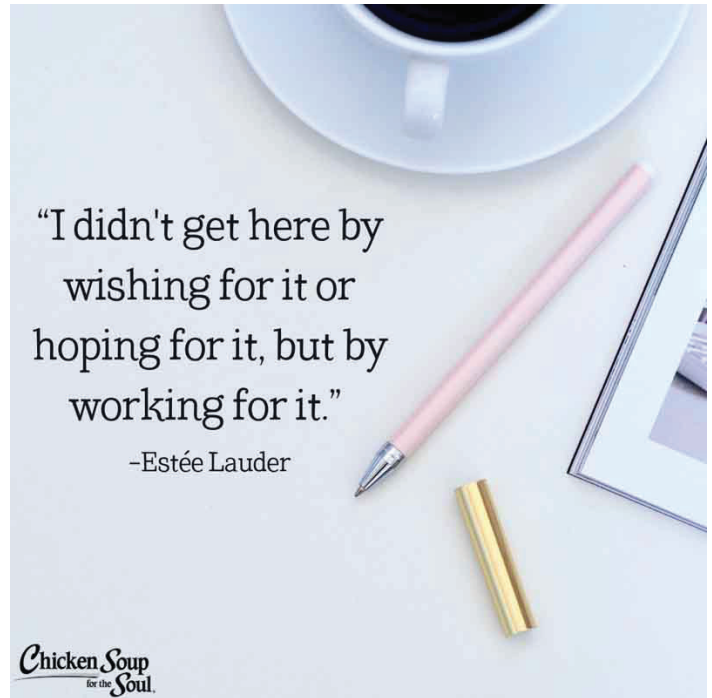


Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 1 of 66

- [1- Tonight on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [2- Prismatic Sensations perform in Mitchell](#)
- [3- Traphagen on All NEC GBB Team](#)
- [3- Weekly Vikings Roundup](#)
- [4- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [7- Yesterday's COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [14- Social Security Disability Benefits Ad](#)
- [15- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [16- Weather Pages](#)
- [19- Daily Devotional](#)
- [20- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [21- News from the Associated Press](#)



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 2 of 66



Groton Prismatic Sensations competed in Mitchell on Saturday.
(Photos from Mitchell High Friend de Coup Facebook Page)



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 3 of 66

Traphagen on All NEC GBB Team

The All-Conference Northeast Conference girls basketball teams have been announced.

On the first team are Addison Rozell, senior, Redfield; Madelyn Bragg, Roncalli, junior; Kylee Wadsworth, senior, and Kami Wadsworth, sophomore, both from Hamlin; and Chloe Langager, freshman, Sisseton.

Second team members are Morgan Fiedler, junior, and Olivia Hanson, junior, both from Roncalli; Gracie Traphagen, sophomore, Groton Area; Maurina Street, sophomore, Milbank; Cara Shoemaker, senior, Webster Area; and Jada Burke, sophomore, Clark/Willow Lake.

Third team members are Charity Kabwe, senior, Clark/Willow Lake; McKenna Prouty, senior, Hamlin; Alivia Baumgarn, junior, Webster Area; Elissa Hammrich, senior, Roncalli; and Hailey Nelson, junior, Sisseton.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

I want to preface this article by saying I don't know nearly as much as Mike Zimmer or Rick Spielman. I have faith that they know what is best for this team. With that said, after the first wave of free agency, I simply do not understand some of the moves they have made.

Starting free agency above the salary cap was not an enviable position to be in, even though most teams around the NFL were in similar situations. To get under the cap with enough room to sign some free agents, the Minnesota Vikings released veteran players like Kyle Rudolph and Riley Reiff, while also restructuring some contracts like Anthony Barr's and Adam Thielen's. Once those moves were completed, the team had a little bit of money to spend – and although the team had many holes to fill, both starting positions and depth, the Vikings elected to spend most of their remaining cap space on two players.

Going into free agency, the Vikings needed help at defensive tackle, defensive end, linebacker, safety, and most importantly offensive line. The first signing the team did was defensive tackle Dalvin Tomlinson, which on paper sounds like a sound investment. However, when you dig deeper, some questions arise. The Vikings play in a 4-3 defensive base, which means there are four defensive linemen (two defensive tackles, two defensive ends), and three linebackers in their base sets. The two defensive tackles have different responsibilities. The nose tackle is responsible for taking up two blockers and stopping the run, which is what last year's big free-agent signing, Michael Pierce (6', 340 pounds), is perfect for. The other defensive tackle is responsible for creating penetration in the middle, which can give opposing quarterbacks trouble since they can't step up into the pocket and throw the ball. I say all of that to make one point: Dalvin Tomlinson (6'3", 320 pounds) is better suited for the nose tackle position. The Vikings are clearly making a concerted effort to stop the run in 2021, but in today's pass-happy NFL, I'm not sure that's a great strategy.

The other big free agent the Vikings brought in is someone who most football fans have heard of... cornerback Patrick Peterson. Since entering the league in 2011, Peterson has made the Pro Bowl eight times and has been named a First-Team All-Pro three times. There is no doubt he is a special talent. However, Peterson's best attribute has been his athleticism, which has started to wane over the last two seasons. Head coach Mike Zimmer's specialty is defensive backs, and he has been known to take older cornerbacks and revive their careers (most recently Terence Newman). The Vikings have invested many draft picks in recent years to overhaul their cornerbacks, which has led to the team having many young CBs on the roster who have plenty of potential. Peterson will bring to Minnesota a wealth of knowledge he can pass along to the younger players, which will be an added benefit. I'm just not sold that this was the best way for the team to spend what little salary cap space they had left.

So while there are a lot of reasons why bringing in Tomlinson (2 years, \$21 million) and Peterson (1 year, \$8 million) could be good moves, what concerns me is the Vikings don't have much more money to use in free agency, and there are still plenty of holes to fill. According to Spotrac.com., the Vikings only have \$3.3 million left, so unless they can convince good players to come to Minnesota for very little money, this could be a rough season. But then again, as Vikings fans, we're used to that by now. Skol!

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 4 of 66

#392 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Slight declines this week. We dropped below 50,000 new cases fewer times this week than last and even had a day above 60,000, which is worrisome, but today dropped below 40,000 again, just as we did last Sunday—weekend effect, I'm guessing. We are now at 29,842,300 cases in the US, 0.1% more than yesterday. There were just 38,120 new case reports today, lower than last week, which was the lowest since October. Hospitalizations are at a new low for this wave at 39,333 people hospitalized with this virus today, lowest since March 16.

We're up to six from four states and territories in the red zone, at 38 in orange, and have 10 in yellow. One-week increase in total cases was 427,300 last week and is down to 381,400 this week, so we're moving down again. Two-week increase was 840,600 last week and is down to 808,700 this week. I have us at a one-week daily average new-case number of 54,485.7, which 11 percent below last week. Overall, we're in better shape, but it concerns me that more states are in trouble. This says to me that we might have some forest fires to put out over the coming weeks, even if the whole country isn't in trouble; and that is still a worry.

I track 54 states and US territories, including the District of Columbia; and we have two over 10 percent increase in two weeks, Missouri at 11.19 percent and Vermont at 10.30 percent. We're up to four states above five percent from just one. Highest per capita rates of increase are in New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, Michigan, and the District of Columbia; all but one of these were among the leaders a week ago.

There have been 541,935 deaths in the US in this pandemic, 0.1% more than we had yesterday. There were 466 deaths reported today; we haven't been below 500 daily deaths since November 11. This is the first week we've had fewer than 10,000 deaths since November 15, four months ago. States with the most per capita deaths this week were Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Georgia, Texas, and Massachusetts.

On March 21, 2020, one year ago today, we had 23,662 cases in the US in all 50 states and three territories. New York and New Jersey were becoming the new hot spot, a worst-in-the-nation status they retained for a very long time; New York would lead the nation in total cases for over five months—until late into July. There had been 322 deaths in 31 states, well over half of them in Washington and New York. We'd gone in two weeks from 437 cases and 19 deaths to 23,662 cases and 322 deaths. Hawaii was imposing a 14-day quarantine on new arrivals in the state. The first case was reported in a federal prison; that went nowhere good in the ensuing months. As of Friday, there have been 1884 cases and 230 deaths in the federal prison system during this pandemic. Doctors were being advised to refrain from testing patients except where a test result would change the treatment course; this was, of course, due to a shortage of tests. With six times their population and many, many more cases, we had run barely more tests than South Korea had.

Worldwide, we were up to 303,001 cases and 12,944 deaths. Italy was up to 53,578 cases and 4825 deaths; it has passed China for total deaths. Spain was looking rough with 25,000 cases and 1326 deaths. The UK was up to over 5000 cases and 233 deaths. One month before, there had been just over 1000 cases outside China; now there were close to a quarter-million. There were 30 cruise ships wandering over the world's oceans, looking for a port that would permit them to dock. We were a world looking straight ahead at disaster. Which came.

There are some preliminary studies out that indicate it's possible vaccination with an mRNA vaccine (either Moderna or Pfizer/BioNTech) during pregnancy might result in antibodies being transferred to a fetus before birth through the placenta and after birth in breast milk. It also indicates pregnant people have pretty much the same immune response to vaccine as nonpregnant ones, which would mean the vaccine is presumably effective when given during pregnancy. One of the studies also found that the Moderna vaccine elicited higher levels of a particular class of antibody known as IgA, a type found on mucous membranes, the linings of various body cavities, including the gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts. The work is all in preprint, so it hasn't been peer reviewed, but this is an interesting possibility. I'll add that transfer of antibodies isn't a critically important issue; the far greater threat to a fetus is not being infected after

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 5 of 66

birth; it is that the mother gets Covid-19 while pregnant. That has serious implications for both mother and fetus, so the better reason for a pregnant person to be vaccinated is to protect her during the pregnancy.

Most states have now opened up vaccination to meatpacking workers. You may recall that, early in the pandemic, meatpacking plants were foci of outbreaks in several states; back last March and April, the ten biggest outbreaks in the country were nearly all at meatpacking plants and prisons. There have been mass vaccination clinics put on at the plants, and a great deal of effort has gone into educating the workers to increase vaccine acceptance. In a plant in Worthington, Minnesota, for example, union representatives have made several visits over the past several weeks to provide information to workers; in the end, some 1500 of 1850 members signed up to be vaccinated. We could use those kinds of numbers across the country.

With Ramadan approaching, there has also been an educational effort with Muslim communities in the US. During Ramadan, observant Muslims are not permitted food or drink from dawn to dusk each day, and there have been questions asked whether an intake of vaccine would break the fast. Fortunately, here is general agreement on this point among Islamic scholars who are advising that taking vaccine does not break the fast. Muslim organizations around the country have joined in a cooperative effort, taking advice from scholars of Muslim law, so they can help people to make informed decisions about vaccination. This group is also working to spread the word that there is no cause for spiritual concern about the vaccines and their components. We talked a while back about potential concerns in this regard, so I won't repeat all of that here; but the bottom line is that there are no problematic components, and vaccines are not subject to dietary laws anyway. In any case, according to Muslim law, the imperative to protect lives in society would supersede concerns about the composition of the vaccines.

The stories we're hearing from the beaches of Florida certainly do give one pause. There have been curfew violations and scuffles with police attempting to bring crowds under control. There have also been arrests. I'm going to guess South Florida will be relieved when spring break is over. Let's hope the relief lasts without a spike to spoil things.

Way back last summer, we talked about a possible association between ABO blood type and susceptibility to Covid-19. At the time I first mentioned it, I'd seen a paper in preprint written about a small study indicating there was an association seen in patients in China. If you're interested in that conversation, which provides a description of the theoretical work done at that time, you can find it in my Update #116 posted June 18 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3693558790660500>. Then, about a month later, there was another study published which seemed to indicate that in a larger sample the association disappeared. That was discussed in my Update #143 posted July 15 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3774546619228383>. I figured this would be the end of the matter. I guess I was wrong about that.

Now there's been additional work done which has experimentally established that, at least in the laboratory, SARS-CoV-2 does have a particular affinity for the kind of ABO(H) antigen found, in type A people. Thing is, these ABO(H) antigens are expressed not just on red blood cells, but also on tissue cells, and there are tiny chemical differences between the precise structures of the antigen in these two different kinds of cells. As it turns out, SARS-CoV-2 has no particular affinity for the ABO(H) antigen on type A blood cells, but it has a strong affinity for the antigen on type A people's respiratory epithelium—and that's where the virus latches on first. Additionally, it appears that, since non-type A individuals have antibodies that interact with that particular ABO(H) antigen found in type A people, it could be those antibodies interfere with the receptor binding domain (RBD) of the virus which is keyed-in to that antigen; hard to say how this plays out at this point. So it looks like we're back on the maybe-blood-type-matters-after-all bus. There remains plenty of work ahead before we can say with any kind of assurance whether this is a real thing—and more work after that before we know whether it matters in terms of therapeutic implications. I guess we'll see where the science takes us from here. (And for the record, this is the sort of thing that happens in science all the time. Turns out science is generally a whole lot messier than it looks in your 8th -grade science book. Who knew?)

Wei Li left a life as a university professor and immigrated from China with her husband and daughter, Jing, some 30 years ago. After they arrived, they had a second daughter, Lisa; and Li's time was taken

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 6 of 66

up with raising her daughters and, with her husband, making a life for the family. It was after both girls had graduated college and established themselves in the world that Li had time to indulge more of her personal interests. Among those interests was dance; growing up in a small town in China during the Cultural Revolution, dance wasn't the sort of thing that happened, ever. She told The Lily, "I never took a dancing class." But now, she was in the US and had the time, and so, at the age of 55, she started ballet. There were classes once a week at first, and then she moved to two classes a week. An avid hiker and gardener, dance wasn't much of a stretch for her fitness level, although she said she is now in the best shape of her life.

Of course, one of the casualties of the pandemic and the ensuing stay-at-home orders in her home city of Portland, Oregon, was things like in-person dance class. Li didn't let that slow her down: She went to three-times-a-week classes over Zoom, using her kitchen countertop as her barre. Then she started watching YouTube demonstrations of traditional Chinese dance and broke those down into their components so she could learn them as well.

One thing led to another, and before you know it, Li, now 62, is teaching dance twice a week via Zoom to 38 friends around the world. She said, "Since last year I teach my friends dancing also. My teaching isn't professional, and there's no charge. Just an open Zoom class for my friends. They enjoy it." She is teaching a blend of ballet and the Chinese dances she's learning in four countries: the US, Canada, England, and China. She is also teaching balance and flexibility. "I teach people body control and body movements. How to hold your leg or point your foot."

So she is dancing five days a week, and her daughters couldn't be more pleased. Lisa told The Lily, "There's actually a nine-year age gap between my sister and me, because Jing was born in China, and I was born in America when my mom was 36. So most of that time, between Mom's 30s and 50s, was really spent trying to just get me over the stinking finish line, graduate from college, get me working. Jing heads up a video game studio. I am the operations manager in digital projects for Snopes.com. But none of that would be possible without mom, if she hadn't sacrificed a lot of her own personal time and her own physical energy. It's just so beautiful and wonderful to be able to see Mom have her chance to flourish."

We should all aim to flourish despite our circumstances during what I hope is the end of this pandemic. And it wouldn't hurt the rest of us to get in Li's kind of shape too. Meanwhile, let's just admire this woman's resilience and recognize the world's not that bad a place when women in their 60s can realize their dreams.

Be well. I'll be back tomorrow.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 7 of 66

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	2841	2734	6053	39	Substantial	14.9%
Bennett	385	371	1193	9	Minimal	3.1%
Bon Homme	1512	1482	2127	26	Minimal	1.5%
Brookings	3712	3579	12340	37	Substantial	3.7%
Brown	5240	5085	13024	91	Moderate	6.2%
Brule	700	684	1905	9	Minimal	3.2%
Buffalo	422	407	903	13	Minimal	8.3%
Butte	1006	977	3275	20	Moderate	6.7%
Campbell	131	127	263	4	Minimal	0.0%
Charles Mix	1328	1262	4027	21	Substantial	7.2%
Clark	395	370	963	5	Minimal	16.7%
Clay	1840	1796	5540	15	Substantial	6.2%
Codington	4136	3948	9859	79	Substantial	21.6%
Corson	474	460	1013	12	Minimal	9.1%
Custer	775	751	2773	12	Moderate	3.5%
Davison	3034	2913	6715	66	Substantial	13.4%
Day	682	643	1822	29	Moderate	3.6%
Deuel	488	465	1161	8	Minimal	5.0%
Dewey	1435	1406	3897	26	Substantial	6.9%
Douglas	439	426	933	9	Minimal	6.5%
Edmunds	489	470	1085	13	Minimal	14.8%
Fall River	558	536	2691	15	Substantial	4.5%
Faulk	363	348	708	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	994	936	2300	40	Moderate	5.0%
Gregory	566	517	1318	30	Moderate	4.0%
Haakon	260	247	548	10	Minimal	14.3%
Hamlin	737	684	1836	38	Moderate	4.3%
Hand	356	336	843	6	Moderate	9.1%
Hanson	374	364	744	4	Moderate	13.6%
Harding	92	91	187	1	Minimal	0.0%
Hughes	2346	2284	6727	36	Moderate	2.2%
Hutchinson	803	764	2443	26	Moderate	0.0%

Groton Daily Independent

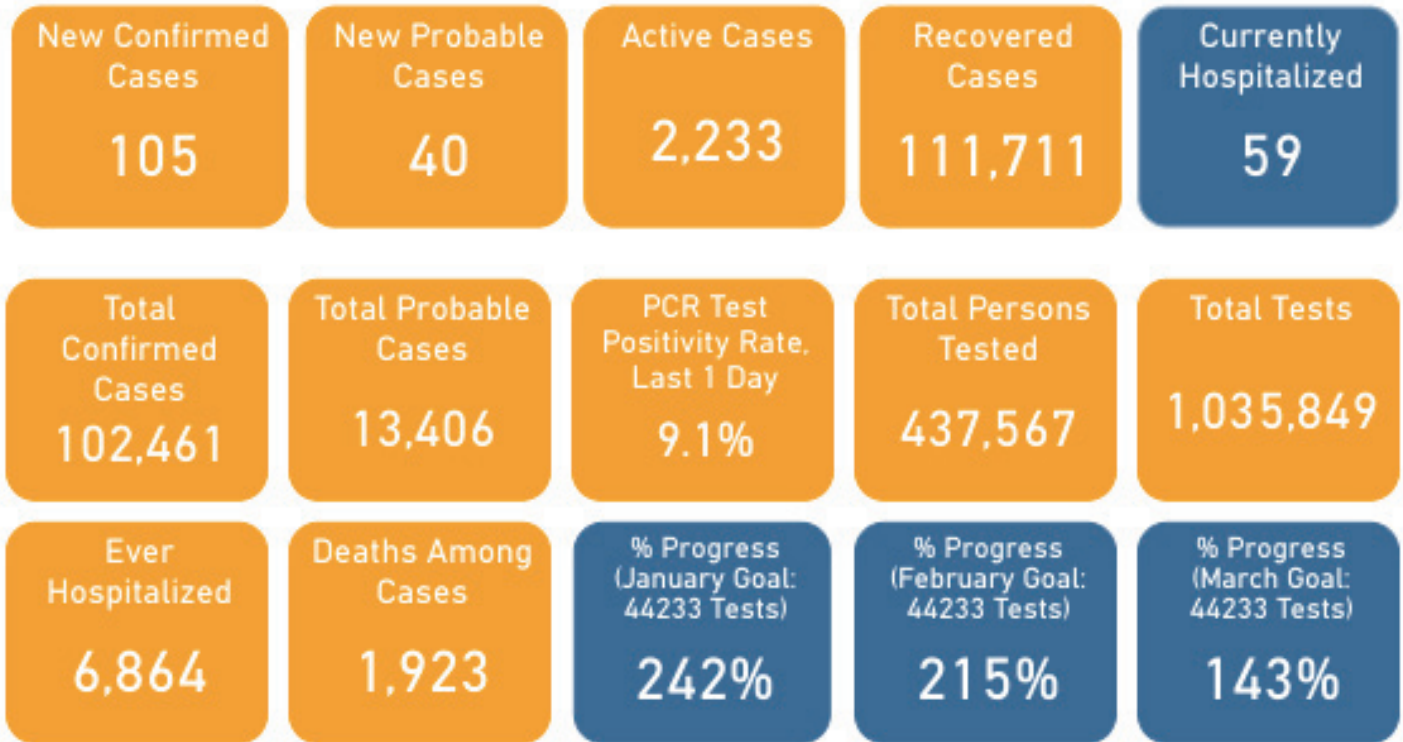
Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 8 of 66

Hyde	140	138	421	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	284	268	920	14	Minimal	9.1%
Jerauld	275	253	568	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	89	88	229	0	None	0.0%
Kingsbury	671	634	1708	14	Moderate	2.4%
Lake	1265	1186	3471	18	Substantial	12.7%
Lawrence	2878	2816	8646	45	Moderate	2.0%
Lincoln	8051	7785	20793	77	Substantial	10.5%
Lyman	613	592	1901	10	Moderate	6.5%
Marshall	361	327	1241	6	Substantial	10.0%
McCook	770	728	1686	24	Substantial	19.4%
McPherson	240	234	565	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2673	2603	7877	31	Moderate	7.4%
Mellette	255	250	748	2	Moderate	0.0%
Miner	282	261	592	9	Minimal	10.0%
Minnehaha	29026	28037	80286	340	Substantial	9.4%
Moody	623	602	1791	17	Minimal	0.0%
Oglala Lakota	2081	2012	6701	49	Moderate	9.2%
Pennington	13168	12821	40220	191	Moderate	6.2%
Perkins	351	333	836	14	Minimal	0.0%
Potter	387	375	856	4	Moderate	13.8%
Roberts	1288	1203	4245	36	Substantial	18.7%
Sanborn	336	328	704	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	819	780	2176	26	Moderate	9.4%
Stanley	339	337	958	2	Minimal	4.3%
Sully	137	134	325	3	None	0.0%
Todd	1221	1190	4177	29	Minimal	1.5%
Tripp	728	696	1513	16	Substantial	11.9%
Turner	1116	1025	2791	53	Substantial	20.8%
Union	2083	1959	6451	40	Substantial	11.3%
Walworth	740	709	1852	15	Moderate	12.8%
Yankton	2872	2783	9548	28	Moderate	9.0%
Ziebach	337	327	878	9	Minimal	0.0%
Unassigned	0	0	1924	0		

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 9 of 66

South Dakota



RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
White, Non-Hispanic	86678	75%
Native American, Non-Hispanic	13660	12%
Unknown, Non-Hispanic	5567	5%
Hispanic	4204	4%
Black, Non-Hispanic	2571	2%
Other, Non-Hispanic	1692	1%
Asian, Non-Hispanic	1495	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	60292	905
Male	55575	1018

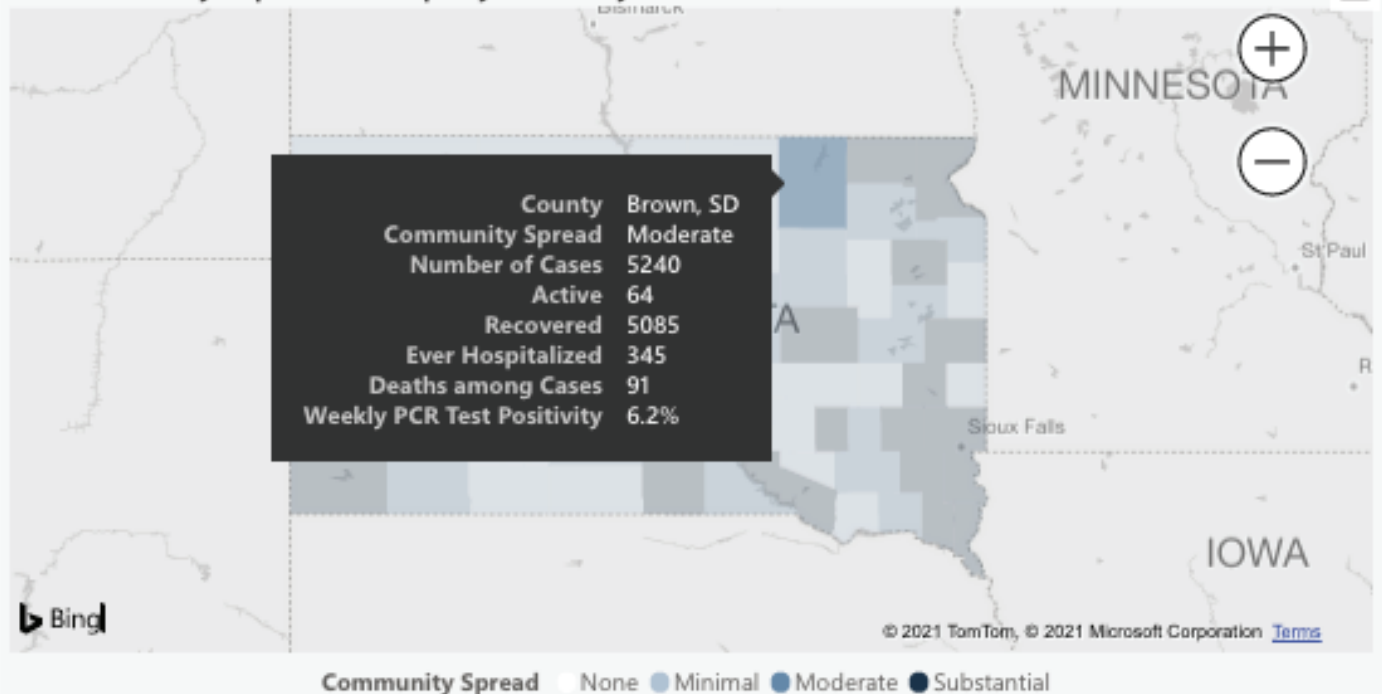
Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 10 of 66

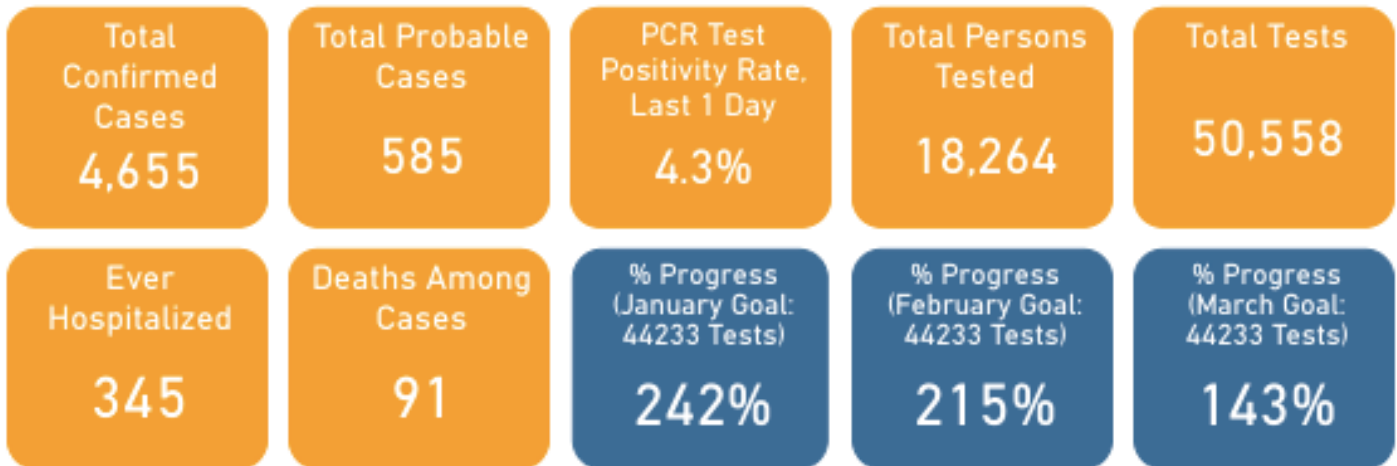
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



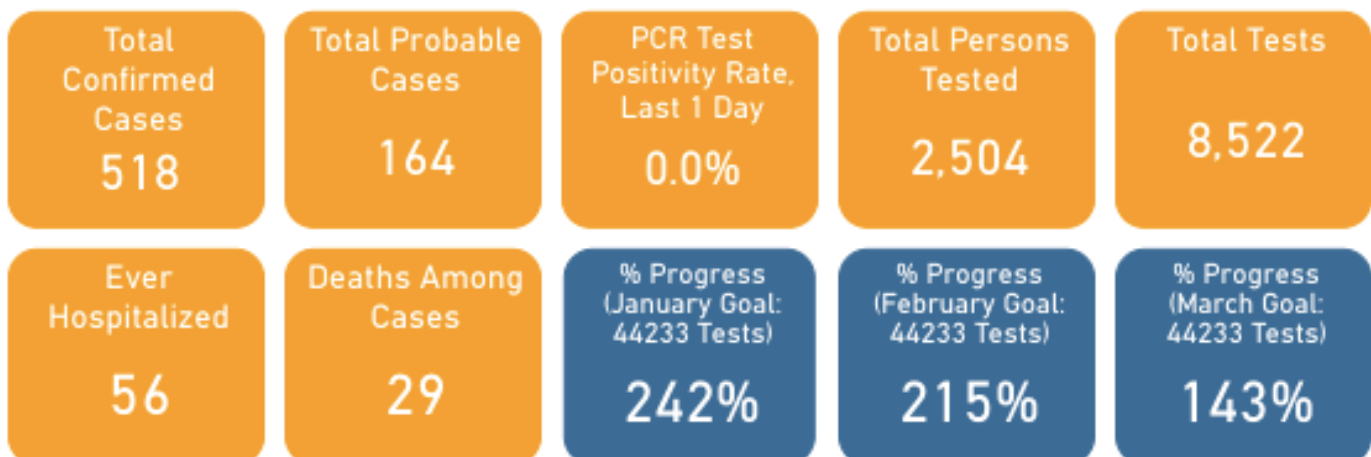
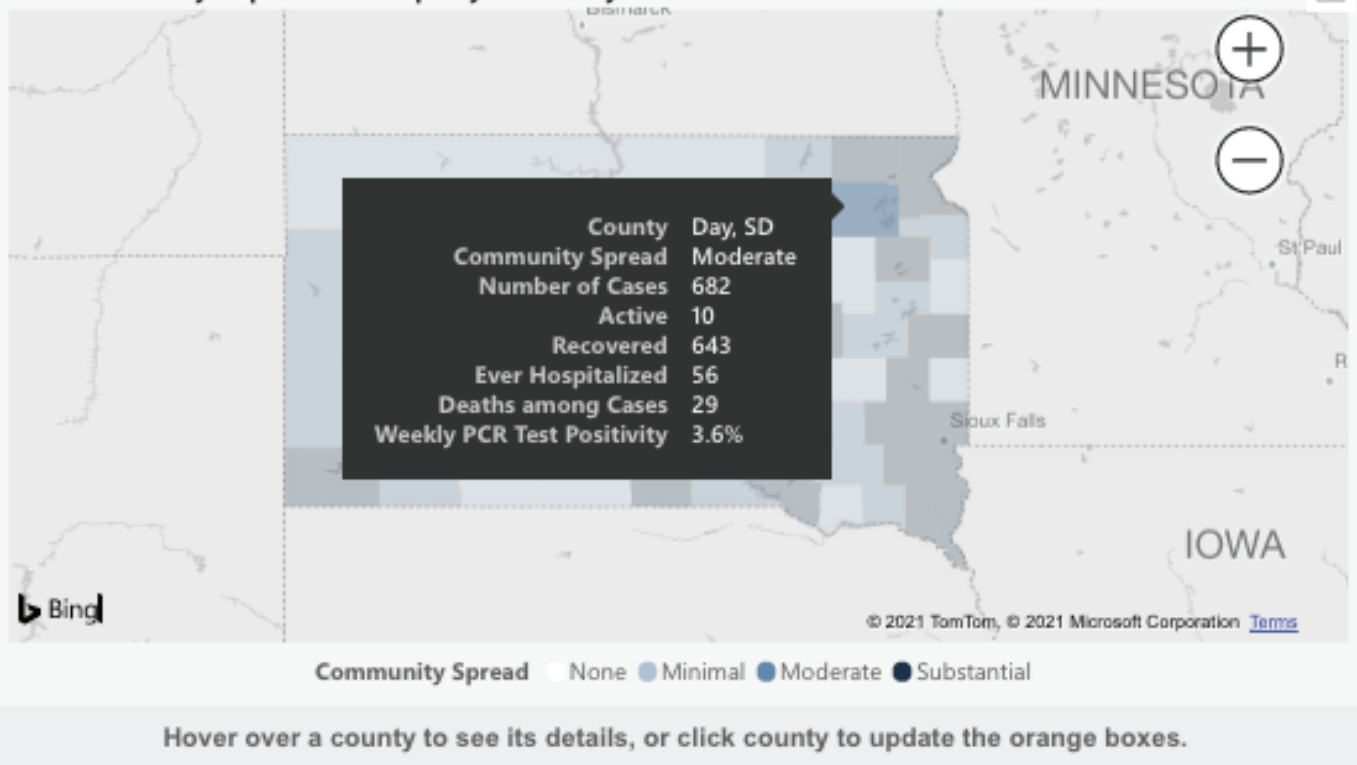
Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 11 of 66

Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 12 of 66

Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

347,275

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	4,679
Moderna	167,968
Pfizer	174,628

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

217,278

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	4,679
Moderna - 1 dose	43,048
Moderna - Series Complete	62,460
Pfizer - 1 dose	39,578
Pfizer - Series Complete	67,525

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

37%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	37.13%
Series Complete	23.12%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,052	358	347	705
Beadle	7,233	2,110	2,561	4,671
Bennett*	486	132	177	309
Bon Homme*	4,019	887	1,566	2,453
Brookings	10,687	4,167	3,260	7,427
Brown	16,287	4,279	6,004	10,283
Brule*	1,986	494	746	1,240
Buffalo*	136	78	29	107
Butte	2,415	883	766	1,649
Campbell	1,178	184	497	681
Charles Mix*	3,544	1,164	1,190	2,354
Clark	1,411	459	476	935
Clay	5,719	1,713	2,003	3,716
Codington*	10,755	2,919	3,918	6,837
Corson*	313	71	121	192
Custer*	3,113	861	1,126	1,987
Davison	8,452	2,340	3,056	5,396
Day*	2,859	863	998	1,861
Deuel	1,684	500	592	1,092
Dewey*	388	64	162	226
Douglas*	1,357	375	491	866
Edmunds	1,498	424	537	961
Fall River*	2,783	681	1,051	1,732
Faulk	1,170	340	415	755
Grant*	2,886	1,066	910	1,976
Gregory*	1,954	538	708	1,246
Haakon*	568	148	210	358

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 13 of 66

Hamlin	1,956	552	702	1,254
Hand	1,597	507	545	1,052
Hanson	555	184	185	369
Harding	119	51	34	85
Hughes*	8,711	1,965	3,373	5,338
Hutchinson*	3,869	974	1,447	2,421
Hyde*	586	162	212	374
Jackson*	432	118	157	275
Jerauld	1,009	313	348	661
Jones*	684	146	269	415
Kingsbury	2,744	950	897	1,847
Lake	4,559	1,545	1,507	3,052
Lawrence	9,259	3,111	3,074	6,185
Lincoln	28,033	5,632	11,199	16,831
Lyman*	883	259	312	571
Marshall*	2,049	667	691	1,358
McCook	2,359	593	883	1,476
McPherson	279	69	105	174
Meade*	6,981	1,809	2,586	4,395
Mellette*	52	14	19	33
Miner	969	277	346	623
Minnehaha*	88,289	18,894	34,695	53,589
Moody*	2,023	733	645	1,378
Oglala Lakota*	188	56	66	122
Pennington*	40,646	8,900	15,873	24,773
Perkins*	744	254	245	499
Potter	1,006	332	337	669
Roberts*	4,739	1,177	1,781	2,958
Sanborn	1,127	359	384	743
Spink	3,375	879	1,248	2,127
Stanley*	1,338	276	531	807
Sully	416	92	162	254
Todd*	178	44	67	111
Tripp*	2,211	473	869	1,342
Turner	3,931	800	1,565	2,365
Union	3,569	1,355	1,107	2,462
Walworth*	2,039	393	823	1,216
Yankton	11,242	2,472	4,385	6,857
Ziebach*	59	13	23	36
Other	6,537	1,795	2,371	4,166

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Social Security
Disability Benefits?**

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FIGHTING FOR YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY BENEFITS FOR OVER 25 YEARS!

You Could Be Eligible To Receive:



Steady monthly income
depending on your paid
in amount



A lump sum payment
of benefits owed from
back-pay



Annual cost of living
increases

- We simplify the process & strive for quick claim approval
- Starting the process is easy and takes only minutes to complete

BILL GORDON
&
ASSOCIATES

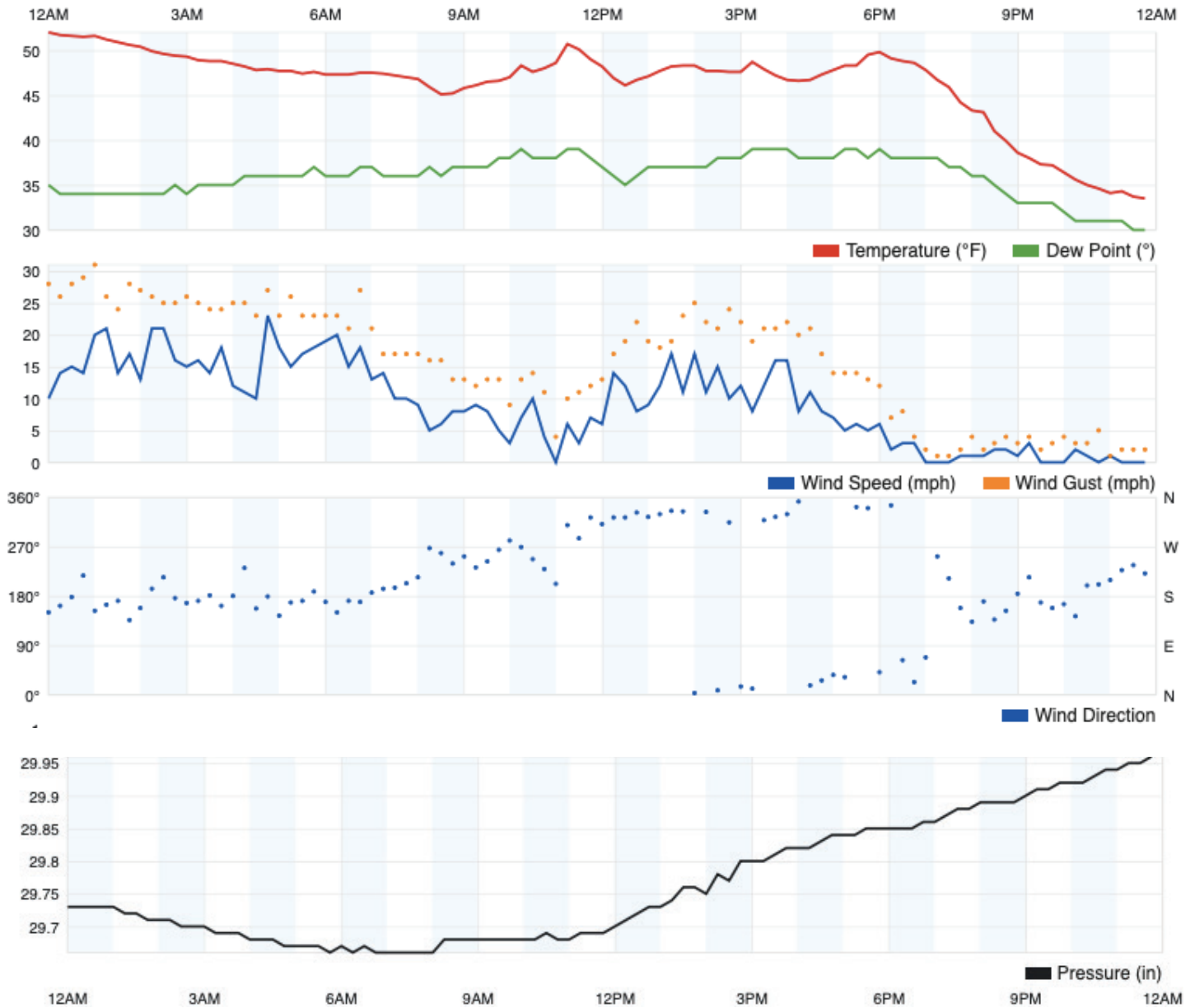
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Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 15 of 66

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

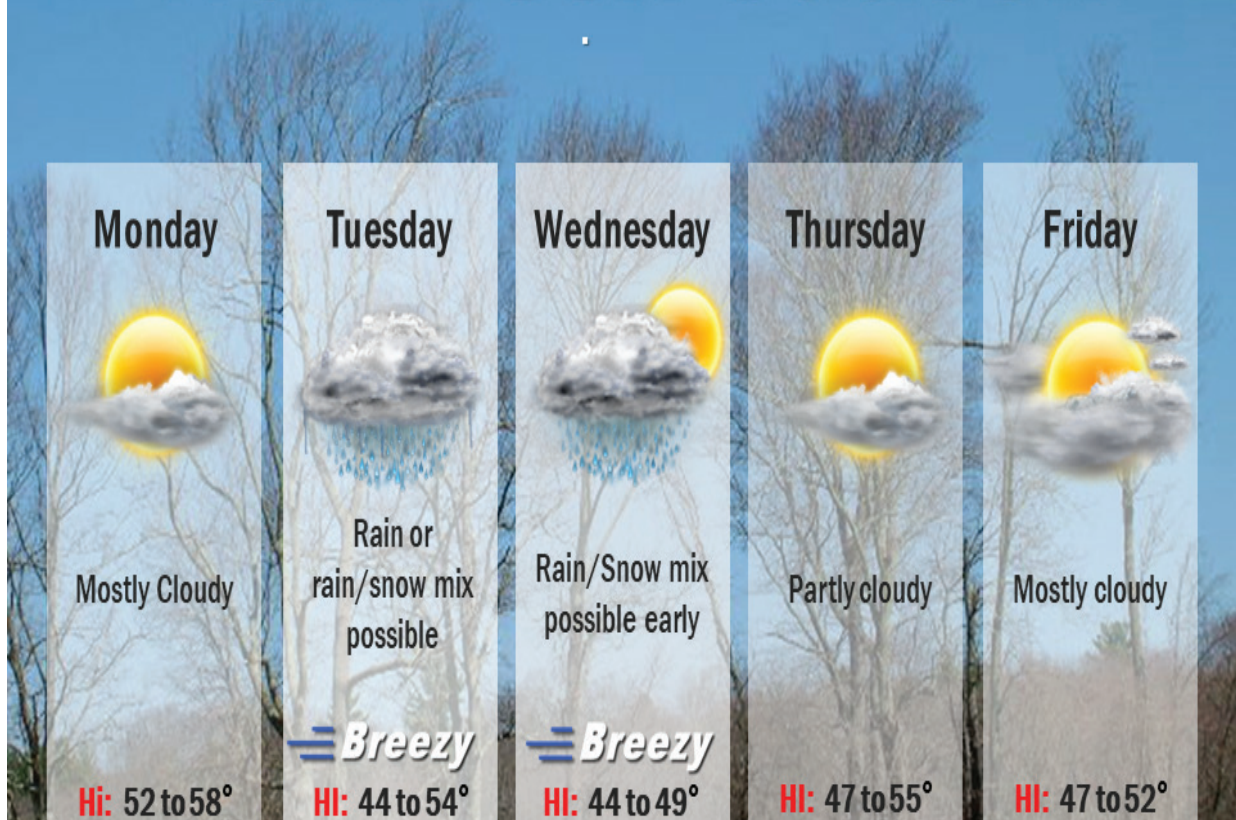


Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 16 of 66

Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Rain and Breezy	Chance Rain and Breezy	Breezy. Chance Snow then Partly Sunny
High: 56 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 48 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 47 °F

Workweek Outlook



Above normal highs continue, generally in the upper 40s and 50s. Tuesday morning through Wednesday afternoon is the next chance for precipitation in the region. While mostly rain is expected, a mix of rain and snow is possible during the cooler hours.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 17 of 66

Today in Weather History

March 22, 1966: The blizzard began on the 22nd in the west, moving southeastward into Nebraska and then moving northeastward across the southeastern part of South Dakota. Winds up to 50 mph caused blowing snow, which reduced visibility to near zero. Seven to 8 inches of snow fell on the plains of South Dakota with up to 2 feet in the Black Hills. Traffic was paralyzed due to snow-blocked roads. Schools and many businesses were closed. One death was attributed to the storm to exposure and exhaustion. A heart attack indirectly caused one death in Sioux Falls.

March 22, 1987: Snowmelt and rainfall caused some rivers and small streams to rise to very high levels in central South Dakota. Lowland flooding around the basins occurred, submerging some minor roads and streets. Also, high water levels and ice damaged some railroad bridges between Wakpala and Mahto in Corson County.

March 22, 2009: A stretch of warmer weather occurred from March 14th to 17th, which resulted in high temperatures in the 40s and low 50s. The snow depth in Fargo on the 14th was 15 inches, with a melted water equivalent of 3.10 inches. By the 17th, the snow depth in Fargo had dropped to 6 inches. The snow was followed by a couple of colder days, which temporarily slowed down any additional snowmelt. The second period of warmer weather began on March 20th and continued through the 24th. During this period, high temperatures again climbed into the 40s and low 50s. Most of the remaining snow in Fargo melted during this stretch of warm weather, with the Fargo snow depth falling from 2 inches to 0. Conditions were about the same in Grand Forks, with the snow depth dropping to 0 by the 24th. These two warm-ups resulted in the quick response in river levels, especially across the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. The Red River also rosed, especially in the southern part of the Red River Valley. With all the runoff moving into the river systems, water covered many roads and resulted in numerous road closures. The water covered entire sections of land as well and threatened many homes. A winter storm event on March 24th and 25th brought more snow to the region, along with a turn to colder temperatures. This resulted in the first crest for many rivers in the southern Red River Valley and west-central Minnesota. However, river levels at most points along the Red River continued to stay high. Another winter storm event hit much of the area March 30th to 31st, dropping up to 2 feet of snow in the southern Red River Valley. There was a lot of moisture in this new snow, with snow to liquid ratios of less than 10 to 1. This set the stage for continued flooding into April and early May. The North Dakota Governor issued a statewide disaster declaration on March 13 in anticipation of spring flooding. Most counties in eastern North Dakota later received a Presidential Disaster Declaration.

1888: Chicago's morning low dips to one degree below zero, the latest sub-zero Fahrenheit reading in the city's history. This record still stands today.

1893: The first tornado was recorded in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on this date. It destroyed 14 buildings and injured four people as it passed through the center of town. There was minor damage to the Weather Bureau office, which was located at Grand and Robinson in south Oklahoma City.

1920: A spectacular display of the "Northern Lights" was visible as far south as Bradenton FL, El Paso, TX and Fresno, CA. At Detroit MI, the display was described "so brilliant as to blot out all-stars below the first magnitude."

1936 - A great flood crested on rivers from Ohio to Maine. The flood claimed 107 lives and caused 270 million dollars property damage. (David Ludlum)

1954 - Six to ten inch rains caused the Chicago River to overflow its banks. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An intense storm produced heavy snow in the southern and central Rockies, and high winds from southern California to West Texas. Wolf Creek Pass CO received 24 inches of snow, and winds gusted to 69 mph at Ruidoso NM. Blizzard conditions were reported in eastern Colorado. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

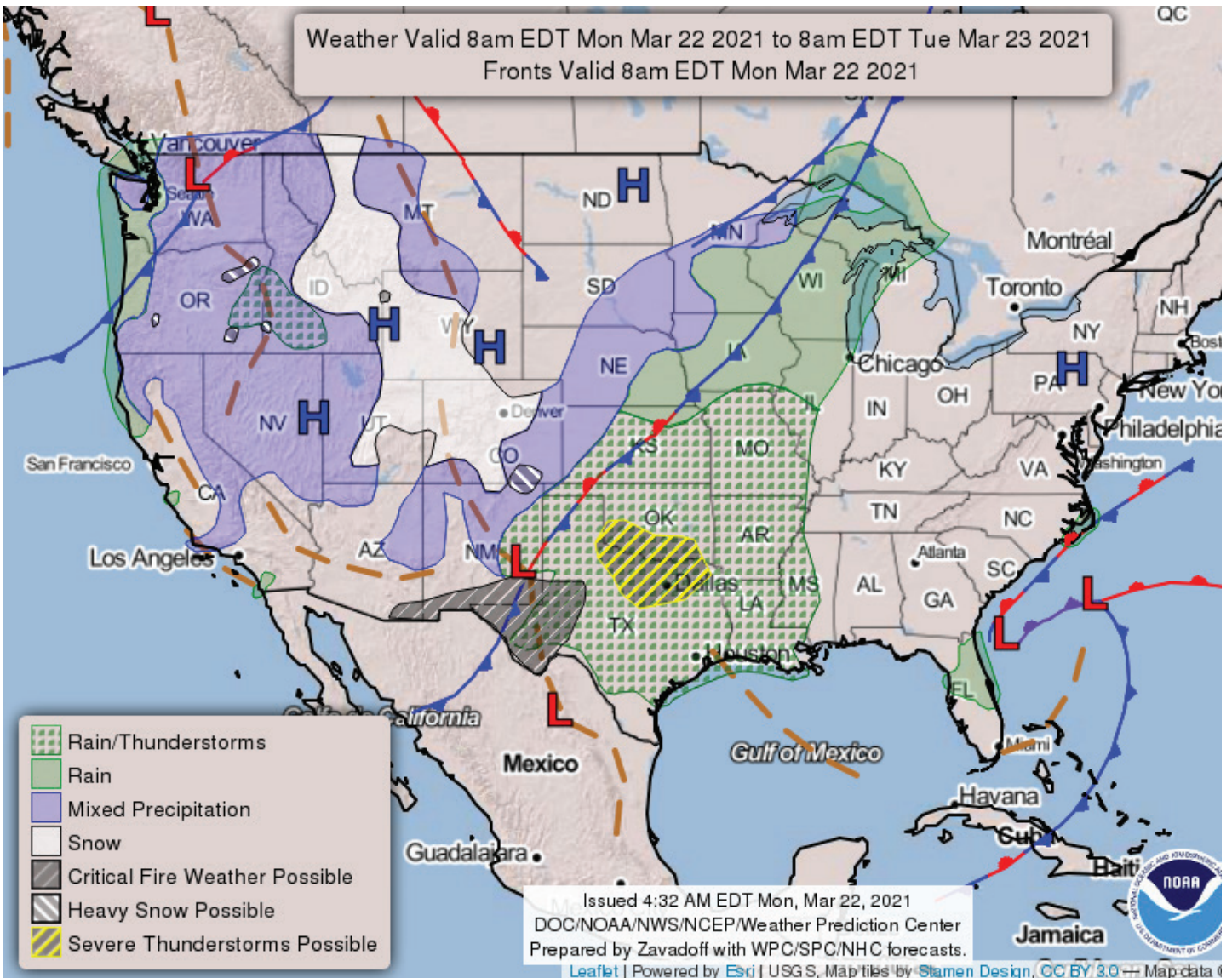
Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 18 of 66

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 52 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 33 °F at 11:55 PM
Wind: 31 mph at 12:58 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 79° in 1907
Record Low: -16° in 1899
Average High: 43°F
Average Low: 22°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.71
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.35
Average Precip to date: 1.73
Precip Year to Date: 0.53
Sunset Tonight: 7:49 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:30 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 19 of 66



LIFE'S FINAL MOMENTS

If the two options we have in life are faith or fear, then we can come to enjoy and take comfort in the peace we have in a living God who is our light, salvation, and hope. If we do not have a hope that comes from the Lord, we are condemned to a life of anguish as we move toward our final hours on earth.

Bertrand Russell said, "The older I get the more nervous I become." In contrast to his fear is the faith we see in Pope John XXIII. Two weeks before his death he said, "My bags are packed. I'm ready to go!"

David had an unusual boldness as he faced life and death. "Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident." Imagine this if you can: Even though he is confronted by an army or fighting to win a war or trying to survive with his very life, he says that "I am confident." Confident of what? His well-trained troops and their weapons? His superior skills as a leader?

Indeed not. His confidence was in his Lord who was his light, salvation, and hope. The word David uses for confidence in this verse means to feel secure or to be unconcerned. His confidence, the security he enjoyed when facing the uncertainties of life and the possibilities of death, was in the Lord Himself.

David's passion was to live in the Lord's house and to behold His beauty forever. Living in the Lord's house means much more than being an occasional visitor. It implies being a resident now and in eternity. To behold His beauty means to enjoy God's goodness and blessings today, tomorrow, and through eternity. Have you accepted His invitation?

Prayer: How blest we are, Father, to know that faith in You gives us hope for this life and the one to come. Thank You for Your grace and salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident. Psalm 27:3

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 20 of 66

2021 Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

Sanford residency doctors wind up in front line of COVID-19

By MORGAN MATZEN Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Doctoral students in the Sanford Health residency program in Pierre have served as the front line for COVID-19 patients for the last year, along with the physicians they're learning from.

Residents are graduates with both a Bachelor's and doctoral degree, who spend three or more years in a residency at a hospital, working under practicing physicians to further advance their skills and education before becoming board-certified in their area of specialization.

Both Dr. Abigail Serpan, a third-year resident from Kansas, and Dr. Maurice Chessmore, a second-year resident from Nebraska, took up their family medicine residency in Pierre during the pandemic through Sanford School of Medicine at the University of South Dakota in Sioux Falls. Serpan describes the residency as an "apprenticeship."

The residents said much of their training was "Covid-focused."

"A positive challenge, or something we've learned from Covid from a residency standpoint is that out here, we are the frontline for a lot of the Covid patients that we see," Chessmore said.

One of the patients Chessmore saw in the clinic was a few days into her Covid illness. He saw her in the emergency room in Pierre days later. Then, she had to go into the hospital and was flown in to Sioux Falls, before she came back to the Pierre emergency room once again, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

"It's been challenging seeing what COVID-19 has done to people's lives, and how real it is," he said. "It's a challenge to see the people that suffer from it, and the problems and long-term complications that patients are having from it is a challenge from any provider's standpoint."

Serpan was in Pierre six months prior to the pandemic and said she can see the difference between what she called normal era and pandemic era.

"There has been a big change with how folks treat coming to the doctor," she said.

Less patients came in, because they were following recommendations to stay home, she said.

Completing a residency in the pandemic also taught the both doctors-in-training some new things.

Serpan said she learned more about ventilator management, being on the frontlines and working as a team to solve problems. It was a more "hands-on experience," she said.

Telemedicine played an important part in her residency experience, too, she said, noting the tele-visits aren't likely to go away any time soon because how important the technology is to connect physicians and patients.

Chessmore said he was exposed to more in a rural hospital setting in Pierre than he was in a more urban hospital setting like Sioux Falls, such as being responsible for making decisions on incoming trauma cases.

He said he also learned the importance of keeping up-to-date on the medical literature and information, especially on masking guidance, hydroxychloroquine trials and COVID-19 treatments.

"You have to know your stuff, and you have to be comfortable handling challenging situations," he said. "That's the point to this residency program. Nothing would scare me more than being at a big volume system and never having to manage a trauma on my own."

As she nears the end of her residency, Serpan said working in a rural setting is a positive experience. She grew closer with her patients, and they were always excited to see her.

"You see your patients in the neighborhood, and you're a big influence in the smaller communities," she said. "Not just being a doctor, but a lot of physicians will go on to be part of the school board or city council. You're a part of the community, and (you) help build the community."

"That's something Covid has shown us," she added. "The community comes together."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 22 of 66

Engstler leads Syracuse over South Dakota State 72-55

By JIM VERTUNO AP Sports Writer

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Two years ago, Syracuse got bounced out of the NCAA Tournament off its home court.

Fast forward to Sunday against the same opponent and a matchup 1,700 miles south, the Orange served up some payback.

Emily Engstler scored 18 points and made three 3-pointers in the fourth quarter and No. 8-seed Syracuse pulled away from No. 9 South Dakota State for a 72-55 first-round win that had a sweet taste of revenge.

"It was definitely ammunition for us," Engstler said, "and it looks like we answered very well."

Syracuse advanced to the second round to play the winner of No. 1 seed UConn and No. 16 High Point in San Antonio.

Syracuse led 50-48 to open the fourth quarter before Engstler struck from long range on consecutive baskets for the Orange and Syracuse slowly pulled away from there. Her third from long range took two bounces on the rim before falling in to put Syracuse ahead 66-52 with 3:19 to play.

The Orange (15-8) had five players score in double figures in a methodical offense that produced points from everywhere, including 12 3-pointers. Senior guard Tiana Mangakahia had 11 points and seven assists.

Paiton Burckhard had 17 points for South Dakota State (21-4).

Syracuse started quickly behind Mangakahia and freshman center Kamilla Cardoso only to see the Jackrabbits mount a steady comeback and take a 28-25 lead early in the second quarter.

The Orange closed the period with a 10-3 run that included 3-pointers from Digna Strautmene and Engstler for a 37-31 lead at halftime.

Syracuse stretched the lead to nine when Mangakahia made a 3-pointer from the right wing. The Jackrabbits immediately responded behind Burckhard, who scored 11 points in the quarter and cut it to 43-42 with a short jumper.

Defensive pressure by the Orange unsettled the Jackrabbits in the backcourt in the fourth. A floater by Mangakahia off a steal pushed the Syracuse lead to 61-52 with 5:46 to play and the Orange were in control.

"Our pressure was just a factor. We were able to speed the game up," Syracuse coach Quinton Hillsman said. "I thought tonight we did a great job of knocking down 3s. When they doubled the post we made 12 3s in this game, and that was huge."

COMEBACK FROM CANCER

Mangakahia sat out last season after being diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer, which led to chemotherapy and a double mastectomy to remove fast-growing tumors. The Australian returned to lead the NCAA with 7.5 assists per game coming into the tournament.

MISSING POINTS

South Dakota State was missing the star of its 2019 upset. Myah Selland, the Summit League player of the year, has been out since a Feb. 19 injury.

"That's definitely a thought in the back of all our minds, but we had a really good season with Myah and we continued to play well without Myah," Burckhard said. "I'm not going to sit on it and dwell on it."

REBOUNDING BATTLE

The Jackrabbits don't start a player taller than 6-foot-2 yet controlled the rebounding for much of the game and finished with a 48-36 advantage over much-bigger Syracuse. They couldn't capitalize. The Jackrabbit grabbed 13 offensive rebounds but turned them into just six second-chance points.

"They definitely had a lot more size than we're normally used to playing in the Summit League," Burckhard said. "Just having to utilize our strength and just kind of having a different mentality when it comes to guarding 6-7 girls and guards that are 6-feet tall."

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

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 23 of 66

South Dakota active virus cases level, hospitalizations down

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Sunday reported no change in the number of active COVID-19 cases and a drop in hospitalizations.

The update showed 145 positive tests in the last day, increasing the total to 115,867 cases since the start of the pandemic. Active cases remained at 2,233, the report showed.

Hospitalizations dropped by 10 since Saturday, to 59. Of those patients, 13 are being treated in intensive care units and five are on ventilators.

The report listed one new death, a Brown County man in his 60s, upping the total number of fatalities to 1,923.

There were about 266 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks 14th in the country for new cases per capita, according to Johns Hopkins University researchers. One in every 717 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past week.

State health officials said Sunday that 347,275 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered to 217,278 people and 134,664 recipients have completed their dosages.

Saturday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

State Tournament=

Championship=

Class A=

Sioux Falls Christian 84, Sioux Valley 50

Class AA=

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 60, O Gorman 37

Class B=

DeSmet 59, Aberdeen Christian 43

Fifth Place=

Class A=

St. Thomas More 62, Chamberlain 49

Class AA=

Aberdeen Central 55, Brandon Valley 50

Class B=

White River 74, Lower Brule 72

Seventh Place=

Class A=

Vermillion 78, Winner 49

Class AA=

Mitchell 78, Harrisburg 72, OT

Class B=

Canistota 59, Lyman 44

Third Place=

Class A=

Dakota Valley 69, Dell Rapids 60

Class AA=

Yankton 62, Sioux Falls Washington 55

Class B=

Dell Rapids St. Mary 76, Viborg-Hurley 58

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

AstraZeneca: US data shows vaccine effective for all ages

By MARIA CHENG and LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writers

LONDON (AP) — AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine provided strong protection against sickness and eliminated hospitalizations and deaths from the disease across all age groups in a late-stage study in the United States, the company announced Monday.

AstraZeneca said its experts did not identify any safety concerns related to the vaccine, including finding no increased risk of rare blood clots identified in Europe.

Although AstraZeneca's vaccine has been authorized in more than 50 countries, it has not yet been given the green light in the U.S. — and has struggled to gain public trust amid a troubled rollout. The study comprised more than 30,000 volunteers, of whom two-thirds were given the vaccine while the rest got dummy shots.

In a statement, AstraZeneca said its COVID-19 vaccine was 79% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 and was 100% effective in stopping severe disease and hospitalization, though it has not yet published full data. Investigators said the vaccine worked across all ages, including older people — something experts wanted better data on. Two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine were given to people four weeks apart.

"These findings reconfirm previous results observed," said Ann Falsey, of the University of Rochester School of Medicine, who helped lead the trial. "It's exciting to see similar efficacy results in people over 65 for the first time."

The AstraZeneca shot is a pillar of a U.N.-backed project known as COVAX that aims to get COVID-19 vaccines to poorer countries, and it has also become a key tool in European countries' efforts to boost their sluggish vaccine rollouts.

Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia, said the results were reassuring but that more details were needed to back up AstraZeneca's claim that the vaccine was completely effective at preventing severe disease and hospitalization.

"It would be good to know how many severe cases occurred in the control group and so what the confidence intervals are for this 100% figure," said Hunter, who was not connected to the study. "But this should add confidence that the vaccine is doing what it is most needed for."

The early findings from the U.S. study are just one set of information AstraZeneca must submit to the Food and Drug Administration. An FDA advisory committee will publicly debate the evidence behind the shots before the agency decides whether to allow emergency use of the vaccine. In the past, the time between a company revealing efficacy data and a shot being authorized in the U.S. has been about a month.

Stephen Evans, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said the new data is important for two reasons: The findings will reassure the FDA, which is reluctant to rely on data obtained outside the United States, but they could also boost confidence more broadly in the shot.

"The benefits of these results will mainly be for the rest of the world where confidence in the AZ (AstraZeneca) vaccine has been eroded, largely by political and media comment," he said.

Scientists had hoped the U.S. study would clear up some of the confusion about just how well the shots really work, particularly in older people. Previous research suggested the vaccine was effective in younger populations, but there was no solid data proving its efficacy in those over 65, often those most vulnerable to COVID-19.

Britain first authorized the vaccine based on partial results from testing in the United Kingdom, Brazil and South Africa that suggested the shots were about 70% effective. But those results were clouded by a manufacturing mistake that led some participants to get just a half dose in their first shot — an error the researchers didn't immediately acknowledge.

Then came more questions, about how well the vaccine protected older adults and how long to wait before the second dose. Some European countries including Germany, France and Belgium initially withheld the shot from older adults and only reversed their decisions after new data suggested it was offering seniors protection.

AstraZeneca's vaccine development was rocky in the U.S., too. Last fall, the FDA suspended the company's study for an unusual six weeks, as frustrated regulators sought information about some neurologic complaints reported in Britain; ultimately, there was no evidence the vaccine was to blame.

Last week, more than a dozen countries, mostly in Europe, temporarily suspended their use of the AstraZeneca shot after reports it was linked to rare blood clots — even as international health agencies insisted the benefits of the vaccine outweighed the risks. On Thursday, the European Medicines Agency concluded after an investigation that the vaccine did not raise the overall risk of blood clots, but could not rule out that it was connected to two very rare types of clots. It recommended adding a warning about these cases to the vaccine's leaflet.

It's not unheard of for such rare problems to crop up as vaccines are rolled out since trials typically look at tens of thousands of people, and some issues are only seen once the shot is used in millions of people.

France, Germany, Italy and other countries subsequently resumed their use of the shot on Friday, with senior politicians rolling up their sleeves to show the vaccine was safe.

AstraZeneca said it would continue to analyze the U.S. data before submitting it to the FDA in the coming weeks. It said the data would also soon be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

The AstraZeneca shot is what scientists call a "viral vector" vaccine. The shots are made with a harmless virus, a cold virus that normally infects chimpanzees. It acts like a Trojan horse to carry the coronavirus's spike protein's genetic material into the body that in turn produces some harmless protein. That primes the immune system to fight if the real virus comes along.

Two other companies, Johnson & Johnson and China's CanSino Biologics, make COVID-19 vaccines using the same technology but using different cold viruses.

Neergaard reported from Washington.

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

On federal death row, inmates talk about Biden, executions

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — On federal death row, prisoners fling notes on a string under each other's cell doors and converse through interconnected air ducts. A top issue these days: whether President Joe Biden will halt executions, several told The Associated Press.

Biden hasn't spoken publicly about capital punishment since taking office four days after the Trump administration executed the last of 13 inmates at the Terre Haute, Indiana, penitentiary where all federal death row inmates are held. The six-month run of executions cut their unit from around 63 to 50. Biden's campaign website said he'd work to end federal executions, but he's never specified how.

Four inmates exchanged emails with the AP through a prison-monitored system they access during the two hours a day they are let out of their 12-by-7-foot, single-inmate cells. Biden's silence has them on edge, wondering whether political calculations will lead him to back off far-reaching action, like commuting their sentences to life in prison and endorsing legislation striking capital punishment from U.S. statutes.

"There's not a day that goes by that we're not scanning the news for hints of when or if the Biden administration will take meaningful action to implement his promises," said 36-year-old Rejon Taylor, sentenced to death in 2008 for killing an Atlanta restaurant owner.

Everyone on federal death row was convicted of killing someone, their victims often suffering brutal, painful deaths. The dead included children, bank workers and prison guards. One inmate, white supremacist Dylann Roof, killed nine Black members of a South Carolina church during a Bible study in 2015. Many Americans believe death is the only salve for such crimes.

Views of capital punishment, though, are shifting. One recent report found people of color are overrepresented on death rows nationwide. Some 40% of federal death row inmates are Black, compared with

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 26 of 66

about 13% of the U.S. population. With growing scrutiny of who gets sentenced to die and why, support for the death penalty has waned, and fewer executions are done overall. Virginia lawmakers recently voted to abolish it.

The prisoners expressed relief at Donald Trump's departure from the White House after he presided over more federal executions than any other president in 130 years. Gone is the ever-present fear that guards would appear at their cell door to say the warden needed to speak to them — dreaded words that meant your execution had been scheduled.

They described death row as a close-knit community where bonds are forged. All said they were still reeling from seeing friends escorted away for execution by lethal injection at a garage-size building nearby.

"When it's quiet here, which it often is, you'll hear someone say, 'Damn, I can't believe they're gone!' We all know what they are referencing," said Daniel Troya, sentenced in 2009 for participating in drug-related killings of a Florida man, his wife and their two children.

The federal executions during the coronavirus pandemic were likely superspreader events. In December, 70% of the death row inmates had COVID-19, some possibly infected via air ducts through which they communicate.

The AP attended all 13 federal executions.

Five of the first six inmates executed were white. Six of the last seven were Black, including Dustin Higgs, the final inmate put to death, on Jan. 16 for ordering the killing of three Maryland women.

Memories of speaking to Higgs just before his execution still pain Sherman Fields, who is on death row but has a resentencing for convictions in the killing of his girlfriend after escaping from a jail in Waco, Texas.

"He kept saying he's innocent and he didn't want to die," Fields, 46, said. "He's my friend. It was very hard."

While there were rumors Biden would take action on the death penalty in his first days as president, there have been no announcements. As he grapples with issues like the coronavirus and the economy, capital punishment appears to be on a back burner. Meanwhile, federal prosecutors are still saying they'll pursue death sentences.

The easier step politically for Biden would be to simply instruct his Justice Department not to carry out any executions during his presidency. That would spare inmates' lives for at least four years but would leave the door open for a future president to resume them.

The inmates first learned federal executions would restart after 17 years in 2019 when the first inmates were put on execution lists. More were added throughout 2020.

Through last year, inmates would flinch whenever they heard the jangle of thick key rings as a larger-than-normal contingent of guards entered their floor. That sound meant guards would soon stop at an inmate's door and that he'd soon be in the warden's office to be handed his death warrant.

When a frantic Keith Nelson, convicted of raping and killing a Kansas girl, kept saying a year ago he was sure he'd be selected next to die, one inmate yelled at him to "shut up," that he was unnerving everyone else, Troya recalled. Nelson was executed on Aug. 28.

Emotions ran high as execution days approached. As guards led condemned men away, other inmates shouted, "Come on! Fight 'em!" Troya said. None appeared to resist.

Inmates can't access the regular internet but could follow news of last-minute appeals on TVs in their cells. When broadcasts confirmed an execution had been carried out, Taylor said, a hush fell on death row, followed by a chorus of curses.

Inmates know that Biden, while a senator, played a key role in passing a 1994 crime bill that increased federal crimes for which someone could be put to death.

"I don't trust Biden," Troya said. "He set the rules to get us all here in the first place."

Several inmates said Brandon Bernard's death was especially hard to process. They described him as introspective and kind. Bernard, convicted of participating in the Texas carjacking, robbery and killing of an Iowa couple, also organized a death-row crocheting group that shared patterns and knitting tips.

"The gentlest guy on federal death row," Fields said.

Bernard's case drew the attention of reality TV star Kim Kardashian and other celebrities, who pleaded

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 27 of 66

on Twitter for Trump to commute his sentence.

His lawyers said Bernard, 18 at the time and the lowest-ranking member of a street gang, was pressured to light a car on fire with Todd and Stacie Bagley's bodies inside. They said he believed the Bagleys were already dead after a gang leader shot them in the head.

He and co-defendant Christopher Vialva, both of whom were Black, were convicted by a nearly all-white Texas jury in 2000.

Strapped to a cross-shaped gurney on Dec. 10, Bernard addressed the couple's relatives in an adjoining death-chamber witness room, repeatedly apologizing and telling them he hoped his death would bring them closure.

After his execution, Todd Bagley's mother called the killings an "act of unnecessary evil." She said the executions of Bernard and of Vialva months earlier did bring closure. But she also expressed gratitude to both for apologizing. Beginning to cry, she told reporters: "I can very much say — I forgive them."

Troya said he thinks often about Bernard, Vialva and Higgs, whom he considered close friends. All three, he said, had long since transformed themselves into better people and were mentoring other inmates.

"They killed future prison role models," he said. "So much potential, lost for nothing."

Police chief says Miami partying "couldn't go on any longer"

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Pointing to over 1,000 arrests in one of the nation's top party spots, Miami Beach officials warned Sunday that the unruly spring break crowd gathering by the thousands, fighting in the streets, destroying restaurant property and refusing to wear masks has become a serious threat to public safety.

During a last-minute meeting Sunday, city officials voted to extend a highly unusual 8 p.m. curfew for another week along famed South Beach, with the possibility of extending it well into April if needed, and stressed this isn't the typical spring break crowd. They said it's not college students, but adults looking to let loose in one of the few states fully open during the pandemic.

Law enforcement officers from at least four other agencies, along with SWAT teams, were added to help contain the raucous crowds, but it wasn't enough. After days of partying, including several confrontations with police, Miami Beach officials enacted a highly unorthodox curfew Saturday from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m., forcing restaurants to stop outdoor seating entirely during the three-day emergency period, and encouraging local businesses to voluntarily shut down.

More than half of the more than 1,000 arrests were from out of state, said City Manager Raul Aguila, adding many are coming "to engage in lawlessness and an 'anything goes' party attitude." He also noted that the crowds weren't eating at restaurants or patronizing businesses generating badly needed tourism dollars, but merely congregating by the thousands in the street.

Officers in bullet proof vests dispersed pepper spray balls Saturday night into a defiant, but mostly nonviolent crowd, refusing to submit to the curfew that had only been enacted four hours earlier. Some people responded by jumping on top of cars, twerking and throwing money into the air.

A military style vehicle was seen rolling down the palm-tree lined Ocean Drive as outnumbered Miami Beach police officers struggled to disperse the raucous crowds Saturday. Tourists were urged to stay inside their hotels and pedestrians or vehicles were not allowed to enter the restricted area after 8 p.m.

Miami Beach Police Chief Richard Clements initially became concerned last Monday when the crowds seemed larger than normal on what is typically a quieter day. A group of vehicles blocked the street "and basically had an impromptu street party," he said. By Thursday, the crowds were growing, fights were breaking out, setting off dangerous stampedes of people fleeing for safety.

"We couldn't go on any longer," Clements said during Sunday's meeting, defending the city's curfew. "I think this was the right decision."

By Friday night, police said the partying was out of control. One restaurant was "turned upside down" in the melee, "chairs were used as weapons," and broken glass covered the floor.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 28 of 66

Next door, the iconic bar, the Clevelander South Beach, announced it was temporarily suspending all food and beverage operations until at least March 24 after crowds crammed Ocean Drive, breaking out into street fights.

After gunshots were fired, a young woman cut her leg so badly in a stampede that she was transported to the hospital where they initially thought she had been shot, police said.

"How many more things are we going to allow to occur before we step in," said Clements.

Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber said he has trouble sleeping at night, worried about the out-of-control parties.

"When hundreds of people are running through the streets panicked, you realize that's not something that a police force can control," he said during a commission meeting Sunday.

Local officials have struggled to enforce COVID-19 ordinances. Florida has no statewide mask rules, limits on capacity or other such restrictions, courtesy of Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' pro-business stance.

"I think there are very few places that have been open as our state have been open," said Gelber. "We're in the middle of a pandemic. The virus is still very present in our community. We have 1,000 infections a day on most days."

One commissioner asked whether a toll could be levied on nonresidents to discourage visitors. Several said it was time for a new marketing campaign to help rebrand South Beach's as a party city, pointing to the small handful of arrests in nearby Fort Lauderdale over spring break.

Local officials and businesses have struggled to balance courting tourists to boost the economy while doing so safely amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Local residents complained they spent three to four hours in traffic after bridges were closed during the curfew and some restaurants asked for permission to continue food delivery after the curfew.

Miami tourism officials say billions of dollars were lost when the pandemic first erupted last year, canceling spring break and forcing beach closures across the Sunshine State. The city's tourism arm just spent \$5 million on its biggest national advertising campaign in 20 years.

At the same time, local officials banned alcohol from the beach, along with all alcohol sales after 10 p.m. in an effort to curb partying. The city even sent cellphone text messages to tourists warning, "Vacation Responsibly or Be Arrested."

"I just feel like it's really not fair," tourist Heather Price told NBC 6. "People paid a lot of money to come all the way out here, just to not be able to do the activities they wanted to."

Teachers lament 'chaotic' virus rules in German schools

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Under pressure to ease Germany's virus restrictions, officials last month agreed to gradually reopen schools. Confirmed COVID-19 cases started climbing again, leading some states to backtrack while others pressed on and insisted that in-class teaching must be the rule.

Caught in the middle are students, parents and teachers such as Michael Gromotka, whose plans to teach art to his year 7-9 students were upended last week when the state of Berlin nixed their return to school after months of remote learning.

"It was all very chaotic," Gromotka said. "We got less than a week's notice."

Gromotka, who is married to a fellow teacher and has a child in primary school, says the back and forth reflects the absence of a coherent strategy in Germany for how to safely keep schools open.

Authorities in Berlin purchased about 1,900 air filters that experts say will reduce the risk of the virus spreading throughout classrooms. But the available number is only enough to supply each of the capital's 900 schools with about two devices.

Berlin's online teaching platform is so overloaded during the day that some elementary school students must wait until 6:30 p.m. to have their video lessons. More reliable commercial systems were rejected over privacy concerns.

And while Berlin now offers free tests for staff and students, there is no requirement for anybody to

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 29 of 66

take them before going to school.

"Teachers are incredibly worried," Gromotka told The Associated Press.

He launched a petition demanding that secondary school teachers be given priority when it comes to getting coronavirus vaccines, arguing that they deserve the same protection as elementary school and kindergarten teachers because of the large number of students they come into contact with each week.

Like other educators, Gromotka says officials have failed to learn the right lessons more than a year into the pandemic.

Figures published by Germany's disease control agency, the Robert Koch Institute, show the number of weekly confirmed cases among under-15s more than doubled over the past month as more children returned to schools and kindergartens.

The proposal to prioritize all teachers for vaccinations, like Italy is doing, has gained support from some education unions.

"We can't pretend that schools are isolated from the rest of society," said Juergen Boehm, who chairs VDR, an association representing certain secondary school teachers across Germany.

The former principal says it's nearly impossible to police mask-wearing and social distancing rules in school hallways and buses, and that giving all of the country's 1 million teachers the shots to protect them from COVID-19 would mean "far fewer problems."

Likewise, Boehm backs a system of regular compulsory testing — if necessary, with help from the Red Cross or the army — and a firm threshold for reverting to online teaching in regions that top 100 new weekly cases per 100,000 inhabitants.

Many counties and cities already exceed that limit, which Chancellor Angela Merkel and Germany's 16 state governors agreed should trigger an "emergency brake" on looser restrictions. But several states have insisted that schools must nevertheless remain open, arguing that it is in children's best interest to go to school.

Merkel says there's little her government can do under Germany's federal system to enforce nationwide rules for schools. As in the United States, education policy is largely the purview of Germany's 16 states.

Boehm says he supports the principle of local control of schools but thinks there needs to be a clear rule for all in a situation like the pandemic.

Lothar Wieler, the head of the Robert Koch Institute, said earlier this month that from an infection control perspective, "closing (schools) would of course be a good step."

But he acknowledged that factors other than medical concerns should be considered, too, and said in-class teaching could continue if "intelligent plans" were put in place to ensure it was safe.

The institute has proposed how that could be done with rigorous testing, mask-wearing and hygiene policies that would significantly reduce the risk of infection.

"It just needs to be implemented," Wieler said.

Amid growing fears among weary parents that schools will be closed again soon, the federal government recently boosted funding for school test kits but refrained from imposing rules for how to use them.

"It's the responsibility of the states to organize this," Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said.

Gromotka said teachers want schools to be safe and reliable however that is accomplished, but that a testing strategy and vaccinating all teachers would be good ways to start.

"Otherwise I fear that schools will soon have to close again, and that would be terrible for everyone involved," he said.

Monday Fun Day: March Madness kicks off the week

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — It's not like anyone's going to the office anyway.

The change in the March Madness schedule brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic will give basketball fans a first-of-its-kind experience -- eight games on a Monday.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 30 of 66

The second-round matchups start with a lunchtime (or coffee break) affair between Oregon and Iowa and conclude with a game between USC and Kansas that should wrap up after midnight in the east.

The NCAA condensed the tournament schedule ever so slightly this year, packing 67 games into 19 days instead of the usual 21, as it brought all 68 teams to Indiana in an attempt to create a safe environment in which to play all the games.

By now, coaches and players are so used to starts and stops and games at strange times during this pandemic-tinged season, they've become immune to it.

"It makes no difference," Iowa coach Fran McCaffery said. "We're playing Oregon on Monday."

The revised schedule didn't include any daytime games Thursday, which is when the madness traditionally revs up.

That Thursday-Friday spectacular — 32 games packed into about 36 hours over four networks — led to some deep thinking in the I-T world, which led to the creation of, among other contraptions, the now-famous "Boss button." That was the icon you clicked while watching the game online.

For instance, Worker A is wrapped up in upset-in-the-making between Lehigh and Duke. He or she hears the boss coming from around the corner. Simple fix: Click the mouse, which will bring up a fake spreadsheet on the screen.

Nothing to see there.

But, as we all know, too many gatherings around the water cooler — or the computer monitor, in this case — have come at a cost over the years.

As sure as the brackets come out in March, they're soon followed by a handful of studies that detail the lost workplace productivity due to all those employees watching all those games.

One such study in 2019 said up to 1.5 million people watched games online from their desks, while still others call in sick or take a long lunch. In all, the study said, it could cost employers up to \$1.7 billion in wasted work time over the 16 business days of the tournament.

Another study, by the folks at (third-seeded) Kansas no less, said fewer and fewer people were trying to hide it.

"They openly admitted they work less during the tournament," said Jordan Bass, one of the study's authors. "That's not shocking, but we thought it was cool they came right out and admitted they were less productive and planned their days around it."

For all the wrong reasons, far fewer people will have to go through the motions of pretending to be busy when the ball is tipped Monday.

A Pew survey last year found that before the pandemic, only one in five workers who could do their job from home actually did. Since the pandemic, that number increased to 71%.

On Monday, a chance to make the best of an unfortunate situation. As for all those office pools — anyone here take Venmo?

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

EXPLAINER: Players in Israel's fourth election in 2 years

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel is holding its fourth parliamentary election in two years, the product of protracted political deadlock and disagreement over longtime leader Benjamin Netanyahu's fitness to rule while facing corruption charges. Election surveys published in the final days before Tuesday's vote predict a tight race between the two major blocs: those who support Netanyahu as the next prime minister, and those against him.

Here's a look at the main players:

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

Israel's five-term prime minister seeks to win decisively in the March 23 elections while he stands trial

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 31 of 66

on corruption charges. Netanyahu, Israel's longest serving leader, is stumping on the country's vaccination campaign success and the normalization deals with four Arab states orchestrated by the Trump administration.

But for the first time in Israel's two-year political morass, Netanyahu faces stiff opposition from rival nationalist parties. Election polls project that his Likud party and its presumed allies may come up short of a 61-seat majority needed to form a governing coalition.

YAIR LAPID

Israel's opposition leader ran in last year's elections as part of Defense Minister Benny Gantz's Blue and White coalition. Gantz and Netanyahu struck a power-sharing deal, Lapid refused to take part. This round, Lapid has spent much of the election keeping a low profile, but in the final stretch has stepped up his campaign as a centrist leader seeking to replace Netanyahu.

Polls forecast Lapid's Yesh Atid party will be the second largest party, after Likud, but it remains unclear whether he and his allies will have enough to build a majority coalition.

GIDEON SAAR

Once seen as Netanyahu's heir-apparent, the former education minister broke away from the ruling party to form "A New Hope," a faction comprised of former Likud party politicians who seek to oust the prime minister.

Saar's party has positioned itself as a nationalist alternative to rule the country, unencumbered by the corruption trial and what he says is a cult of personality that characterizes Likud. After a strong start out the gate, polls suggest New Hope may not achieve its aspiration to stand on par with the Likud.

NAFTALI BENNETT

Another former Netanyahu ally-turned-rival may become the kingmaker after the election results are in. The hardline nationalist politician, formerly Netanyahu's education and defense minister, has not unequivocally ruled out joining a coalition with the embattled prime minister.

But if an anti-Netanyahu alliance has an edge, he could provide them with enough seats to form a government without the Likud party.

Dozens of towns isolated by flooding in Australian state

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Hundreds of people have been rescued from floodwaters that have isolated dozens of towns in Australia's most populous state New South Wales and forced thousands to evacuate their homes as record rain continues to inundate the country's east coast.

Around 18,000 people had been evacuated from flooding in New South Wales by Monday and emergency services feared up to 54,000 people could be displaced with rain forecast to continue until Wednesday.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison told Parliament that 35 communities in northern New South Wales had been isolated and emergency services had conducted more than 700 flood rescues.

"We are grateful at this point that no lives have been lost so far," Morrison said. "But weakened foundations for buildings, for roads and trees, they all create risk, as do downed power lines and rising water levels."

A year ago, vast swathes of New South Wales had been charred by unprecedented wildfires following years of drought that gripped most of the state.

Some of the same areas were now being by inundated by one-in-50-year and one-in-100-year rain events.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said up to 38 parts of the state had been declared natural disaster areas.

"I don't know any time in our state's history where we have had these extreme weather conditions in such quick succession in the middle of a pandemic," Berejiklian told reporters. "So, they are challenging times for New South Wales."

Thousands of people have been affected with 40 flood warnings and 20 evacuation orders along the state's Mid North Coast, and in western Sydney. Houses had been submerged and destroyed while several communities had lost power.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 32 of 66

Heavy rain will remain a serious risk on Tuesday for the Mid North Coast, where communities are facing the worst flooding conditions since 1929.

Communities along the Hawkesbury River were also bracing for the worst flooding in the area since 1961. Bureau of Meteorology national flood services manager Justin Robinson described the rainfall as a "very significant flood event for New South Wales."

"I've been a flood forecaster with the bureau for 20 years and this is probably the worst flooding that I've experienced," Robinson said.

Nepean River levels at Penrith on Sydney western outskirts had peaked late Sunday at a higher level than the 1961 record and the Hawkesbury River flood waters at Windsor, northwest of Sydney, were expected to peak late Monday around a 1988 record level, Robinson said.

Israeli election seen as referendum on divisive Netanyahu

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israelis vote Tuesday in their fourth parliamentary election in just two years. Once again, the race boils down to a referendum on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu, who has served as prime minister for the past 12 years, hopes voters will reward him for leading the country's successful coronavirus vaccine rollout and his diplomatic outreach to the Arab world. His challengers have highlighted his earlier missteps in the coronavirus strategy, his reliance on divisive religious and ultra-nationalist allies and his ongoing corruption trial.

Over the years, Netanyahu has developed a reputation as a political magician and master manipulator capable of surviving any crisis. With witnesses set to take the stand against him next month, Netanyahu is hoping for another miracle that could deliver a friendlier parliament willing to grant him immunity or freeze his trial. Opponents portray him as a serial liar who has caused two years of political paralysis by putting his political survival and legal troubles ahead of the country's interests.

Opinion polls forecast an extremely tight race, raising the possibility of continued deadlock and even an unprecedented fifth consecutive election. Netanyahu appears to hold a slight advantage because of the intricacies of Israel's political system.

In Israel, people vote for parties, not individual candidates. Netanyahu's Likud is again poised to emerge as the largest individual party. But since no party has ever won a 61-seat parliamentary majority on its own, political alliances must be formed to create a governing coalition. If the opinion polls prove accurate, Netanyahu would have a clearer path to building a government than the array of rivals that have little in common beyond their animosity toward him.

Here is a look at the key factors that could determine whether Netanyahu or any of his challengers can clinch that elusive 61-seat majority.

VACCI-NATION: Netanyahu has staked his re-election hopes on the success of Israel's successful vaccination campaign. Netanyahu last December moved quickly and aggressively, personally lobbying the CEOs of Pfizer and Moderna to secure enough vaccines for Israel's 9.3 million people. In under three months, Israel has vaccinated some 80% of its adult population. With infection rates plunging, that has allowed the country to reopen schools, restaurants, museums and the main airport just in time for election day.

Opponents have accused Netanyahu of bungling the management of the pandemic over the past year. A series of lockdowns hit the economy hard, thousands of businesses failed and unemployment remains in double digits. Many also have bitter memories of Netanyahu's ultra-Orthodox allies flouting lockdown rules and point to the country's more than 6,000 COVID-19 deaths.

With the economy coming back to life, Netanyahu is hoping the growing sense of normalcy will make voters forget the difficulties of the past year. This may explain that while polls show a majority of Israelis want Netanyahu replaced, he also is seen as best-suited to be prime minister.

"In people's minds, first and foremost when you go into an election, is the identity of the prime minister," said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute. "In many ways, this works in Netanyahu's favor because it's unclear who the opponent is."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 33 of 66

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO: Opinion polls have indicated that some 15% of voters remain undecided. Tuesday's election will hinge not only on who these voters support, but whether they choose to vote at all.

Analysts expect turnout to be lower than the 71% level of the most recent election a year ago, in part because of continued concerns about the coronavirus along with general voter fatigue. Israel is providing special accommodations, including separate booths and mobile ballot stations, to allow people who are sick or in quarantine to vote.

But more important than overall turnout will be voter participation in key sectors. Netanyahu's religious and nationalist allies tend to have highly motivated voters. On the other hand, Arab voters, disappointed with the disintegration of the umbrella "Joint List" party, are expected to stay home in larger numbers this time around. Voters in the more liberal and secular areas around Tel Aviv also tend to have lower rates of participation. Netanyahu could benefit if these trends materialize.

ON THE EDGES: This election could well hinge on the showing of a few small parties. In order to enter the Knesset, or parliament, a party must receive at least 3.25% of the vote, giving them a minimum of four seats in the 120-seat body.

Pollster Camil Fuchs said four small parties are hovering near the threshold. Of these, the dovish Meretz party and the centrist Blue and White are "much more in danger" of not getting enough support, according to recent polls, he said. Both are members of the anti-Netanyahu bloc.

The Religious Zionist party, a small pro-Netanyahu faction that includes openly racist and homophobic candidates, appears to be gaining strength. If one of the anti-Netanyahu parties fails to get in, a strong showing by the Religious Zionists could help put Netanyahu over the edge.

THE KINGMAKERS: Despite the tight race, neither Netanyahu and his religious and hardline allies, nor the anti-Netanyahu bloc, led by centrist Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party, are expected to capture a majority of seats on their own.

That sets the stage for former Netanyahu aide Naftali Bennett to emerge as the decisive voice in coalition building. Bennett's Yemina party supports the same hardline ideology as the Likud. But the two men have a notoriously strained relationship, and Bennett has refused to commit to either side.

Given their similar world views, Bennett, who has served as Netanyahu's education and defense minister, appears to be better suited to join Netanyahu than the anti-Netanyahu bloc, which ranges from dovish Arab parties to hard-line former Netanyahu allies who have had bitter personal breakups with him. Still, if offered the chance to be prime minister, Bennett could side with Netanyahu's opponents.

Some polls have forecast both sides falling short of a coalition even with Bennett's support. That could create the unlikely scenario of a small Islamic party led by Arab lawmaker Mansour Abbas as kingmaker -- or simply forcing a fifth election.

MISSING IN ACTION: In the previous three elections, Netanyahu boasted of his close alliance with then-President Donald Trump, posting massive billboards on highways and high-rises showing the men together. With Joe Biden now occupying the White House, Netanyahu has barely mentioned the new president, whose administration has given him a cool reception.

Likewise, there has been almost no mention of the Palestinians, reflecting the years-long freeze in substantive peace efforts. But Biden has indicated he will soon re-engage with the Palestinians. That could make it difficult for the next Israeli leader to ignore the issue — or Biden.

Donations pour in for families of Atlanta shooting victims

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

Shortly after his mother was killed in the Atlanta-area shootings, Randy Park launched a GoFundMe page asking for \$20,000 to pay for funeral expenses. By Sunday, the donations were approaching \$3 million.

With many people seeking a way to support the families of the dead, Park's page and others have offered an outlet for tens of thousands of donors, and the accounts have surpassed their goals only days after they were opened.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 34 of 66

"I've never had a good understanding how much money was worth, but every cent of it will be used only in pure necessity," wrote Park, son of Hyun Jung Grant, 51, who was one of the eight people killed in the attacks on massage businesses.

Rani Ban contributed to Park just to show kindness.

"It's important that he knows there are still good people. That's simply it," said Ban, who is from the San Francisco Bay Area.

To date, no central fund been created to aid families of the victims — a contrast with some other mass shootings where groups were set up to collect and distribute money to those directly affected.

For example, following the 2017 attack on the Las Vegas Strip that killed 58 people that night and at least two others who died later, a nonprofit corporation was formed to pay \$275,000 to the families. The nonprofit stemmed from a GoFundMe account that received more than 90,000 donations.

In 2019, a group of nonprofits organized a relief effort after a gunman opened fire in El Paso, Texas, killing 22 people in an attack that police said targeted Mexicans.

For now, donors to victims of the Atlanta shootings must scour individual GoFundMe accounts.

"We all have to stand up for all the innocent lives that fall victim to such reckless hate," Mallory Spalding wrote on a GoFundMe page set up for Suncha Kim, 69, who was fatally shot in the chest.

The page has seen more than \$125,000 in donations in a single day.

"It brings tears to our eyes that you are all standing with us and our beloved halmoni, mother, and wife. Suncha was such a strong, loving presence in all of our lives, and we miss her so much," the family said in a statement posted on the page.

A page for Delaina Yaun has collected more than \$102,000, and one for survivors of Paul Michels has raised more than \$57,000. A page for Yong Yue's family drew more than \$94,000.

The donations will help pay for travel for family members who would otherwise be unable to attend funerals.

Yong Yue's family issued a statement less than 24 hours after creating the GoFundMe page that the money would be used to fly her six grandchildren to the funeral, as well to take care of Yue's "business and home affairs."

The suspect, 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long, is charged with killing four women at the Atlanta spas and four other people at a massage business about 30 miles (50 kilometers) away in Cherokee County. Seven of the slain were women, and six of them were of Asian descent.

Park's family was the first to launch a GoFundMe page. He explained that he had "no time to grieve" because financial obligations were quickly mounting.

After his page began taking off, others soon followed to raise money for more families.

"To put it bluntly, I can't believe you guys exist. People I will probably never meet, hear nor express my thanks to. This is simply a change in my life," Park wrote to the 70,000 people who had contributed as of Sunday afternoon.

Mexico limits non-essential travel on southern border

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

CIUDAD HIDALGO, Mexico (AP) — The Mexican banks of the Suchiate river dawned Sunday with a heavy presence of immigration agents in place to enforce Mexico's new limits on all but essential travel at its shared border with Guatemala.

Dozens of immigration agents lined the riverside asking those who landed on the giant innertube rafts that carry most of the cross-border traffic for documentation and turning many back.

But those turned away weren't migrants, they were the small-time Guatemalan merchants and residents from Tecun Uman, across the river, who buy in bulk in Mexico to re-sell in Guatemala or purchase household items when the exchange rate favors it.

"They haven't let us enter because they think we're migrants when really we're only coming to shop," said Amalia Vázquez, a Guatemalan citizen with her baby tied to her back and seven other relatives ac-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 35 of 66

companying her. Vázquez said her family travels the 100 kilometers monthly from Quetzaltenango to buy plastic items and sweets they re-sell at home.

After a negotiation, immigration agents allowed her sister and another relative to pass, but they had to leave their IDs with agents while they shopped. Nearby, other agents turned away a man who said he was just coming to buy his medicine.

The Mexican government has interrupted the usually free-flowing cross-river traffic here before, infuriating merchants on both sides. In recent years, as migrant caravans arrived in Tecun Uman, Mexican troops lined the Mexican side of the Suchiate and largely stopped the raft traffic.

The last time was in January 2020 when hundreds of soldiers blocked large groups of migrants trying to cross.

This time there is no large migrant presence across the river, but Mexico is again under pressure to slow the flow of migrants north as the U.S. government wrestles with growing numbers, especially of families and unaccompanied minors.

Many of those, however, are believed to be traveling with smugglers who can simply choose among the hundreds of unmonitored crossing points on Mexico's long jungle borders with Guatemala and Belize.

The government said the measures that went into effect Sunday — one year into the pandemic — were aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19. But most saw it as a cover to again try to control illegal migration and no one was talking about health concerns. The U.S. and Mexico have had a similar limit on non-essential travel on their shared border for a year, but Mexico is one of the few countries to otherwise not impose health restrictions on people entering the country by land or air.

"There's no reason that this would help public health," said Yuriria Salvador of the Fray Matías de Cordova Human Rights Center in Tapachula. "It comes from the negotiation with the United States, it's very clear."

"What is going to happen is that they'll be pushed more into secrecy and the trafficking of people," Salvador said.

Juan José Ramírez, a Guatemalan who crosses to Mexico daily just upriver at the Talisman crossing, said he didn't note any change Sunday at the port of entry.

"They only asked for my border visitor card, but the taking of the temperature and all of that, they stopped awhile ago," he said. "It was only at the beginning (of the pandemic) when it was worse."

The Mexican government last week also announced a new effort against the smuggling of families with minors. They said they would increase patrols in areas and checkpoints and use drones and night vision to watch crossing points.

On Saturday, Mexico's immigration agency announced that authorities had detained 95 Central American and Cuban migrants who arrived by plane to the northern city of Monterrey. Among them were eight unaccompanied minors. The flights originated in southeast Mexican cities, Villahermosa and Cancun. Smugglers sometimes put migrants who can pay on such flights to avoid highway checkpoints in Mexico.

On Friday, hundreds of National Guard troops and immigration agents paraded through the capital of the southern state of Chiapas. On Sunday, few soldiers were visible along the river.

"It's all a show," said a woman with a sweets stand in the market, who asked to remain anonymous to avoid retaliation. "They don't let the ones coming to buy pass, but the smugglers are very active."

Mexico's National Immigration Institute says smugglers are telling Central American migrants to bring children to improve their chances of entering Mexico and the United States.

The flow hasn't reached early 2019 levels yet, but the U.S. government is worried by the rapid increase in illegal entries since last fall.

"It isn't much that we take for reselling," said María Vázquez, Amalia's sister, while she negotiated the price of some cookies and her family waited by the river. "The migrants traveling in groups really harm us and the pandemic too. They never asked us for documentation."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 36 of 66

In Myanmar's hinterland, army uproots ethnic Karen villagers

By JERRY HARMER Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — In the jungles of southeast Myanmar, the army was shooting and otherwise oppressing civilians long before last month's military coup.

This largely unseen repression continues even now. In the country's remote southeast, an army offensive has driven as many as 8,000 ethnic Karen people to flee their homes in what aid groups say is the worst upheaval there for nearly 10 years.

They're now living in the jungle, with fears growing for their health and security, and no prospect of an early return.

This crisis in the borderlands has been overshadowed by the deadly crackdown on the mass movement protesting the military's takeover of power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

But it also is a reminder of the brutal force Myanmar's army has long used against civilians, and in particular the country's ethnic minorities.

The Karen National Union, the leading political body for the Karen, for now is shouldering all of the displaced people's basic needs for food, shelter and security.

But in the long run, that will be a challenge for the group, said Padoh Saw Taw Nee, head of the KNU's foreign affairs department, in an email interview.

"Therefore the international community should reach out with humanitarian assistance to these people who are in need as soon as possible," he said.

The Karen are among more than a dozen ethnic groups that have been seeking greater autonomy from the central government since Myanmar, then known as Burma, became independent from Britain in 1948.

At times the ethnic groups' guerrilla forces have engaged in full-on armed conflict with the government; in recent years, many have reached an uneasy cease-fire. Their talks with Suu Kyi's government failed to reach a comprehensive political resolution before it was deposed by the coup.

The army, meanwhile, has aggressively expanded its reach in at least two districts in Karen state since 2017, building new bases and roads to try to dominate an area that doesn't want it there.

In the last few months, troop numbers and activity have scaled up dramatically, according to relief organizations active there.

The Karen's own armed force, the Karen National Liberation Army, has fought back. In retaliation, the army has increased its attacks and shelled surrounding villages.

Relief agencies say the 8,000 or so people who abandoned their homes for the privations of the jungle are safe and are adapting as well as they can, building bamboo shelters and holding school classes in the open.

But no one knows when they can return or whether their villages will still be standing when they do. Meanwhile, the fields where their crops would grow are untended, threatening food supplies later in the year.

A humanitarian group, the Free Burma Rangers, has been bringing in aid since the attacks began and documenting the Karens' plight. The group was formed in the late 1990s during intense attacks that displaced more than 100,000 Karen people.

Its founder and director, Dave Eubank, is a former member of the U.S. Special Forces who combines evangelical activities with well-disciplined forays by Karen volunteers to deliver medical aid to villagers.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press via satellite phone from the affected area, Eubank spoke of what the displaced Karen desperately need.

He said that stopping attacks by Myanmar troops — "security and survival" — is the top priority.

Food comes next. "As they get displaced they've got to eat," he said. "They can't go back and start their crops. They can't prepare for the next fields, they can't look after the animals," he said.

Medical care and shelter are also essential, Eubank said.

In 2012, the Karen National Union signed a cease-fire with the government, which it hoped would end decades of military aggression. But Myanmar's army has repeatedly breached it. This is the worst breach

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 37 of 66

yet, aid groups say.

Hsa Moo from the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network has just returned from the affected area. A former refugee herself, she says it's heartbreaking.

"This is not a good time for us. This is after the cease-fire; but we thought the cease-fire can help them, but actually not. So they have to flee and they have to hide, so it is very difficult for them to hide in the jungle," she said.

The Karen long ago learned the brutal nature of the military, independent analyst David Mathieson told The Associated Press.

"What's interesting about Karen state is a lot of people there see the fighting and now the coup and the civil disobedience movement as intricately linked," he said. "It's like 'Look, we've been telling you for years that the enemy is the military.'"

"For all those people who wanted to accommodate the military, when you live in these areas of ongoing armed conflict you know exactly who you are dealing with and you know that you can't trust them," he explained.

The lesson he takes from the army's actions in the cities and in the hinterlands: "This is the military trying to subjugate the entire country once again."

Nun-and-done: Loyola Chicago stuns top-seeded Illinois 71-58

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — If the pregame prayer sounded more like a scouting report, it was. And if Sister Jean didn't have any plans for next weekend, well, she does now.

Loyola Chicago carried out its 101-year-old superfan's plans to a T on Sunday, moving to the Sweet 16 with a 71-58 win over Illinois, the first No. 1 seed bounced from this year's NCAA Tournament.

Cameron Krutwig delivered a 19-point, 12-rebound masterpiece and the quick-handed, eighth-seeded Ramblers (26-4) led wire to wire. The team with the nation's leading defense befuddled powerful Illinois to return to the second weekend three years after its last magical run to the Final Four.

A hard habit to break for these Ramblers. And a classic case of nun-and-done for the Illini.

Loyola Chicago will next play Oregon State, which topped Oklahoma State 80-70 later Sunday.

"We just executed, played our game and controlled the game from the start," Krutwig said. "Nobody was really doing anything out of body or out of mind. We just stuck to the game plan."

Who wrote it?

Some of Loyola's wisdom comes from Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, the venerable team chaplain, who headlined the team's 2018 run to the Final Four and received both COVID-19 vaccination shots so she could travel to Indianapolis to see what inspiration she could provide in 2021.

Before taking in this game from a luxury suite — sitting in her wheelchair and decked out in her trademark maroon and gold scarf — Jean delivered a pregame prayer that could've been stripped straight from a John Wooden handbook.

"As we play the Fighting Illini, we ask for special help to overcome this team and get a great win," she said. "We hope to score early and make our opponents nervous. We have a great opportunity to convert rebounds as this team makes about 50% of layups and 30% of its 3 points. Our defense can take care of that."

From her mouth to their ears.

Illinois (24-7) earned top seeding for the first time since its own Final Four run in 2005, but fell behind by 14 in the first half and never got within striking range. The Illini committed 16 turnovers and scored 23 points fewer than their season average. A team that lives for easy buckets in transition got a grand total of two fast-break points.

Illinois' 7-foot second-team All-American Kofi Cockburn finished with 21 points on 7-for-12 shooting, but worked hard for every shot against the pestering presence of Krutwig and Co.

Loyola's handsy guards, Lucas Williamson (14 points) and Keith Clemons (two steals), kept first-team

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 38 of 66

All-American Ayo Dosunmu from ever finding his comfort zone. He finished with nine points, 11 under his season average. Illini guard Trent Frazier went 1 for 10 for two points.

Loyola held its lead in the eight-to-12-point range through most of the second half, and though Illinois made a few 4-0 flurries, it never got this to a one-possession game.

"We tried everything in the bag," Illinois coach Brad Underwood said. "Everything that's made us one of the most efficient offensive teams, today, just for whatever reason, didn't work."

Krutwig is also an All-American — a third-teamer who looked all-world in this one.

Posting up, pivoting, dishing when necessary and causing all kinds of trouble on defense in the paint, the 6-9 senior played bigger. He also had five assists and four steals. Krutwig was with Loyola for the last Final Four trip, and has since become one of only four players in Missouri Valley Conference history to record 1,500 points, 800 boards and 300 assists.

And there's a chance for more.

It's a turn of events that Sister Jean could see happening. Before the game, she suggested Loyola, the MVC champs who allow only 55.7 points per game and were ranked 17th in the final AP poll, might have gotten a raw deal with a No. 8 seeding that put it up against a 1 so early.

Turns out, it was Illinois that got the bad break. To anyone outside of Champaign — or now holding a freshly obliterated bracket — it's hard to argue this Loyola team isn't the breath of fresh air this tournament-in-a-bubble sorely needed.

Sure, there have been upsets, some drama and little teams doing big things.

But there's nobody quite like Sister Jean to put the whole thing in perspective. The Ramblers and March Madness — what an inspiration!

"It's amazing what happens when you get a group of young men who believe," coach Porter Moser said. "And these guys believed."

IN THE CROWD

On other days, for other teams, Jerry Harkness might have been the biggest celebrity spotted in the crowd for Loyola Chicago. The point guard sparked Loyola's national-championship run in 1963 — a win, of course, that Sister Jean watched on an 11-inch TV loaned to her by a friend.

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

Cyber attack tied to China boosts development bank's chief

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The cyberattack crested just as finance officials from across Latin America were descending on Washington to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Inter-American Development Bank.

On Sept. 24, 2019, requests from more than 15,000 internet addresses throughout China flooded the bank's website, knocking part of it intermittently offline. To unclog the network, the bank took the drastic step of blocking all traffic from China.

But the attackers persisted, and as officials gathered for a day of conferences with athletes, academics and celebrity chefs the bombardment intensified.

Details of the attack, which has not been previously reported, are contained in an IDB internal document reviewed by The Associated Press.

News of the attack is surfacing just as the bank's new president, Mauricio Claver-Carone, seeks to leverage his hawkish views on China from his time in the Trump administration to outmaneuver those in Washington and beyond still fuming over his politically charged election last year.

Claver-Carone, the former National Security Council's senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs, chaired last week in Colombia his first annual meeting of the IDB since he was elected last fall over the objections of Democrats and some regional governments who complained he was breaking the longstanding tradition of a Latin American being at the helm.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 39 of 66

A geopolitical ideologue, Claver-Carone seems in no rush to abandon his disdain for Beijing's growing influence in Washington's backyard. In sharp contrast to his predecessor, Luis Alberto Moreno of Colombia, who eagerly promoted Chinese investment in the region, Claver-Carone recently floated the possibility of inviting Taiwan, the island democracy claimed by the communist Beijing government as part of its territory.

In curtailing China's influence, Claver-Carone is looking to curry favor with Democrats who question his leadership but share his mistrust of Beijing. If he succeeds, they can help him deliver on what was the main pledge of his unorthodox candidacy: U.S. support for a capital increase so the bank can help the region dig out from a pandemic-induced recession that's the worst in more than a century.

There are early signs he may be making some headway. This month, a bipartisan group of five lawmakers led by Sen. Bob Menendez, head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, proposed legislation authorizing an \$80 billion capital increase that would boost lending at the Washington-based bank by 60%.

"People need to accept that he won," said Dan Runde, a former official with the U.S. Agency for International Development in the George W. Bush administration and an expert on multilateral institutions at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "Those who are not happy haven't gone through the five stages of grief yet. They're stuck somewhere between denial and anger."

But Sen. Patrick Leahy, the powerful chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, has yet to sign on after warning last year that the choice of Claver-Carone, a "polarizing American," to lead the IDB would hurt — not help — the case for a funding boost. There's also an expectation that some in the region who supported Claver-Carone when Trump was in office — such as Brazil and Colombia — might switch allegiances to appeal to the new sheriff in town: President Joe Biden.

"The argument that an underfunded bank is an opportunity for China is very compelling," said Dan Restrepo, who served in the same National Security Council role as Claver-Carone during the Obama administration. "But it doesn't answer how you adequately fund the bank and with what leadership."

As far as cyber-disruptions go, the attack against the IDB was too small to generate concern beyond the bank. Last year, more than 10 million similar distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks were observed throughout the world, according to digital security firm NETSCOUT.

But occurring amid the IDB's gala celebration it was fraught with symbolism.

The bash in Washington was hastily organized after the Trump administration six months earlier rallied allies to force the cancellation of the IDB gathering in the Chinese city of Chengdu, which was to be something of a breaking out party for China a decade after it joined the bank.

While the U.S. had been trying to derail the meeting for months, China's denial of a visa to a representative of Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó gave it the opportunity to act decisively. While the IDB and the bulk of nations in Latin America recognize Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate leader, China is a staunch ally of President Nicolás Maduro.

Claver-Carone was the U.S. official driving the diplomatic standoff with China at the IDB. As the top White House official for Latin America, he was also the architect of "America Rising," a program that sought to curb the inroads being made by China in Latin America, where it has displaced the U.S. as the top trading partner in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

According to the IDB document, on Sept. 19, 2019, traffic to the IDB website surged to more than four times normal levels, forcing the main website and publications page offline. At first, the bank defended itself by blocking individual IP addresses.

But then "the attackers switched tactics and started to throw requests from more than 15,000 IP addresses spread throughout China," according to the internal document. "By Tuesday 24th evening all income traffic from China was blocked, a decision that allowed us to come back online."

Unthwarted, the attackers pivoted again, this time relying on 180,000 IP addresses from countries including Singapore and Japan. In all, the attack lasted for months but was effectively contained after three weeks when the bank turned to Amazon to build a more robust firewall.

While there is no indication the site was breached, "the downtime affected our digital presence and had a negative impact in different communication endeavors," the document says. "It also made our vulner-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 40 of 66

abilities explicit for third parties, which could potentially make us the target of new attacks and impact the reputation of the IDB brand.”

Still, it’s impossible to know who was behind the attack.

While China has some of the world’s most skilled hackers, security experts say that doesn’t necessarily mean it is behind the attacks. Poorly protected computers can be hijacked and marshaled from anywhere in the world and turned into botnets for unleashing DDoS attacks.

“A targeted attack this long has an obvious financial or political motive — you don’t troll for three weeks,” said Tord Lundstrom, a digital security expert at Qurium, a Swedish non-profit organization. “But determining whether China was behind it, or someone is just trying to make it look like it was, is very hard to determine without additional digital forensic information.”

China’s foreign ministry didn’t respond directly to questions about whether the government knew about the incident at the IDB or was involved but said in a statement that it strongly opposes cyber attacks

“Linking cyber attacks directly to a government is a highly sensitive political issue,” the ministry statement said. “All parties should jointly resolve the hacking issue through dialogue and cooperation and avoid politicizing the issue.”

Claver-Carone declined to be interviewed while the IDB said it does not comment on internal cybersecurity issues. Nonetheless, three people at the bank told the AP they recall China being openly blamed for the attack in briefings back in 2019 to discuss the fallout. The people spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

On paper, China has a minuscule 0.004% of the IDB’s voting shares, the smallest stake of any of the bank’s 48 members. But membership has been a cheap way for China to expand its reach in Latin America. Chinese companies are able to bid on IDB-financed projects, rub shoulders with political leaders and pick up valuable economic intelligence that would be harder to acquire on its own.

China is also the second-largest non-borrowing shareholder in IDB Invest, the bank’s private lending arm, with nearly 6% of shares, thanks to a reorganization in 2015 when the Obama administration refused to pony up additional resources and saw the U.S.’ stake diluted to 13%.

The IDB also manages a \$2 billion fund made up entirely of contributions from China. Over the years the IDB also hosted more than a dozen business summits connecting Latin American entrepreneurs with Chinese investors.

“For too long the IDB was too friendly with the Chinese Communist Party,” said Runde. “The Bank and its shareholders did not hold China accountable when it ruined the 60th Anniversary for the IDB. This too cozy relationship has to change.”

China has made no secret of its tense relationship with Claver-Carone. In a symbolic rebuke, Yi Gang, the head of China’s central bank, refrained from voting in the special meeting last year when Claver-Carone was elected, according to a person who attended the meeting on the condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door discussion.

Rebecca Ray, a Boston University economist who tracks China’s investment in the region, said the touchy politics around China can be a double-edged sword. While Claver-Carone’s attempts to isolate Beijing may play well in the U.S. Congress and help him secure additional funding it could ultimately end up undermining the IDB’s mission at a time of great need for financing to build infrastructure, improve health care and reduce poverty in the region.

She noted that as the IDB has lagged other multilateral institutions in securing more funding, three Latin American countries — Brazil, Ecuador, and Uruguay — have joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China’s answer to the World Bank and one which the U.S. opposes.

“Sidelineing China may end up limiting China’s willingness to keep playing an active role, which would not be popular in the region,” said Ray. “As long as the need for financing remains high, countries will keep turning to China because that’s where the money is.”

Associated Press writer Joe McDonald in Beijing contributed to this report.

An outsider's eye, an instant camera and America seen anew

By The Associated Press undefined

Through the lens of an instant camera, through the eyes of an outsider, oft-neglected corners of America take on a very different cast.

There is beauty in the swing ride at the Mississippi State Fair, seats suspended against an azure sky. There is humor in the giant statue of a hotdog alongside a highway in Lesage, West Virginia. There is desolation in a street scene in Cairo, Illinois.

Photographer Maye-E Wong was part of an Associated Press team that drove the backroads during the run-up to the 2020 election. She illustrated stories about currents of racial tension that still ripple through towns that once expelled Black people, about how claims of a gentler political culture in Utah turned out to be far more complicated than the folklore, about people in coal country who were isolated from COVID-19 and race issues and so much more.

But Wong, raised in Singapore, also brought along an Instax camera that made prints immediately, without the complications of her professional equipment. Fully in the moment, she used that camera to compile a visual diary — “a collective portrait of a dysfunctional family,” as she describes it.

There are photos of the many people they met, from the Mississippi man whose wife had been put in a medically induced coma to the unemployed casino workers in Las Vegas struggling with poverty. Some supported Donald Trump and some didn't, and so many opened their arms to the visitors.

But the Instax photos — tangible, color-saturated art-on-the-spot — also capturing slices of American life and the American landscape: Youths playing basketball on an outdoor court in Mississippi. A pig race at the state fair. Women collecting water at an old trough in Ohio.

Exquisite images of a Mississippi cotton field and bison grazing in Utah give way to shots that are less so — a Dollar General in Kentucky, abandoned cars in Meridian, Mississippi. There is irony in a Superman statue, usually a favorite spot for tourists to pose in Metropolis, Illinois.

In these pandemic times, there is no one around. And Superman wears a mask.

Jury selection in 3rd week for ex-cop's trial in Floyd death

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Jury selection enters a third week Monday for a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death.

Thirteen jurors have been seated for Derek Chauvin's trial on murder and manslaughter charges, with the judge saying two more will be seated ahead of opening statements expected March 29. Only 12 will deliberate. The others will be alternates, needed only if some jurors are unable to to serve for any reason.

Floyd, who was Black, was declared dead May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee on his neck for about nine minutes while he was handcuffed and pleading that he couldn't breathe. Floyd's death, captured on a widely seen bystander video, set off weeks of sometimes violent protests across the country and led to a national reckoning on racial justice.

On Friday, Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill declined a defense request to delay or move Chauvin's trial over concerns that a \$27 million settlement for Floyd's family had tainted the jury pool.

Cahill, who called the timing “unfortunate,” said he believed a delay would do nothing to stem the problem of pretrial publicity, and that there's no place in Minnesota untouched by that publicity.

In another significant ruling Friday, the judge handed the defense a victory by ruling that the jury can hear evidence from Floyd's 2019 arrest, but only information possibly pertaining to the cause of his death in 2020. He acknowledged several similarities between the two encounters, including that Floyd swallowed drugs after police confronted him.

The judge previously said the earlier arrest could not be admitted, but he reconsidered after drugs were found in January in a second search of the police SUV that the four officers attempted to put Floyd in last year. The defense argues that Floyd's drug use contributed to his death.

Cahill said he'd allow medical evidence of Floyd's physical reactions, such as his dangerously high blood

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 42 of 66

pressure when he was examined by a paramedic in 2019, and a short clip of an officer's body camera video. He said Floyd's "emotional behavior," such as calling out to his mother, won't be admitted.

The county medical examiner classified Floyd's death as a homicide in an initial summary that said he "had a cardiopulmonary arrest while being restrained by police." Floyd was declared dead at a hospital 2.5 miles (4 kilometers) from where he was restrained.

The full report said he died of "cardiopulmonary arrest, complicating law enforcement subdual, restraint, and neck compression." A summary report listed fentanyl intoxication and recent methamphetamine use under "other significant conditions" but not under "cause of death."

The 13 jurors seated through Friday are split by race: Seven are white, four are Black and two are multiracial, according to the court.

Only two alternates had been expected before Friday, when Cahill said the court would seek 15 — meaning three alternates. A court spokesman, asked to explain the apparent change, cited a November order that called for up to 16 jurors.

It's unclear which jurors would be alternates. Legal experts said it's almost always the last people chosen, but the court said that wouldn't necessarily be the case for Chauvin's jury.

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

Sweet 16 bound: No. 15 seed Oral Roberts tops Florida 81-78

By TIM BOOTH AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Dunk City, say hello to Max Abmas and soaring Oral Roberts.

The fraternity of No. 15 seeds to reach the second week of the NCAA Tournament has its second member. "It's really just mind blowing," forward Kevin Obanor said. "We're grateful. Just happy that we got the win."

Abmas and Obanor led the way as Oral Roberts pulled off another surprise Sunday night, reaching the round of 16 with an 81-78 victory over Florida.

The Golden Eagles erased an 11-point deficit on the way to their seventh straight victory. Next up for the Summit League Tournament champions, who eliminated No. 2 seed Ohio State in the first round, is a matchup with No. 3 seed Arkansas next weekend.

"As I told the guys, we're not going to let somebody put a number in front of our name and tell us that that's our worth, or that's our value," Oral Roberts coach Paul Mills said. "We're not capitulating to anybody here."

Obanor scored 28 points and Abmas (pronounced ACE-mus), the regular-season national leading scorer, finished with 26 as the Golden Eagles (18-10) closed the game on a 25-11 run to overcome the 11-point lead Florida held with less than 10 minutes remaining.

Oral Roberts joins Florida Gulf Coast — those guys from "Dunk City" — as the only No. 15 seeds to reach the round of 16 in tournament history. The private evangelical university in Tulsa, Oklahoma, has won twice in the tournament for the first time since 1974 when it reached the region final before losing to Kansas.

The Oral Roberts fans inside Indiana Farmers Coliseum chanted "Cinderella" during a wild celebration after the victory.

The chance to reach the Sweet 16 was a message hammered home by Mills after the opening victory over Ohio State. If they enjoyed beating the Buckeyes, Mills said, a week reveling in moving onto the next round would be even better.

They'll get that chance.

"I told them, 'I told you so,' when we got to locker room," Mills said. "I told you the Sweet 16 was a much better feeling."

Oral Roberts took a 77-76 lead — its first lead since late in the first half — on Obanor's basket with less than 3 minutes remaining. Noah Locke answered for the Gators, but DeShang Weaver, who missed his first five shots, hit an open 3-pointer for an 80-78 lead with 2:08 remaining.

Florida had a chance but failed to get good shots on its final few possessions. The Gators had a pair of

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 43 of 66

turnovers, Locke missed a corner 3-pointer and, after Obanor split free throws, difficult 3-point attempts by Tre Mann and Scottie Lewis were off line.

Mann led the Gators (15-10) with 19 points, but went quiet late in the second half, failing to score over the final 17 minutes.

"I just missed shots," Mann said. "We made the same plays we did in the first half. I got the same shots. I just missed shots. I didn't get the wide-open looks I was getting."

Locke finished with 17 points and Colin Castleton and Tyree Appleby both added 14 for the Gators. But there will be plenty of anger and frustration after losing in the second round for the third straight NCAA appearance and a game Florida felt it gave away.

The Gators shot 55%. They outrebounded the smaller Golden Eagles 37-24 and had 42 points in the paint. But Florida committed 20 turnovers and had just three made baskets over the final 9½ minutes.

Florida coach Mike White was worried about fatigue with his players and playing slower backfired.

"We were tired. These guys get you in rotation. I was hoping slowing it down would help us make better decisions," White said. "We made some erratic decisions. We made some passes that boy I wish we had back."

In the eight previous instances of a No. 15 seed playing in the round of 32, only Florida Gulf Coast was able to keep its magical run going. "Dunk City" ousted San Diego State in the second round before losing to Florida in the Sweet 16.

Most times, the elation of pulling off the first-round upset led to a second-round rout. Only Coppin State in 1997 lost by less than 10 points, an 82-81 defeat to Texas.

SMART FOUL

One of the biggest decisions of the game came with 3:11 left after Oral Roberts pulled within 76-75. The Golden Eagles fouled Florida's Osayi Osifo, a 50% free-throw shooter on the season, as soon as the ball got in his hands. Osifo missed the front end of a 1-and-1, and Obanor scored to give the Golden Eagles the lead.

"We're not getting stops. We're not getting rebounds. We're down one, so we need to give ourselves a chance here and so we took the gamble and it paid off," Mills said.

FLORIDA HELP

Florida had Appleby back on the floor after suffering a gash on his head against Virginia Tech that knocked him out of the game. The Gators also had Omar Payne back after he was held out by a coach's decision for the opener. 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 loss to Oregon State.

Payne scored four points in 11 minutes.

UP NEXT

The Golden Eagles faced Arkansas earlier this season, losing 87-76 to the Razorbacks on Dec. 20.

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

Supply bottlenecks leave ships stranded, businesses stymied

By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A trade bottleneck born of the COVID-19 outbreak has U.S. businesses anxiously awaiting goods from Asia — while off the coast of California, dozens of container ships sit anchored, unable to unload their cargo.

The pandemic has wreaked havoc with the supply chain since early 2020, when it forced the closure of factories throughout China. The seeds of the current problems were sown last March, when Americans stayed home and dramatically changed their buying habits — instead of clothes, they bought electronics, fitness equipment and home improvement products. U.S. companies responded by flooding reopened Asian factories with orders, leading to a chain reaction of congestion and snags at ports and freight hubs

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 44 of 66

across the country as the goods began arriving.

Main Street businesses are now forced to wait months instead of the usual weeks for a delivery from China, and no one knows when the situation will be resolved. Owners do a lot of explaining to customers, order more inventory than usual and lower their expectations for when their shipments will arrive.

Alejandro Bras used to be able to place an order to factories in China and expect to receive his products in 30 days. Now, with problems throughout the supply chain, "we're adding an additional two months," he says. And that two months is "iffy" — it can take even longer.

Bras' company, Womple Studios, sells monthly subscription boxes with educational crafts and activities for children; many of the products are custom-made, so he can't easily find substitutes.

Bras has found himself spending more time on logistics rather than product development, and more time apologizing to the Oakland, California, company's customers who expect a shipment each month. Customers have been understanding — they realize the pandemic has upset shipping and trade worldwide.

The cluster of ships offshore are perhaps the most dramatic symptom of an overwhelmed supply chain. As production surged in Asia, more ships began arriving in the fall at ports in Los Angeles, Long Beach and other West Coast cities than the gateways could handle. Ships holding as many as 14,000 containers have sat offshore, some of them for over a week. At times there have been as many as 40 ships waiting; normally, there's no more than a handful, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California, a service that monitors port traffic and operations.

"With this type of backlog, it will take several weeks to work through that. It doesn't go away. And new ships are sailing to the U.S. even as we speak," says Shanton Wilcox, a manufacturing adviser with PA Consulting.

But there are choke points on land as well. It can take 8,000 trucks to haul the cargo away from a ship, says Kip Louttit, executive director of the Marine Exchange of Southern California. But when all those trucks hit the road, there aren't enough available when dockworkers are trying to unload the next ships in port. Freight rail traffic has also been affected.

"When you have more cargo, you have a less efficient cargo moving system," Louttit says. The pandemic itself is also slowing down the flow of goods, sidelining workers in warehouses at the ports, he says.

Put all the problems together, and when a ship gets into port, it takes five to seven days to unload instead of two to three, says Shruti Gupta, an industrial analyst with the consulting firm RSM. "That again has consequences on truckers and rail service, because they have to wait until the port clears," she says.

Businesses also wait because of the high demand for space on ships, and inside the shipping containers that range from 20 to 45 feet long.

"Normally a shipment can be booked with a couple days' notice and currently you have to book containers 30 days in advance," says Peter Mann, CEO of Oransi, a maker of air purifiers and filters based in Raleigh, North Carolina. He has to account for shipment times twice as long as normal in his operating plans.

When Mann began having trouble getting shipments in the fall, he decided to place larger orders — getting the goods manufactured wasn't a problem and fewer deliveries meant less waiting time. It has meant investing more money in inventory.

Supply disruptions can be a more serious problem for smaller companies because, unlike larger players, they may not be able to shift production to other countries — for example, Western Hemisphere nations whose products can be shipped to East Coast ports. And big companies can better afford to use air freight, which is more expensive than shipping.

Because there's so much competition for containers, the cost of importing is climbing.

"The price can be as much as five times as usual," says Craig Wolfe, whose company, CelebriDucks, has had problems getting rubber ducks from China since the start of the pandemic.

One of Wolfe's shipments sat on the dock for three weeks because there were no railcars available. Another that he expected to be shipped by mid-February still hasn't left China.

"It would have arrived by now," says Wolfe, whose company is based in Kelseyville, California. He's anxious because most of his products aren't typical rubber ducks — they're based on presidents and other celebrities and pop culture trends like the Harry Potter books and movies. Like Mann, he's placed some

larger-than-usual orders to be sure he has enough stock.

Exporters are also feeling the impact of the bottlenecks. When containers are unloaded at the ports, many are being sent empty back to Asia instead of being held and filled with U.S. goods.

Isaiah Industries sells its metal roofs to Japan, "but we're having huge delays getting containers scheduled to ship to them. So, we're sitting here with orders and product to fill those orders but no way to get them shipped," says Todd Miller, president of the Piqua, Ohio, company.

Miller is also waiting for shipments of raw materials from overseas, including sheeting commonly known as tar paper that is placed under roofing tiles. His problem is he's competing with every other importer for space on container ships.

"We can get it produced, but it will take four to six weeks before they can load it on a ship," he says.

A rapid COVID-19 vaccine rollout backfired in some US states

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and NICKY FORSTER Associated Press

Despite the clamor to speed up the U.S. vaccination drive against COVID-19 and get the country back to normal, the first three months of the rollout suggest faster is not necessarily better.

A surprising new analysis found that states such as South Carolina and Florida that raced ahead of others to offer the vaccine to ever-larger groups of people have vaccinated smaller shares of their population than those that moved more slowly and methodically, such as Hawaii and Connecticut.

The explanation, as experts see it, is that the rapid expansion of eligibility caused a surge in demand too big for some states to handle and led to serious disarray. Vaccine supplies proved insufficient or unpredictable, websites crashed and phone lines became jammed, spreading confusion, frustration and resignation among many people.

"The infrastructure just wasn't ready. It kind of backfired," said Dr. Rebecca Wurtz, an infectious disease physician and health data specialist at the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health. She added: "In the rush to satisfy everyone, governors satisfied few and frustrated many."

The findings could contain an important go-slow lesson for the nation's governors, many of whom have announced dramatic expansions in their rollouts over the past few days after being challenged by President Joe Biden to make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1.

"If you're more targeted and more focused, you can do a better job," said Sema Sgaier, executive director of Surgo Ventures, a nonprofit health-data organization that conducted the analysis in collaboration with The Associated Press. "You can open it up — if you have set up the infrastructure to vaccinate all those people fast."

Numerous factors stymied state vaccination performance. Conspiracy theories, poor communication and undependable shipments slowed efforts after the first vials of precious vaccine arrived Dec. 14.

But the size of the eligible population was always within the control of state officials, who made widely varying decisions about how many people they invited to get in line when there wasn't enough vaccine to go around.

When the drive began, most states put health care workers and nursing home residents at the front of the line. In doing so, states were abiding by national recommendations from experts who also suggested doing everything possible to reach everyone in those two groups before moving on to the next categories.

But faced with political pressure and a clamor from the public, governors rushed ahead. Both the outgoing Trump administration and the incoming Biden team urged opening vaccinations to older Americans.

By late January, more than half the states had opened up to older adults — some 75 and above, others 65 and up. That's when the real problems started.

South Carolina expanded eligibility to people in Steven Kite's age group Jan. 13. Kite, 71, immediately booked a vaccination at a hospital. But the next day, his appointment was canceled along with thousands of others because of a shortage of vaccine.

"It was frustrating at first," Kite said. After a week of uncertainty, he rescheduled. He and his wife are now vaccinated. "It ended up working out fine. I know they've had other problems. The delivery of the doses has been very unreliable."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 46 of 66

In Missouri, where more than half of adults were eligible for shots, big-city shortages sent vaccine seekers driving hundreds of miles to rural towns. Dr. Elizabeth Bergamini, a pediatrician in suburban St. Louis, drove about 30 people to often out-of-the way vaccination events after the state opened eligibility to those 65 and older Jan. 18 and then expanded further.

"We went from needing to vaccinate several hundred thousand people in the St. Louis area to an additional half-million people, but we still hadn't vaccinated that first group, so it has been this mad dash," Bergamini said. "It has just been a whole hot mess."

"It got a little chaotic," said Dr. Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. "We created far more demand than there was supply. That stressed the system and that may have left the system less efficient."

Plescia said the analysis suggests that "a more methodical, measured, judicious, priority-based approach — despite people's perception — actually can be as efficient, or more efficient, than opening things up and making it available to more people."

In retrospect, health workers and nursing home residents were the easy groups to vaccinate. Doses could be delivered to them where they lived and worked.

"We knew where they were and we knew who they were," Wurtz said. As soon as states went beyond those populations, it got harder to find the right people. Nursing home residents live in nursing homes. People 65 and older live everywhere.

West Virginia bucked the trend with both high numbers of eligible residents and high vaccination rates in early March, but the state started slow and built its capacity before expanding eligibility.

Similarly, Alaska maintained a high vaccination rate with a smaller eligible population, then threw shots open to everyone 16 and older March 9. This big increase in eligible adults near the end of the period studied led the AP and Surgo Ventures to omit Alaska from the analysis.

The analysis found that as of March 10, Hawaii had the lowest percentage of its adult population eligible for vaccination, at about 26%. Yet Hawaii had administered 42,614 doses per 100,000 adults, the eighth-highest rate in the country.

Thirty percent of Connecticut's adult population was eligible as of the same date, and it had administered doses at the fourth-highest rate in the country.

In contrast, Mississippi had the sixth largest percentage of its adult population eligible at about 83%. Yet, Mississippi had administered only 35,174 total doses per 100,000 adults, ranking 43rd among states.

Missouri, with 61% of its population eligible, had dispensed 35,341 doses per 100,000 adults.

Seven states in the bottom 10 for overall vaccination performance — Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Mississippi, South Carolina and Missouri — had larger-than-average shares of their residents eligible for shots.

Among high-performing states, five in the top 10 for high vaccination rates — New Mexico, North Dakota, Connecticut, Wyoming and Hawaii — stuck with more restrictive eligibility. Another two high-performing states from the top 10 — South Dakota and Massachusetts — were about average in how many residents were eligible for vaccine.

"This is a thorough analysis showing a clear association between breadth of eligibility and vaccination rates across states," said Dr. Mark McClellan, a former head of the Food and Drug Administration who was not involved in the new analysis but reviewed it for AP.

The better-performing states could be getting results by paying closer attention to vaccine supply, thoroughly vaccinating high-risk groups and then opening to additional categories more slowly as they wait for supplies to build, McClellan said.

What happens next will depend on how much states can improve their vaccine delivery systems and whether Americans remain eager for vaccination, even as the threat eases with more people protected and case numbers dropping.

"Have states used this time wisely and fruitfully to lay down the infrastructure needed to open it up to more people?" Sgaier asked.

This story has been corrected to fix the percentage of people eligible for COVID-19 vaccines as of March 10 in Missouri. It was 61%, not 92%.

Associated Press Writer Heather Hollingsworth in Mission, Kansas, contributed to this report.

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'Sorry': GOP US Rep. Tom Reed retiring amid misconduct claim

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

U.S. Rep. Tom Reed, a Republican from western New York who was accused last week of rubbing a female lobbyist's back and unhooking her bra without her consent in 2017, apologized to the woman on Sunday and announced that he will not run for reelection next year.

Reed, 49, said in a statement that the incident involving then-lobbyist Nicolette Davis occurred "at a time in my life in which I was struggling." He said he entered treatment that year and realized he was "powerless over alcohol."

Reed apologized to his wife and children, and to Davis, and said he planned "to dedicate my time and attention to making amends for my past actions."

Reed, who was first elected to Congress in 2010, had been among the members of Congress calling for the resignation of Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo over sexual harassment allegations. In late February, Reed said he was seriously considering running for governor against Cuomo should the Democrat seek a fourth term next year.

Reed said in his statement Sunday that he would not seek any elective office in 2022.

The announcement came two days after The Washington Post reported the allegations from Davis, who was 25 and a lobbyist for insurer Aflac when she said Reed, seated next to her at a Minneapolis bar, unhooked her bra from outside her blouse and moved his hand to her thigh.

"A drunk congressman is rubbing my back," she texted a co-worker at Aflac that evening, adding later, "HELP HELP."

Reed released a statement Friday saying, "This account of my actions is not accurate."

In his statement Sunday he said, "In reflection, my personal depiction of this event is irrelevant. Simply put, my behavior caused her pain, showed her disrespect and was unprofessional. I was wrong, I am sorry, and I take full responsibility."

A former mayor of Corning, New York, Reed is co-chair of the House of Representatives' bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus.

He voted against impeaching former President Donald Trump in January but voted in favor of certifying the 2020 election of Democrat Joe Biden.

Slain spa workers and customers mourned by families

Associated Press undefined

ATLANTA (AP) — Mothers, grandmothers and a brother. They loved to cook, dance, sing and travel. They worked long hours, sometimes in settings their children little understood. These are the eight people killed by gunfire at three Atlanta-area massage businesses. Seven of the slain were women, and six of them were of Asian descent. Police charged a 21-year-old white man with the killings, saying he was solely responsible for the deadliest U.S. mass shooting since 2019. In the days since the shooting, fuller pictures of almost all the victims have emerged. The exception is 44-year-old Daoyou Feng, an employee at Youngs Asian Massage near Woodstock about whom little is known.

Sunday should have seen 63-year-old Yong Ae Yue buying groceries and cooking Korean food for her

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 48 of 66

family. Instead those relatives are mourning her death Tuesday at the Aromatherapy Spa in Atlanta.

"We are devastated by the loss of our beloved mother, and words cannot adequately describe our grief," her sons said in a statement released by attorney BJay Pak.

Yue immigrated from South Korea to the United States, and was married for a time to Mac Peterson of Columbus, who once served at the Army's Fort Benning in that Georgia city.

"Mom was an amazing woman who loved to introduce our family and friends to her home-cooked Korean food and Korean karaoke," said Rob Peterson, one of Yue's sons, who described her as an "amazing woman" in a fundraising appeal. "Will miss joining mom on her weekly Sunday routine to the grocery store and traditional Korean dinner. She was always kind-hearted and willing to help everyone she encountered."

Yue was a licensed massage therapist in Georgia who owned a home in the suburb of Peachtree Corners. Relatives reached there declined comment.

A granddaughter lauds Suncha Kim's love and mourns that she won't be able to "watch her children and grandchildren live the life she never got to live."

The 69-year-old Kim was one of three women killed at the Gold Spa in Atlanta.

Regina Song wrote that her grandmother was born in Seoul and came to the United States speaking little English, working multiple jobs to provide for her husband, son and daughter.

"This took immense courage and my grandmother was a fighter," Song wrote.

Family members told The Washington Post that Kim was a Catholic and naturalized American citizen who volunteered her time and helped raised money for various causes. Relatives said Kim won the President's Volunteer Service Award for her efforts to help feed the homeless in the Washington, D.C., area.

"She was pure hearted and the most selfless woman I knew," her granddaughter wrote. "She represented everything I wanted to be as a woman, without an ounce of hate or bitterness in her heart."

"She never forgot to call me once a week to say 'Stay strong in life... when you're happy, I'm happy.'"

Soon Chung Park had spent much of her life in New York and northern New Jersey before moving to Atlanta, son-in-law Scott Lee told The New York Times and The Washington Post.

In Atlanta, the 74-year-old Park settled in a corridor that included Korean businesses in the Gwinnett County suburb of Duluth. Though she had family members in the New York area, she made a new life here, with 38-year-old Gwangho Lee telling The Daily Beast that he accepted Park's marriage proposal after the two met in 2017.

Park was the day manager at the Gold Spa, cooking for employees. Lee, a ride-hailing service driver, told The Daily Beast he was already on the way to Gold Spa when he got texts about an apparent robbery, and tried to resuscitate Park while a police officer stood by after he arrived.

She was described as unusually youthful-looking for her age, fit and active, a former dancer and hard a worker,

"She just liked to work," Scott Lee told The New York Times. "'It wasn't for the money. She just wanted a little bit of work for her life.'"

Hyun Jung Grant loved disco and club music, often strutting or moonwalking while doing household chores and jamming with her sons to tunes blasting in the car.

The single mother found ways to enjoy herself despite working "almost every day" to support two sons, said the older son, 22-year-old Randy Park.

"I learned how to moonwalk because, like, I saw her moonwalking while vacuuming when I was a kid," Park said.

On Tuesday night, Park was at home playing video games when he heard a gunman had opened fire at the Gold Spa where his mother worked. He rushed to the scene and then to a police station to find out more information. But it was through word of mouth that he learned his mother was dead.

Her job was a sensitive subject, Park said, noting the stigma often associated with massage businesses.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 49 of 66

She told her sons that they should tell others she worked doing makeup with her friends.

Ultimately, Park said, he didn't care what she did for work.

"She loved me and my brother enough to work for us, to dedicate her whole life," he said. "That's enough."

An entrepreneur who built multiple businesses after arriving in the United States knowing little about the country, Xiaojie "Emily" Tan is remembered for being devoted to her work and her family.

The 49-year-old owned Youngs Asian Massage near Woodstock, where she was shot dead two days short of her 50th birthday. She leaves a daughter who is a recent University of Georgia graduate, Jami Webb. Tan had been married twice, first to Michael Webb, who she met in her native city of Nanning, according to USA Today. Later, she married Jason Wang. She also owned Wang's Feet and Body Massage in Kennesaw when she died.

"She worked a lot, and she was the kind of lady that she wanted to depend on herself," Wang told The Washington Post. Tan had earlier worked in and owned a nail salon.

Tan frequently visited her mother and other relatives in China.

"She'd always say, 'we family,'" Michael Webb told USA Today. "Even when we got divorced, she'd say that: 'We family.' Because that's how she was."

Paul Andre Michels owned a business installing security systems, a trade he learned after moving to the Atlanta area more than 25 years ago.

He'd been talking about switching to a new line of work, but never got the chance. He was fatally shot at Youngs Asian Massage on Tuesday along with three others.

"From what I understand, he was at the spa that day doing some work for them," said Michels' younger brother, John Michels of Commerce, Michigan.

Paul Michels also might have been talking with the spa's owner about how the business operates, his brother said, because he had been thinking about opening a spa himself.

"His age caught up to him. You get to a point where you get tired of climbing up and down ladders," John Michels said. "He was actually looking to start his own massage spa. That's what he was talking about last year."

Paul Michels grew up in Detroit in a large family where he was the seventh of nine children. His brother John was No. 8.

Though they were born 2 1/2 years apart, "he was basically my twin," John Michels said. Both enlisted in the Army after high school, with Paul joining the infantry.

A few years after leaving the military, Paul followed his brother to the Atlanta area in 1995 for a job installing phones and security systems. He also met his wife, Bonnie, and they were married more than 20 years.

"He was a good, hard-working man who would do what he could do to help people," John Michels said. "He'd loan you money if you needed it sometimes. You never went away from his place hungry."

The day before she was killed, Delaina Ashley Yaun dropped by Rita Barron's boutique to say hello and show photos of her 8-month-old daughter.

"She told me, 'I'm happy. I want another baby,'" said Barron, who had gotten to know the 33-year-old Yaun from eating at the Waffle House where the new mother worked.

Yaun and her new husband returned Tuesday to the shopping center where Gabby's Boutique is located, only this time they headed next door to Youngs Asian Massage. They had planned it as a day for Yaun to relax while a relative watched their baby girl.

Barron and her husband, Alejandro Acosta, heard gunshots from inside the boutique and later noticed that a bullet had gone through the wall. She called 911, and after police arrived Acosta watched them bring people out of the business, some bleeding and wounded. Among those who walked out was Yaun's husband, unhurt but distraught. His wife had been killed. "As you can imagine, he's totally destroyed,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 50 of 66

without strength, doesn't want to talk with anybody," said Acosta, who added that he had spoken twice with Yaun's husband since the shootings.

Family members said Yaun and her husband were first-time customers at Youngs, eager for a chance to unwind.

"They're innocent. They did nothing wrong," Yaun's weeping mother, Margaret Rushing, told WAGA-TV. "I just don't understand why he took my daughter."

Biden aims to prevent border crossings from swamping agenda

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is scrambling to manage a growing humanitarian and political challenge at the U.S.-Mexico border that threatens to overshadow its ambitious legislative agenda.

With the number of migrants surging, administration officials say Biden inherited an untenable situation that resulted from what they say was President Donald Trump's undermining and weakening of the immigration system.

But as Congress pivots to immigration legislation, stories of unaccompanied minors and families trying to cross the border and seek asylum and of overwhelmed border facilities have begun to dominate the headlines, distracting from the White House's efforts to promote the recently passed \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill.

Biden told reporters Sunday at the White House that "at some point" he would go to the border and that he knows what is going on in the border facilities.

"A lot more, we are in the process of doing it now, including making sure we re-establish what existed before, which was they can stay in place and make their case from their home countries," Biden said upon returning from a weekend at Camp David.

The White House dispatched Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to four Sunday news shows in an effort to stress that it was working to get things under control.

"Our message has been straightforward — the border is closed," Mayorkas said. "We are expelling families. We are expelling single adults. And we've made a decision that we will not expel young, vulnerable children."

The White House has steadfastly refused to call the situation a "crisis," leading to a Washington battle over the appropriate description of the tense situation. Career immigration officials had warned there could be a surge after the November election and the news that Trump's hard-line policies were being reversed.

In the first days of his term, Biden acted to undo some of Trump's measures, a rollback interpreted by some as a signal to travel to the United States. While the new 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.

"We have seen large numbers of migration in the past. We know how to address it. We have a plan. We are executing on our plan and we will succeed," Mayorkas said. But, he added, "it takes time" and is "especially challenging and difficult now" because of the Trump administration's moves. "So we are rebuilding the system as we address the needs of vulnerable children who arrived at our borders."

Biden officials have done away with the "kids in cages" imagery that defined the Trump family separation policy — though Trump used facilities built during the Obama administration — but have struggled with creating the needed capacity to deal with the surge. Unaccompanied children and teenagers in Customs and Border Protection custody must be transferred to the care of Health and Human Services within three days, although the minors coming now are being held for days longer than that.

Officials are trying to build up capacity to care for some 14,000 migrants now in federal custody — and more likely on the way. Critics say the administration should have been better prepared.

"I haven't seen a plan," said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas. "They have created a humanitarian crisis down here at this border that you have seen now. And the reason why they are coming is because he says words do matter, and they do. The messaging is that if you want to come, you can stay."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 51 of 66

The administration also has been pressed as to why it will not allow media to see the facilities at the border. Mayorkas said the government was "working on providing access so that individuals will be able to see what the conditions in a Border Patrol station are like."

But Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., told "Fox News Sunday" that "it's rich that Secretary Mayorkas won't let press travel with him to the border, but he will come on your Sunday morning show and peddle the same kind of nonsense that has created the Biden border crisis in the first place."

Since Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20, 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.

Among the reasons for the surge: 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.

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.

Pointing to the urgency of the situation at the border, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., expressed confidence that enough Republicans would vote to pass an immigration overhaul.

"We go into this debate, whether it's a crisis or a challenge at the border. Let me tell you, the crisis. We need to address our immigration laws in this country that are broken," said Durbin. "What we see at the border is one exhibit of it, one exhibit of evidence in that. But there's more across the board."

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 to support efforts to process the growing number of unaccompanied migrant children arriving at the border.

Mayorkas appeared on Fox, ABC's "This Week," CNN's "State of the Union" and NBC's "Meet the Press," while McCaul was on ABC and Durbin on CNN.

Associated Press writers Aamer Madhani and Colleen Long contributed to this report.

Married 66 years, husband, wife die minutes apart of virus

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Bill and Esther Ilnisky spent nearly seven decades together as Christian ministers and missionaries, working in the Caribbean and Middle East before preaching for 40 years in Florida.

They complemented each other — he the bookworm, she outgoing and charismatic. One without the other seemed unthinkable.

So when they died minutes apart of COVID-19 this month at a Palm Beach County hospice, it may have been a hidden blessing, their only child, Sarah Milewski, said — even if it was a devastating double loss for her. Her father was 88, her mom 92. Their 67th wedding anniversary would have been this weekend.

"It is so precious, so wonderful, such a heartwarming feeling to know they went together," Milewski said, then adding, "I miss them."

Bill Ilnisky grew up in Detroit, deciding at 16 to devote his life to God, Milewski said. He headed to Central Bible College, an Assemblies of God school in Springfield, Missouri. He preached at nearby churches and needed a piano player. Friends suggested Esther Shabaz, a fellow student from Gary, Indiana. They fell in love.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 52 of 66

"When my dad proposed, he told her, 'Esther, I can't promise you wealth, but I can promise you lots of adventure,'" Milewski said. "She had a lot, a lot of adventure."

After graduation and their wedding, Bill Inisky opened churches in the Midwest. In the late-1950s, the Iniskys took congregants to Jamaica for a mission, fell in love with the island, and stayed on to run a church in Montego Bay for a decade.

It was during that time they adopted Milewski, then 2, from a Miami foster home. In 1969, the family moved from Jamaica to Lebanon, where Bill Inisky ministered to college students and taught. His wife started an outreach center and had a Christian rock band.

"At that time, Lebanon was an amazing country — gorgeous," Milewski said.

But in 1975, civil war broke out between Christian and Muslim factions, and Beirut, the nation's capital, became a battleground. Twice, bombs exploded outside their apartment — the first knocking Milewski out of bed, the second slamming her father to the ground.

"My mom thought he was dead," Milewski said. "My mom and I went and hid in the bathroom all night, crying and praying." The next morning, bullet holes pocked the walls of apartments on every floor except theirs.

"We attributed that to prayer," she said.

They fled in 1976 when U.S. Marines evacuated Americans, catching the last plane out.

Shortly after their return to the States, Bill Inisky became pastor at Calvary Temple in West Palm Beach, later renamed Lighthouse Christian Center International. His wife started Esther Network International, aimed at teaching children to pray.

Tom Belt, a retired missionary in Oklahoma City, was a teenager at Calvary Temple when the couple arrived. He said Bill Inisky's tales of missionary work whetted his desire to travel.

Belt said the Iniskys "were very accommodating, believed in others and very forgiving."

Bill Inisky retired three years ago and while physically healthy for a late octogenarian, had some dementia. His wife still ran her prayer network and did Zoom calls.

When the pandemic hit last year, the couple took precautions, Milewski said. Her mother stayed home and had groceries delivered, but Bill Inisky occasionally went out.

"He couldn't take it," his daughter said. "He needed to be around people."

Sarah Milewski and her husband visited her parents on Valentine's Day, her mother's birthday. A few days later, her mom became ill, and not long after the couple were diagnosed with the virus and hospitalized.

While the prognosis was initially good, the disease overtook them. The decision was made Feb. 27 to put them in hospice. Jacqueline Lopez-Devine, chief clinical officer at Trustbridge hospice, said in her 15 years working with the dying, no couple had arrived together. She said there was no hesitation about putting them in the same room for their final days.

Because of the virus, Milewski said her goodbyes through a window, a microphone carrying "I love you" to her parents' bedside. They looked like they did when sleeping, her father lying on the right side, her mother facing him. He would nod as Milewski spoke; her mom tried to speak but couldn't.

"It was horrible," Milewski said.

At 10:15 a.m. on March 1, Esther Inisky died. Fifteen minutes later, her husband followed.

"They were always, always together," Milewski said. "So in sync."

Texas Roadhouse CEO Kent Taylor dies amid COVID-19 struggle

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Kent Taylor, founder and CEO of the Texas Roadhouse restaurant chain, has died. He was 65. His family and the company say he took his own life after suffering from symptoms related to COVID-19, including severe tinnitus.

Taylor's family and the company on Sunday confirmed his death in a statement.

Tinnitus is a common condition involving ringing or other noises in one or both ears. Experts say the coronavirus can exacerbate tinnitus problems.

"Kent battled and fought hard like the former track champion that he was, but the suffering that greatly

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 53 of 66

intensified in recent days became unbearable," the statement said.

Taylor recent committed to funding a clinical study to help military members suffering with tinnitus, the statement said.

"Kent leaves an unmatched legacy as a people-first leader, which is why he often said that Texas Roadhouse was a people company that just happened to serve steaks," the statement said.

Taylor opened the first Texas Roadhouse restaurant in 1993 in Clarksville, Indiana, coming up with the idea on a cocktail napkin. It currently operates 610 restaurants in 49 states and 10 other countries. Texas Roadhouse is based in Taylor's hometown of Louisville, Kentucky.

"Kent's kind and generous spirit was his constant driving force whether it was quietly helping a friend or building one of America's great companies in @texasroadhouse," Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer said on Twitter. "He was a maverick entrepreneur who embodied the values of never giving up and putting others first."

Taylor, who died Thursday, is survived by his parents, Powell and Marilyn Taylor; three children and five grandchildren. Texas Roadhouse spokesman Travis Doster said a small private service is planned this week.

There is still madness in the NCAAs, it's just a bit quieter

By TIM BOOTH AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — No bands. No cheer squads. No packed buildings filled with neutral fans suddenly throwing their support behind a plucky double-digit underdog hoping to pull off an upset.

The games during the first week of the NCAA Tournament have still brought madness — see: Oral Roberts, North Texas, Ohio and Abilene Christian — but it's a much different version than the past.

Yet despite the restrictions, despite the lack of fans with venue capacity capped at 22 % and despite teams being walled off from friends and family — the joy is still there. The fabric of March will always include upsets and big shots and they have come aplenty already.

This March, things are just a little quieter.

"We played most of the year with little or no fans. I think that atmosphere, that part of the experience for the student-athletes is noticeably missing," Wisconsin coach Greg Gard said. "So when you add just a few into the crowd, that makes a difference. That adds life to the building."

One of the hallmarks of NCAA Tournaments of the past is the atmosphere. The crowded arenas mixed between traveling diehards and neutral locals. The downtowns overflowing with visitors, the costumes and painted faces. Villanova's crying piccolo girl and more.

There is still some of that in Indianapolis this year. But it's on a far smaller scale and the line of delineation is obvious. Police vehicles and metal barricades surround parts of downtown around the hotel bubble where tournament teams are being housed. Skyways these use to walk to practices are closed off.

The meaning is clear. Family, friends and fans are on the outside looking in.

"I haven't seen my wife or my kids in over a week now, so I've obviously miss them terribly. I wave at my wife out of the hotel window every day since she got here," Abilene Christian coach Joe Golding said after the 14th-seeded Wildcats stunned No. 3 seed Texas. "That's the tough part about being here. I wish I could celebrate with them because she's the rock of the family."

Fans are still here. The orange of Syracuse, Illinois and Oregon State still pop in a crowd. The Hogs were definitely being called at local establishments after Arkansas' opening victory.

Supporters of Baylor and Gonzaga have shown up expecting long stays. Illinois fans did as well, only to get bounced in the second round by Loyola Chicago. The Mean Green of North Texas, Golden Eagles of Oral Roberts and Golding's Wildcats are sticking around longer than most anybody thought.

But it's different. It was going to have to be different to function inside of a bubble and that's translated to an atmosphere that's not library quiet, but not a rocking madhouse either.

Still, the players are taking notice of the noise that is there.

"The game yesterday was fun," Maryland's Darryl Morsell said Sunday, emphasizing the last word after its first round win over UConn. "ou know, half the building was Maryland, half the building was UConn."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 54 of 66

When UConn was making their little run, their fans getting loud. Our fans trying to pick us up, cheer us on. It was great. It felt like a packed house like a real game. I loved it. That's what we're all here for."

The NCAA has given nods to each school participating, whether its the fight songs playing when the teams take the floor, or videoed performances of each school's cheer squads being played at halftime.

The national anthem? It's a recording. Coaches' instructions and criticisms often are clearly heard during games. And don't expect crowd noise to rattle any free throws in the final seconds.

"You're used to running out for the most part to packed houses. Obviously that's different. I think we're grateful the fact that there are fans here," Illinois coach Brad Underwood said after its first-round win. "But it's a little different feel. Once the ball is thrown up, the game is the game, and it is different that way. But I'm just ecstatic that we're playing. Our players are ecstatic we're playing. There's going to be a champion."

It's not all stale atmospheres and library-quiet venues. Georgia Tech students roared inside Hinkle Fieldhouse until getting silenced by Loyola Chicago. Same with the hundreds of Grand Canyon students — known as Havocs — who were on hand for the first round matchup against Iowa.

Chants of "R-U" echoed through Bankers Life Fieldhouse as Rutgers won its first tournament game since 1983. Abilene Christian fans had Lucas Oil Stadium rocking well after midnight enjoying its upset of the flagship school in its home state.

For the guys at North Texas, who pulled one of the big first-round upsets by knocking out No. 4 seed Purdue, they loved the hostile feel of having most of Lucas Oil Stadium against them.

For the Mean Green, it definitely felt like March.

"We're doing something we love to do, playing basketball. Yeah, I want to experience the crowd, the sellout," North Texas star Javion Hamet said. "But it still was loud in there (Friday) night. It felt like 10- or 20,000 fans in there when Purdue went on a run. No, I don't feel like we're being shortchanged."

Added North Texas coach Grant McCasland, "We were playing a team from Indiana, the only team from Indiana in the tournament, in Indianapolis and I thought it was a pretty good atmosphere considering. Our guys loved it, man. It was a blast."

AP Sports Writers Eric Olson and Hank Kurz Jr. contributed to this report.

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

Whiskey makers face worsening hangover from trade dispute

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — A hangover from Trump-era tariff disputes could become even more painful for American whiskey distillers unless their entanglement in a trans-Atlantic trade fight is resolved soon.

Bourbon, Tennessee whiskey and rye whiskey were left out of recent breakthroughs to start rebuilding U.S. trade relations with the European Union and the United Kingdom in the wake of Donald Trump's presidency. Tariffs were suspended on some spirits, but the 25% tariffs slapped on American whiskey by the EU and UK remain in place. And the EU's tariff rate is set to double to 50% in June in the key export market for U.S. whiskey makers.

A leading spirits advocate is imploring top U.S. trade envoy Katherine Tai to not leave whiskey producers behind. The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States urged her to press for an immediate suspension of the European tariffs and to secure agreements removing them.

"Swift removal of these tariffs will help support U.S. workers and consumers as the economy and hospitality industry continue to recover from the pandemic," the council said in a recent statement after Tai was confirmed by the Senate.

American whiskey makers have been caught up in the trans-Atlantic trade dispute since mid-2018, when the EU imposed tariffs on American whiskey and other U.S. products in response to Trump's decision to slap tariffs on European steel and aluminum.

Since then, American whiskey exports to the EU are down by 37%, costing whiskey distillers hundreds

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 55 of 66

of millions in revenue between 2018 and 2020, the council said. American whiskey exports to the UK, the industry's fourth-largest market, have fallen by 53% since 2018, it said.

The tariffs amount to a tax, which whiskey producers can either absorb in reduced profits or pass along to customers through higher prices — and risk losing market share in highly competitive markets.

Amir Peay, owner of the Lexington, Kentucky-based James E. Pepper Distillery, said American whiskey has become "collateral damage" in the trade disputes. It's cost him about three-fourths of his European business, and the looming 50% EU tariff threatens to drain what's left.

"That could possibly end our business in Europe as we've known it over the years," Peay said in a phone interview Thursday.

He's already curtailed some whiskey shipments to Europe as a hedge against the potential doubling of the EU tariff. His distillery's signature bourbon and rye brand is James E. Pepper 1776.

Peay spent years and significant money cultivating European markets, especially in Germany, France and the UK. He was planning to double his European business before the trade disputes hit.

"The way things are going, everything that we invested to date looks like it could be destroyed," he said.

The tariffs have hurt spirits industry giants as well.

"We estimate that our company ... has borne roughly 15% of the entire tariff bill levied against the U.S. in response to steel and aluminum tariffs," Lawson Whiting, president and CEO of Louisville, Kentucky-based Brown-Forman Corp., said recently. "They have become a big problem for us and it's imperative that we get it resolved as soon as possible."

Brown-Forman's leading product is Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey, a global brand.

For Kentucky bourbon producers, tariffs slashed their exports by 35% in 2020, with shipments to the EU plummeting by nearly 50%, the Kentucky Distillers' Association said.

The EU had traditionally been the largest global market for Kentucky distilleries, accounting for 56% of all exports in 2017. It's now about 40%, the association said.

"Our signature bourbon industry has sustained significant damage for more than two years because of a trade war that has nothing to do with whiskey," KDA President Eric Gregory said. "And it will get much worse if we can't deescalate this dispute."

Kentucky distilleries craft 95% of the world's bourbon supply, the association estimates.

The thaw in the U.S. disputes with the EU and UK were part of an effort to resolve a longstanding Airbus-Boeing dispute. The tariff suspensions applied to duties that had been imposed on some spirits producers on both sides of the Atlantic. But the breakthroughs left plenty unresolved, including disputes that led to the retaliatory tariffs still hitting American whiskey.

The suspended tariffs mean some European spirits producers can ship their products into the U.S. duty free, while American whiskey makers are still subject to tariffs, Whiting said.

"We just want a level playing field for American whiskey," he said.

AP sources: Iran threatens US Army post and top general

By JAMES LAPORTA Associated Press

Iran has made threats against Fort McNair, an Army post in the U.S. capital, and against the Army's vice chief of staff, two senior U.S. intelligence officials said.

They said communications intercepted by the National Security Agency in January showed that Iran's Revolutionary Guard discussed mounting "USS Cole-style attacks" against the Army post, referring to the October 2000 suicide attack in which a small boat pulled up alongside the Navy destroyer in the Yemeni port of Aden and exploded, killing 17 sailors.

The intelligence also revealed threats to kill Gen. Joseph M. Martin and plans to infiltrate and surveil the installation, according to the officials, who were not authorized to publicly discuss national security matters and spoke on condition of anonymity. The Army post, one of the oldest in the country, is Martin's official residence.

The threats are one reason the Army has been pushing for more security around Fort McNair, which sits

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 56 of 66

alongside Washington's bustling newly developed Waterfront District.

City leaders have been fighting the Army's plan to add a buffer zone of about 250 feet to 500 feet (75 meters to 150 meters) from the shore of the Washington Channel, which would limit access to as much as half the width of the busy waterway running parallel to the Potomac River.

The Pentagon, National Security Council and NSA either did not reply or declined to comment when contacted by The Associated Press.

As District of Columbia officials have fought the enhanced security along the channel, the Army has offered only vague information about threats to the installation.

At a virtual meeting in January to discuss the proposed restrictions, Army Maj. Gen. Omar Jones, commander of the Military District of Washington, cited "credible and specific" threats against military leaders who live on the Army post. The only specific security threat he offered was about a swimmer who ended up on the installation and was arrested.

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the district's sole representative in Congress, was skeptical. "When it comes to swimmers, I'm sure that must be rare. Did he know where he was? Maybe he was just swimming and found his way to your shore?" she said.

Jones conceded that the swimmer was "not a great example there, but our most recent example" of a security breach.

He said the Army has increased patrols along the shoreline, erected more restricted area signs and placed cameras to monitor the Washington Channel.

Puzzled city officials and frustrated residents said the Army's request for the buffer zone was a government overreach of public waterways.

Discussions about the Fort McNair proposal began two years ago, but the recent intelligence gathered by the NSA has prompted Army officials to renew their request for the restrictions.

The intercepted chatter was among members of the elite Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and centered on potential military options to avenge the U.S. killing of the former Quds leader, Gen. Qassem Soleimani, in Baghdad in January 2020, the two intelligence officials said.

They said Tehran's military commanders are unsatisfied with their counterattacks so far, specifically the results of the ballistic missile attack on Ain al-Asad airbase in Iraq in the days after Soleimani's killing. No U.S. service members were killed in that strike but dozens suffered concussions.

Norton told the AP that in the two months since the January meeting, the Pentagon has not provided her any additional information that would justify the restrictions around Fort McNair.

"I have asked the Department of Defense to withdraw the rule because I've seen no evidence of a credible threat that would support the proposed restriction," Norton said. "They have been trying to get their way, but their proposal is more restrictive than necessary."

She added: "I have a security clearance. And they have yet to show me any classified evidence" that would justify the proposal. Norton pointed out that the Washington Navy Yard and Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, which also have access to district waters, do not have restricted zones along their shorelines and have not requested them.

The proposed changes, outlined in a Federal Register notice, would prohibit both people and watercraft from "anchoring, mooring or loitering" within the restricted area without permission.

The notice specifies the need for security around the Marine Helicopter Squadron, which transports American presidents, and the general and staff officers' quarters located at the water's edge. The southern tip of Fort McNair is home to the National War College, where midlevel and senior officers gunning for admiral or general study national security strategy.

The Washington Channel is the site of one of the city's major urban renewal efforts, with new restaurants, luxury housing and concert venues. The waterway flows from the point where the city's two major rivers, the Potomac and Anacostia, meet.

It's home to three marinas and hundreds of boat slips. About 300 people live aboard their boats in the channel, according to Patrick Revord, who is the director of technology, marketing and community engagement for the Wharf Community Association.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 57 of 66

The channel also bustles with water taxis, which serve 300,000 people each year, river cruises that host 400,000 people a year and about 7,000 kayakers and paddleboarders annually, Revord said during the meeting.

Residents and city officials say the restrictions would create unsafe conditions by narrowing the channel for larger vessels traversing the waterway alongside smaller motorboats and kayakers.

Guy Shields, a retired Army infantry colonel and member of the Capitol Yacht Club who opposes the restrictions around Fort McNair, said during the meeting that waterway restrictions wouldn't boost security.

"Those buoys aren't going to do anything to enhance security. It will increase congestion in an already congested area," Shields said. "And I'll say, signs do not stop people with bad intentions."

It's unclear whether the new intelligence will change the city's opposition to the Army's security plan. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment Sunday. Iranian state media did not immediately acknowledge the AP report.

LaPorta reported from Boca Raton, Florida. Associated Press writer Jon Gambrell in Dubai contributed to this report.

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org

In Kabul, Pentagon chief speaks of 'responsible end' to war

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, on his first visit to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief, said Sunday that the Biden administration wants to see "a responsible end" to America's longest war, but the level of violence must decrease for "fruitful" diplomacy to have a chance.

With questions swirling about how long U.S. troops will remain in the country, Austin said that "in terms of an end date or setting a specific date for withdrawal, that's the domain of my boss." He said his stop in Kabul, the capital, where he met with military commanders and senior Afghan government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani, was intended to let him "listen and learn" and "inform my participation" in reviewing the future of the American force.

President Joe Biden said last week in an ABC News interview that it will be "tough" for the U.S. to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But Biden said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between the Trump administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn't be by a "lot longer."

Austin, who arrived after a visit to India, said: "There's always going to be concerns about things one way or the other, but I think there's a lot of energy focused on, you know, doing what's necessary to bring about a responsible end, a negotiated settlement to the war."

The Taliban on Friday warned of consequences if the United States doesn't meet the deadline. Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiation team, told reporters that if American troops were to stay beyond May 1, "it will be a kind of violation of the agreement. That violation would not be from our side. ... Their violation will have a reaction."

A statement released by the presidential palace on the Ghani-Austin meeting said both sides condemned the increase in violence in Afghanistan. There was no mention of the May 1 deadline. Washington is reviewing the agreement the Trump administration signed with the Taliban last year and has been stepping up pressure on both sides in the protracted conflict to find a swift route to a peace agreement.

"It's obvious that the level of violence remains pretty high in the country," Austin said. "We'd really like to see that violence come down and I think if it does come down, it can begin to set the conditions for, you know, some really fruitful diplomatic work."

In a sharply worded letter to Ghani earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it was urgent to make peace in Afghanistan and that all options remained on the table. He also warned that it was likely the Taliban would make swift territorial gains if U.S. and NATO troops withdrew. The United States spends \$4 billion a year to sustain Afghanistan's National Security Forces

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 58 of 66

The Taliban warned America against defying the May 1 deadline, at a news conference in Moscow, the day after meeting with senior Afghan government negotiators and international observers to try to jump-start a stalled peace process to end Afghanistan's decades of war.

Washington has given both the Taliban and the Afghan government an eight-page peace proposal, which both sides are reviewing. It calls for an interim "peace government" that would shepherd Afghanistan toward constitutional reform and elections.

Ghani has resisted an interim administration causing his critics to accuse him of clinging to power. He says elections alone would be acceptable to bring a change of government.

Both the U.S. and Kabul have called for a reduction in violence leading to a cease-fire. The Taliban say a cease-fire would be part of the peace negotiations. The insurgent movement has not attacked U.S. or NATO troops since signing the agreement.

But U.S. military commanders and NATO leaders have argued that the Taliban have not lived up to their part of the peace agreement, which includes a reduction in violence and a separation from al-Qaida and other terrorist groups.

Austin said he was confident in the ability of Gen. Austin Miller, the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, to accomplish his mission "with the resources he has" and to protect American troops.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last month that the alliance "will only leave when the time is right" and when conditions have been met.

"The main issue is that Taliban has to reduce violence, Taliban has to negotiate in good faith and Taliban has to stop supporting international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda," he said.

Austin has said little on the record about the stalemate. After a virtual meeting of NATO defense ministers, Austin told reporters that "our presence in Afghanistan is conditions based, and Taliban has to meet their commitments."

Austin's stop in Afghanistan was his first return to a U.S. war zone in the Middle East since taking the Pentagon post. But he spent a great deal of time in the region during his service as an Army commander.

Austin, a retired four-star general, served in Afghanistan as commander of the 10th Mountain Division. From 2013-2016 he was the head of U.S. Central Command, which oversees the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan visit comes at the end of Austin's his first overseas trip as secretary. After a stop in Hawaii, he went to Japan and South Korea, where he and met with their defense and foreign counterparts.

Baldor reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Kathy Gannon in Islamabad contributed to this report.

Republic of Congo polls open; candidate sick with COVID-19

By LOUIS OKAMBA Associated Press

BRAZZAVILLE, Republic of Congo (AP) — Republic of Congo pressed ahead Sunday with an election in which President Denis Sassou N'Guesso is widely expected to extend his 36 years in power, while the leading opposition candidate was flown to France after suffering COVID-19 complications.

The watchdog group NetBlocks reported an internet blackout that began in the Central African country around midnight on election day.

After casting his ballot, Sassou N'Guesso said the government was aware of opposition candidate Guy Brice Parfait Kolelas' illness and had taken the steps necessary for him to be transferred to France for further treatment.

Aides confirmed the medical evacuation flight bringing Kolelas to a French hospital took off from Brazzaville on Sunday afternoon.

Elira Dokekias, who heads Republic of Congo's pandemic response, said Kolelas had been in serious condition on Saturday evening but that the candidate's condition was stable ahead departure.

Kolelas, 61, had skipped his final campaign event on Friday after telling some reporters a day earlier that

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 59 of 66

he feared he had malaria. A video circulating on social media Saturday 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."

Kolelas placed second to Sassou N'Gusso 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'Gusso 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 to this report.

Gun waiting periods rare in US states but more may be coming

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

Not long before the deadly Atlanta-area shootings spread fear and anger through Asian American communities nationwide, police say the attacker made a legal purchase: a 9 mm handgun.

Within hours, they say, he had killed eight people, seven of them women and six of Asian descent, in a rampage targeting massage businesses.

If Georgia had required him to wait before getting a gun, lawmakers and advocates say, he might not have acted on his impulse.

"It's really quick. You walk in, fill out the paperwork, get your background check and walk out with a gun," said Robyn Thomas, executive director of the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. "If you're in a state of crisis, personal crisis, you can do a lot of harm fairly quickly."

The purchase was a normal transaction at Big Woods Goods, a shop north of Atlanta that complies with federal background check laws and is cooperating with police, said Matt Kilgo, a lawyer for the store.

"There's no indication there's anything improper," he said.

The vast majority of states are like Georgia, allowing buyers to walk out of a store with a firearm after a background check that sometimes can take minutes. Waiting periods are required in just 10 states and the District of Columbia, although several states are considering legislation this year to impose them.

Gun control advocates say mandating a window of even a couple of days between the purchase of a gun and taking possession can give more time for background checks and create a "cooling off" period for people considering harming themselves or someone else. Studies suggest that waiting periods may help bring down firearm suicide rates by up to 11% and gun homicides by about 17%, according to the Giffords Center.

Georgia Democrats plan to introduce legislation that would require people to wait five days between buying a gun and getting it, said Rep. David Wilkerson, who is minority whip in the state House.

"I think a waiting period just makes sense," he said.

A 2020 analysis by the Rand Corp., a nonprofit think tank, also found that research links waiting periods to decreased suicide and homicide rates but determined that the effect on mass shootings was inconclusive because the sample size was too small.

California has one of the country's longest waiting periods — 10 days. That did not stop more than 1.1 million people from buying guns last year, which was just shy of the record number sold in 2016. Gun sales nationwide, meanwhile, surged to record levels last year amid pandemic-related uncertainty.

Against that backdrop, lawmakers in at least four states — Arizona, New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont — have proposed creating or expanding waiting periods.

New gun laws will not fix deep-seated problems such as racism, misogyny and violence, said Seo Yoon

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 60 of 66

“Yoonie” Yang, a leader with Students Demand Action, a gun violence prevention group. But they can help keep guns out of the hands of people who would do harm in the meantime, she said.

“Legislation is practical. Research shows that it works,” she said. “It is change that can happen efficiently and quickly.”

In Colorado, Democratic state Rep. Tom Sullivan ran for office after his son, Alex, died along with 11 others when a gunman opened fire in an Aurora movie theater eight years ago. Sullivan said he hopes a waiting period in legislation he’s planning to sponsor could help curb domestic violence and suicide.

“In Atlanta, imagine if this guy’s parents or somebody else were notified that he was trying to get a firearm. Maybe they could have helped,” he said. “It wouldn’t have hurt anybody to wait ... let it breathe a while. If there’s a problem, let it surface, we’ll sort it out.”

Gun rights groups, including the National Rifle Association, oppose waiting periods. The group points to 2018 federal firearm-tracing data that shows the average time between first retail sale of a gun and involvement in a crime was nearly nine years. They also argue that waiting periods create a delay for people buying legally, while leaving illegal weapons transfers unaffected.

“A right delayed is a right denied,” Second Amendment Foundation founder Alan Gottlieb said.

Gun control legislation also is making its way through Congress. The Senate is expected to consider a bill to expand background checks, but it faces a difficult road — Democrats would need at least 10 Republican votes to pass it. While the House approved two bills to strengthen the checks this month, Congress has not passed any major gun control laws since the mid-1990s.

In Georgia, the Republican-controlled Legislature may resist new firearms laws before it concludes business at the end of the month. But Wilkerson pointed to recent long-sought victories that once seemed improbable, including passage of a hate crimes law and the likely repeal of a citizen’s arrest law a year after the death of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man pursued by armed white men while jogging.

“You’re going to run into resistance. It doesn’t mean you don’t try,” Wilkerson said. “In tragedy, sometimes we can move forward. This may be the opportunity to look at another tragedy and do something about it.”

Whitehurst reported from Salt Lake City. Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington; Don Thompson in Sacramento, California; and Jim Anderson in Denver contributed to this story.

A year into pandemic, veterans halls ‘barely hanging’ on

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW BEDFORD, Mass. (AP) — Paul Guilbeault knew the writing was on the wall for the last Veterans of Foreign Wars post in this city south of Boston when businesses across Massachusetts were ordered to close as the coronavirus pandemic took hold last March.

Within six months, the 90-year-old Korean War vet was proven right. VFW Post 3260 in New Bedford, a chapter of the national fraternity of war vets established in 1935, had surrendered its charter and sold the hall to a church.

“The economic shutdown is what killed us,” said Guilbeault, who has overseen the post’s finances for years. “There’s no way in the world that we could make it. A lot of these posts are barely hanging on. Most don’t make a huge profit.”

Local bars and halls run by VFW and American Legion posts — those community staples where vets commiserate over beers and people celebrate weddings and other milestones — were already struggling when the pandemic hit. After years of declining membership, restrictions meant to slow the spread of COVID-19 became a death blow for many.

The closures have added to the misery from a pandemic that’s hit military veterans hard. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently estimated the death toll in its facilities alone was approaching 11,000.

In many states, veterans posts were ordered to close like other bars and event halls last spring. Their supporters argued that the spaces serve a greater community purpose than their for-profit counterparts and should have been allowed to reopen sooner.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 61 of 66

They say many posts quickly pivoted their community service efforts to respond to the pandemic. In Lakeview, Michigan, VFW Post 3701 made hundreds of masks for workers and operated blood drives with the Red Cross. In Queens, New York, American Legion Post 483 ran a food pantry that fed thousands. And posts from Connecticut to North Carolina have been hosting vaccine registration drives and clinics.

The closure of some halls and bars also means vets dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and other wartime trauma have lost a critical safe space amid an isolating pandemic, leaders say.

"They can talk about things here that happened to them in the war that they'd never say to their psychiatrist or even their families," said Harold Durr, commander of American Legion Post 1 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Like a number of posts nationwide, Durr says his facility qualified for federal and local pandemic relief, though most of it could only be used to cover employee salaries, not utilities and other expenses.

He says the shuttered post, which includes a bar and hall, has largely relied on donations to pay monthly costs.

"We've had a rough go," says the 75-year-old Navy vet, who served in the Vietnam War. "But we've got to stay open. We've existed for 100 years. There's no way we can let it close."

How many vets halls and bars have permanently shuttered or risk closure because of the pandemic is hard to quantify.

The national VFW and American Legion organizations say the number of posts that dissolved completely last year was at or lower than prior years. But the organizations say they do not track bars and halls because they are locally controlled.

Many posts, they say, do not run halls or bars. Still, both organizations launched emergency grant programs last fall, doling out thousands of dollars to hundreds of posts to help cover facility costs and other expenses.

"A post could conceivably lose these things and still continue as a post," said John Raughter, spokesman for the Indianapolis-based American Legion.

Some facilities have found workarounds to keep bringing in money, which goes to a wide range of community work, from hosting free lunches for disabled veterans to sponsoring high school ROTC programs and offering free gathering space for Scout troops and other groups.

Members of the VFW Post 2718 on Long Island, New York, have been dipping into reserves and organizing fundraisers until they can fully reopen their hall. Their next effort is a first-time Mother's Day plant sale, said John McManamy, a former post commander.

In Massachusetts, the New Bedford post is the only one that's dissolved for pandemic-related reasons so far, but the state risks losing some 20% of its VFW buildings if they are forced to remain closed into the crucial summer months, said Bill LeBeau, head of the VFW Massachusetts, which oversees local posts.

Closing VFW Post 3260 in the historic fishing port city some 60 miles (97 kilometers) south of Boston has been bittersweet for longtime members.

Dennis Pelletier, a 75-year-old Marine who served in Vietnam, had his wedding reception at the hall in 1967, the year it opened. He's been a dues-paying member pretty much ever since.

"It's been a part of my whole adult life," Pelletier said. "It's been a second home at times."

But like VFW posts nationwide, the New Bedford hall struggled to draw new members. In the '60s, it had more than 1,000 paying members; by last year, it had roughly 100, the majority in their 70s and 80s.

"The stigma of just being a bar is hard to overcome," said Delfino Garcia, the post's last commander. "Younger vets want something different. You've got to be more family-oriented. You've got to make it more hospitable. VFWs are struggling to adapt to that new reality."

Guilbeault, who joined the post in 1956 after serving in the Air Force, has no regrets about winding things down.

With mortgage payments and other bills mounting, he had put in more than \$5,000 of his own savings in those final days. He eventually recouped the money when the building's sale was finalized in September, and the remaining profits went to the state VFW.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 62 of 66

"In a way, it's been a blessing to let it go," Guilbeault said. "If we'd kept going, we'd still be closed. There was no sense keeping it open. All we were doing was accumulating debt, debt, debt, debt."

Philippine defense chief asks Chinese flotilla to leave reef

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The Philippine defense chief on Sunday demanded more than 200 Chinese vessels he said were manned by militias leave a South China Sea reef claimed by Manila, saying their presence was a "provocative action of militarizing the area."

"We call on the Chinese to stop this incursion and immediately recall these boats violating our maritime rights and encroaching into our sovereign territory," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said in a statement, adding without elaborating that the Philippines would uphold its sovereign rights.

A government watchdog overseeing the disputed region said about 220 Chinese vessels were seen moored at Whitsun Reef, which Beijing also claims, on March 7. It released pictures of the vessels side by side in one of the most hotly contested areas of the strategic waterway.

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin tweeted late Sunday the Philippines has filed a diplomatic protest over the Chinese presence.

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 government watchdog said.

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.

Chinese fishing fleets have long been suspected of being utilized as maritime militias to help assert Beijing's territorial claims, although China has played down those claims.

Philippine military chief Lt. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana said the military's "utmost priority remains to be the protection of our citizens in the area, particularly our fishermen, through increased maritime patrols."

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 demand 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, which it called "a sham," and continues to defy it.

"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.

Coronavirus doesn't care that it's the NCAA Tournament

By JIM LITKE AP Sports Writer

If you didn't pay attention to college basketball until the NCAA Tournament, the good news is you didn't miss much. The regular season was a revolving door, the schedule and sometimes even the final score determined by which players and teams were entering the sport's COVID-19 protocols and which were

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 63 of 66

coming out.

Besides, Day 2 of the tournament was just like that.

Oregon beat Virginia Commonwealth 1-0 — technically scored a “no-contest” — and advances to meet Iowa because because multiple players on the VCU side tested positive. Their rotten luck. One-fifth of the 2020-21 season got wiped out due to the pandemic, and the coronavirus reminded everyone it doesn't make exceptions just because all the players now have new blue patches affixed to their tournament uniforms reading “NCAA.”

“It just stinks,” said VCU coach Mike Rhoades, whose team was notified at their pregame meal and went straight into quarantine. “There's no way I can sugarcoat it.”

Defending champion Virginia, dealing with COVID-19-related issues of its own, had most of its roster in quarantine until Thursday, didn't arrive in Indiana until Friday and then promptly got bounced out by 13th-seeded Ohio 62-58. But that was only the second-biggest upset Saturday.

Tiny Abilene Christian, a 14 seed that didn't even officially join Division I until 2018, took down No. 3 Texas, parlaying 23 turnovers and two free throws by Joe Pleasant — a 58.8% shooter from the line — with 1.2 seconds left into a 53-52 win.

“I was visualizing the free throws going in before I shot them,” Pleasant said afterward. “I was just trying to key in on the rim, just lock in and block out the noise.”

UCLA, which entered the main bracket as a No. 11 after a First Four win over Michigan State, overpowered sixth-seeded BYU 73-62 in the day's only other upset. Otherwise, it was all chalk.

Both No. 1 seeds playing Saturday came out breathing fire. Gonzaga, the tournament's overall top seed, crushed Norfolk State, and Michigan manhandled Texas Southern. No. 2 Alabama had its way with Iona and peripatetic coach Rick Pitino, and Iowa sent packing Grand Canyon — which chartered two private jets to bring 240 members of the GCU student section to the game.

The other winners were Oklahoma, Creighton (narrowly), USC, Kansas, LSU, Colorado (over media favorite and trendy upset pick Georgetown), Florida State and Maryland.

Virginia coach Tony Bennett had an alibi handy for why he didn't make that list, but he declined to reach for it.

“I don't know if it would have mattered if it was a normal prep or not,” he said. The loss marked the second time in the Cavaliers' last three NCAA Tournament appearances — this time as a No. 4 — that they've lost to a double-digit seed in the first round.

“I'm grateful we got the chance,” Bennett added. “You can't go back and change anything. I thought our guys were as ready as they can given the circumstances.”

Yet not everyone in the same situation had the same result. When No. 3 Kansas started to slow, trailing 11th-seeded Eastern Washington 46-38 at intermission, coach Bill Self had good reason to wonder how much firepower he had left.

The Jayhawks bowed out of the Big 12 Tournament after a positive test last week and like Virginia, barely made the Indiana state line in time to claim their bracket spot. Forward Jalen Wilson remains in the protocols and 6-foot-10-center David McCormack was cleared to return only Friday. He hadn't practiced in 10 days, didn't start against EWU and after a tiring few minutes in the first half, McCormack using up all five of his fouls before he ran out of gas was the most Self admitted thinking that he could expect.

Instead, McCormack staked out a spot in the heart of an Eagles' defense stretched thin by the Jayhawks' timely perimeter shooting and scored a game-high 22 points as Kansas pulled away.

“He kind of got his legs under him and he was really, really good in the second half,” Self said afterward. He sounded as surprised as anyone else. “I mean really, really good.”

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

Pope decries shame of racism, like 'virus' lurking in wait

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis on Sunday denounced racism, likening it to a virus that lurks in waiting and only to emerge and show that "our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive" as people think.

Francis tweeted on racism on the date that the United Nations marks as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The pope likened racism to a "a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting."

"Instances of racism continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think," Francis tweeted, adding the hashtags #FightRacism #FratelliTutti. "Fratelli Tutti" is the title of the encyclical, or special teaching document, which the pope issued last year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic to press for solidarity, brotherhood and care for the environment worldwide.

In his tweet, Francis cited no particular instance of racism or place. Throughout his papacy, he has championed the rights of people who are marginalized in societies, including migrants.

The annual U.N. commemoration on March 21 falls on the anniversary of the day that police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid laws in 1960.

N. Korean diplomats leaving Malaysia after ties are severed

By EILEEN NG Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — North Korean diplomats vacated their embassy in Malaysia and were expelled Sunday, after the two nations cut diplomatic relations in a spat over the extradition of a North Korean criminal suspect to the United States.

The North Korean flag and embassy signage were removed from the premise in a Kuala Lumpur suburb. Two buses ferried the diplomats and their families to the airport, where they were seen checking in for a flight to Shanghai.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said the expulsion was in response to Pyongyang's "unilateral and utterly irresponsible decision" on Friday to sever diplomatic ties.

"This action is a reminder that Malaysia shall never tolerate any attempt to meddle in our internal affairs and judiciary, disrespect our governance system and constantly create unnecessary tensions in defiance of the rules-based international order," he said in a statement.

Ties between North Korea and Malaysia have been virtually frozen since the 2017 assassination of the estranged half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Two days after Kuala Lumpur extradited a North Korean man to the U.S. to face money laundering charges, a furious North Korea on Friday announced it was terminating ties with Malaysia. Malaysia denounced the decision and in a tit-for-tat response, gave North Korean diplomats 48 hours to leave.

Kim Yu Song, the chargé d'affaires and councilor in Kuala Lumpur, said Malaysia had "committed an unpardonable crime." Echoing Pyongyang's earlier statement, he accused Malaysia of being subservient to the U.S. and being part of a U.S. conspiracy aimed at "isolating and suffocating" his country.

"The Malaysian authority delivered our citizen to the U.S. in the end, thus destroying the foundations of the bilateral relations based on respect of sovereignty," he said in a short statement outside the embassy, before heading to the airport.

North Korea has called the money laundering charges an "absurd fabrication and (a) sheer plot" orchestrated by the U.S. and warned Washington will "pay a due price."

Some experts say cutting ties with Malaysia was North Korea's way of showing anger with President Joe Biden's administration, without jeopardizing an eventual return to nuclear negotiations with Washington.

North Korea has insisted it won't engage in talks with Washington unless it abandons what Pyongyang's perceives as a "hostile" policy. But experts say North Korea will eventually seek to return to diplomacy to find ways to get sanctions relief and revive its moribund economy.

Malaysia has defended its move to extradite Mun Chol Myong, saying it was carried out only after all

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 65 of 66

legal processes have been exhausted. A top court ruled Mun can be extradited after rejecting his appeal on grounds that the U.S. charges were politically motivated.

Mun, who lived in Malaysia for a decade and was arrested in May 2019, has denied U.S. accusations that he was involved in supplying luxury goods from Singapore to North Korea in violation of U.N. sanctions while working in the city-state. He denied laundering funds through front companies and issuing fraudulent documents to support illicit shipments to his country.

North Korea has long used Malaysia as a crucial economic hub where it handled trade, labor exports and some illicit businesses in Southeast Asia, but their relations suffered major setbacks over the 2017 killing of Kim Jong Nam.

Two women — one Indonesian and the other Vietnamese — were charged with colluding with four North Koreans to murder Kim Jong Nam by smearing his face with VX nerve agent. The four North Koreans fled Malaysia the day Kim died. The two women were later released after a trial.

Malaysian officials never officially accused North Korea of involvement in Kim's death, but prosecutors made it clear throughout the trial that they suspected a North Korean connection.

North Korea denied the victim was Kim Jong Nam and disputed it had any role in the man's death. Long-time North Korea watchers believe Kim Jong Un ordered his brother's killing as part of efforts to remove potential rivals and cement his grip on power.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, March 22, the 81st day of 2021. There are 284 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On March 22, 1941, the Grand Coulee hydroelectric dam in Washington state officially went into operation.

On this date:

In 1820, U.S. naval hero Stephen Decatur was killed in a duel with Commodore James Barron near Washington, D.C.

In 1882, President Chester Alan Arthur signed a measure outlawing polygamy.

In 1894, hockey's first Stanley Cup championship game was played; home team Montreal defeated Ottawa, 3-1.

In 1945, the Arab League was formed with the adoption of a charter in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1976, principal photography for the first "Star Wars" movie, directed by George Lucas, began in Tunisia.

In 1987, a garbage barge, carrying 3,200 tons of refuse, left Islip, New York, on a six-month journey in search of a place to unload. (The barge was turned away by several states and three other countries until space was found back in Islip.)

In 1988, both houses of Congress overrode President Ronald Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act.

In 1991, high school instructor Pamela Smart, accused of recruiting her teenage lover and his friends to kill her husband, Gregory, was convicted in Exeter, New Hampshire, of murder-conspiracy and being an accomplice to murder and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

In 1993, Intel Corp. unveiled the original Pentium computer chip.

In 1997, Tara Lipinski, at age 14 years and 10 months, became the youngest ladies' world figure skating champion in Lausanne, Switzerland.

In 2010, Google Inc. stopped censoring the internet for China by shifting its search engine off the mainland to Hong Kong.

In 2019, special counsel Robert Mueller closed his Russia investigation with no new charges, delivering his final report to Justice Department officials. Former President Jimmy Carter became the longest-living chief executive in American history; at 94 years and 172 days, he exceeded the lifespan of the late former President George H.W. Bush.

Ten years ago: Yemen's U.S.-backed president, Ali Abdullah Saleh (AH'-lee ahb-DUH'-luh sah-LEH'), his

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 259 ~ 66 of 66

support crumbling among political allies and the army, warned that the country could slide into civil war as the opposition rejected his offer to step down by the end of the year. NFL owners meeting in New Orleans voted to make all scoring plays reviewable by the replay official and referee; also, kickoffs would be moved up 5 yards to the 35-yard line.

Five years ago: Capping a remarkable visit to Cuba, President Barack Obama sat beside President Raul Castro at a baseball game between Cuba's national team and the Tampa Bay Rays (the Rays won, 4-1); Obama left the game early to fly to Argentina for a state visit there. Suicide bombers attacked the Brussels airport and subway system, killing 32 people. Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton padded their delegate troves with victories in Arizona; Democratic challenger Bernie Sanders won caucuses in Utah and Idaho and Republican Ted Cruz claimed his party's caucuses in Utah. Rob Ford, the troubled former mayor of Toronto, died at age 46.

One year ago: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered all nonessential businesses in the state to close and nonessential workers to stay home. The Senate voted against advancing a \$2 trillion coronavirus rescue package that Democrats said was tilted toward corporations, but negotiations continued. (Approval would come by week's end.) Kentucky Republican Rand Paul became the first member of the U.S. Senate to report testing positive for the coronavirus; his announcement led Utah senators Mike Lee and Mitt Romney to place themselves in quarantine. The Chinese city of Wuhan, where the pandemic was first detected, went a fourth consecutive day without reporting any new or suspected cases of the coronavirus.

Today's Birthdays: Composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim is 91. Evangelist broadcaster Pat Robertson is 91. Actor William Shatner is 90. Former Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, is 87. Actor M. Emmet Walsh is 86. Actor-singer Jeremy Clyde is 80. Singer-guitarist George Benson is 78. Writer James Patterson is 74. CNN newscaster Wolf Blitzer is 73. Composer Andrew Lloyd Webber is 73. Actor Fanny Ardant is 72. Sports-caster Bob Costas is 69. Country singer James House is 66. Actor Lena Olin is 66. Singer-actor Stephanie Mills is 64. Actor Matthew Modine is 62. Actor-comedian Keegan-Michael Key is 50. Actor Will Yun Lee is 50. Olympic silver medal figure skater Elvis Stojko is 49. Actor Guillermo Diaz is 46. Actor Anne Dudek is 46. Actor Cole Hauser is 46. Actor Kellie Williams is 45. Actor Reese Witherspoon is 45. Rock musician John Otto (Limp Bizkit) is 44. Actor Tiffany Dupont is 40. Rapper Mims is 40. Actor Constance Wu is 39. Actor James Wolk is 36.