text."

AP Sports Writers Howard Fendrich and Hank Kurz Jr. contributed to this report.

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

Prosecutor: Man accused of 1 murder says he really killed 16

By ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

WOODBURY, N.J. (AP) — A man charged with beating to death a New Jersey resident he says sexually abused him as a child now claims he has killed a total of 16 people, including his ex-wife and three others found dead near a New Mexico airport, officials said. Authorities have not corroborated his claim.

Sean Lannon, 47, said he killed the four whose remains were found in a vehicle and "11 other individuals" in New Mexico, Alec Gutierrez, an assistant prosecutor in Gloucester County, New Jersey, said at a detention hearing Friday, NJ.com reported.

Gutierrez said Lannon had confessed to luring several victims to a home in New Mexico and dismembering some of them.

Authorities said in court documents that Lannon made the admission in a phone call to a relative, who told investigators he expressed remorse. Lannon has been charged only with the death in New Jersey, and his lawyer says his client was provoked. He has been named a person of interest in the four New Mexico slayings.

Police Lt. David Chavez in Lannon's hometown of Grants, New Mexico, said authorities have no indication that his claims about 11 other killings are true and that they aren't aware of any missing-person or homicide reports that would fit his narrative.

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"Is it possible? Sure, anything's possible. Is it plausible?" Chavez said. "Unfortunately we are still investigating that and conducting search warrants for evidentiary value."

It was a twist in a case that spans the country but has many unanswered questions, including how Lannon was connected to the New Mexico slayings. Officials from the FBI, U.S. Marshals Service, several police agencies in New Mexico, and police and prosecutors in New Jersey either didn't respond to requests for comment Saturday or didn't immediately have more information.

The case began on March 5, when the bodies of Lannon's ex-wife and three other people were found in a vehicle in a parking garage at Albuquerque International Sunport, New Mexico's largest airport. It's not clear how they were killed.

Police say three of them were reported missing in January from Grants, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) west of Albuquerque. The victims were identified as Jennifer Lannon, 39; Matthew Miller, 21; Jesten Mata, 40; and Randal Apostalon, 60.

Chris Whitman, Jennifer Lannon's brother, said that Sean Lannon told the family in January that Jennifer had "run off" with some friends, possibly to Arizona. Whitman said that didn't sound right.

"She was a great mom and, just, it would be uncharacteristic of her to not be with her children," Whitman told The Associated Press Saturday in a telephone interview from his home in Washington Township, New Jersey. When the family were unable to reach her, he said they filed a missing person's report.

Jennifer Lannon, Miller and Mata were friends, and Apostalon lived out of his car and was known to give rides for money, Grants police said. The bodies were found in Apostalon's car.

"I can understand he (Sean Lannon) stated that, you know, he shot his wife and her boyfriend," Chavez said. "But Matthew was not her boyfriend, so I don't know how he became involved."

Whitman told the AP that Sean Lannon had flown to New Jersey March 4 with the couple's three young children — girls 6 and 7, and a boy aged 4. Lannon took them to his parents' house and said he was going back to New Mexico to continue looking for Jennifer.

Whitman told the AP that although the couple had divorced after nearly a decade of marriage, they were still living together. They were even talking of moving the family back to the East Coast, he said.

"They were still parenting together, and there was no indication that there was trouble —at all," said Whitman. "From my knowledge and our family's knowledge, they were working on their relationship and heading in the right direction."

On March 8, three days after the remains were found in New Mexico, the body of Michael Dabkowski was discovered in his New Jersey home, just south of Philadelphia, after a welfare check. Sean Lannon is accused of breaking in and beating the 66-year-old to death with a hammer, according to an affidavit.

Lannon told investigators that Dabkowski had sexually abused him as a child and that he had gone to the home to retrieve sexually explicit photos. Dabkowski mentored Lannon and his twin brother through a Big Brothers program in the 1980s, NJ.com reported.

Whitman said the family did not know of the alleged abuse. In fact, he said he met Dabkowski at the birthday party of one of the Lannon children a couple of years ago, and all seemed fine.

"I knew he was a close, just a close friend to Sean, and that he was a father figure," Whitman said. "But outside of that, we knew nothing else."

A search for Lannon ended with his arrest in St. Louis on March 10. He was driving a car stolen from Dabkowski.

In court in New Jersey on Friday, public defender Frank Unger challenged probable cause for the murder charge, arguing that Dabkowski had allowed Lannon into his home and that what followed amounted, at worst, to manslaughter provoked by passion, NJ.com reported.

He said Lannon didn't want anyone "to have control over me any longer" in trying to take back the photos. Dabkowski had "documented those sexual assaults, those rapes, by taking pictures of himself with Mr. Lannon in sexually compromised positions," Unger said.

The public defender said Lannon retrieved two hammers from Dabkowski's garage and gave them to the victim, saying, "You're going to need these. I don't want to hurt you."

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"I would suggest that this fact alone illustrates this was not purposeful murder. He did not even bring a weapon to the home," Unger said, arguing that Dabkowski attacked his client and then was killed.

Unger wanted the judge to release Lannon before trial, saying he had no prior convictions and is an Army veteran with an honorable discharge.

Lannon was born in Massachusetts and spent most of his early years in suburban Philadelphia's Gloucester County before he was deployed to Germany, Unger said. He has family in southern New Jersey, including his mother and sister.

But Gutierrez said Lannon "admitted his efforts to conceal evidence" in killings in New Mexico.

The prosecutor added that Lannon had previously spent a week in jail in New Mexico for failing to appear in court. It wasn't clear what he had been cited with.

The judge ordered that Lannon remain behind bars.

Unger, an attorney for Sean Lannon's family and Big Brothers Big Sisters Independence Region didn't immediately respond Saturday to messages seeking comment.

Whitman said Lannon's story of abuse was "heartbreaking." And while his family is angry and hurt, there is a part of him that feels sorry for his former brother-in-law.

"We still want justice," Whitman said. "We're clinging to our faith right now in the Lord. And, you know, one day — it might not be any time soon — we want to get to a place of forgiveness for him."

This story has been updated to delete incorrect attribution in the first paragraph about the suspect's confession to 11 killings. It also corrects that the suspect was arrested March 10, not March 17; that the airport bodies were found March 5, not last week; and that the New Jersey victim's body was found March 8, not March 10.

Rallies in Atlanta, nation against hate after spa shootings

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A diverse crowd gathered Saturday near the Georgia state Capitol to demand justice for the victims of recent shootings at massage businesses and to denounce racism, xenophobia and misogyny.

Hundreds of people of all ages and varied racial and ethnic backgrounds gathered in Liberty Plaza in Atlanta, and in similar rallies across the country, waving signs and chanting slogans.

In Atlanta, they cheered U.S. Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, and Georgia state Rep. Bee Nguyen, the first Vietnamese American to serve in the Georgia House.

"I just wanted to drop by to say to my Asian sisters and brothers, we see you, and, more importantly, we are going to stand with you," Warnock said to loud cheers as passing drivers honked car horns in support.

Robert Aaron Long, a 21-year-old white man, is accused of killing four people inside two Atlanta spas and four others at a massage business about 30 miles (50 kilometers) away in suburban Cherokee County. Six of the eight people killed Tuesday were women of Asian descent. Another person was shot but survived.

Investigators have said Long confessed to the slayings but said they weren't racially motivated. He claimed to have a sex addiction, which caused him to lash out at what he saw as sources of temptation, according to authorities. Police have said they're still working to establish a motive, including looking into whether the attacks can be classified as hate crimes.

Georgia lawmakers last year passed a hate crimes law allowing additional penalties for certain offenses when motivated by a victim's race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender or disability. A hate crime is not a standalone crime under Georgia law, but can be used to add time to a sentence of someone convicted of another crime.

"No matter how you want to spin it, the facts remain the same. This was an attack on the Asian community," said Nguyen, an advocate for women and communities of color. She noted the shooter targeted businesses operated by women of Asian descent.

"Let's join hands with our ally community and demand justice for not only these victims but for all victims of white supremacy," she said.

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A couple hundred people gathered in a separate Atlanta park and marched through the streets to join the larger rally, chanting "Stop Asian hate" and "We are what America looks like."

Frankie Laguna, 23, who grew up in Atlanta and now lives in Tennessee, was an organizer of that group. She told the crowd she was the first person in her family born in the U.S. after her mother arrived from Taiwan.

"I'm sick of being belittled and hypersexualized and hated for who I am, for something I can't change," she said as the group marched.

Bernard Dong, a 24-year-old student from China at Georgia Tech, said he came out to the protest for the rights not just for Asians but for all minorities. "Many times Asian people are too silent, but times change," he said.

Dong said he was "angry and disgusted" about the shootings, and the violence that persists in 2021 against Asians, minorities and women.

Otis Wilson, a 38-year-old photographer who's Black, said people need to pay attention to the discrimination those of Asian descent face. "We went through this last year with the Black community, and we're not the only ones who go through this," he said.

Camden Hunt, a 28-year-old Black woman, said she first got involved in activism in her native Baltimore. She attended protests over the death of Freddie Gray, a Black man who suffered a broken neck in police custody in Baltimore in 2015. She moved to Atlanta four years ago and got involved in community organizing, last summer pulling together an event to support Black women victimized by police violence.

Hunt joined Saturday's rally to "show Black and Asian solidarity," adding "I think it's amazing. I look out and I see people of all shades and ages and backgrounds."

Similar rallies were held from coast to coast. In San Francisco, hundreds gathered in Portsmouth Square, in the middle of Chinatown, to grieve the victims and to call for an end to racist and sexist violence against Asian Americans. The participants waved signs reading "stop Asian hate."

In Pittsburgh, hundreds also rallied, and videos posted to social media showed former Grey's Anatomy actress and Golden Globe Award winner Sandra Oh speaking to the crowd.

"I will challenge everyone here ... If you see one of our sisters and brothers in need, will you help us?" she said, later yelling into a megaphone: "I am proud to be Asian! I belong here!"

In Chicago, about 300 people gathered and in New York City, hundreds marched from Times Square to Chinatown, news outlets reported.

Associated Press writers Candice Choi in Atlanta and Daisy Nguyen in San Francisco contributed reporting.

LeBron James sprains right ankle in loss, out indefinitely

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — LeBron James left in the second quarter with a high right ankle sprain that the Lakers said will sideline him indefinitely, and Los Angeles went on to fall 99-94 to the Atlanta Hawks on Saturday.

Two hours after the game, the Lakers announced that James is out indefinitely. The defending NBA champions already are without All-NBA big man Anthony Davis, who has missed 14 consecutive games with a right calf injury and likely won't play again until April.

"Nothing angers and saddens me more than not being available to and for my teammates!" James tweeted later Saturday. "I'm hurt inside and out right now. The road back from recovery begins now. Back soon like I never left."

James was hurt when he rolled his ankle under Solomon Hill, who was called for a foul as he reached awkwardly for a steal. The 36-year-old superstar screamed and fell to the court clutching at his ankle, yet he got up and briefly stayed in the game.

"I haven't necessarily seen him scream and squall like that, probably ever, not even with that groin," said Kyle Kuzma, who was with the Lakers when James missed 17 games with a groin injury two seasons

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ago. "It had to hurt a little bit, for sure."

After the injury, James hit a corner 3-pointer that extended his NBA-record streak of games with at least 10 points to 1,036, but he called a timeout and left the court shortly afterward. James knocked over a chair in frustration as he went to the locker room.

"The mood of the team is we're disappointed we lost, and we've got to come back and get one tomorrow," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "I won't disclose what LeBron was like (in the locker room). It's in-house."

John Collins had 27 points and a season-high 16 rebounds, and Trae Young added 14 points and 11 assists for the Hawks. They opened an eight-game trip with their eighth straight victory under new coach Nate McMillan — but only after their defending champion opponents lost their 17-time All-Star to an injury that could shake the NBA's balance of power if it turns out to be serious.

With James out, the remaining Lakers rallied and actually took a one-point lead to halftime, but missed their first 11 shots of the second half. Danilo Gallinari scored 14 of his 18 points after halftime for the Hawks, who are on their longest winning streak since January 2015.

"That was the first thing I told the guys: We can't relax because LeBron is out of the game," McMillan said. "We have to keep up the pressure, and I thought our guys did that."

James' absence left the Lakers without three starters in the second half, and the Hawks capitalized for their first road victory over Los Angeles since March 2016. Along with Davis, Marc Gasol missed his seventh straight game since February after sitting out under the NBA's health and safety protocols.

"It's different without (James), without AD," Gallinari said. "Of course they're a different team. But at the same time, all of the players that stepped up are all NBA veterans with experience, guys that won championships. I would say it's anyway a very good win."

Montrezl Harrell had 23 points and 11 rebounds, while Dennis Schröder had 16 points and seven assists against his former team for the Lakers, whose four-game winning streak ended amid much bigger concerns.

Harrell suggested Hill's actions during James' injury were "not a basketball play," and said the officials should have considered giving him more than a personal foul.

TIP-INS

Hawks: "It's definitely a different type of game when Bron is out," Young said. "Everything they do goes through him and AD." ... Clint Capela had 16 rebounds.

Lakers: Gasol has cleared the NBA's health and safety protocols, but coach Frank Vogel said the Spaniard wasn't ready to play because he hasn't practiced since February.

RONDO RETURNS

The Lakers played a tribute video to former guard Rajon Rondo, who had five assists in 14 minutes during his first trip to Staples Center since the Lakers' championship run in the Florida bubble. Rondo, who already got his championship ring through the mail earlier this season, watched the video appreciatively.

Rondo also stoked more nostalgia from Lakers fans when he got a technical foul in the third quarter for a weird bit of gamesmanship, inexplicably shoving the basketball into Schröder's face after a whistle.

"I love competitors who really try to compete against me on the court, but that's not competing," Schröder said. "I'm going to leave it at that."

UP NEXT

Hawks: At Los Angeles Clippers on Monday night

Lakers: At Phoenix on Sunday night.

More AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/hub/NBA> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

The Latest: UNLV now plans in-person spring graduation

By The Associated Press undefined

LAS VEGAS — The University of Nevada, Las Vegas is changing course and now plans in-person spring graduation ceremonies in May as the coronavirus outbreak slows.

UNLV President Keith Whitfield on Friday announced the change from plans announced in February to

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hold graduation virtually.

Whitfield said in a letter to students and staff that he firmly believes the university "can offer a traditional commencement while adhering to public health guidelines."

"Graduation is the culmination of a student's educational journey and is a significant milestone in their UNLV career. We need to make every effort to provide an experience our graduates so richly deserve," Whitfield wrote.

Whitfield said there would be two ceremonies for spring 2021 graduates at 8 a.m. on May 14 and May 15 and a third ceremony for 2020 graduates on May 14 at 6:30 p.m.

All three ceremonies will be held at Sam Boyd Stadium.

Each graduate will be allowed up to four guests, with everyone required to follow social distancing guidelines and wear face coverings.

Whitfield said holding the in-person graduation ceremonies is contingent on approval from local and state authorities and COVID numbers continuing to decline.

Nevada on Saturday reported 271 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases with 10 more deaths, increasing the state's pandemic totals to 300,951 cases and 5,171 deaths, according to the state's coronavirus dashboard.

The state's seven-day rolling averages both declined over the past two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

The rolling average of daily new cases dropped from about 347 on March 4 to around 294 on Thursday and the rolling average of daily deaths dropped from 11.1 to 9.1 during the same period.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- Half of UK adults have gotten one dose of COVID-19 vaccine
- Fans from abroad barred from Tokyo Olympics this summer
- Some NY nursing homes proved helpless in face of virus surge
- As vaccinations lag, Italy's elderly again pay the price.

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

PHOENIX — Arizona on Saturday reported 735 additional confirmed coronavirus cases with 42 more deaths amid indications of continued slowing of the coronavirus outbreak.

Arizona's pandemic totals rose to 835,765 cases and 16,733 deaths, according to the state's coronavirus dashboard.

Johns Hopkins University data showed the rolling average of daily new cases dropped from 1,265.1 on March 4 to 456.9 on Thursday while the rolling average of daily deaths declined from 62.2 to 24.6 over the same two-week period.

The state's dashboard reported that the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients occupying inpatient beds rose to 700 as of Friday, up from 686 as of Thursday, but remained far below the Jan. 11 high of 5,082.

BRAZZAVILLE, Republic of Congo — The leading opposition presidential candidate in Republic of Congo was receiving oxygen at a private hospital after being diagnosed with COVID-19, a family member said, casting Sunday's election into doubt on the eve of the vote.

Guy Brice Parfait Kolelas, 61, had skipped his final campaign event on Friday after telling some reporters a day earlier that he feared he had malaria. A relative who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter said plans were underway for Kolelas to be evacuated abroad for further treatment.

A video circulating on social media dated Friday showed Kolelas wearing an oxygen mask and with a blood pressure cuff on his arm as he lay in a hospital bed.

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"My dear compatriots, I am in trouble. I am fighting death," the candidate says in a weak-sounding voice after removing his oxygen mask. "However, I ask you to stand up and vote for change. I would not have fought for nothing."

A campaign spokesman confirmed the authenticity of the video and Kolelas' hospitalization. Two people at the hospital who had seen the Kolelas' test results confirmed to the AP late Saturday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus.

LONDON — The U.K. says half of the country's adults have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. The National Health Service has put shots in the arms of 26.9 million people, or 51% of the adult population, according to the latest government statistics. The NHS passed the halfway point on Friday by delivering 589,689 doses.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Saturday that's the highest daily total since the mass vaccination program began in early December.

The celebration comes amid growing concerns about the failure of wealthy countries to share scarce vaccine supplies with developing nations. The director of a London-based health policy think tank says while Britain should be proud of the success of its vaccination drive, it's time to start thinking about the rest of the world. Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of Wellcome, says the country has the rights to enough doses to vaccinate its entire population twice.

He says ensuring the world is vaccinated is a scientific and economic imperative: "Science has given us the exit strategy, but it will only work if its benefits can reach the maximum number of people around the world."

SANTIAGO, Chile — Chile has reported its highest daily count of 7,084 coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic despite widespread restrictions and progress on vaccinations.

The government on Saturday reported cases topping the previous record in June. It says coronavirus has become the country's leading cause of mortality, causing 26% of deaths this year.

Chile has given at least one vaccine shot to more than 29% of the population and both doses to 15% — far more than in other nations in the region. But Health Minister Enrique Paris says people should remain cautious since population-level immunity isn't likely until about 80% are vaccinated, probably by the end of June.

Officials say hospital bed usage has reached 94%, with rising numbers among those below 60 as older Chileans have been inoculated.

The government has imposed restrictions on three quarters of the country's municipalities. Officials say Saturday they are tightening limits on people entering from abroad, especially from Brazil.

DENVER — Colorado's health department is moving to relax its statewide mask mandate and limits on gathering capacity.

Health officials say the state's role in determining COVID-19 restrictions will lessen in favor of more local control as vaccination eligibility is extended.

For the majority of the state, masks will be required for indoor public places with 10 or more people, and the capacity restrictions remain in place.

The proposal would allow local authorities and "private entities" in the counties with the lowest coronavirus infection rates to determine whether masks would be required. It would end most restrictions on capacity for restaurants, retailers and outdoor events.

There are currently only two Level Green counties where this applies — the rural Crowley and Otero counties in southern Colorado — which means they have fewer than 15 cases per 100,000 people in a week.

Most of the state is in the next risk level up, while the Denver metro area is two levels higher than the least restrictive designation.

WARSAW, Poland — Poland reported more than 25,000 coronavirus cases Saturday, compared to less

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than 15,000 in early March.

Health Minister Adam Niedzielski blamed the increase on the British variant of the virus, which he described as "extremely infectious and vicious." He urged Poles to observe restrictions that were reintroduced Saturday, closing hotels, shopping malls, theaters, galleries and sports centers.

Poland's authorities have urged people to get vaccinated, saying they're speeding up registration of more age groups for the inoculation. They use Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines.

Unlike many European countries, Poland never discontinued using the AstraZeneca vaccine, insisting it was medically approved and safe. However, many Poles were not turning up for their AstraZeneca inoculation and authorities blamed that on "panic" in other countries.

So far, more than 5 million doses of various COVID-19 vaccines, including some 1.8 million second doses, have been administered in the nation of 38 million.

ZAGREB, Croatia — Several thousand people in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro rallied against anti-virus measures on Saturday, despite a rise in daily infections in the past weeks.

Protests in Croatia were held in the capital Zagreb and several smaller towns. Local media say participants refused to wear face masks or keep distance among themselves, while holding banners reading "Enough tyranny," or "Give us back the flu."

In Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, several hundred people protested after the Serbian government kept bars, restaurants and non-essential shops and businesses closed this week.

The state Montenegrin RTCG television reported about one hundred people came out in the rain to protest anti-virus rules. The report says that police urged them to respect distancing.

BÉRIGAMO, Italy — Promises to vaccinate all Italians over 80 by the end of March have fallen woefully short, amid well-documented interruptions of vaccine supplies and organizational shortfalls.

Just one third of Italy's 7.3 million vaccine doses administered so far have gone to people in that age group. The new government of Premier Mario Draghi has pledged to accelerate the vaccination campaign. It is aiming to vaccinate 80% of the population by September.

On Friday, Draghi said Italy aimed to administer 500,000 shots a day by next month, from a current daily level of about 165,000.

Italy has recorded more than 104,000 confirmed deaths, the sixth-highest tally in the world. As of early March, two thirds of Italy's virus-related deaths were among those over 80.

BÉRILIN — Several thousand people participated in the protests regarding coronavirus measures in Kassel on Saturday.

German news agency dpa says protesters have clashed with police, with officers using pepper spray and batons against people trying to break through police barriers. There were also several scuffles with counter-protesters.

In Berlin, some 1,800 police officers were on standby, but only a few dozen protesters assembled at the city's landmark Brandenburg Gate. Meanwhile, around 300 citizens gathered on Berlin's Unter den Linden boulevard to protest against the far-right demonstration.

TIRANA, Albania — The first Kosovar doctors and nurses on have traveled to neighboring Albania to receive COVID-19 vaccinations.

Albania offered to inoculate 500 Kosovo medical personnel as a gesture of solidarity. The shots of the AstraZeneca vaccine are being given over two days in Kukes, near the Kosovo border, where Kosovar doctors and nurses were taken by bus.

Vaccination has yet to start in Kosovo, which is expecting the first batch of vaccines from the Covax facility later this month. The government has ordered an overnight curfew and banned public gatherings of over 50 people.

Kosovo has reported 80,621 total confirmed cases and 1,744 confirmed deaths.

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TOKYO — Spectators from abroad will be barred from the Tokyo Olympics this summer.

The decision was announced after a meeting of the International Olympic Committee, the Japanese and Tokyo governments and other groups.

Officials say the risk was too great to admit fans from overseas during the coronavirus pandemic. Organizers say 600,000 tickets were sold to fans from outside Japan and about 4.45 million tickets were sold to Japan residents. Several surveys of the Japanese public indicated up to 80% opposed holding the Olympics and a similar percentage opposed fans from overseas.

The ban on fans from abroad comes just days before the Olympic torch relay starts Thursday from Fukushima prefecture in northeastern Japan. It will last for 121 days, crisscross Japan with 10,000 runners and end on July 23 at the opening ceremony at the National Stadium in Tokyo.

The Olympics and Paralympics involve 15,400 athletes entering Japan. They will be tested before leaving home, upon arrival in Japan and tested frequently while residing in a secure "bubble" in the Athletes Village alongside Tokyo Bay. Most athletes will be vaccinated, but it's not mandatory.

Japan is officially spending \$15.4 billion to organize the Olympics. Several government audits say the actual cost may be twice that much. All but \$6.7 billion is public money, and a University of Oxford study says these are the most expensive Olympics on record.

Japan has recorded 8,800 confirmed deaths to COVID-19 and controlled the virus better than most countries.

BERLIN — The European Union's executive arm is increasing its pressure on pharmaceutical companies to speed up their vaccine delivery to the continent as virus numbers are rising again in many member countries.

The European Commission says AstraZeneca in particular could face export bans to countries outside the EU if it didn't quickly deliver the promised amount of vaccines to the 27-nation bloc.

"We have the possibility to ban planned exports," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Saturday in an interview with German media group Funke.

She said the commission had sent a "formal reminder" to AstraZeneca.

AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine is one of three vaccines that's approved in the EU. However, its usage has been overshadowed by several problems, including a slow start, recurring delivery problems and a temporary ban for several days earlier this week in many of the bloc's member countries after reports of blood clots in some recipients of the vaccine.

Most countries in the EU resumed giving shots of AstraZeneca again Friday as infection numbers were spiking again across the continent.

ISLAMABAD — Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has tested positive for the coronavirus, two days after he received his first vaccine dose.

Dr. Faisal Sultan, Khan's special assistant on health, said Saturday the prime minister has quarantined himself at his private home on a hilltop in the Islamabad suburbs.

There has been a spike in COVID-19 in the capital and in eastern and northern Pakistan where authorities have reported 42 new deaths and 3,876 new cases of COVID-19 during past 24 hours across the country, taking the total deaths to 13,799 and total infected cases to more than 623,000.

Since February, Pakistan has been using a COVID-19 vaccine donated by neighboring China. Health workers have been vaccinated and now older people are receiving the jab.

Media reports say a private Pakistani pharmaceutical company has imported 50,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, but it was unclear at what price the vaccine will be available to people.

SAN FRANCISCO — Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti says a lot of pandemic deaths could have been prevented in California if the state had focused earlier on vaccinating people in the most disadvantaged

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neighborhoods.

Garcetti also said Friday the federal and state governments haven't given local officials like him enough freedom to inoculate who they feel are most at risk.

Garcetti and Gov. Gavin Newsom are fellow Democrats and close friends. And while the mayor didn't name Newsom, his comments ultimately are criticism of the governor and his initial tightly constrained approach to vaccinating residents by age and profession.

Newsom has since pivoted and set aside 40% of all doses for people in the state's poorest areas.

WASHINGTON -- The White House is canceling the annual Easter Egg Roll for the second straight year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A spokesman for first lady Jill Biden said Friday the White House will mark the holiday by sending out 2021 commemorative Easter Egg Roll eggs in the coming days to vaccination sites and local hospitals.

President Rutherford B. Hayes started the tradition in 1878.

There have been a few other times when the event was either moved off the White House grounds or cancelled. During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson suspended the Egg Roll, and Franklin Roosevelt did the same during World War II. President Harry Truman scratched the Egg Roll from 1948 to 1952, because of food rationing and renovations at the White House.

President Dwight Eisenhower restored the event in 1953.

ATLANTA — President Joe Biden has paid a visit to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and used the appearance to celebrate his administration reaching the benchmark of injecting 100 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine since his inauguration.

Biden met with scientists at the CDC in Atlanta on Friday to express his gratitude for their work trying to stop the coronavirus, while also learning about variants of the virus and the unfolding medical situation.

Biden pumped his fist as the CDC's director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, said the 100 million vaccine-threshold had been reached.

The president told CDC staff: "We owe you a gigantic debt of gratitude and we will for a long, long long time. You are the army, you are the navy, the marines, the coast guard ... you are the frontline troops."

Biden is on his heels amid a migrant surge at Mexico border

By AAMER MADHANI and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Somehow, they didn't see it coming.

Within weeks of Inauguration Day on Jan. 20, the Biden administration had reversed many of the most maligned Trump-era immigration policies, including deporting children seeking asylum who arrived alone at the U.S.-Mexico border and forcing migrants to wait in Mexico as they made their case to stay in the United States.

While the administration was working on immigration legislation to address long-term problems, it didn't have an on-the-ground plan to manage a surge of migrants. Career immigration officials had warned there could be a surge after the presidential election and the news that the Trump policies, widely viewed as cruel, were being reversed.

Now officials are scrambling to build up capacity to care for some 14,000 migrants now in federal custody — and more likely on the way — and the administration finds itself on its heels in the face of criticism that it should have been better prepared to deal with a predictable predicament.

"They should have forecasted for space (for young migrants) more quickly," said Ronald Vitiello, a former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and chief of Border Patrol who has served in Republican and Democratic administrations. "And I think in hindsight, maybe they should have waited until they had additional shelter space before they changed the policies."

The situation at the southern border is complex.

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Since Biden's inauguration, the U.S. has seen a dramatic spike in the number of people encountered by border officials. There were 18,945 family members and 9,297 unaccompanied children encountered in February — an increase of 168% and 63%, respectively, from the month before, according to the Pew Research Center. That creates an enormous logistical challenge because children, in particular, require higher standards of care and coordination across agencies.

Still, the encounters of both unaccompanied minors and families are lower than they were at various points during the Trump administration, including in spring 2019. That May, authorities encountered more than 55,000 migrant children, including 11,500 unaccompanied minors, and about 84,500 migrants traveling in family units.

Career immigration officials, overwhelmed by the earlier surges, have long warned the flow of migrants to the border could ramp up again.

Biden administration officials have repeatedly laid blame for the current situation on the previous administration, arguing that Biden inherited a mess resulting from President Donald Trump's undermining and weakening of the immigration system. The White House says it has taken several steps to address the situation.

Migrant children are sent from border holding cells to other government facilities until they are released to a sponsor. That process was slowed considerably by a Trump administration policy of "enhanced vetting," in which details were sent to immigration officials and some sponsors wound up getting arrested, prompting some to fear picking up children over worries of being deported. Biden has reversed that policy, so immigration officials hope the process will speed up now.

The White House also points to Biden's decision to deploy the Federal Emergency Management Agency, known for helping communities in the aftermath of a natural disaster, to support efforts to process the growing number of unaccompanied migrant children arriving at the border. HHS announced Saturday that it was opening an additional facility in West Texas to help with influx of unaccompanied minors. The facility will initially accommodate about 500 children but can be expanded to house 2,000.

Biden and others have pushed back on the notion that what's happening now is a "crisis."

"We will have, I believe, by next month enough of those beds to take care of these children who have no place to go," Biden said in a recent ABC News interview, when asked whether his administration should have anticipated the surge in young unaccompanied migrants as well as families and adults. He added, "Let's get something straight though. The vast majority of people crossing the border are being sent back ... immediately sent back."

Adam Isacson, an analyst at the human rights advocacy group Washington Office on Latin America, said Republicans' insistence that there is a "crisis" at the border is overwrought, but that the surge in migrants was predictable.

He called it a perfect storm of factors: hurricanes that hit Central America last fall; the economic fallout caused by the coronavirus pandemic; typical seasonal migration patterns; the thousands of Central American migrants already stuck at the border for months; and the persistent scourge of gang violence afflicting Northern Triangle countries — Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Isacson said the Biden administration may have been "two or three weeks" slow in preparing for the increase in unaccompanied young migrants and the subsequent housing crunch after announcing in early February it would stop deporting unaccompanied youths.

But Isacson added that the bottleneck was also affected by the lack of cooperation by the Trump administration with the Biden transition.

The Biden administration announced on Feb. 2 it would no longer uphold the Trump administration policy of automatically deporting unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. Two weeks later, the White House announced plans to admit 25,000 asylum-seekers to the U.S. who had been forced to remain in Mexico.

In subsequent weeks, the number of young migrants crossing without adults skyrocketed. Both Customs and Border Protection, and Health and Human Services officials have struggled to house the influx of children. Immigration officials say the number of adult migrants and families trying to enter the U.S.

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illegally also has surged.

Border patrol officials had encountered more than 29,000 unaccompanied minors since Oct. 1, nearly the same number of youths taken into custody for all of the previous budget year, administration officials say.

"Getting capacity up to deal with the unaccompanied minors is critical, but the numbers just don't bear out to pointing to a crisis," Isacson said.

That hasn't stopped Republicans -- including Trump and House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California -- from pillorying Biden.

"It's more than a crisis. This is a human heartbreak," said McCarthy, who led a delegation of a dozen fellow House Republicans to El Paso, Texas, on Monday.

Biden is also facing criticism from Republicans that his administration has sent mixed messages.

Critics have focused on public comments from Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who earlier this month said the administration's message to migrants was "don't come now" and a slip by Roberta Jacobson, the White House's lead adviser on the border, who said in Spanish during a recent briefing the "border is not closed," before correcting herself.

The president and other administration officials in recent days have stepped up efforts to urge migrants not to come. Embassies in Northern Triangle countries are airing public service announcements underscoring the dangers of making the trek north.

Eric Hershberg, director of the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies at American University, said Biden's team faces a powerful counter-narrative as it attempts to persuade desperate Central Americans to stay put: chatter on social media from migrants who successfully made it across the border and smugglers who insist that now is the ideal time.

Hershberg cites a Honduran friend's reaction to U.S. warnings that migrants could face danger on the journey: "You know, you don't need to go with such uncertainty. You can just stay here and know that you'll be raped or killed."

Republic of Congo candidate hospitalized with COVID-19

By LOUIS OKAMBA Associated Press

BRAZZAVILLE, Republic of Congo (AP) — The leading opposition presidential candidate in Republic of Congo was receiving oxygen at a private hospital after being diagnosed with COVID-19, a family member said, casting Sunday's election into doubt on the eve of the vote.

The election's outcome was already all but certain even before confirmation of Guy Brice Parfait Kolelas' illness. President Denis Sassou N'Guesso has been in power for more than 36 years, last winning 60% of the vote in 2016. But the Central African country's constitution stipulates that an election can be delayed if a candidate dies or is unable to participate in the vote.

Kolelas, the president's leading opponent, skipped his final campaign event on Friday after telling some reporters a day earlier that he feared he had malaria. A relative who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter said plans were under way for Kolelas to be evacuated abroad for further treatment.

The 61-year-old is diabetic and at higher risk of complications from COVID-19. A video circulating on social media dated Friday showed Kolelas wearing an oxygen mask and with a blood pressure cuff on his arm as he lay in a hospital bed.

"My dear compatriots, I am in trouble. I am fighting death," the candidate says in a weak-sounding voice after removing his oxygen mask. "However, I ask you to stand up and vote for change. I would not have fought for nothing."

A campaign spokesman confirmed the authenticity of the video and Kolelas' hospitalization. Two people at the hospital who had seen Kolelas' test results confirmed to the AP late Saturday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus.

There was no immediate reaction to the developments from the government late Saturday.

Kolelas placed second to Sassou N'Guesso in the country's 2016 presidential election with about 15%

of the vote. The opposition figure has been particularly critical of the incumbent leader in recent days, declaring that Republic of Congo had become "a police state."

Sassou N'Guesso is the third-longest serving president in Africa, ruling from 1979-1992 and then again since 1997 in this nation often overshadowed by its vast neighbor Congo.

Republic of Congo has had fewer than 10,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began, with 134 confirmed deaths.

Associated Press writer Krista Larson in Dakar, Senegal contributed.

Eruption of Iceland volcano easing, not affecting flights

By EGILL BJARNASON Associated Press

REYKJAVIK, Iceland (AP) — The eruption of a long-dormant volcano that sent streams of lava flowing across a small valley in southwestern Iceland is easing and shouldn't interfere with air travel, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said Saturday.

The fissure eruption began at around 8:45 p.m. Friday in the Geldinga Valley, about 32 kilometers (20 miles) southwest of the capital, Reykjavik, the Met Office said. The eruption is "minor" and there were no signs of ash or dust that could disrupt aviation, the agency said.

"The more we see, the smaller this eruption gets," geophysicist Pall Einarsson told The Associated Press on Saturday after monitoring the volcano throughout the night.

This southwestern corner of Iceland is the most heavily populated part of the country. The Department of Emergency Management said it doesn't anticipate evacuations, unless levels of volcanic gases rise significantly.

Keflavik Airport, Iceland's international air traffic hub, said flights have remained on schedule since the eruption began.

"There is no indication of production of ash and tephra, and there is no imminent hazard for aviation," the Met Office said on its website.

In 2010, an eruption of the Eyjafjallajokull volcano in Iceland sent clouds of ash and dust into the atmosphere, interrupting air travel between Europe and North America because of concerns the material could damage jet engines. More than 100,000 flights were grounded, stranding millions of passengers.

The Geldinga Valley eruption is the first on the Reykjanes Peninsula in almost 800 years.

The area began rumbling with increased seismic activity 15 months ago, and the tremors increased dramatically last month.

Over the past three weeks, the area has been rattled by about 50,000 small earthquakes, dozens of them magnitude 4 or stronger, the Met Office said.

Iceland, located above a volcanic hotspot in the North Atlantic, averages one eruption every four to five years. The last one was at Holuhraun in 2014, when a fissure eruption spread lava the size of Manhattan over the interior highland region.

Scientists flew over the Geldinga Valley eruption on Saturday morning and estimated the eruptive fissure was about 500 meters long (1,640 feet.) The two streams of lava were about 2.5 kilometers from the nearest road.

Solny Palsdottir's house is the closest to the site of the eruption, just four kilometers (2.5 miles) away in the coastal town of Grindavik. She and her husband were watching TV on Friday night when her teenage son pointed out a red glow in the distance.

"Today, I see a white-blue cloud of steam coming from the mountains," Palsdottir, 50, told The Associated Press. "Not something I expected to have in my backyard."

"I am just relieved the earthquakes are over," she added.

Prince Harry gives advice to grieving children in new book

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's Prince Harry has written the forward for a new book aimed at the children of frontline workers who died in the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing the pain he suffered as a boy after the death of his mother, Princess Diana.

Harry wrote that losing his mother at age 12 left "a huge hole inside of me," according to excerpts of the book printed in the Times of London. Diana died in a Paris car accident in August 1997.

"Hospital by the Hill," by Chris Connaughton, is the story of a young person whose mother worked at a hospital and died during the pandemic. It is being given to children who have experienced similar losses.

"While I wish I was able to hug you right now, I hope this story is able to provide you comfort in knowing that you're not alone," Harry wrote in the forward. "When I was a young boy I lost my mum. At the time, I didn't want to believe it or accept it, and it left a huge hole inside of me. I know how you feel, and I want to assure you that over time that hole will be filled with so much love and support."

Harry has on several occasions reflected on the enduring pain he experienced from his mother's sudden death. He has made mental health awareness a key part of his charitable work.

"We all cope with loss in a different way, but when a parent goes to heaven, I was told their spirit, their love and the memories of them do not," Harry wrote. "They are always with you, and you can hold on to them forever. I find this to be true."

Germany: police clash with protesters against virus measures

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Protesters in Germany clashed with police Saturday over coronavirus measures, with officers using water cannons, pepper spray and batons against people trying to break through police barriers, German news agency dpa reported.

Protests against government measures to rein in the pandemic also were reported in several other countries across Europe, including Austria, Britain, Finland, Romania and Switzerland.

More than 20,000 people participated in the protest in the central German city of Kassel, where there also were confrontations between the demonstrators and counter-protesters.

Thousands of people marched through downtown Kassel despite a court ban, and most didn't comply with infection-control protocols such as wearing face masks. Some protesters attacked officers and several journalists, dpa said.

Federal police, who were brought in beforehand from other parts of Germany, used water cannons and helicopters to control the crowds, the news agency reported.

Police said several people were detained, but didn't give any numbers.

Various groups, most of them far-right opponents of government regulations to fight the pandemic, had called for protests Saturday in cities across the country.

Virus infections have gone up again in Germany in recent weeks and the government is set to decide next week on how to react.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said Friday Germany will have to apply an "emergency brake" and reverse some recent relaxations of restrictions as coronavirus infections accelerate.

Germany's national disease control center said new infections were growing exponentially as the more contagious COVID-19 variant first detected in Britain has become dominant in the country.

On Saturday, the Robert Koch Institute reported 16,033 new cases and registered 207 additional deaths, bringing the overall death toll to 74,565 in Germany.

In Berlin, some 1,800 police officers were on standby for possible riots, but only about 500 protesters assembled at the city's landmark Brandenburg Gate. Meanwhile, around 1,000 citizens came together on Berlin's Unter den Linden boulevard to protest against the far-right demonstration.

Protesters also hit the streets in other cities across Europe. In London, demonstrators opposing the U.K.'s months-long lockdown defied police who warned of potential fines and arrest for violating prohibi-

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tions on most group meetings.

The demonstration took place after more than 60 lawmakers signed a letter demanding that the government change the law and allow protests to take place even when pandemic restrictions bar other types of gatherings.

The letter, coordinated by the civil rights groups Liberty and Big Brother Watch, followed police roughly breaking up a vigil last weekend in honor of Sarah Everard, a woman who was abducted while walking home in London. A London police officer has been charged with her kidnapping and murder.

In Finland, police estimated that about 400 people without masks and packed tightly together gathered in the capital, Helsinki, to protest government-imposed COVID-19 restrictions. Smaller demonstrations were scheduled in other Finnish cities.

Before the Helsinki rally, some 300 people chanting slogans like "Let the people speak!" and carrying placards with phrases such as "Facts and numbers don't add up" marched through the streets of the city, ending up at the Parliament building.

Helsinki police tweeted that the registered march and rally took place peacefully but violated social distancing requirements and Finland's current limits on public gatherings.

More than a thousand anti-vaccination protesters took to the streets in Romania's capital of Bucharest amid a surge of COVID-19 infections there.

The largely mask-less crowd honked horns, waved national flags, and chanted messages such as "Block vaccination," and "Freedom." One placard read: "Parents, protect your children! Stop the fear!"

Romania's far-right AUR party has strongly backed a movement linked to nationalism that planned anti-vaccination demonstrations in recent weeks.

In Austria, about 1,000 protesters participated in a demonstrations against the government's virus measures near Vienna's central train station. Police reprimanded several protesters who were not wearing masks and remaining too close together, news agency APA reported.

In Switzerland, more than 5,000 protesters met for a silent march in the community of Liestal 15 kilometers (9 miles) southeast of the city of Basel, local media reported. Most didn't wear masks and some held up banners with slogans like "Vaccinating kills."

Jari Tanner in Helsinki, Finland, Danica Kirka in London, and Stephen McGrath in Bucharest, Romania contributed reporting.

Feds want to fix canal, but Nevada town lives off the leaks

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

FERNLEY, Nev. (AP) — A Nevada town founded a century ago by pioneers lured to the West by the promise of free land and cheap water in the desert is trying to block the U.S. government from renovating a 115-year-old earthen irrigation canal with a plan that would eliminate leaking water that local residents long have used to fill their own domestic wells.

A federal judge denied the town of Fernley's bid last year to delay plans to line parts of the Truckee Canal with concrete to make it safer after it burst and flooded nearly 600 homes in 2008.

Now, lawyers for the town a half-hour east of Reno have filed a new lawsuit accusing the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation of illegally failing to consider the expected harm to its municipal water supply and hundreds of private well users who tap into the groundwater based on what they say are binding water allotments, some dating to World War II.

Safety aside, the bureau says the loss of federally owned water from the dirt canal is a waste of U.S. taxpayers' money. The city says the government shares responsibility for their dependence on the unintended subsidy provided by the seepage, partly because it's never before objected.

"Fernley has a right to continued recharge from the Truckee Canal under the public use doctrine because the seepage conditions have continued for 115 years," the lawsuit stated.

Over time, local users have become "utterly reliant on seepage from the canal to keep the aquifer re-

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charged and in a healthy condition," the suit said. It says Fernley spent \$40 million on a state-of-the-art water treatment facility based on that reliance.

"You (the government) created the system and now you are essentially taking it away and claiming it is not your problem," former Fernley Mayor David Stix Jr. told The Associated Press Friday.

A decision is crucial for the town and surrounding farms in the high desert where only 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain falls annually. And the dispute could have far-reaching implications for the one in five U.S. farmers who use water delivered by federal canals in 17 western states to irrigate an area three times the size of Connecticut.

Built in 1905, the Truckee Canal was part of the Newlands Project named after the Nevada congressman whose legislation led to creation of the Bureau of Reclamation three years earlier. It was the first major irrigation project in the West — intended to "make the desert bloom."

Fernley's lawyers say it was a huge success, attracting settlers who developed the West. But they say the new project pulls the rug out from under their descendants in the town of 23,000 where some still raise livestock and grow alfalfa and melons.

The agency says lining the canal at a cost of about \$148 million is necessary to prevent another costly disaster like the 2008 canal break. The Truckee-Carson Irrigation District managing the canal system settled a class-action suit for \$18.1 million in 2016 with 1,200 victims of the flood that damaged 590 homes.

The agency has studied efficiency of canal linings for decades and in recent years stepped up research of new ways to combat seepage with remote satellite sensing, ground sensors detecting soil moisture and sediment temperature.

Last month, the bureau teamed up with NASA and HeroX, a crowdsourcing platform, to sponsor a two-year contest with a \$360,000 prize to foster other innovations.

This week, the bureau awarded \$42 million in grants to 55 projects in 13 states from Kansas to Arizona and the Pacific Northwest to improve water delivery efficiency and generate more hydropower.

Bureau officials couldn't immediately estimate how much water leaks from canals nationally but in neighboring California, it has said one-third of the water passing through a stretch of the All-American Canal is lost to seepage annually — some 168,500 acre-feet (207 million cubic-meters).

One acre-foot (1,233 cubic-meters) of water covers an acre (.40 hectare) — roughly the size of a football field — and a foot deep (.3 meters). Average California households use one-half to one acre-foot of water every year.

In 1985, the U.S. Geological Survey estimated natural recharge, such as from rainfall, in Fernley's groundwater basin was 600 acre-feet (740,000 cubic-meters) — a fraction of the 18,000 acre-feet (22 million cubic-meters) it estimated was leaking annually into the aquifer from the unlined canal.

The bureau largely agrees with simulations run by an expert Fernley hired in 2018 who estimates 13% of the 400-plus domestic wells in Fernley would dry up in a year if the artificial recharge ends and 71% would stop working over 40 years.

The bureau hasn't responded to the lawsuit filed March 10 in federal court in Reno but its final environmental impact statement said in September that Fernley "has no legal entitlement to the continued existence of seepage water from the Truckee Canal."

"The city's claim of right to seepage water is not valid under Nevada law," the agency said. "The city's use of canal seepage is not a valid project water delivery."

Sister Jean gets the vaccine and seat at the NCAA Tournament

By JIM LITKE AP Sports Writer

The best COVID-19 vaccine shots in America just might be the two that went into Sister Jean's arm.

The breakout star and model for the most coveted bobblehead of the 2018 NCAA Tournament is now eight months beyond her 101st birthday and still serving as chaplain for the Loyola Chicago basketball team. It took two vaccinations and some serious wrangling, but Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt was back on the scene Friday in Indianapolis watching her beloved Ramblers in person, sporting brand-new, brick-red

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kicks but the same radiant smile — a fresh reminder for a pandemic-weary fan base that a little perseverance still goes a long way.

In this case, thankfully, she didn't have to wait long. The eighth-seeded Ramblers were dead behind the arc and dominated the boards to pull away for a relatively easy 71-60 win over No. 9 Georgia Tech. Loyola's next opponent, Midwest Regional No. 1 seed Illinois, is bound to provide a much stiffer test of Sister Jean's faith.

Yet her celebratory fist bump at the buzzer was one of the signature moments of the first full day of an NCAA Tournament canceled a year ago due to the pandemic. The time away hardly blunted the tourney's reputation for producing upsets, though to be fair, ranking teams based on a string of chaotic conference tournaments and a shortened regular season — 20% of games wound up canceled — was probably more hit-and-miss than usual.

The biggest takedown was scored by No. 15 seed Oral Roberts, which needed overtime to escape second-seeded Ohio State 75-72. That marked just the ninth time in tournament history it happened.

"We put our shoes on just as the other team puts their shoes on," said Kevin Obanor, who led Oral Roberts with 30 points. "We just had the mindset of, 'Show us that you deserve to be No. 2,' and we came out with a lot of confidence."

Not long after, No. 13 North Texas registered its first tourney win by stunning a second entry from the mighty Big Ten Conference, fifth-seeded Purdue 78-69, and Oregon State claimed this year's first by-now familiar 12-seed-over-a-No. 5 slot by handily beating Tennessee 70-56. Syracuse, an 11 seed, made a staggering 56% (15 of 27) of its 3-point attempts en route to burying No. 6 San Diego State 78-62.

That game also produced one of those father-son moments sports are so good at: Buddy Boeheim, who made seven of his 10 3-point shots — including one from the edge of half-court logo — finished with 30 points, one better than the school record set by his father, Syracuse head coach Jim Boeheim, in the 1966 tournament.

Finally, No. 10 Rutgers pulled off a mild upset over seventh-seeded Clemson, 60-56, while No. 9 Wisconsin's 85-62 rout of No. 8 North Carolina hardly qualified as an upset, unless you count Tar Heels coach Roy Williams' first-ever loss in a tournament opener.

Baylor and Houston, the other No. 1 and No. 2 seeds in action, clobbered Hartford and Cleveland State, respectively. All the other higher seeds — Villanova, Texas Tech, Arkansas, Florida, Oklahoma State and West Virginia — also won.

Loyola guard Lucas Williamson, who scored a game-high 21 points to send the ACC Tournament-champion Yellow Jackets packing, was a freshman during Loyola's magical run to the Final Four in 2018. So much about this year's tournament is different, but the feeling of accomplishment was the same.

"It feels so good, and I want to feel it again," Williamson began, smiling broadly.

But when the next question came about playing Illinois — which drowned No. 16 Drexel 78-49 in a dunkfest earlier in the day — he got serious.

"Going to take everything we got. They're one of the best teams in the country," Williamson said. "That's no secret."

ORU wasn't exactly a secret — it boasts the nation's leading scorer in Max Abmas — but only 4.25% of people who filled out brackets at the NCAA site picked them to oust the Buckeyes.

"When they rank them, it was only just a number at the end of the day," said Obanor, who scored seven of his 30 in overtime. Abmas added 29.

The Golden Eagles face another tall task when they meet No. 7 Florida. Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann left little doubt how much better that was than the alternative.

"Obviously, a really bitter end to terrific season. We'll own that, accept it and ..." he paused, fighting back tears, "we'll move forward."

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

US ties with Russia, China sink as Biden toes tough lines

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. relations with its two biggest geo-political rivals are facing severe tests as President Joe Biden tries to assert America's place in the world and distinguish himself from his predecessor.

Airing myriad complaints, the Biden administration took an extraordinarily tough line with China and Russia this past week. Public spats between the countries erupted as Biden characterized Russian President Vladimir Putin as a "killer" and his top national security aides excoriated China for a litany of issues.

Moscow and Beijing both fired back, setting the stage for months, if not more, of escalating tensions that are unlikely to be resolved without intense discussions at the leadership level and major concessions from all sides.

Biden himself kicked off the latest round of recrimination in a television interview in which he sought to draw clear differences between his Russia policies and those of former President Donald Trump, who was accused of being soft on Putin. Just 24 hours later, Biden's top diplomat and national security adviser blasted Chinese officials in face-to-face talks.

Although Biden's strong comments about Putin reflected a shift from Trump's often conciliatory approach to the Kremlin, the harsh criticism directed at China by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan in many ways mirrored the previous administration's hard line toward Beijing.

The contrasting styles suggested that Biden is intent on reversing years of perceived U.S. weakness toward Russia while rejecting Trump's 2020 campaign allegations that he's not tough enough on China.

In taking a strong line on Russia, Biden has said the days of the U.S. "rolling over" to Putin are done. And, in the interview with ABC broadcast on Wednesday, Biden replied "I do" when asked if he thought Putin was a "killer." Russia responded by recalling its ambassador in Washington for consultations.

Putin then shot back by pointing to the U.S. history of slavery, the slaughter of Native Americans and the atomic bombing of Japan in World War II in an "it-takes-one-to-know-one" response.

As that was unfolding, on Thursday in Alaska, China's top two diplomats reacted in similar fashion to criticism from Blinken and Sullivan about Beijing's human rights record in the western Xinjiang region and Tibet and its aggressive actions in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Communist Party foreign policy chief Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi accused the U.S. of hypocrisy for condemning China while at the same time grappling with its own internal issues, including violence against Asian Americans and other people of color and political unrest following the 2020 presidential election.

Blinken and Sullivan took umbrage at those comments and replied that the U.S. was not perfect but sought to openly and honestly address such matters. Sullivan said Americans' willingness to confront their shortcomings was the "secret sauce" of U.S. success.

And, they sought to reframe U.S.-China relations in the context of the Biden administration's resolve to correct those issues, strengthen the U.S. economy and improve ties with democratic allies in Asia such as Australia, Japan and South Korea.

Blinken, having just finished a trip to Japan and South Korea with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, made clear to the Chinese that the U.S. is aligned with its allies.

"I have to tell you, what I'm hearing is very different from what you described," he told Wang and Yang. "I'm hearing deep satisfaction that the United States is back, that we're re-engaged with our allies and partners. I'm also hearing deep concern about some of the actions your government has taken."

Blinken appears to have impressed his boss. "I'm very proud of the secretary of state," Biden said after the testy talks in Anchorage.

A similar effort with allies is underway in Europe with respect to Russia.

Blinken will leave Monday for Brussels for talks with NATO and European Union officials designed to repair strains caused by Trump's largely transactional diplomacy. Trump's bluster, threats of trade wars and intense demands that Europe pay more for its defense angered many, particularly in the continent's two major powers: France and Germany.

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That trip is aimed at underscoring the Biden administration's "determination to strengthen the transatlantic alliance and reinvigorate our ties with allies through NATO" with an eye toward challenges posed by both Russia and China, the State Department said.

Russia's relations with the United States and the European Union already had plunged to post-Cold War lows after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, meddling in elections, hacking attacks and, most recently, the jailing of Russia's opposition leader Alexei Navalny after his poisoning, which he blamed on the Kremlin. Russian authorities rejected the accusations.

Then, the U.S. national intelligence director's office released a report finding that Putin authorized influence operations to help Trump's reelection bid. The Biden administration warned that Russia would face sanctions soon over its attempt to influence the election and the widespread SolarWinds hacks.

"(Putin) will pay a price," Biden said in the ABC interview when asked about the declassified report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, March 21, the 80th day of 2021. There are 285 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 21, 2006, the social media website Twitter was established with the sending of the first "tweet" by co-founder Jack Dorsey, who wrote: "just setting up my twttr."

On this date:

In 1685, composer Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany.

In 1918, during World War I, Germany launched its Spring Offensive on the Western Front, hoping to break through the Allied lines before American reinforcements could arrive. (Although successful at first, the Spring Offensive ultimately failed.)

In 1935, Persia officially changed its name to Iran.

In 1945, during World War II, Allied bombers began four days of raids over Germany.

In 1963, the Alcatraz federal prison island in San Francisco Bay was emptied of its last inmates and closed at the order of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

In 1965, civil rights demonstrators led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. began their third, successful march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

In 1972, the Supreme Court, in *Dunn v. Blumstein*, ruled that states may not require at least a year's residency for voting eligibility.

In 1981, Michael Donald, a Black teenager in Mobile, Alabama, was abducted, tortured and killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan. (A lawsuit brought by Donald's mother, Beulah Mae Donald, later resulted in a landmark judgment that bankrupted one Klan organization.)

In 1986, Debi Thomas of the United States won the ladies' title at the World Figure Skating Championships in Geneva, Switzerland, dethroning Katarina Witt of East Germany.

In 1990, Namibia became an independent nation as the former colony marked the end of 75 years of South African rule.

In 1997, President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin wrapped up their summit in Helsinki, Finland, still deadlocked over NATO expansion, but able to agree on slashing nuclear weapons arsenals.

In 2019, President Donald Trump abruptly declared that the U.S. would recognize Israel's sovereignty over the disputed Golan Heights, a major shift in American policy.

Ten years ago: Syrians chanting "No more fear!" held a defiant march after a deadly government crack-down failed to quash three days of mass protests in the southern city of Deraa. Grammy-winning bluesman Pinetop Perkins died in Austin, Texas, at 97.

Five years ago: Laying bare a half-century of tensions, President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro prodded each other over human rights and the longstanding U.S. economic embargo during an unprecedented joint news conference in Havana.

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One year ago: Negotiators from Congress and the White House held talks on a \$1 trillion-plus economic rescue package. During a White House briefing, President Donald Trump doubled down on his support for the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a possible treatment for the coronavirus, while Dr. Anthony Fauci said the evidence was "anecdotal." Italy announced nearly 800 new deaths of people with the coronavirus. Hawaii's governor instituted a mandatory 14-day self-quarantine of all people traveling to the state.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Kathleen Widdoes is 82. Songwriter Chip Taylor ("Wild Thing") is 81. Folk-pop singer-musician Keith Potger (The Seekers) is 80. Actor Marie-Christine Barrault is 77. Singer-musician Rose Stone (Sly and the Family Stone) is 76. Actor Timothy Dalton is 75. Singer Ray Dorset (Mungo Jerry) is 75. Rock singer-musician Roger Hodgson (Supertramp) is 71. Rock musician Conrad Lozano (Los Lobos) is 70. R&B singer Russell Thompkins Jr. is 70. Comedy writer-performer Brad Hall is 63. Actor Sabrina LeBeauf is 63. Actor Gary Oldman is 63. Actor Kassie Depaiva is 60. Actor Matthew Broderick is 59. Comedian-actor Rosie O'Donnell is 59. Actor Cynthia Geary is 56. Hip-hop DJ Premier (Gang Starr) is 55. Rock musician Jonas "Joker" Berggren (Ace of Base) is 54. Rock MC Maxim (Prodigy) is 54. Rock musician Andrew Copeland (Sister Hazel) is 53. Actor Laura Allen is 47. Rapper-TV personality Kevin Federline is 43. Actor Sonequa Martin-Green (TV: "The Walking Dead") is 36. Actor Scott Eastwood is 35. Tennis player Karolina Pliskova is 29. Actor Jasmin Savoy Brown is 27. Actor Forrest Wheeler is 17.