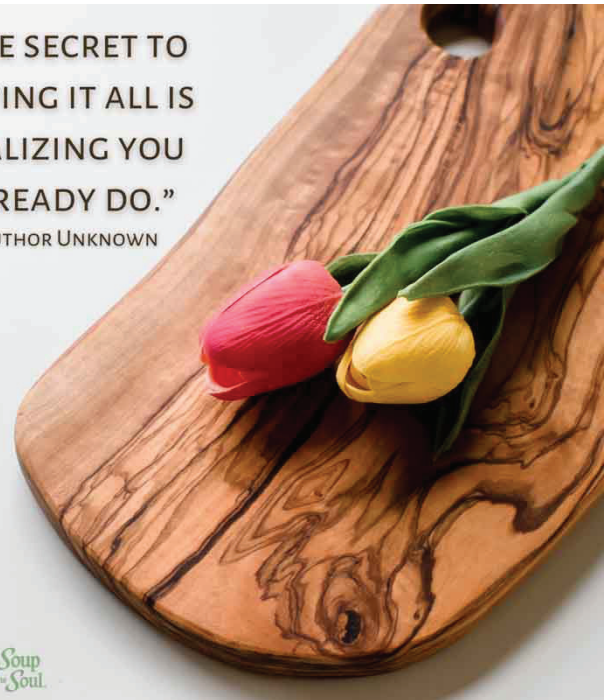


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"THE SECRET TO
HAVING IT ALL IS
REALIZING YOU
ALREADY DO."
-AUTHOR UNKNOWN



Chicken Soup
for the Soul

You're Invited

Date: Saturday, March 27th

Arrive Anytime Between:
9:00am – 1:00pm

Location:

Aberdeen Civic Arena
203 S. Washington St.

COVID protocols apply;
face coverings required

Onsite
Offers

- ✓ Production Operators
- ✓ Maintenance Technicians
- ✓ Electrical System Technicians

3M is an equal opportunity employer



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Updated School 2021-22 School Calendar

2021-2022 Groton Area School District

Adopted 3/22/2021

August 2021						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

August
23 - Faculty Inservice
24 - Faculty Inservice
25 - 1st Day of School

Student Contact: 5; Inservice: 2

September 2021						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

September
3 - NO SCHOOL
6 - Labor Day - NO SCHOOL
17 - Homecoming

Student Contact: 20; Inservice: 0

October 2021						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

October
7 - Parent/Teacher Conferences (4:00-8:00)
8 - Conferences (8:00-12:00)/Faculty Inservice
8 - Lake Region Marching Festival
11 - Native American Day - NO SCHOOL
22 - End of 1st Quarter (39)

Student Contact: 19; Inservice: 2

November 2021						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

November
11 - Veterans Day Program
24-26 - Thanksgiving - NO SCHOOL

Student Contact: 19; Inservice: 0

December 2021						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

December
9 - MS/HS Christmas Concert (7:00)
22 - Elementary Christmas Concert (1:00)
22 - Early Dismissal (2:00)
22 - End of 1st Semester (40/79)
23-31 Christmas Break - NO SCHOOL

Student Contact: 16; Inservice: 0

January 2022						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

January
4 - School Resumes
14 - NCSEC Faculty Inservice - NO SCHOOL

Student Contact: 19; Inservice: 1

February 2022						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

February
17 - Parent/Teacher Conferences (4:00-8:00)
18 - Conferences (8:00-12:00)/Faculty Inservice
21 - President's Day - NO SCHOOL

Student Contact: 18; Inservice: 2

March 2022						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

March
10 - End of 3rd Quarter (45)
17-18 - Spring Break - NO SCHOOL

Student Contact: 21; Inservice: 0

April 2022						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

April
3 - Pops Concert (2:00 & 5:00)
15 - Good Friday - NO SCHOOL
18 - Easter Monday - NO SCHOOL
23 - PROM
28 - Middle School Spring Concert (7:00)

Student Contact: 19; Inservice: 0

May 2022						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

May
3 - Elementary Spring Concert (7:00)
5 - HS Concert/Awards Night (7:00)
15 - Graduation (2:00)
18 - End of 2nd Semester (45/90)
19 - Faculty Inservice

Student Contact: 13; Inservice: 1

- Faculty Inservice
- No School
- Important Dates
- End of Quarter/Semester
- Early Dismissal

All make-up days will be added to the end of the school calendar.

Sometimes a Diagnosis is Skin Deep

Recently I saw a patient who had experienced two consecutive days of pain in his right upper abdomen. I questioned him, looking for clues of gallstones, liver mass, or maybe an ulcer in the small bowel, but his answers did not fit my expectations.



By Dr. Kelly Evans-Hullinger ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

The pain was located under his right ribs and radiated into his back, just as I would expect of gallbladder disease; but it was not triggered by eating, and the way the patient described the pain did not fit the profile of an abdominal disorder. Then, a lightbulb went off; I needed to look at his skin.

I examined his right back, and sure enough there it was: a cluster of red, blistering, lesions that the patient had not yet noticed. This was not gallbladder or liver disease; it was shingles.

Shingles is a skin eruption caused by a reactivation of the varicella zoster (or chicken pox) virus. In people who have had chicken pox earlier in life, the virus goes dormant in a spinal nerve. For most of us, it never again causes a problem, but in some people the reactivated virus can spread to areas of the body following the distribution of that spinal nerve, causing a painful blistered rash which looks like chicken pox.

The pain caused by shingles often occurs prior to the visible skin outbreaks making it easy to misdiagnose. In my few years of practice I have discovered shingles in patients complaining of ear pain, abdominal pain, and low back pain.

When administered early, antiviral medication can limit the duration of shingles and reduce the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia, a pain in the affected nerve distribution which lasts long after the rash resolves. At its worst, post-herpetic neuralgia can be a debilitating and life-long condition.

Fortunately, we have a highly effective vaccine that greatly reduces the risk of having shingles. The current shingles vaccine is FDA approved for people 50 and older and is much more effective than the previous version of the vaccine.

Thankfully, widespread childhood chicken pox vaccinations started in the late 1990s so decades from now, shingles may be a rare relic of the past in the United States. Until then, I will always remember to look skin deep when investigating a patient's new pain.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

SDSU Encourages Virtual Attendance at 98th Little International March 26-27

BROOKINGS, S.D. - South Dakota State University invites members of the public to watch the 98th Little International via livestream on the group's social media sites as exhibitors carry on a modified version of the traditional event at the Animal Science Arena in Brookings March 26-27.

As the largest two-day, student-run agricultural exposition in the nation, Little "I" has proven to be one of the longest-standing traditions at SDSU. The event provides 4-H, FFA and collegiate students with an opportunity to compete in judging contests, showmanship competitions and fitting challenges.

After the campus closure forced the cancelation of the 97th Little "I" in March 2020, the 130-student staff found the theme "The Show Must Go On" appropriate for this year's event. Despite challenges COVID-19 has placed on event protocols and procedures, the staff modified the 98-year-old tradition to create a safe and memorable experience for all.

While the event is not open to the public due to event restrictions, every show can be viewed through livestreaming services provided by Walton Webcasting. Livestream links will be posted to the SDSU Little International Facebook page immediately before each session: <https://www.facebook.com/SDSULittleI>.

4-H and FFA competitions will be held virtually on March 26 for youth competitors. Collegiate livestock showing and fitting and other contests will be held according to approved social distancing protocols on campus throughout the weekend.

Manager Jacob Rausch and assistant manager Grady Gullickson met extensively with the SDSU COVID-19 Response Team to ensure the event plan met university guidelines and kept safety as a top priority. While staff members have been planning for the event since early last fall, final approval to host the event was dependent upon Brookings County's COVID-19 status. Approval for a modified event was not received until late January. Since receiving approval, staff volunteers worked even harder to ensure several components of the event could be held in person given modified protocols.

In addition to livestock shows and contests, Little "I" will recognize both the 97th and 98th Honored Agriculturalists, Donna Moenning and Kevin Vander Wal, respectively, on the evening of Saturday, March 27. Greg Harder and Colin Geppert will serve as the event's masters of ceremonies.

For more information, full event schedule and the event catalog, go to sdsulittleinternational.com.

Department of Tourism gearing up for a promising summer season

PIERRE, S.D. – With pent-up travel demand and consumers beginning to express increased interest and optimism about traveling, the South Dakota Department of Tourism is gearing up for what looks to be a busy summer tourism season.

“Our Department of Tourism has worked hard and smart over the past year to keep South Dakota top-of-mind for visitors, even during a pandemic,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Because of their efforts and our respect for freedom, we are seeing growing interest in our state nationwide. We’re hearing from visitors in our established markets in record numbers, but we are also seeing growing interest in new regions of the country. I’m looking forward to a very good tourism season in The Mount Rushmore State.”

As the Department of Tourism looks ahead to the 2021 peak travel season, adjusting the marketing strategy to mimic the ever-changing travel intent of consumers is critical – especially after the challenges of traveling in 2020.

“Consumer confidence in traveling has been climbing consistently since January. With the vaccination rollout, consumers are feeling more comfortable and confident in travel,” said James Hagen, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism. “In recent national surveys, respondents have consistently indicated they are interested in visiting rural destinations and small towns, metro areas, beach destinations, state and regional parks, national parks, and mountain destinations. Of those six, South Dakota has four in spades. That bodes very well for future travel to our state.”

The 2021 marketing campaign theme “Go Great Places” encourages travelers to embark on road trips, discover outdoor adventures, seek wide open spaces, and explore South Dakota when the time feels right for them. The department is utilizing a phased messaging approach. As traveler sentiment and overall outlook for travel changes, the department's message will adjust accordingly.

The department's 2021 efforts include national and regional magazines; cable and broadcast television; digital; social media and influencer partnerships; inspirational direct mail pieces; podcast sponsorships; traditional and online radio; ongoing public relations outreach; international and domestic trade efforts; and out-of-home placements across billboards, gas station pump advertising, street kiosks and grocery stores. As consumers continue to spend more time on mobile devices and view video content, marketing efforts will leverage interactive video to drive further consumer engagement.

The department also partners with many communities across the state through a co-op marketing program which allows further extension of marketing dollars, added diversity in content the state is promoting, and reach into additional markets. Community co-op partners in 2021 include the Aberdeen Hotel Alliance/Aberdeen Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Black Hills and Badlands Tourism Association, Custer BID Board, Custer State Park, Deadwood Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau, Hill City Chamber of Commerce, Hot Springs BID Board, Mitchell Convention and Visitors Bureau, Pierre BID #1, City of Sturgis, Visit Spearfish, Watertown Convention & Visitors Bureau and Yankton Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Early results from the campaign have been positive, showing a 45% increase in visits to the department's website, TravelSouthDakota.com, from the beginning of the year versus the same time in 2020.

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism and the South Dakota Arts Council. The department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen.

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Groton Area School District Third Quarter Honor Roll

Seniors

4.0 GPA: Isaac Smith, Sage Mortenson, Brooklyn Gilbert, Alexis Hanten, Alexa Herr, Tanae Lipp, Hailey Monson, Erin Unzen, Samantha Pappas, Tessa Erdmann, Trey Gengerke, Regan Leicht, Grace Wambach, Grace Wiedrick

3.99-3.50: Eh Tha You Say, Jasmine Gengerke, Alex Morris, Kaden Carda, Alyssa Fordham, Kale Pharis, Lucas Simon, Chloe Daly, Chandler Larson, Connor Lehman, Tucker Carda, Dylan Krueger, Braden Freeman, Steven Paulson, Austin Anderson

3.49-3.00: Dragr Monson, Tiara DeHoet, Jaimen Farrell, Hunter Kassube, Douglas Heminger, Taryn Taylor

Juniors

4.0 GPA: Allyssa Locke, Travis Townsend, Madeline Fliehs, Trista Keith, Alyssa Thaler, Seth Johnson, Jordan Bjerke

3.99-3.50: Madisen Bjerke, Stella Meier, Pierce Kettering, Lane Krueger, Hannah Gustafson, Julianna Kosel, Kaden Kurtz, Megan Fliehs, Kansas Kroll

3.49-3.00: Kennedy Anderson, Jackson Cogley, Jace Kroll, Ryder Daly, Favian Sanchez-Gonzalez, Brayden Hansen, Landon Kokales, Jayden Zak

Sophomores

4.0 GPA: Ethan Clark, Jackson Dinger, Jacob Lewandowski, Elliana Weismantel

3.99-3.50: Kaleb Antonsen, Caleb Hanten, Andrew Marzahn, Cole Bisbee, Cole Simon, Brooke Gengerke, Aspen Johnson, Gracie Traphagen, Sheylee Peterson, Cadence Tullis, Shallyn Foertsch, Tate Larson

3.49-3.00: Cade Larson, Carter Barse, Sierra Ehresmann, KayLynn Overacker, Porter Johnson

Freshmen

4.0 GPA: Claire Heinrich, Lydia Meier, Hannah Monson

3.99-3.50: Emily Clark, Holden Sippel, Camryn Kurtz, Jaycie Lier, Anna Fjeldheim, Shea Jandel, Ashlyn Sperry, Kyleigh Englund, Abigail Jensen, Dillon Abeln, Sara Menzia, Lexi Osterman, Emma Schinkel, Anna Bisbee, Sydney Leicht, Faith Fliehs, Bradin Althoff, Cadence Feist

3.49-3.00: Jackson Garstecki, Lane Tietz, Colby Dunker, Jacob Zak, Karsyn Jangula, Logan Ringgenberg, Ava Wienk, Bryson Wambach, Elijah Lich

Eighth Graders

4.0 GPA: Gretchen Dinger

3.99-3.50: Payton Mitchell, Axel Warrington, Elizabeth Fliehs, Faith Traphagen, Jeslyn Kosel, Blake Dennert, Blake Pauli, Aiden Heathcote, Karrah-Jo Johnson, Corbin Weismantel

3.49-3.00: Ashlyn Feser, Emma Kutter, Kellen Antonsen, Laila Roberts, Easten Ekern, Kaden Kampa, Kayla Lehr, Rebecca Poor, Carter Simon, Brevin Fliehs, Kennedy Hansen, Ashley Johnson, Turner Thompson

Seventh Graders

4.0 GPA: Carly Gilbert, Jerica Locke, Jaedyn Penning, Talli Wright

3.99-3.50: Lucas Carda, Nathan Unzen, Natalia Warrington, Logan Warrington, Benjamin Hoeft, Gage Sippel, Mia Crank, Ryder Johnson, De Eh Tha Say, London Bahr, Karter Moody

3.49-3.00: Keegen Tracy, Raelee Lilly, Cali Tollifson, Olivia Stiegelmeier, Keegan Harry, Garrett Schultz, Jayden Schwan, Rylee Dunker, Paisley Mitchell, Karsten Fliehs, Hannah Sandness, Breslyn Jeschke, Noah Teisen, Lincoln Krause, Nicholas Groeblichhoff

Sixth Graders

4.0 GPA: Teegan Hanten, Carlee Johnson, Ashlynn Warrington

3.99-3.50: Brody Lord, Colt Williamson, Liby Althoff, Emerlee Jones, Kira Clocksene

3.49-3.00: Halee Harder, Blake Lord, Aiden Strom, Claire Schuelke, Avery Crank, Addison Hoffman Wipf, Zander Harry, Brenna Imrie, Gavin Kroll, McKenna Tietz, Walker Zoellner, Hailey Pauli, Taryn Traphagen

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#394 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

The numbers came in very late tonight; there will be about four extra hours in this report. There were 61,500 new case reports today. This brings us up to 29,957,300 total cases, some 0.2% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations are down again today at 38,565. Total deaths are up to 543,479, which is 0.2% more than yesterday. There were 918 deaths reported today.

On March 23, 2020, one year ago today, the US had 43,024 cases with nearly half of them coming from New York, which had 20,909 cases and 157 deaths. This was a 31 percent increase from the previous day. There had been 536 deaths, more than 100 more than the day before. With about four percent of the world's population, we had over 12 percent of the cases. I noted at the time this was not a great situation, which as it turned out, was about to get worse, and mentioned that "watching the numbers climb is painful because I know this climb represents lives broken and lost." Didn't know then just what was coming. The US Surgeon General warned at the White House coronavirus press briefing, "[T]his week, it's going to get bad." He was not wrong. California beaches were crowded despite the shelter-in-place order—not these folks' best decision. Amazon had to remove more than half a million listings for price gouging on items like hand sanitizer and disinfectants. 13,500 US citizens abroad were looking for assistance to return home; in retrospect, this may not have been the smartest move.

We had 341,000 cases worldwide with 14,700 deaths. Italy had more than 59,000 cases and almost 6100 deaths. Germany had 22,672 cases and 86 deaths. Nigeria started reporting chloroquine poisonings, illustrating why we should not be touting unproven treatments, especially without context. Cancellations and closures: McDonald's and Nando's in the UK; all UAE shopping malls and food markets for two weeks; mobile testing at a Chicago children's hospital due to lack of materials; San Diego parks, beaches, and trails; Georgia's bars and nightclubs; hiking trails in Los Angeles; gatherings of three or more people in South Carolina and 11 or more people in Kansas; all public gatherings in the Netherlands; Virginia schools; in-person US Supreme Court meetings; mortgages for US property owners who do not evict tenants; Zimbabwe; Nigeria; museums, gyms, and theaters in Mexico City; Boeing production in Washington; non-essential businesses in Maryland and Massachusetts; India's Parliament; professional football in Spain; all commercial domestic flights in India.

OK, so travel is probably safe if you're vaccinated—safe for you, that is, not so safe for the country. The worry here is that you'll run off to an exotic vacation spot, hauling one of these variants with you or that you'll bring one of them home. In either case, things will get worse at the delivery end if you do. The variants, primarily B.1.1.7 at the moment, are accounting for an ever-growing proportion of cases, and we've already talked several times about how this is a problem—more transmissible and more lethal variant is not good news. We have a problem largely because we don't have enough people vaccinated yet. We've done really fine work in getting vaccines into people fast; but with 330 million people, it's still going to take some time to get most of us vaccinated. If we could all just hold off another couple of weeks, this could make a big difference to how we look going into the summer.

But it appears that ship has sailed: 1.5 million people flew on Sunday, about three times as many as flew a year ago Sunday. That brings us to 9.8 million who traveled in the past week. For 11 consecutive days, more than a million people flew per day. We've been looking at the spring break crowds in Florida; those aren't locals drinking on the beach. And before we all start tut-tutting about those irresponsible kids, consider your own absolutely necessary-for-your-mental-health vacation trip to Florida/Cancun/Vegas/that cute little Caribbean resort. You know, the one you think is OK for you to take because you're going to be really careful? Not like those crazy kids. That one. Yes.

So we've plateaued—for a long time. Around 50,000 new cases and 1000 deaths a day. A plateau is better than growth; but that's still a whole lot more sick and dead people every single day. If we ignore the quite small possibility a new and truly ugly variant emerges from all of this transmission, then one of two things happens from here: At some point, we'll blow up into a probably short-lived, but deadly surge, or we'll begin to decline, with luck for the last time. But we're not going to sit around waiting to see which

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it is. We can't stand it any longer; we're traveling. Nothing I can do about that. I hope we get really lucky because I don't think we're going to be really smart.

It appears the AstraZeneca drama is not over yet. There is some sort of issue now between the Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB), the independent panel of experts whose job it is to oversee the clinical trials, and the study's sponsors, that is, the company. It appears the DSMB had expressed some concerns to the sponsor about rigor in defining a symptomatic case during the trial and the inclusion of some older data and asked them to conduct a full analysis to account for these concerns, but the company just went ahead and released their data yesterday anyhow. This led the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, to whom the DSMB took its concerns, to issue a statement late last night, urging "the company to work with the DSMB to review the efficacy data and ensure the most accurate, up-to-date efficacy data be made public as quickly as possible." This sort of public airing of disagreements is, to say the least, most unusual. I'm not sure just what this means, but it isn't a good look. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Institute's director, was apparently aware of the issue and characterized the situation this way to ABC News, "This is really what you call an unforced error because the fact is: This is very likely a very good vaccine, and this kind of thing does, as you say, do nothing but really cast some doubt about the vaccines and maybe contributes to the hesitancy." The good news here is that, whether this is a real problem or just a technical matter that doesn't make any difference in the end, it is a clear sign the regulatory process works. The people in charge are not going to be easy to mess with; they catch these things. There will, however, I fear, be fallout in terms of public perception of this candidate if and when it is authorized.

Results from a large clinical trial of the Regeneron monoclonal antibody treatment were released today. You will recall that monoclonal antibodies are highly purified lab-made versions of the same sort of antibodies we might make in our bodies in response to this virus. This one is a mixture of two such monoclonal antibodies. The trial was with 4500 patients and started in the early fall and found that patients who received the therapy within 10 days of first symptoms (or a positive test) had a 70 percent smaller chance of being hospitalized or dying compared with placebo and also that half-doses worked as well as full doses. That's a pretty strong effect. The company plans to request a modification to its emergency use authorization (EUA) to permit the smaller dose, which should expand the number of available doses too. It also reduces the risk of side effects.

Dr. Tom Frieden, former CDC Director, was interviewed on CNN today to talk about vaccination. Interesting tidbit from that appearance: "We estimate that vaccination has already saved at least 40,000 lives in the US. These are good vaccines and the quicker we get them out the better." Consider that's just since December 14 when the first doses were administered and that now we have only about one in eight of us fully vaccinated. This is only going to get better with time.

The supply of Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine should improve radically in the next few days. A company, Catalent, has been doing what's called fill and finish for this vaccine, dedicating a line just to that task and operating 24/7 on that line. They've been waiting for FDA authorization to ship and received that today. There have been questions whether the Johnson & Johnson would be able to meet its commitment to ship 20 million doses by the end of the month; they've shipped only some five million so far, so it doesn't look good. No one's saying at the moment how many doses are coming off the line at Catalent, but this should surely help; they've been running this high-speed line for about two months while awaiting authorization. Meanwhile, the White House Covid-19 response coordinator, Jeff Zients, told governors on his weekly call today that they were allocating 27 million doses of all vaccines this week across all channels—state allocations, federal vaccination sites, and the retail pharmacy program. That's a whole lot of vaccine; to use it all would require exceeding three million—getting close to four million—doses per day. If we can do that, we'll boost the percentage of the population vaccinated considerably by April 1. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to get that stuff moving into people; since we're not about to control ourselves, this is the key to solving our problem.

The CDC is beginning a study of vaccination in pregnant people. The goal is to enroll 13,000 for each of the three vaccines that are currently authorized and monitor safety. There are currently 60,488 pregnant people registered with the V-safe database, so the CDC is building the systems needed to follow them,

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as well as adding more participants. The plan is to call participants several times during their pregnancies and then again after the child is born to ask questions about their medical histories, complications of pregnancy, and birth outcomes. They will also be asked to provide access to medical records. It looks like the researchers are having good luck getting people to sign up, so this could go pretty quickly. Given the risks of Covid-19 in pregnancy, it will be most helpful to have whatever conclusions the study yields to inform future guidance about vaccination during pregnancy.

And where there's a way to make money, folks are going to try. A cybersecurity company Check Point Software went trawling through the corners of the dark web, the hidden-from-us-ordinary-mortals part of the Internet where illicit activity happens, and they found a brisk market in vaccination-related products. For example, there were listings for vaccines at up to \$1000 per dose and vaccination certificates for \$200 each. You can buy a negative Covid-19 test result for \$25 or get in on a bargain with a "Buy 2, get one free" offer. The vaccines on offer appear to be legitimate, but it has not been determined whether they are, indeed, real product somehow raked off supplies being shipped or counterfeits. The vaccination cards are, of course, fakes; you tell them the name and dates you want on the card, and these are custom-printed just for you—same story for the test results. I suppose here's where I warn you that these vaccines being sold are dangerous. Even if they're the real deal, there's no way to know whether these have been stored properly and kept free from contamination or adulteration. If they're being repackaged into single-dose vials for individual sale, then the opportunities for contamination or adulteration balloon. And if they're fakes, no telling what's in the vial or how contaminated with pathogens it might be. If you'd buy a fake vaccination card or test result, you clearly don't care whether you're transmitting virus to other people, so there's not much I can say about that.

When she was in middle school, now-16-year-old Hita Gupta conceived the idea of enlisting her brother, Divit, to help her write and send hand-written cards and letters to people in nursing homes and children's hospitals with the goal of lifting their spirits by spreading good feelings and a sense of connection with the cards. As a volunteer in a nursing home, she saw the need for this sort of contact and decided to do something about it. By January, 2020, the effort had grown into a nonprofit organization called Brighten A Day that coordinates the efforts of volunteers to broaden the work to more places and more services, things like visits and conversations. According to the organization's website, their mission is "Lifting the spirits of those in need of cheer by sending them love, hope, and joy through cards, letters, gifts, conversations, video messages, devices, care packages, and more." I have no idea how many volunteers they have; it doesn't appear on the website. It does say, however, that they have helped "tens of thousands" of people, so the number of volunteers has to be fairly substantial.

Of course, the pandemic changed things. Visits were no long on the table, but the need for connection and uplift became far greater. They added other services to their offerings: short video messages; videos showing off a talent like reading poetry, "singing, dancing, playing music, or telling jokes;" making telephone or video call visits; donating camera-enabled devices for the video calls; and sending care packages containing puzzle books, coloring books, and hygiene products. They also branched out to frontline workers.

So these kids just quietly went out and raised money, partnered with facilities across the country—and in other countries, organized volunteers, backed new chapters in other area, built a website, and publicized their efforts so they could reach even more people. Not bad for a 16- and a 10-year-old, working from home during a pandemic. They say their goal is to make people smile. It worked on me.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	455	435	887	15	Minimal	6.3%
Beadle	2842	2744	6054	39	Substantial	6.9%
Bennett	385	371	1194	9	Minimal	0.0%
Bon Homme	1513	1482	2132	26	Minimal	3.3%
Brookings	3717	3585	12363	37	Substantial	2.9%
Brown	5244	5093	13054	91	Moderate	6.4%
Brule	700	686	1909	9	Minimal	13.3%
Buffalo	423	407	905	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	1007	976	3282	20	Moderate	6.7%
Campbell	131	127	263	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1330	1265	4037	21	Substantial	8.6%
Clark	399	370	962	5	Substantial	34.5%
Clay	1843	1798	5547	15	Substantial	5.6%
Codington	4152	3961	9874	79	Substantial	14.5%
Corson	475	460	1014	12	Minimal	9.5%
Custer	776	751	2775	12	Moderate	10.9%
Davison	3038	2921	6726	66	Substantial	11.6%
Day	683	644	1826	29	Moderate	3.0%
Deuel	488	466	1161	8	Moderate	22.7%
Dewey	1435	1407	3896	26	Moderate	0.0%
Douglas	440	427	937	9	Minimal	8.3%
Edmunds	489	470	1088	13	Minimal	5.3%
Fall River	558	537	2695	15	Moderate	2.8%
Faulk	363	348	709	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	996	936	2304	40	Moderate	9.4%
Gregory	567	518	1320	30	Moderate	8.8%
Haakon	260	248	548	10	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	737	687	1842	38	Moderate	18.5%
Hand	356	336	844	6	Moderate	4.0%
Hanson	374	364	744	4	Moderate	6.3%
Harding	92	91	187	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2347	2286	6743	36	Moderate	4.7%
Hutchinson	806	765	2445	26	Moderate	1.9%

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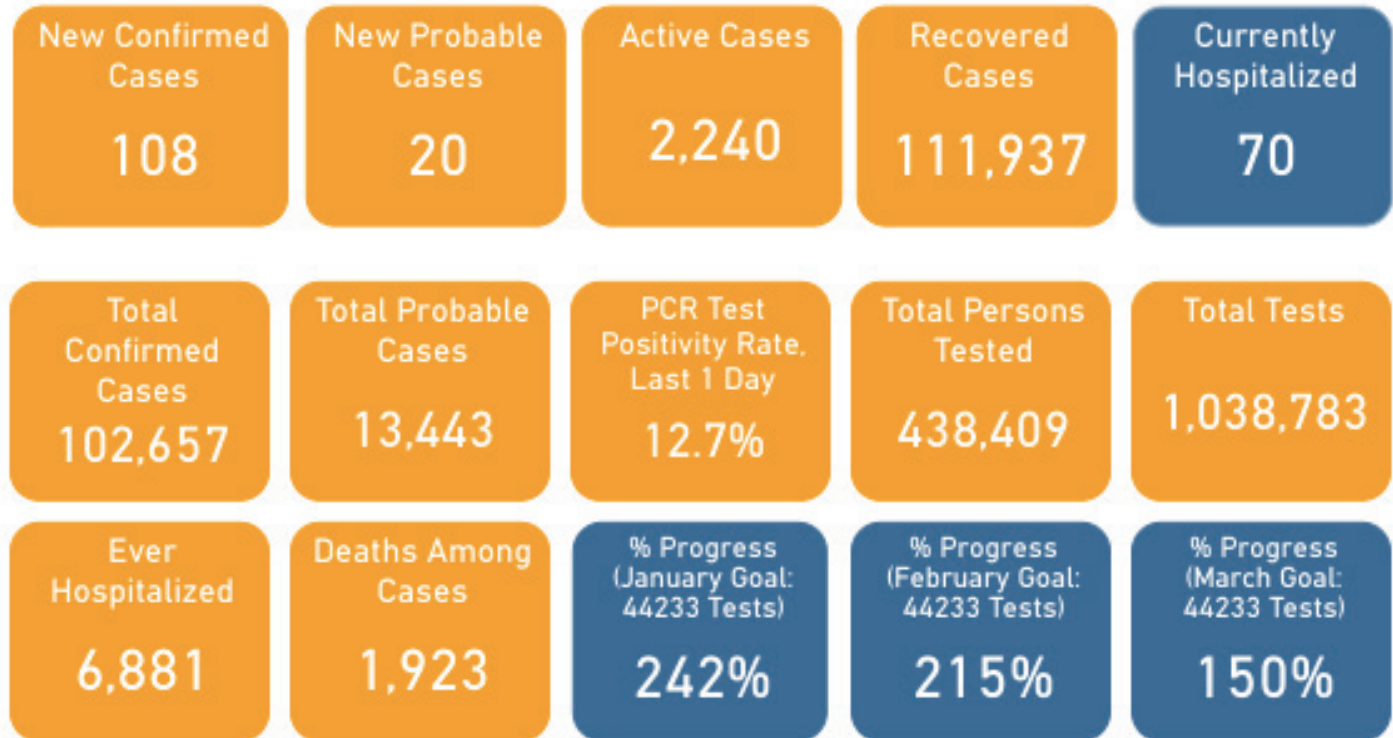
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Hyde	140	138	421	1	Minimal	10.0%
Jackson	284	268	922	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	275	253	568	16	None	0.0%
Jones	89	88	230	0	Minimal	28.6%
Kingsbury	675	636	1717	14	Substantial	20.8%
Lake	1270	1189	3483	18	Substantial	15.1%
Lawrence	2879	2817	8658	45	Moderate	1.5%
Lincoln	8091	7805	20843	77	Substantial	13.6%
Lyman	613	593	1905	10	Moderate	4.5%
Marshall	363	330	1242	6	Substantial	7.2%
McCook	771	730	1690	24	Substantial	11.5%
McPherson	240	234	567	4	None	0.0%
Meade	2678	2610	7896	31	Moderate	6.2%
Mellette	255	250	748	2	None	0.0%
Miner	282	263	592	9	Moderate	6.3%
Minnehaha	29115	28100	80501	340	Substantial	11.6%
Moody	623	602	1795	17	Minimal	1.7%
Oglala Lakota	2082	2013	6716	49	Moderate	4.0%
Pennington	13177	12842	40269	191	Moderate	7.5%
Perkins	351	333	836	14	Minimal	10.5%
Potter	387	377	858	4	Moderate	3.4%
Roberts	1293	1208	4247	36	Substantial	18.1%
Sanborn	336	329	706	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	820	783	2180	26	Moderate	8.7%
Stanley	340	337	960	2	Minimal	8.7%
Sully	137	134	326	3	None	0.0%
Todd	1221	1190	4178	29	Minimal	8.3%
Tripp	731	699	1514	16	Moderate	17.1%
Turner	1121	1028	2805	53	Substantial	13.5%
Union	2084	1968	6467	40	Substantial	15.0%
Walworth	741	711	1855	15	Moderate	15.1%
Yankton	2878	2790	9557	28	Substantial	9.5%
Ziebach	337	327	878	9	Minimal	0.0%
Unassigned	0	0	1912	0		

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South Dakota



RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
White, Non-Hispanic	86878	75%
Native American, Non-Hispanic	13678	12%
Unknown, Non-Hispanic	5573	5%
Hispanic	4205	4%
Black, Non-Hispanic	2581	2%
Other, Non-Hispanic	1689	1%
Asian, Non-Hispanic	1496	1%

COVID-19 Variant

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	60407	905
Male	55693	1018

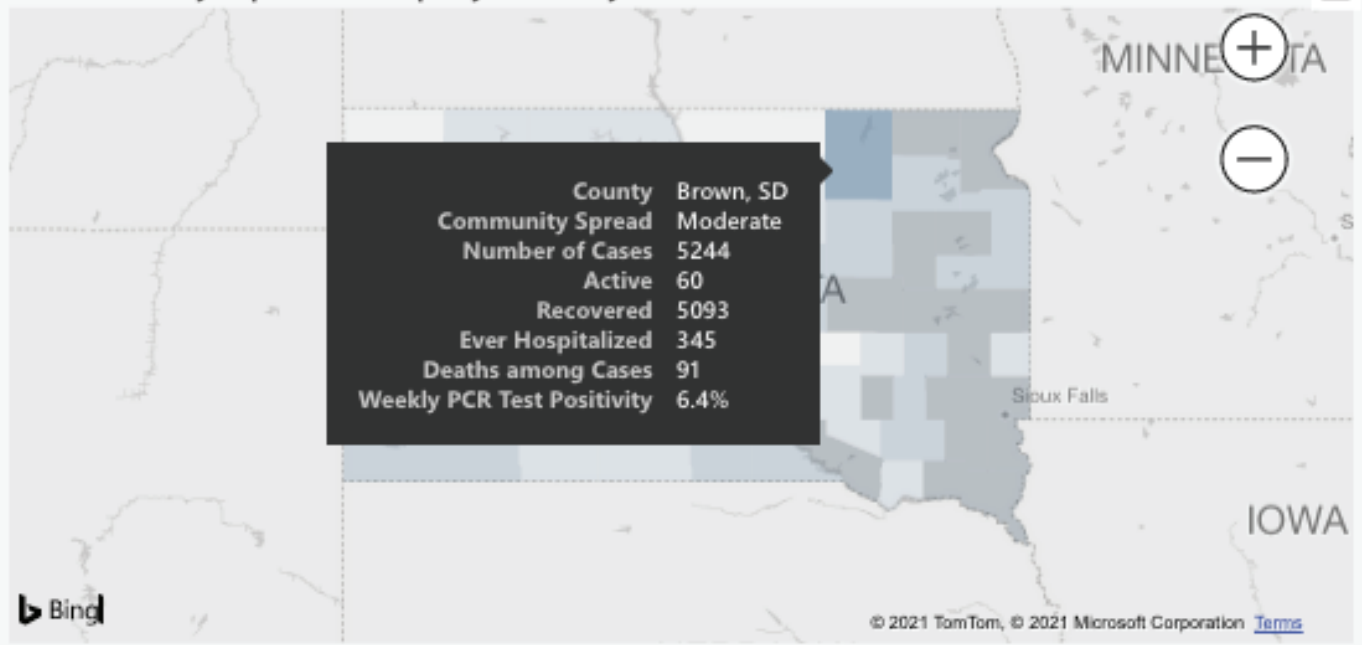
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Brown County

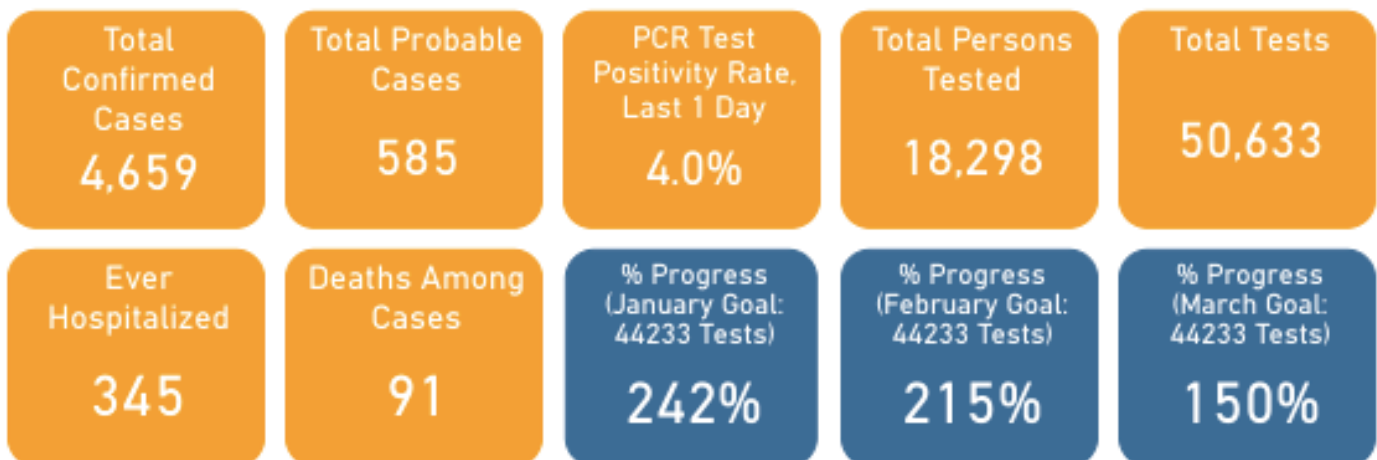


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

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



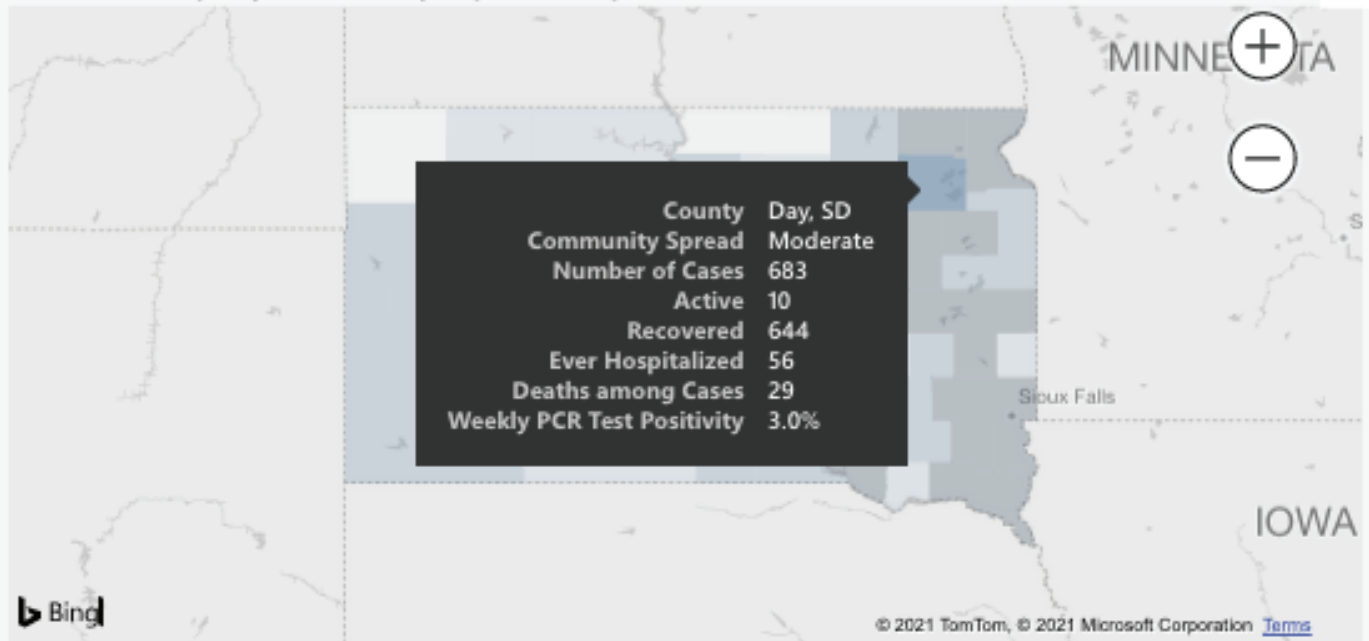
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Day County

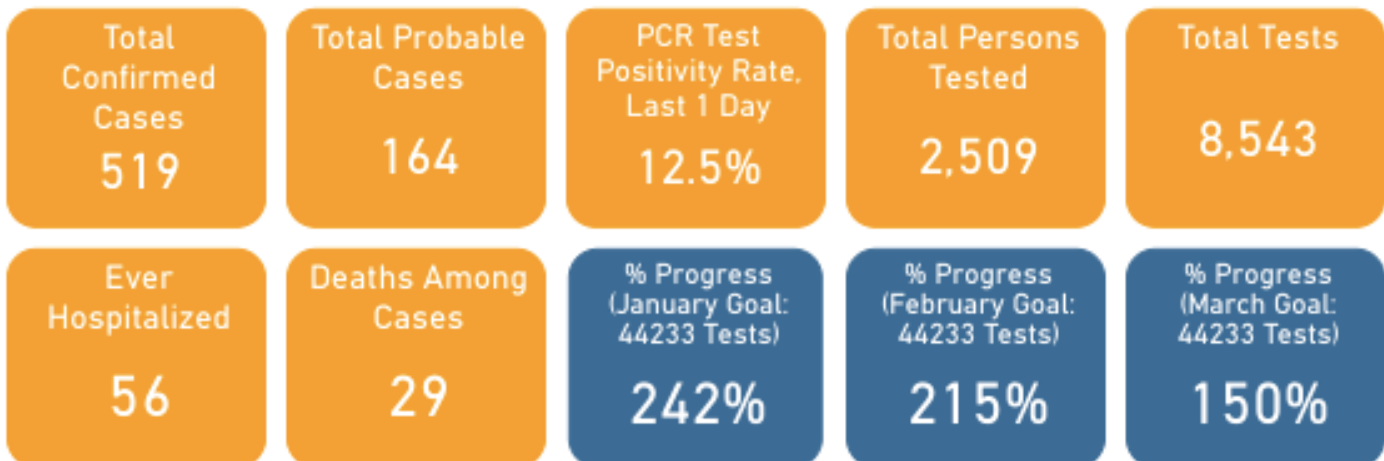


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread None Minimal Moderate Substantial

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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

351,033

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	4,883
Moderna	168,768
Pfizer	177,382

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

219,400

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	4,883
Moderna - 1 dose	43,542
Moderna - Series Complete	62,613
Pfizer - 1 dose	39,358
Pfizer - Series Complete	69,012

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

37%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	37.43%
Series Complete	23.39%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,056	360	348	708
Beadle	7,377	2,194	2,591	4,785
Bennett*	486	132	177	309
Bon Homme*	4,023	885	1,569	2,454
Brookings	10,819	4,245	3,287	7,532
Brown	16,326	4,304	6,011	10,315
Brule*	1,989	491	749	1,240
Buffalo*	136	78	29	107
Butte	2,438	906	766	1,672
Campbell	1,192	186	503	689
Charles Mix*	3,563	1,147	1,208	2,355
Clark	1,417	457	480	937
Clay	5,792	1,746	2,023	3,769
Codington*	10,869	2,943	3,963	6,906
Corson*	313	71	121	192
Custer*	3,142	868	1,137	2,005
Davison	8,497	2,331	3,083	5,414
Day*	2,863	863	1,000	1,863
Deuel	1,689	505	592	1,097
Dewey*	388	64	162	226
Douglas*	1,359	373	493	866
Edmunds	1,501	423	539	962
Fall River*	2,787	685	1,051	1,736
Faulk	1,172	342	415	757
Grant*	2,904	1,062	921	1,983
Gregory*	1,956	536	710	1,246
Haakon*	569	147	211	358

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Hamlin	1,971	559	706	1,265
Hand	1,623	517	553	1,070
Hanson	558	182	188	370
Harding	119	51	34	85
Hughes*	8,759	2,003	3,378	5,381
Hutchinson*	3,876	975	1,450	2,425
Hyde*	587	161	213	374
Jackson*	434	118	158	276
Jerauld	1,014	314	350	664
Jones*	687	149	269	418
Kingsbury	2,759	955	902	1,857
Lake	4,628	1,578	1,525	3,103
Lawrence	9,333	3,165	3,084	6,249
Lincoln	28,312	5,567	11,372	16,939
Lyman*	883	259	312	571
Marshall*	2,054	664	695	1,359
McCook	2,372	592	890	1,482
McPherson	281	71	105	176
Meade*	7,088	1,824	2,632	4,456
Mellette*	52	14	19	33
Miner	975	279	348	627
Minnehaha*	89,514	18,869	35,320	54,189
Moody*	2,040	730	655	1,385
Oglala Lakota*	188	56	66	122
Pennington*	41,483	9,069	16,207	25,276
Perkins*	745	255	245	500
Potter	1,006	332	337	669
Roberts*	4,784	1,134	1,825	2,959
Sanborn	1,144	362	391	753
Spink	3,387	883	1,252	2,135
Stanley*	1,342	280	531	811
Sully	417	93	162	255
Todd*	178	44	67	111
Tripp*	2,212	472	870	1,342
Turner	3,952	798	1,577	2,375
Union	3,589	1,353	1,118	2,471
Walworth*	2,039	393	823	1,216
Yankton	11,290	2,468	4,411	6,879
Ziebach*	59	13	23	36
Other	6,676	1,830	2,423	4,253

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in amount



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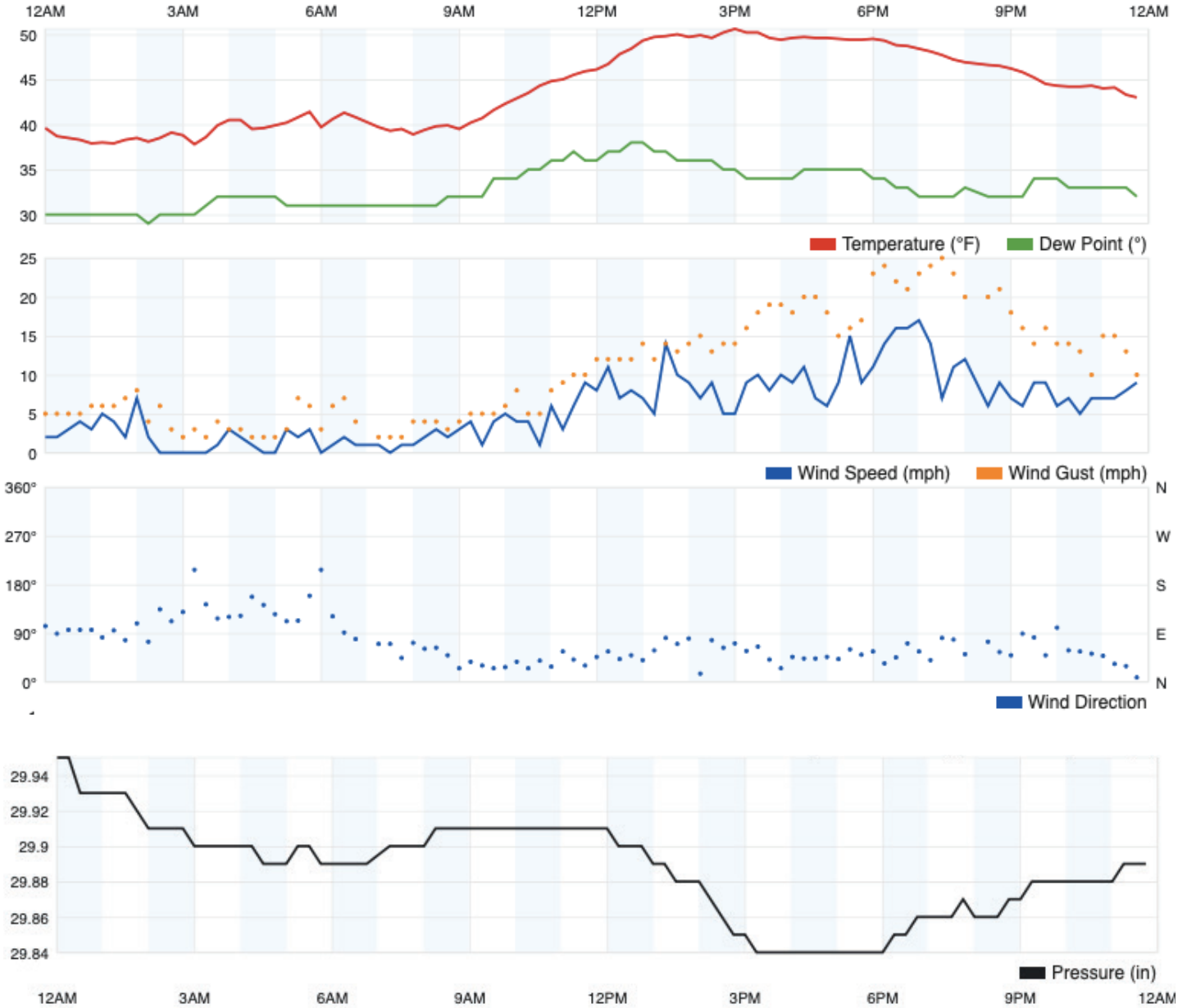
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Mostly Cloudy and Breezy then Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny then Slight Chance Rain
High: 49 °F	Low: 27 °F	High: 56 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 57 °F

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
www.weather.gov/abr
Created: 3/24/2021 4:16 AM

Today Highs: 45-50  Breezy Northwest winds 15-30 mph	Thursday Highs: 50-60  Increasing Southeast winds/Very High Fire Danger north central SD
Tonight Mostly Clear Lows: 25-30	

Breezy northwest winds today with clouds decreasing into the afternoon with highs from 45 to 50. Thursday will become breezy again as southeast winds increase with highs in the 50s to around 60.

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Today in Weather History

March 24, 1996: North winds of 30 to 40 mph, gusting to 55 mph, combined with the falling snow and the previous day's snowfall to create blizzard conditions. Travel became extremely difficult. Several cars went into ditches, and flights out of Aberdeen were canceled. Schools and activities were either delayed or canceled. Some of the more significant two-day snowfall amounts include 6 inches at Sisseton and Aberdeen, 7 inches at Sand Lake NWR, 8 inches near Veblen, 9 inches at Britton, and 10 inches near Victor.

March 24, 2009: An area of low pressure moved out of the Rockies and into the Northern Plains producing snow and widespread blizzard conditions across central and north central South Dakota. Winds gusting to over 60 mph along with several inches of snow caused hazardous travel conditions. Interstate 90 was closed for a time across much of Jones and part of Lyman County. Power was also out in parts of Pierre and Mobridge for a short period. Some snowfall amounts included; 2 inches at Pierre; 5 inches in Hayes and Timber Lake; 6 inches in Murdo, McLaughlin, and 6 miles southeast of McIntosh; 7 inches 14 miles northeast of Isabel; 8 inches in Eagle Butte; and 12 inches 8 miles southwest of Keldron.

1912: Residents of Kansas City began to dig out from a storm that produced 25 inches of snow in 24 hours. The snowfall total was nearly twice that of any other storm of modern record in Kansas City before or since that time. A record 40 inches of snow fell during March that year, and the total for the winter season of 67 inches was also a record. By late February of that year, Kansas City had received just six inches of snow. Olathe, Kansas received 37 inches of snow in the snowstorm, establishing a single storm record for the state of Kansas. (23rd-24th)

1929: St. Louis, Missouri soared to 92 degrees; their all-time record high for March.

1975: "The Governor's Tornado" hop-scotched a 13-mile path across the western part of Atlanta, GA during the early morning hours, causing considerable damage to the Governor's mansion. Hundreds of expensive homes, businesses and apartment complexes were damaged. Total losses were estimated at \$56 million. Three people lost their lives, and the F3 tornado injured another 152.

1987 - A winter-like storm in the central U.S. produced blizzard conditions from South Dakota to western Kansas. Snowfall totals ranged up to 24 inches at Neligh NE, with 19 inches at Winner SD. Winds gusting to 60 mph created twelve foot snow drifts in Nebraska stranding thousands on the highways. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather from Minnesota to north-eastern Texas. The thunderstorms spawned ten tornadoes, including one which injured five persons near Raymondville MO. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure off the coast of Virginia brought heavy rain to the Middle Atlantic Coast States, and heavy snow to the Northern Appalachians. Cape Hatteras NC was soaked with 5.20 inches of rain in 24 hours, and snowfall totals in Vermont ranged up to 12 inches. Winds gusted to 52 mph at New York City. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - The storm system which produced heavy snow in the Lower Missouri Valley the previous day, spread heavy snow across parts of the Upper Ohio Valley and the Middle Atlantic Coast Region. Snowfall totals of 2.2 inches at Philadelphia PA and 2.4 inches at Atlantic City NJ were records for the date. Up to six inches of snow blanketed southern Ohio. In the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, snow coated the blossoms of cherry trees which had bloomed in 80 degree weather the previous week. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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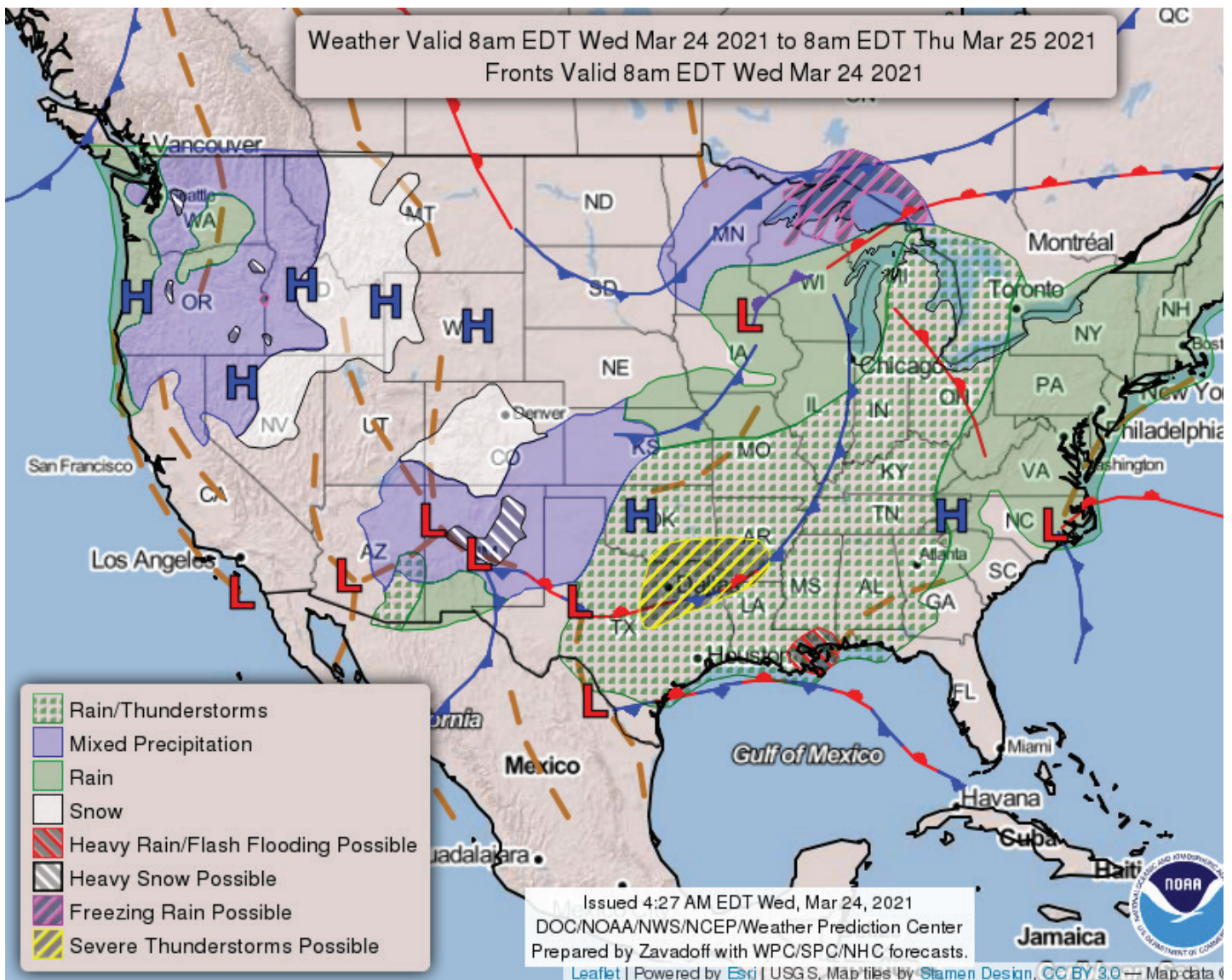
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 51 °F at 2:59 PM
Low Temp: 38 °F at 3:15 AM
Wind: 26 mph at 6:35 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 80° in 1939
Record Low: -10° in 1893
Average High: 44°F
Average Low: 23°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.79
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.35
Average Precip to date: 1.81
Precip Year to Date: 0.53
Sunset Tonight: 7:52 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27 a.m.





THE THREAT OF GOD'S SILENCE

Prayer puts our faith at risk.

When we "pray to God in faith believing" and nothing happens or the results are different from what we expected or there is no answer at all, the tendency is to question the goodness and wisdom of God. We often doubt the need for prayer or the confidence to trust in and believe God when we do not get what we want.

As we begin to read Psalm 28, David seems to be having a problem in his prayer life. "I pray to You, O Lord, my Rock. Do not turn a deaf ear to me." Notice the way he begins: "I pray to You!" His prayer is direct and intense. But there is something very important to be noted here. In this moment of need David, in no uncertain terms, lets us into his heart. Prayer was not just part of his life. It was at the center of his life. He was completely dependent upon the Lord for help. "You, O Lord, are my Rock!" This prayer, though we do not know specifically what David was praying for, arose from a definite need at a specific time in his life. Perhaps years later, when he wrote this psalm, he could not remember specifically what his request was. But he could not forget that he had a need that only God could meet. And God granted his request and met his need.

In this prayer, we hear his cry and see his hands raised to God demonstrating his dependence on Yahweh. And his prayer was answered. "Praise be to the Lord," he finally shouted, "for He has heard my cry for mercy."

God always answers us – but on His terms and in His time – what He knows is best.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to depend only on You – not on ourselves or others – when we face our greatest needs. May we know that all is well...until. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I pray to you, O Lord, my rock. Do not turn a deaf ear to me. Psalm 28:1

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

12-23-35-38-55, Mega Ball: 11, Megaplier: 2

(twelve, twenty-three, thirty-five, thirty-eight, fifty-five; Mega Ball: eleven; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$122 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$220 million

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. March 22, 2021.

Editorial: A Tourism Rebound For South Dakota?

There's optimism in the air, and understandably so, regarding the outlook for South Dakota's tourism industry this year.

And if the state at large needs to look for hope as the COVID-19 pandemic (hopefully) subsides, it can turn to the Yankton area, which bucked the state trend and enjoyed record visitation numbers last year amid the worst of times.

According to a South Dakota News Watch story in Saturday's Press & Dakotan, the state saw a 13% decrease in visitors last year compared to 2019, and spending tumbled by 18%, which was about \$700 million.

However, the state's District 9 recreation areas, which included state facilities from Gavins Point Dam to Springfield, enjoyed a great 2020. According to a Press & Dakotan story last fall, District 9 saw a whopping 49% increase in visitors from Jan. 1 through the end of September. That also included an 18% increase in camping numbers.

To be honest, this wasn't really a surprise to local officials, although it would be too strong to say it was expected. Rather, those officials had a good feeling that the attributes of the local facilities could appeal to crowds during the COVID pandemic. Specifically, the camping facilities were perfect for social distancing purposes while allowing visitors to either engage in a familiar summertime ritual or get away from the pandemic grind in relative safety.

"It was good to see people out here you don't normally see — even from different states we don't normally see," District Park Supervisor Shane Bertsch told the P&D at the time. "I talked to a few of those folks as well (last) summer. Their state might have been shut down and they wanted to come to some place that was still open."

Anecdotal, another plus for the area was the clean conditions of the park facilities, especially at a time when cleanliness was a vital aspect of our COVID defense. We know of people who were particularly appreciative and reassured by the hard work put in by park workers.

South Dakota now looks forward to a rebound year in 2021. A combination of increased vaccinations across the nation coupled with (and we cannot possibly stress this enough) immense pent-up demand may produce a major surge in visitors that should help turn the state's tourism numbers around.

How much of a boost Yankton will see, at least relative to 2020, is hard to tell. Last year's big numbers create a high bar to meet, but judging from the traffic already being seen in Yankton the last few weeks — especially in stark contrast to last spring — the area is going to take a real run at it. Also, the opening of the Huether Family Aquatics Center this summer could bolster local numbers even further.

There is a lot of hope looming for state tourism this year, and the Yankton area — which was a clear

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bright spot amid a bleak 2020 — could help lead a big turnaround in 2021.
END

EXPLAINER: How states are seeking to loosen controls on guns

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Mass shootings in Georgia and Colorado that left at least 18 people dead since last week are reigniting calls from gun control advocates for tighter restrictions on buying firearms and ammunition. But with Democrats in control of the federal government, gun rights advocates have been persuading Republican-run state legislatures to go the other way, making it easier to obtain and carry guns.

How are the politics of gun legislation playing out in the United States this year? Here's the breakdown.

PROSPECTS MIXED FOR LEGISLATION

This month, the Democrat-controlled U.S. House of Representatives adopted measures to expand background checks to all gun purchases and expand the time to vet people flagged in a nationwide background check system.

But to pass in the Senate, the support of every Democrat would be needed. And that's not a sure thing. States led by Democrats are pushing to expand some gun control laws.

Maryland lawmakers overrode a veto from Republican Gov. Larry Hogan on a bill that requires background checks for all sales and transfers of rifles and shotguns. Previously, the checks were required only for sales of handguns and long guns by licensed firearms dealers.

In Washington state, a ban on high-capacity magazines has stalled, but a measure to ban carrying weapons openly at the state Capitol or during permitted demonstrations has cleared one house of the Legislature and is awaiting a vote in the other.

California lawmakers are expected to require individual identifiers on all bullet casings to include weapons used by law enforcement. Proponents say the pending legislation is another attempt to help investigate shootings by police as well as make it easier to solve crimes. Critics say it's based on unworkable technology.

At least five states also have bills that would require or expand waiting periods before the purchase of a gun.

NULLIFYING FEDERAL LAWS, PRE-EMPTING LOCAL ONES

Lawmakers in at least a dozen states have introduced legislation that would prohibit local police officers from enforcing any federal gun-control laws that could be passed by congressional Democrats and signed by President Joe Biden. Some of the bills would make officers who do so subject to lawsuits or even criminal charges.

It's not clear if those laws would withstand legal challenges. Courts struck down nullification laws passed in GOP-controlled states during former President Barack Obama's tenure.

Some states also are considering bans on future laws or local ordinances that would restrict gun rights. In New Hampshire, Republican lawmakers are pushing a state constitutional amendment that would block the Legislature from restricting gun rights. The amendment ultimately would need voter approval.

Another bill would block local governments from restricting firearms.

ALLOWING GUNS IN MORE PLACES

Several states are expanding where people can take their guns.

Most adults over 21 would be allowed to carry firearms — either concealed or in the open — without a permit under a measure advanced by the state Senate in Tennessee this month.

Most states require background checks and firearm safety training for people who want to be allowed to carry weapons in public. But 15 states already have laws allowing permitless carry for concealed guns. Nine states are considering measures to allow or expand the practice. One was sent Monday to Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, for her signature.

In Montana, Gov. Greg Gianforte, the first Republican to hold the job in 16 years, signed a bill that relaxes gun restrictions. It allows concealed firearms to be carried in most places without a permit and expands the list of places where guns can be carried to include university campuses and the state Capitol. Similar

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measures are being pushed in states that include Oklahoma and West Virginia.

'STAND YOUR GROUND' GAINING TRACTION

In January, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, signed a so-called "Stand Your Ground" bill that eliminates an individual's duty to retreat before using force.

DeWine acted despite his ongoing criticism of GOP lawmakers for ignoring his own legislation seeking to toughen background checks and boosting penalties for felons committing new crimes with guns. The governor proposed those measures following a 2019 mass shooting in Dayton.

A similar "Stand Your Ground" measure has been approved by the South Dakota Legislature and is awaiting Republican Gov. Kristi Noem's signature.

THE STATE OF THE COURTS

A federal judiciary system that is more conservative after nominations by former President Donald Trump gives gun-rights advocates hope that pro-gun measures will be left intact by courts and restrictions will be tossed out.

One big test has been in California. In 2016, voters there approved a measure banning magazines holding more than 10 rounds of ammunition.

Two federal courts have struck down the restriction. Last month, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals agreed to have 11 judges consider the case.

Last June, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear challenges to several gun-control laws. Since then, liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg has died and her former seat has been filled by a conservative Trump appointee, Amy Coney Barrett.

Associated Press statehouse reporters from around the United States contributed to this report.

US colleges tout hopes for return to new normal this fall

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — Colleges throughout the U.S. are assuring students that the fall semester will bring a return to in-person classes, intramural sports and mostly full dormitories. But those promises come with asterisks.

Administrators say how quickly campus life comes back will depend on the success of the nation's COVID-19 vaccination efforts and the ability to avoid widespread outbreaks.

Universities saw their budgets hammered during the coronavirus pandemic, which emptied dorms and led to declines in enrollment, and are facing pressure to reopen fully. A flood of announcements from schools describing their plans has begun as high school seniors and returning students are making decisions about where they will be next fall.

Some students are waiting to decide until they know what to expect on campus, and others are still worried about the economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

Like many colleges, Ashland University in Ohio is seeing that freshmen who have been accepted are slower to enroll this year. To give them a push, the university is offering a semester of free tuition next spring for first-time students who come in the fall and promising no tuition increases over four years.

Many students are feeling "burned out" by a year of virtual classes and limited activities and asking themselves if they're willing to invest in another year if virus protocols are still in place, said Carlos Campo, president of Ashland, which is planning for almost all classes to be in person and for clubs, intramurals and Greek life to resume normal activities.

"We owe it to students to let them know what's coming," he said.

Casey Knutson skipped spring semester after starting her first year of college at Ohio University taking classes on Zoom from home in Tiffin last fall. Her grades were good, but "I realized I wasn't learning a single thing," she said. "It wasn't worth the money."

She's hopeful that she'll be on campus next fall for a somewhat normal college experience.

"I really don't want to be stuck in my hometown," she said. "I think a lot of students feel like that."

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Ultimately, the course of the pandemic will determine what campuses look like in the fall, said Terry Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, a Washington, D.C.-based trade association of college and university presidents.

"There are no guarantees, but we are more hopeful than we have been for a long, long time that colleges and universities will look like they usually do," Hartle said.

Schools have gotten a boost from about \$80 billion in federal coronavirus relief to colleges, universities and students. But there have been serious effects from the pandemic, including roughly 650,000 layoffs out of 3 million campus employees, he said.

"It will take several years for institutions to return to normal operations, and it will really be four or five years before we can sort out what the real impact has been," Hartle said.

University of Michigan President Mark Schlissel anticipates that most classes and student groups will be able to be met in person and fans will be allowed at games because the number of COVID-19 cases have dropped and vaccine supply is increasing.

Some large lecture classes are likely to remain online, and some dorm rooms will be kept open if students need to quarantine, school spokesman Rick Fitzgerald said.

"Will it be exactly the way it was before the pandemic? No," he said. "But it will be approaching what it was."

Seyoung Ree, a high school senior at Notre Dame Academy in Toledo, said some of the college reopening plans she's looked at have been vague. But whether a school starts fully with in-person classes won't affect her college choice, she said, adding that she'd be more worried if it doesn't have safe guidelines.

"I guess for us, we've already been through our senior year and part of our junior year wearing masks," she said of high school. "It's hard to imagine not wearing a mask to school and things going back to normal."

Local health rules also will determine how quickly colleges are buzzing with activity.

University of South Dakota President Sheila Gestring says the school plans to return this fall without social distancing rules or mask mandates as long as infection rates remain low.

The University System of Georgia has told the state's public universities to plan for normal operations even though most higher education employees are not yet eligible for the vaccine.

"We anticipate that we will have been able to vaccinate faculty and staff by that time," University of North Georgia Provost Chaudron Gille wrote to faculty in early March. "Of course, if this year has taught us anything, it is that we must be prepared for the unexpected."

At the University of Connecticut, where registration for fall classes began Monday, Provost Carl Lejuez said the school is aiming to offer 90% of classes in-person. But he said that will depend on widespread vaccinations and state guidelines, which now call for 6 feet (2 meters) of social distancing.

He said a message spelling that out is going out to prospective students this week.

"What we decided to do was approach the semester in a way where we would have as much in-person for registration as possible, but based on vaccinations, the virus rate, state guidelines and a variety of other factors," Lejuez said. "We've gotten really good at being flexible."

Associated Press writers Michael Melia in Hartford, Connecticut, and Jeff Amy in Atlanta contributed to this report.

Attorney general hopeful Jackley gets prosecutors' backing

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota attorney general candidate Marty Jackley announced Tuesday that he has gained an early advantage in the 2022 election by gathering endorsements from a large majority of county state's attorneys.

Jackley, a Republican, is running for his old job as Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg is facing three misdemeanor charges and calls for his resignation after he struck and killed a man walking on the side of a rural highway last year. Jackley is so far the only candidate for the state's top law enforcement position.

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Jackley's campaign announced that prosecutors from 59 out of the state's 66 counties have endorsed him. Several praised Jackley's record in a statement. He previously served nearly a decade as attorney general.

Jackley's candidacy could reignite an old rivalry with Republican Gov. Kristi Noem. The two squared off in the GOP gubernatorial primary in 2018. Noem beat Jackley, who eventually offered his endorsement to Noem.

However, if Ravensborg resigns or is removed from office by impeachment, Noem would get to appoint a new attorney general. Ravensborg has so far shunned calls to step down and pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The Republican candidate for the post will be determined by delegates at the party's state convention next year.

Texting 911 now an option in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakotans now have the option to text 911 when they're unable to make a 911 call.

The text, like a phone call, will be routed to a local dispatch center. The new texting option is part of the state's 9-1-1 Coordination Program.

"Text-to-9-1-1 should only be used in an emergency when you can't call 9-1-1," said Craig Price, cabinet secretary for the South Dakota Department of Public Safety. "The Text-to-9-1-1 option would be good to use if speaking out loud would put the caller in danger or if the caller is deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired."

Officials said texting should only be used when someone can't safely make a voice call, such as in situations involving an active shooter, domestic violence or a home invasion. Texting to 911 can also be used by people who lose the ability to speak because of a medical crisis.

The South Dakota Department of Public Safety issued some guidelines, including first texting location and type of emergency. Photo or video texts cannot be received by dispatchers.

Texting to 911 is not yet fully activated in Todd County.

Noem signs bill to give top state officials raises

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem has signed legislation that gives herself a pay raise if reelected and those of other top state officials.

The bill raises the salaries of the governor, the attorney general, the secretary of state, the state auditor, the state treasurer, and the commissioner of school and public lands.

The governor's 9.4% raise to \$130,000 a year pays the state's top executive more or equal to South Dakota's six neighboring states. The governors of Nebraska and Wyoming make \$105,000 a year, the Rapid City Journal reported. Iowa pays its governor \$130,000.

The raises will take effect on July 1, 2023. Noem's current term ends on Jan. 3, 2023.

The attorney general will make \$125,000, an increase of about 5%. The secretary of state, state auditor, state treasurer, and the commissioner of school and public lands will receive \$113,000 per year, up from about \$95,000.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Gary Cammack said the pay scale for top state officials has not kept pace with other government agencies. Cammack said the raises were similar to those given to judges this year through another appropriations bill.

But, Republican Sen. Jim Bolin argued that constitutional officers receive a cost-of-living adjustment every year and that the raises are not needed.

AP journalist Thein Zaw released from detention in Myanmar

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Thein Zaw, a journalist for The Associated Press who was arrested more than three weeks ago while covering a protest against the coup in Myanmar, was released from detention

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on Wednesday.

As he left a court hearing, Thein Zaw told the AP by phone that the judge in his case had announced that all charges against him were being dropped because he was doing his job at the time of his arrest. He also called his family.

"I'm looking forward to meeting my family members," he said. "I'm sorry for some colleagues who are still in prison."

Thein Zaw had been charged with violating a public order law that carries a penalty of up to three years' imprisonment.

He was one of nine media workers taken into custody during a Feb. 27 street protest in Yangon, the country's largest city, and had been held without bail. About 40 journalists have been detained or charged since the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, roughly half of whom remain behind bars.

They are among thousands of people who have been arrested since the takeover, many of them protesters. On Wednesday, more than 600 demonstrators were released.

The AP and many press freedom organizations have called for the release of Thein Zaw and the other detained members of the press.

"The Associated Press is deeply relieved that AP journalist Thein Zaw has been freed from prison in Myanmar," said Ian Phillips, AP vice president for international news. "Our relief is tempered by the fact that additional journalists there remain detained. We urge Myanmar to release all journalists and allow them to report freely and safely on what is happening inside the country."

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

He had been kept at Yangon's Insein Prison, notorious for decades for holding political prisoners.

Thein Zaw's lawyer, Tin Zar Oo, saw her client for the first time since his arrest at a hearing on March 12 at which his pre-trial detention was renewed — and even then it was through a video link.

The International Press Institute, headquartered in Vienna, welcomed the release of Thein Zaw, who it said "was detained for doing his job as a journalist and should never have been behind bars in the first place."

"Myanmar must now immediately release all other journalists it is holding," said Scott Griffen, the institute's deputy director. "The military junta must stop all forms of harassment and intimidation of media covering demonstrations against the coup and end restrictions on publication and broadcasting by media outlets in the country."

Alternatives to nursing homes get \$12B boost in COVID-19 law

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the memory of the pandemic's toll in nursing homes still raw, the COVID-19 relief law is offering states a generous funding boost for home- and community-based care as an alternative to institutionalizing disabled people.

Advocates hope the estimated \$12.7 billion will accelerate what has been a steady shift to supporting elderly and disabled people and their overwhelmed families in everyday settings. But the money for state Medicaid programs, long in coming, will only be available over four calendar quarters this year and next. That's raising concerns it will have just fleeting impact, and prompting calls for permanent legislation.

"What we really want is that when our loved ones need support, we are going to be able reach out and get that support without another battle," said Maura Sullivan of Lexington, Massachusetts, who has two sons with autism. "We don't want to have our kids cut out just because the potholes need to be fixed in the states."

Sullivan, an advocate in her state for the disabled, has an older son, Neil, with more severe autism who

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is in a residential facility. But she believes her younger son, Tyler, now 17, could one day hold down a job, if he had help. Autism is a developmental disability that leads to social, communication and behavioral challenges. There's a spectrum of severity, and while some people with autism need a lot of help with daily basics, others are intellectually gifted.

Medicaid was originally intended as a federal-state health program for the poor and severely disabled. As it has grown to cover about 1 in 5 Americans, it's also become the nation's default long-term care program, although qualifying is often an arduous process.

While the federal government requires state Medicaid programs to cover nursing home care for low-income people, that's not the case for home- and community-based support services. All states do offer such services voluntarily, but the scope varies widely. Home and community care usually costs less than half as much as institutional care, although there's debate on whether it prevents or merely delays people from going into a nursing home.

The coronavirus pandemic starkly exposed the vulnerability of nursing home residents. Only about 1% of the U.S. population lives in long-term care facilities, but they accounted for about one-third of COVID-19 deaths as of early March, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

"Clearly COVID demonstrated that living in an institution puts you at higher risk for infection and deaths," said Martha Roherty, executive director of Advancing States, which represents state agencies on aging and disability. "If we want seniors and people with disabilities to have a higher quality of life, that is not going to be in a nursing facility."

A poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research last year found that 60% percent of Americans would be very concerned if an aging friend or family member needed long-term care in a nursing home during the pandemic, and another 27% would be moderately concerned.

The billions in the COVID-19 law represent the first new federal money for home- and community-based services since the Obama-era Affordable Care Act more than 10 years ago, said MaryBeth Musumeci of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

"I expect that that this is going to be first step toward additional focus on strengthening Medicaid home- and community-based services and figuring out how to help states to serve more people in the community," said Musumeci, an expert on Medicaid and the disabled.

In Congress, Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich., and other Democratic lawmakers recently unveiled proposed legislation to make such services a mandatory Medicaid benefit, as well as set basic standards and requirements.

"There are so many people, when they get older, they are forced to go into institutions," said Dingell. "People should not have to go into a long-term care setting where they are in greater danger of contracting disease and they are more isolated."

The chairman of the House committee that oversees Medicaid, Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., says reforming long-term care, including expanding access to home and community-based care options, "are top priorities of mine."

States are likely to push back hard against any federal effort to create a new mandatory Medicaid benefit. There's also some skepticism about the money in the COVID-19 relief law, if taking it means states would be left holding the bag when the temporary federal funding ends.

"This country needs and deserves a thoughtful, humane long-term care policy, and the bedrock of that must be access to these services from anywhere but Medicaid," said Matt Salo, executive director of the National Association of Medicaid Directors, addressing Dingell's proposed legislation.

For now, states and advocates for the disabled are awaiting guidance from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services on how the money in the COVID-19 law can be spent. The agency said that's coming soon. Examples of potential uses include reducing waiting lists, raising the pay of support workers, or investing in technology to improve the delivery of services.

Sullivan, the Massachusetts mother whose two sons have autism, said they were both home during much of the pandemic year. She lobbies for her state chapter of The Arc, a nonprofit that advocates on

behalf people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Although her older son, Neil, has since returned to his residential facility, Sullivan said being cut off from other people was harmful for younger son Tyler.

"The isolation was really bad; he was at a point in his development where social connections were becoming really important," she said. "Honestly, this year we've seen regression, and we're looking to pump him back up to where he was before, with increased services and supports."

Gov't data show race, region disparities in school reopening

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

Nearly half of the nation's elementary schools were open for full-time classroom learning as of last month, but the share of students learning in-person has varied greatly by region and by race, with most nonwhite students learning entirely online, according to results from a national survey conducted by the Biden administration.

For the White House, the survey results, released Wednesday, mark the starting line for President Joe Biden's pledge to have most K-8 schools open full-time in his first 100 days in office. But they also show that he never had far to go to meet that goal.

Among schools that enroll fourth graders, 47% offered full-time classroom learning in February, while for schools that teach eighth-graders, the figure was 46%. The data suggested that at least some students weren't opting in.

In total, about 76% of elementary and middle schools were open for in-person or hybrid learning, according to the survey, while 24% offered remote learning only. The percentage of students spending at least some time in the classroom has likely increased since February, when coronavirus rates were just coming down from a national surge.

"The data collected by the survey are essential for beginning to measure and understand the pandemic's impact on American students," said Mark Schneider, director of the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the U.S. Education Department.

The administration plans to update the initial data set each month to show how many U.S. schools are teaching in-person, online or through a combination. The federal government did not previously collect information on the topic, making it difficult to track progress on reopening schools.

The new findings are based on a survey of 3,500 public schools whose student bodies include fourth graders, along with 3,500 schools that serve eighth graders. A total of 44 states agreed to participate, while six states declined to take part. The survey asked schools about their teaching methods as of February but gathered other data as of January.

The survey casts new light on a period of particularly bitter debate in the school reopening process. In January, officials in California, Chicago and other locales were still locked in stalemate with teachers over reopening plans, with vaccines often arising as a sticking point.

Since January, however, the push to reopen has gained steam in many areas. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a roadmap to reopening in February, and this month the agency relaxed guidelines around social distancing in schools. Amid pressure from Biden, dozens of states are now focusing on giving COVID-19 vaccines to teachers and other school staff.

As more schools invite students back to the classroom, many parents are conflicted, according to a separate poll from The University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. It found that a majority of parents are at least somewhat concerned that in-person instruction will lead to more people being infected, but a slightly larger share are at least somewhat concerned that their children will face setbacks in school because of the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition to tracking school teaching methods, the new federal survey also tracks how many students have enrolled in each type of learning.

In January, the survey found, 38% of fourth graders enrolled in full-time, in-person learning, compared to 28% of eighth graders. Larger shares of students were entirely remote, with 43% of fourth graders and

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48% of eighth graders learning away from school. It was not clear what share of students were learning online by choice and how many were in schools without in-person options.

There were stark differences based on where students live, reflecting the regional battles that have played out as cities debate how and when to reopen schools.

In the South and Midwest, where schools were the quickest to reopen, just under 40% of eighth grade students were enrolled full-time in classroom instruction in January. In the West and Northeast, by contrast, the figure was about 10%.

Across all regions, students in rural areas and towns were far more likely to be back in the classroom full-time compared to students in cities and suburbs.

In a further illustration of the pandemic's uneven impact, the survey found striking differences based on students' race. Among fourth graders, almost half of white students were learning fully in-person, with just over a quarter learning online. Among Black and Hispanic students, by contrast, nearly 60% were learning entirely remotely.

The difference was even wider among students of Asian descent, with 68% remote and just 15% attending fully in-person.

Similar disparities have been uncovered in many cities, raising alarms among education advocates who fear the pandemic is worsening racial inequities in education. The Biden administration has vowed to confront racial gaps in education and is urging schools to prioritize the issue as they spend more than \$120 billion in recently approved relief aid.

As of January, the survey also found that students with disabilities and those who are learning English were not being brought back to the classroom at significantly higher rates than other students. Just 42% of those with disabilities and 34% learning English were enrolled in full-time classroom learning, compared to 38% of all students.

Even so, more than 40% of schools reported on the survey that they were giving priority to students with disabilities, who often have more difficulty with remote learning.

Among students learning online, the amount of time spent with a live teacher also varied greatly, the survey found. Roughly a third of schools offered more than five hours a day of live instruction, but another third offered two hours or less. Among schools serving eighth graders, 10% were offering no live instruction at all.

The survey does not include high schools, which weren't included in Biden's reopening promise and pose additional challenges as they work to reopen. Younger children are less likely to get seriously ill from the coronavirus, and education experts say they have the greatest need for in-person learning.

The Education Department said it will issue updated data from the survey each month through July. The information is published on a dashboard on the agency's website.

Massive cargo ship turns sideways, blocks Egypt's Suez Canal

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A cargo container ship that's among the largest in the world has turned sideways and blocked all traffic in Egypt's Suez Canal, officials said Wednesday, threatening to disrupt a global shipping system already strained by the coronavirus pandemic.

The MV Ever Given, a Panama-flagged container ship that carries trade between Asia and Europe, became grounded Tuesday in the narrow, man-made waterway dividing continental Africa from the Sinai Peninsula.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the Ever Given to turn sideways in the canal. GAC, a global shipping and logistics company, described the Ever Given as suffering "a blackout while transiting in a northerly direction," without elaborating.

Evergreen Marine Corp., a major Taiwan-based shipping company that operates the ship, said in a statement provided to The Associated Press that the Ever Given had been overcome by strong winds as it entered the Suez Canal from the Red Sea but none of its containers had sunk.

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A Egyptian official, who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to brief journalists, similarly blamed a strong wind in the area for the incident. Egyptian forecasters said high winds and a sandstorm plagued the area Tuesday, with winds gusting as much as 50 kph (31 mph).

"All crew are safe and accounted for," said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, which manages the Ever Given. "There have been no reports of injuries or pollution." The management company denied the ship ever lost power.

The Ever Given's bow was touching the canal's eastern wall, while its stern looked lodged against its western wall, according to satellite data from MarineTraffic.com. Several tug boats surrounded the ship, likely attempting to push it the right way, the data showed.

An image posted to Instagram by a user on another waiting cargo ship appeared to show the Ever Given wedged across the canal as shown in the satellite data. A backhoe appeared to be digging into the sand bank under its bow in an effort to free it.

The Egyptian official said tugboats hoped to refloat the ship and that the operation would take at least two days. The ship ran aground some 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) north of the southernly mouth of the canal near the city of Suez, an area of the canal that's a single lane.

That could have a major knock-on effect for global shipping moving between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, warned Salvatore R. Mercogliano, a former merchant mariner and associate professor of history at North Carolina's Campbell University.

"Every day, 50 vessels on average go through that canal, so the closing of the canal means no vessels are transiting north and south," Mercogliano told the AP. "Every day the canal is closed ... container ships and tankers are not delivering food, fuel and manufactured goods to Europe and goods are not being exported from Europe to the Far East."

The Ever Given had listed its destination as Rotterdam in the Netherlands prior to getting stuck in the canal. The ship, built in 2018 with a length of nearly 400 meters (a quarter mile) and a width of 59 meters (193 feet), is among the largest cargo ships in the world. It can carry some 20,000 containers at a time.

Opened in 1869, the Suez Canal provides a crucial link for oil, natural gas and cargo being shipping from East to West. Around 10% of the world's trade flows through the waterway and it remains one of Egypt's top foreign currency earners. In 2015, the government of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi completed a major expansion of the canal, allowing it to accommodate the world's largest vessels. However, the Ever Given ran aground before that new portion of the canal.

The incident Tuesday marks just the latest to affect mariners amid the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands have been stuck aboard vessels due to the pandemic. Meanwhile, demands on shipping have increased, adding to the pressure on tired sailors, Mercogliano said.

"It's because of the breakneck pace of global shipping right now and shipping is on a very tight schedule," he said. "Add to it that mariners have not been able to get on and off vessels because of COVID restrictions."

Associated Press writers Taijing Wu in Taipei, Taiwan, Samy Magdy in Cairo and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP.

Hong Kong halts use of Pfizer vaccine, cites defective lids

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong suspended use of the Pfizer vaccine Wednesday after its Chinese distributor informed the city that one batch had defective bottle lids.

The city's government said the suspension was immediate while the matter is investigated by distributor Fosun Pharma and BioNTech, the German company that created the vaccine with American pharmaceutical firm Pfizer.

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BioNTech and Fosun Pharma have not found any reason to believe the product is unsafe, according to the statement. However, vaccinations will be halted as a preventive and safety measure.

The defective lids were found on vaccines from batch number 210102. A separate batch of vaccines, 210104, will also be not be administered.

The semi-autonomous territory of Macao also said Wednesday that its residents will not receive the Pfizer shots from the same batch.

The vaccines from the batch comprise a total of 585,000 doses, with the other batch number 210104 holding 758,000 doses, according to Hong Kong's Director of Health Constance Chan.

Although about 150,000 doses from the batch 210102 have been administered in the city so far, officials said during a press briefing Wednesday that the vaccines were safe to use despite the packaging defects, and that suspending the vaccination was a precautionary measure. Batch number 210104 remains in the warehouse and has not been used.

Chan said that there were over 40 instances when medical personnel found defective packaging, such as cracks on the vaccine bottles or leakages when the vaccine was diluted with saline before being administered.

None of these vaccines was given to residents and they were thrown away, officials said.

"Fosun has promised to carry out an immediate investigation so they are going to approach the manufacturer in Germany to look into their plant," Chan said. "When the vaccines arrive in Hong Kong, they will have a review of the whole logistics chain to see if that's the cause of the current situation."

She said that officials are urging manufacturers to give a report as soon as possible to check if the batches of vaccines in Hong Kong can be used, otherwise the manufacturers will have to deliver another batch of shots as soon as possible.

Residents who are slated to receive their second Pfizer dose starting on Saturday should get the second shot administered as soon as possible, if new vaccines arrive in Hong Kong after the recommended 19- to 42-day window following the first dose.

BioNTech could not be immediately reached for comment.

Fosun Pharma said in a filing to the Hong Kong stock exchange that it received notice from BioNTech regarding the packaging defects on Tuesday night and informed Hong Kong and Macao authorities on Wednesday to temporarily suspend the vaccines.

The suspension of the Pfizer jab means the only vaccine currently offered to residents is China's Sinovac. The two vaccines are the only ones that were offered to residents in Hong Kong.

German expatriate Jannis Partsafas was among a group of people who received the Pfizer shot ahead of the suspension.

"I got vaccinated this morning at 8.30 a.m. before the news went public about the vaccine suspension, and heard the news when I was on my way home," said 32-year-old Partsafas, who works in the sporting goods industry.

"I'm not very concerned about the safety, but I am worried that this may mean more people will turn down the option of getting vaccinated in Hong Kong which would impact herd immunity and the lifting of social-distancing measures," he said.

Some residents who had appointments to receive the Pfizer shots stood in line outside a community center in the city's Sai Ying Pun neighborhood at about 10.30 a.m. They eventually left when it became clear the vaccines would not be administered.

As of 8 p.m. Tuesday, 403,000 people have received vaccines in the city, of which 150,200 had received the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine, compared with 252,800 who had taken the Sinovac jab.

Myanmar junta frees hundreds held for anti-coup protests

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Hundreds of people imprisoned for protesting last month's coup in Myanmar were released Wednesday in the first apparent gesture by the military to try to placate the protest movement.

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Witnesses outside Insein Prison in Yangon saw busloads of mostly young people, looking happy with some flashing the three-finger gesture of defiance adopted by protesters. State-run TV said a total of 628 were freed.

The prisoners appear to be the hundreds of students detained in early March while demonstrating against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

One lawyer, speaking on condition of anonymity because she doesn't want attention from the authorities, said all those released were arrested on March 3. She said only 55 people detained in connection with the protests remained in the prison, and it is likely they will all face charges under Section 505(A) of the Penal Code, which carries a penalty of up to three years in prison.

Also Wednesday, Thein Zaw, a journalist for The Associated Press who was arrested last month while covering an anti-coup protest, was released from detention.

Thein Zaw told the AP and his family of his release by phone after his second court hearing since his arrest nearly a month ago. Speaking as he headed home, he said the judge in his case read a statement in court that all charges against him were dropped because he was doing his job at the time of his arrest.

"I'm looking forward to meeting my family members," he said, while expressing concern for other journalists who remain in custody. "I'm sorry for some colleagues who are still in prison."

Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners says it has confirmed the killings of 275 people in connection with the post-coup crackdown, with additional deaths still unverified. It also says that as of Tuesday, it had verified arrest or charges against 2,812 people, of whom 2,418 remain in custody or with outstanding charges.

Demonstrators on Wednesday tried a new tactic that they dubbed a silence strike, calling on people to stay home and businesses to close for the day.

The extent of the strike was difficult to gauge, but social media users posted photos from cities and towns showing streets empty of activity save for the occasional stray dog.

The online meme posted to publicize the action called silence "the loudest scream" and explained its purpose was to honor the movement's fallen heroes, to recharge protesters' energy and to contradict the junta's claims that "everything is back to normal."

The new tactic was employed after an extended onslaught of violence from security forces.

Local media reported that a 7-year-old girl in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, was among the latest victims on Tuesday. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners included her in its list of fatalities.

"Khin Myo Chit was shot in the abdomen by a soldier while she sat in her father's lap inside her home in Aung Pin Le ward," the online news service Myanmar Now reported, quoting her sister, Aye Chan San.

The report said the shooting took place when soldiers were raiding homes in her family's neighborhood. The sister said a soldier shot at their father when he denied that any people were hiding in their home, and hit the girl.

Aye Chan San said the soldiers then beat her 19-year-old brother with their rifle butts and took him away.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners recorded three killings in Mandalay on Tuesday, though some other reports said there were five.

Many lives were changed by India's lockdown a year ago

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — The government order on the night of March 24, 2020, was abrupt but clear: In four hours, India and its 1.4 billion people would be locked down entirely because of the coronavirus.

As the clock struck midnight, the world's second-most populous country came to a screeching halt, isolating everyone in their homes.

In the days that followed, millions lost their jobs, devastating the economy. The already-struggling health care system was strained even further. Social inequalities came to the fore, pushing millions more into poverty.

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India's lockdown, among the strictest anywhere, lasted for 68 days, and some form of it remained in force for months before it eventually was lifted. Since the pandemic began, India has had 11.6 million cases and more than 160,000 people have died.

A year after the lockdown, its ripples are still visible. Some people shrugged it off and managed to get back to normal. For many others, though, their lives were changed greatly.

THE ACTOR

First, Neelesh Deepak watched his food dwindle. Then the actor couldn't pay the rent on his New Delhi apartment. Out of money, he returned to his parents' home in Madhubani, a village in eastern Bihar state.

There, he tried to cope with his isolation from work, colleagues and friends. When he returned to the Indian capital in October, things had changed for the worse. Most theaters were closed, and those that tried to stage plays struggled to lure the public back. Shows were suspended indefinitely and thousands of coworkers had no jobs.

Without work amid the pandemic, the 40-year-old soon began to experience anxiety. When a friend took her own life, Deepak began seeing a psychiatrist, who prescribed medication. He began to reckon with the heartbreaking realization that he faced a painful struggle to make a living outside of the theater.

That continued for months until he joined a nonprofit group as a researcher. His income plummeted from between \$500 to \$600 a month to a little more than \$150. He struggles just to buy food.

"My family is barely surviving," he said. "The fear of the lockdown hasn't left me. I don't think it will leave me anytime soon."

THE MIGRANT WORKERS

When 50-year-old Nirbhay Yadav and his 25-year-old son suddenly found themselves without work because of the lockdown, they became part of the biggest migration in India's modern history: 10 million people began leaving the big cities for the countryside.

Fearing starvation, Yadav and his son left New Delhi for Banda, a village in central Uttar Pradesh state. They walked for 600 kilometers (372 miles) in the scorching sun along highways in an exhausting, harrowing journey.

When they finally reached Banda with blistered feet, villagers didn't allow them to enter because of fears of catching the virus. The father and son were forced into a 14-day quarantine.

But many who fled the cities didn't make it — with some killed in accidents and others dying of exhaustion, dehydration or hunger.

"I pray to God that he never shows such days again," Yadav said.

Over the next few months, the lockdown hollowed out Yadav's entire savings, forcing him to delay the weddings of his two daughters he had planned for years. It left him heartbroken.

Local nonprofit groups provided some food but that soon ran out. The state government announced it would provide the equivalent of \$13.80 per month to every family of migrant workers for half a year, but Yadav never received it.

After 11 months, he returned to New Delhi, where things were no better. Now he cannot find work even for one day. He is eating less and sleeps under a highway overpass.

"I have never seen something like this before," he said. "I think I will never come back to this city."

THE HEALTH CARE WORKER

Kavita Sherawat, who administered coronavirus tests to patients, dutifully wore masks and always washed her hands.

Still, the 30-year-old health care worker got infected, as did her husband, parents and in-laws. Only her 4-year-old son avoided it. But that's because she kept herself from seeing him in person for many weeks.

"I couldn't even feed my son during those months," she said. "It pained me."

She thought of quitting her job, believing she was neglecting her parental duties. But she stayed at it, even as others in her family kept their distance from her.

While doctors and nurses were cheered as heroes during the lockdown, people avoided her, fearing infection. She tested thousands of sick and gasping people at hospitals, not knowing if she was adequately

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protected.

"That fear changes you as a person. You start valuing your life more," she said. "Those early days still scare me."

THE TRANSGENDER MODEL

Tashi Singh called it the toughest decision she had made in her life. And she chose the lockdown to do it. For years, the 21-year-old said, she had known she was "a woman trapped in a man's body."

She wanted to tell her parents she was a woman, how she loved to wear makeup and how she had always aspired to become a model.

But Singh said she never had the courage. Until the lockdown.

When she told them, they were unsupportive and hostile. It wasn't long before she found herself caught in a spiral of abuse.

"I wanted to run away, but where would have I gone? The entire country was shut," she said.

The abuse at home led to new struggles. She was locked in her room for days. Her father shaved her head. When she once managed to escape, he found her and beat her in front of the neighbors, she said.

Days later, she succeeded in running away but struggled to find a place to live or make a living. There were no jobs for a trans model. Getting access to sex hormone drugs was difficult.

"The lockdown made me realize how to live life," she said from an apartment she shares with six other trans women. "But I guess it was also a blessing in disguise."

Israel vote deadlock: Netanyahu appears short of majority

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Uncertainty hovered over the outcome of Israel's parliamentary election Wednesday, with both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and sworn political rivals determined to depose him apparently lacking a clear path to a governing coalition.

Deadlock in the 120-seat parliament was a real possibility a day after the election, which had been dominated by Netanyahu's polarizing leadership.

With about 87.5% of the vote counted by Wednesday morning, Netanyahu's Likud party and its ultra-Orthodox and far-right allies fell short of a 61-seat majority — even if the Yamina party of Netanyahu ally-turned-critic Naftali Bennett were to join a Netanyahu-led government. Bennett has refused to endorse either side.

At the same time, a small Arab party emerged as a potential kingmaker on Wednesday morning after the latest count indicated it would cross the threshold to get into parliament. Like Bennett, the head of the Ra'am party, Mansour Abbas, has not ruled out joining either camp.

A fifth election also remains an option if neither camp can form a coalition. In that case, Netanyahu would remain a caretaker prime minister heading for a corruption trial and a confrontation with U.S. President Joe Biden over Iran.

The final tally of the votes cast at regular polling stations is expected later Wednesday.

But even then, much could still change under Israel's whipsaw politics. The elections commission was still counting about 450,000 ballots from voters who cast them outside their home polling place.

The initial results showed the country as deeply divided as ever, with an array of small sectarian parties dominating the parliament.

The results also signaled a continuing shift of the Israeli electorate toward the right wing, which supports West Bank settlements and opposes concessions in peace talks with the Palestinians. That trend was highlighted by the strong showing of an ultranationalist anti-Arab religious party.

After three previous inconclusive elections, Netanyahu had been hoping for a decisive victory that would allow him to form a government with his traditional ultra-Orthodox and hard-line nationalist allies and seek immunity from corruption charges.

In an address to supporters early Wednesday, a subdued Netanyahu boasted of a "great achievement" but stopped short of declaring victory. Instead, he appeared to reach out to his opponents and called for

formation of a "stable government" that would avoid another election.

"We must not under any circumstances drag the state of Israel to new elections, to a fifth election," he said. "We must form a stable government now."

Bennett could play an outsized role. He shares Netanyahu's hard-line nationalist ideology and would seem to be more likely to ultimately join the prime minister. But Bennett has not ruled out joining forces with Netanyahu's opponents.

During the campaign, Netanyahu emphasized Israel's highly successful coronavirus vaccination drive. He moved aggressively to secure enough vaccines for Israel's 9.3 million people, and in three months the country has inoculated some 80% of its adult population. That has enabled the government to open restaurants, stores and the airport just in time for election day.

He also tried to portray himself as a global statesman, pointing to the four diplomatic accords he reached with Arab countries last year. Those agreements were brokered by his close ally, then-President Donald Trump.

Netanyahu's opponents say the prime minister bungled many other aspects of the pandemic, particularly by allowing his ultra-Orthodox allies to ignore lockdown rules and fuel a high infection rate for much of the year.

Over 6,000 Israelis have died from COVID-19, and the economy continues to struggle with double-digit unemployment.

They also point to Netanyahu's corruption trial, saying someone who is under indictment for serious crimes is not fit to lead the country. Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals that he dismisses as a witch hunt by a hostile media and legal system.

The Biden administration has kept its distance, a contrast to Trump's support. Netanyahu has hardly mentioned the new American president, with whom he's clashed over how to rein in Iran's nuclear capabilities.

After the election results come in, attention will turn to the country's figurehead president, Reuven Rivlin.

He will hold a series of meetings with party leaders and then choose the one he believes has the best chance of forming a government as his prime minister-designate. That could set off weeks of horse-trading.

Follow Kellman at <http://www.Twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>

Beyond the pandemic: London's Tube battles to stay on track

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — When London came to a stop as a nationwide coronavirus lockdown was imposed a year ago, the Underground kept running as an essential service. But it was a strange and unnerving experience for its workers.

Joseph Cocks, a driver on the subway's Circle Line that loops around the city center, said he could "count the number of people who got on the train on one hand."

"To see it on a Monday morning peak, to see hardly anyone about, was shocking and surprising," he said of the system that opened in 1863 and is known colloquially as the Tube.

Its continued operation was a sign that even in a pandemic, London's heart was still beating.

Plagues, fires, war — London has survived them all. But it has never had a year like this. The coronavirus has killed more than 15,000 Londoners and shaken the foundations of one of the world's great cities. As a fast-moving mass vaccination campaign holds the promise of reopening, The Associated Press looks at the pandemic's impact on London's people and institutions and asks what the future might hold.

In a city where almost half of households don't own a car, public transit keeps economic and social life moving. Before the nationwide lockdown on March 23, 2020, about 5 million journeys a day were taken on the Tube. Its iconic map, reminiscent of a multicolored circuit board, is both an emblem of the city and an essential tool for residents and visitors alike.

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In the early weeks, when most Britons were told to stay at home and fear outpaced facts about the virus, Underground employees kept going to work, but worried about getting sick.

"We didn't know exactly how bad it was," Cocks said. "There were worries about how dangerous this job was, and you'd hear stories of people on the Underground catching coronavirus. So we didn't know how fast it spread and how safe we were."

COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on Transport for London, which runs the city's subway, suburban rail and bus network. At least 89 TFL staff have died from the coronavirus, most of them bus drivers, whose death rate has been three times the national average, according to a study by University College London.

The virus has hit people in public-facing jobs hardest, and the death toll has been higher among ethnic minorities than their white compatriots. The reasons are thought to include jobs, underlying health conditions and economic inequality.

About a third of the TFL workforce belongs to an ethnic minority, in part a legacy of the thousands of people from Britain's former colonies who came to the U.K. after World War II to bolster a depleted workforce.

Brian Woodhead, the Underground's director of customer services, says the network acted quickly to protect staff and passengers. Masks are mandatory, hand sanitizer is plentiful, escalator handrails are blasted with virus-killing ultraviolet light and one-way systems reduce logjams in station corridors. On buses, drivers sit in sealed-off cabs.

"As much as anyone can in the circumstances that we now find ourselves in, I think that the Tube is a safe environment," Woodhead said.

He cites a recent study by Imperial College London, which tested for the virus on surfaces and in the air on the Underground and found none. That is due in part to people like Ivelina Dimitrova, who supervises 20 cleaners at stations including the busy King's Cross. She and her crew — mostly immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa and south Asia — regularly spray surfaces with hospital-grade disinfectant.

"We had to change our work routine and everything, and (had) to do it fast" when the virus arrived, she said, adding that they felt constant stress about getting infected.

Now, she said, "we have strong morale, because we feel that we have to do what we can do just to keep ourselves safe, our families safe, other people around us safe."

Passengers who previously took little notice of the cleaning staff now sometimes stop to thank them, she said.

The pandemic has left the world's oldest subway system facing an uncertain future. The Tube, which relies heavily on ticket revenues, faces a cash crisis. Ridership plunged to just 4% of pre-pandemic numbers early in the outbreak and now carries about a fourth of the passengers it did before the outbreak.

During one recent rush hour, a trickle of passengers hustled through the ticket gates at the usually teeming Victoria and King's Cross stations, past posters reminding travelers to wear face coverings and "Be Kind" to one another.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has set the country on a slow path out of lockdown, with hairdressers and shops scheduled to reopen April 12. But people are still advised to work from home if they can and to take the Tube only if needed.

His government has given Transport for London about 4 billion pounds (\$5.6 billion) in grants and loans to keep it running, although the money is due to run out on May 18. Talks on funding have been clouded by acrimony between Johnson's Conservative government and London Mayor Sadiq Khan, a member of the Labour Party.

Woodhead expects ridership to increase, but "whether that's 18 months or whether it's 36 months" is hard to predict. And the pandemic may have changed travel patterns for good, with more walking and cycling and less rush-hour commuting.

In December, an independent report commissioned by TFL and the mayor said a "credible" forecast was that there would be a 20% reduction in demand for public transit due to "travel changes and economic weakness" after the pandemic.

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"People won't, I doubt very much, commute five days a week," Woodhead said. "Some people will. But there'll be a lot of people now that do it in a hybrid way. That's surely going to happen, which on one side will help from a congestion point of view, but the other side won't help from a revenue point of view."

Still, Woodhead is confident the Tube will be a key part of London's recovery.

"It's just interwoven into the whole infrastructure and the way in which London works," he said.

Meanwhile, drivers like Cocks will keep doing a job that has become "a bit more secluded, a bit more isolated."

"It's nice to know that you're keeping London moving," he said. "You're doing your bit to keep everything going from A to B."

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at:

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Official: Colorado shooting suspect prone to rage, delusions

By PATTY NIEBERG, THOMAS PEIPERT and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — Law enforcement officials and former associates of a 21-year-old accused of killing 10 people at a Colorado supermarket described the suspect as someone prone to sudden rage who was suspended from high school for a sudden attack on a classmate that left the student bloodied.

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, who is from the Denver suburb of Arvada, was booked into jail Tuesday on murder charges a day after the attack at a King Soopers grocery in Boulder. He was due to make a first court appearance Thursday.

Alissa had bought an assault weapon on March 16, six days before the attack, according to an arrest affidavit. Investigators have not established a motive, said Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty. It was not immediately known where the suspect purchased the weapon.

Among the dead was Boulder police Officer Eric Talley, 51, who was the first to arrive after responding to a call about shots fired and someone carrying a gun, said police Chief Maris Herold.

A law enforcement official briefed on the shooting said the suspect's family told investigators they believed Alissa was suffering some type of mental illness, including delusions. Relatives described times when Alissa told them people were following or chasing him, which they said may have contributed to the violence, the official said. The official was not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

After the shooting, detectives went to Alissa's home and found his sister-in-law, who told them that he had been playing around with a weapon she thought looked like a "machine gun" about two days earlier, according to an arrest affidavit.

No one answered the door Tuesday at the Arvada home believed to be owned by the suspect's father. The two-story house with a three-car garage sits in a relatively new middle- and upper-class neighborhood.

When he was a high school senior in 2018, Alissa was found guilty of assaulting a fellow student in class after knocking him to the floor, then climbing on top of him and punching him in the head several times, according to a police affidavit.

Alissa "got up in classroom, walked over to the victim & 'cold cocked' him in the head," the affidavit read. Alissa complained that the student had made fun of him and called him "racial names" weeks earlier, according to the affidavit. An Arvada police report on the incident said the victim was bloodied and vomiting after the assault. Alissa was suspended from school and sentenced to probation and community service.

One of his former high school wrestling teammates, Angel Hernandez, said Alissa got enraged after losing a match in practice once, letting out a stream of invectives and yelling he would kill everyone. Hernandez said the coach kicked Alissa off the team for the outburst.

"He was one of those guys with a short fuse," Hernandez said. "Once he gets mad, it's like something

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takes over and it's not him. There is no stopping him at that point."

Hernandez said Alissa also would act strangely sometimes, turning around suddenly or glancing over his shoulder. "He would say, 'Did you see that? Did you see that?'" Hernandez recalled. "We wouldn't see anything. We always thought he was messing with us."

Arvada police investigated but dropped a separate criminal mischief complaint involving the suspect in 2018, said Detective David Snelling. The man also was cited for speeding in February. "Our community is obviously concerned and upset that the suspect lived here," Snelling said.

Well after dark Tuesday night, about 100 people mourned at a makeshift memorial near the grocery that was adorned with wreaths, candles, banners reading "#Boulderstrong" and 10 crosses with blue hearts and the victims' names. Therapy dogs were on hand to provide comfort.

Four young girls huddled in the cold, one of them crying as she reminisced about how they had protested the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Homer Talley, 74, described his son Eric as a devoted father who "knew the Lord." He had seven children, ages 7 to 20.

The other dead were identified as Denny Stong, 20; Neven Stanistic, 23; Rikki Olds, 25; Tralona Bartkowiak, 49; Suzanne Fountain, 59; Teri Leiker, 51; Kevin Mahoney, 61; Lynn Murray, 62; and Jodi Waters, 65.

Leiker, Olds and Stong worked at the supermarket, former co-worker Jordan Sailas said.

Kim Cordova, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7, which represents more than 30 store employees, said workers did their best to get customers to safety.

"They grabbed everybody they could and they brought them to the backroom or to other areas of the store to hide or got them out through the back dock," Cordova said. "And these poor grocery workers have just been through hell in general working through COVID this entire last year of the pandemic."

Monday's attack was the seventh mass killing this year in the U.S., following the March 16 shooting that left eight people dead at three Atlanta-area massage businesses, according to a database compiled by the AP, USA Today and Northeastern University.

It follows a lull in mass killings during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which had the smallest number of such attacks in eight years, according to the database, which tracks mass killings defined as four or more dead, not including the shooter.

In Washington, President Joe Biden called on Congress to tighten the nation's gun laws. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed to bring forward two House-passed bills to require expanded background checks for gun buyers. Biden supports the measures, but they face a tougher route to passage in a closely divided Senate with a slim Democratic majority.

Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo in Washington, Jim Anderson in Denver and AP staff members from around the U.S. contributed to this report. Nieberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Analysis: More madness likely in NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Your bracket is shot. We know it. Ours is, too.

A year after the NCAA Tournament was canceled, the madness returned with an opening weekend full of upsets.

No. 1 seed Illinois, gone. So is Ohio State. High seeds Texas and Virginia also are out, replaced by upstarts and mid-major noisemakers.

And we have Sister Jean, the 101-year-old nun who serves as team chaplain for Chicago Loyola. So good to have her back.

It was a wild opening ride to be sure and the tournament is all but guaranteed to have a few more unexpected twists and turns.

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Here's what to look for:

THE REGULARS

Gonzaga — The Zags are the only team to reach the Sweet 16 in six consecutive seasons. They're also four wins from completing perfection, trying to become the first undefeated champion since Indiana 45 years ago.

Baylor — The big, bad ball-hawking Bears appear to have found the form they had before a second COVID-19 pause, so watch out.

Michigan — The Wolverines have looked like a No. 1 seed, even without Isaiah Livers.

Alabama — The Tide's mauling of Maryland in the second round shows just how potent this team can be.

Houston — The Cougars sport some of that same swagger as the Phi Slama Jama teams back in the '80s.

THE UPSTARTS

Chicago Loyola — Sister Jean and the lovable Ramblers are back in the Sweet 16 for the first time since that 2018 Final Four run. Seeing her on the sideline warms the heart. The Ramblers have some heart of their own.

Oral Roberts — The Golden Eagles aren't Dunk City, but they are the first No. 15 seed to reach the Sweet 16 since Florida Gulf Coast became the first eight years ago.

Oregon State — The Beavers were picked to finish 12th in a conference with 12 teams. After two wins as a No. 12 seed, you'd be wise not to pick against these underdogs.

UCLA — Hard to call the all-time leader in national championships an upstart, but the Bruins barely got into the bracket. With three wins and a trip to the Sweet 16, they quickly proved they belong.

Arkansas — The Muss Bus has the Razorbacks chugging into their first Sweet 16 appearance since 1996. Quite a job by coach Eric Musselman in two short years.

STAR PLAYERS

Corey Kispert, Gonzaga — All-American playing like one to put the Zags four games from the first perfect season since 1976.

Evan Mobley, USC — The freshman has the length of a big man, the skills of a guard and the ability to dominate both ends of the floor.

Jared Butler, Baylor — The junior All-American stands out, even on a team oozing with talent.

Jahvon Quinerly, Alabama — There's almost nothing he can't do and nothing opponents can do when he gets it going.

Marcus Zegarowski, Creighton — Forgot some of the shooting woes he had at times during the regular season. This is the junior sharpshooter's time to shine, and he's leaning into it.

Buddy Boenheim, Syracuse. There's a reason they call him Buddy Buckets. He's been filling it up in Indy, too.

RISING STARS

Max Abmas, Oral Roberts — High-volume scoring from this biomedical chemistry major has the Golden Eagles soaring into the Sweet 16 for the first time since 1974.

Cameron Krutwig, Chicago Loyola — Remember that beefy, agile-footed, deft-passing big man during the 2018 Final Four run? Well, he's back and he's rockin' a wispy mustache. The Krustache plays the harmonica, too.

Quentin Grimes, Houston — Leaving Kansas worked out well for the high-scoring guard. It wasn't a bad deal for coach Kelvin Sampson and his Cougars, either.

Chris Duarte, Oregon — Playing on the West Coast has limited his national visibility, but believe us, he was one of college basketball's best guards long before this Ducks' run.

Ethan Thompson, Oregon State — He scores, dishes and rebounds. He's a big reason the underdog Beavers have gotten this far.

MUST-WATCH GAMES

Michigan vs. Florida State, East Region, Sunday — Has the makings of being the best game in the entire bracket. Definitely in must-watch territory.

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Gonzaga vs. Creighton, West Region, Sunday — The Zags' bid for perfection goes through the Bluejays and sweet-shooting Zegarowski.

Alabama vs. UCLA, East Region, Sunday — Alabama likes to play fast. UCLA likes to slow things down. Something's got to give.

Oregon State vs. Loyola Chicago, Midwest Region, Saturday — The underdog branch of the bracket features two scrappy teams and one lovable 101-year-old nun.

Villanova vs. Baylor, South Region, Saturday — Two powerhouse programs expected to put on a show.

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

Born in war, Bangladesh marks 50 years of independence

By JULHAS ALAM and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Shafiqul Islam was studying business at Dhaka College in 1971 when a bloody and brutal war for independence ravaged Bangladesh. After undergoing guerrilla training in India, he returned to fight against Pakistani soldiers.

"It was a time of total destruction," he said. "Our bridges and roads were destroyed, our women were raped, towns were under siege. Thousands of homes and shops were torched."

Nine months after it began, the war culminated in the country's independence.

Fifty years on, 67-year-old Islam presides over Arrival Fashion Ltd., a new-generation garment factory spread over 2.5 acres and surrounded by lush paddy fields on the outskirts of the capital, Dhaka. The factory employs nearly 3,000 workers who make jeans for export to Europe and North America.

Islam's story in many ways mirrors the rise of Bangladesh, home to 160 million people.

On the eve of a half-century of independence this week, Bangladesh has been hailed as a success story for a young nation born out of strife and turbulence. Although it has struggled with famine, poverty, military coups and political violence, it's also been celebrated for what experts say is remarkable progress in uplifting the lives of its young population.

Millions have risen out of poverty as the country has unexpectedly become one of Asia's fastest-growing economies thanks to sectors like its garment industry, which clothes millions around the world.

But some fear its success conceals a darker turn, including concerns over its most recent election in 2018 when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fourth term after clinching 266 out of 300 seats in Parliament. It was a tainted election, as rights groups condemned violence against opponents who alleged manipulated and rigged voting.

"The most worrying thing in Bangladesh is the decimation of the electoral system," said Ali Riaz, an expert on South Asia who teaches political science at Illinois State University.

But it was another fateful election, led by Hasina's father, that spurred Bangladesh's independence, whose origin stretches to 1947 when the Indian subcontinent gained independence from British colonial rule. The land was carved into separate states, with the Muslim-majority regions becoming East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and West Pakistan, now simply Pakistan. But from the beginning, a strong nationalist movement surged as language became a point of tension; Bengali was widely spoken in the East, while the West's Urdu-speaking elite rose to power.

A watershed moment occurred in 1970 amid strikes and rising hostilities, when East Pakistan's Awami League, led by Bengali politician Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, swept the polls in a national election. The government rejected the results, spawning a civil disobedience movement. On March 26, 1971, Bangladesh declared independence, sparking the nine-month war.

Pakistan launched a military operation to stop the move to independence, while India joined on the side of what is now Bangladesh. Pakistani forces surrendered on Dec. 16, 1971.

Bangladesh says 3 million Bengalis were killed. Millions also fled to India, and historians have said hundreds of thousands of Bengali women were raped.

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Another casualty of the war was the economy — GDP was only \$6.2 billion in 1972. This figure has catapulted since, reaching \$305 billion in 2019. Some forecasts expect it to double its size by 2030.

Central to some of the country's success is its apparel industry, second-largest globally after China, which rakes in more than \$35 billion a year from exports. It employs four million people and the triumph has been felt most by women, who form the majority of factory workers. A job at Islam's factory helps Nasima Akhter and her two siblings earn about \$411 a month, which supports her and her family.

When she was a teenager, her parents struggled to provide them with three meals a day. Now 28, Akhter works eight hours a day, sewing hundreds of jeans. "We are doing well now," she said.

Per capita income has nearly tripled under Hasina, who first came to power in 1996 and was then re-elected in 2008. Experts say the country over the years has invested heavily in the lives of women and girls. Currently, 98% of children have finished primary school, with more girls in secondary than boys. Life expectancy in Bangladesh is 72 years against Pakistan's 67 years, and it has also surpassed wealthier India on combating child malnutrition and reproductive health, according to World Bank data.

"It's been a fascinating journey," said prominent economist Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad. "It's a development model for others in the region."

But Bangladesh is also severely vulnerable to the growing effects of climate change, with a third of its population at risk of displacement from rising sea levels. Experts have long warned that a densely populated delta country like Bangladesh, which struggles with severe and frequent flooding, will be one of the hardest hit by climate change. Strikingly, Bangladesh accounts for a mere 0.35% of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the IMF.

More immediately, the coronavirus pandemic poses challenges in Bangladesh. COVID-19 cases prompted a nationwide lockdown, and major industries and small businesses ground to a halt. The country has reported over 560,000 confirmed cases and around 8,600 deaths so far. Although experts say the full toll may be underreported, Bangladesh remains less affected than many other countries.

Still, the garment sector has shown signs of recovery and other economic drivers — remittances, agriculture and the service sector — are doing well too, pointed out Ahmad, the economist.

But not everyone is part of the country's roaring growth, added Riaz, the professor, citing data that job growth remains low despite high GDP numbers.

"Poor people's share in wealth, their income and opportunities are shrinking. The country is failing to create more jobs for young people," said Riaz.

Most concerning, observers say the government's focus on development may be bulldozing its democratic beginnings. Rights groups and nonprofits have raised an alarm over the ruling Awami League. The U.S.-based Freedom House said the party had "consolidated political power through sustained harassment of the opposition and those perceived to be allied with it," in its 2020 annual report on democracy.

Experts also highlight a controversial digital security law, which they say can be misused to mute free speech. In February, protesters swarmed an intersection in Dhaka over the death in prison of a commentator who was charged under the law for critical statements about the government's handling of the pandemic.

Bangladesh is witnessing democratic backsliding over its electoral system, attempts at stifling political opposition, and threats to freedom of expression, Riaz said.

"It was founded with the promise of an inclusive system, but it may be moving away from these foundational promises," he added.

Meanwhile, Hasina has set ambitious targets, including elevating Bangladesh to a higher middle-income country by 2031 and a developed one by 2041. In February, the United Nations' Committee for Development Policy recommended that Bangladesh be promoted to a developing country, from least-developed.

Islam, the garment factory director who fought in the war, said he's done his part — but the country has a lot more to achieve.

"In 1971, we jumped in and never looked back because we knew independence had to come. Otherwise, this nation won't survive," he said. "But that wasn't the end. We still have a way to go but our heart is always with the motherland."

Pathi reported from New Delhi.

No clear winner in Israeli election, signaling more deadlock

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli parliamentary elections on Tuesday resulted in a virtual deadlock for a fourth time in the past two years, exit polls indicated, leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with an uncertain future and the country facing the prospect of continued political gridlock.

The exit polls on Israel's three main TV stations indicated that both Netanyahu and his religious and nationalist allies, along with a group of anti-Netanyahu parties, fell short of the parliamentary majority required to form a new government. That raised the possibility of an unprecedented fifth consecutive election later this year.

The election was seen as a referendum on Netanyahu's polarizing leadership, and the initial results showed the country remains as deeply divided as ever, with an array of small sectarian parties dominating the parliament.

The results also signaled a continuing shift of the Israeli electorate toward the right wing, which supports West Bank settlements and opposes concessions in peace talks with the Palestinians. That trend was highlighted by the strong showing of an ultranationalist anti-Arab religious party.

After three previous inconclusive elections, Netanyahu had been hoping for a decisive victory that would allow him to form a government with his traditional ultra-Orthodox and hard-line nationalist allies and seek immunity from corruption charges.

In an address to supporters early Wednesday, a subdued Netanyahu boasted of a "great achievement" but stopped short of declaring victory. Instead, he appeared to reach out to his opponents and called for formation of a "stable government" that would avoid another election.

"We must not under any circumstances drag the state of Israel to new elections, to a fifth election," he said. "We must form a stable government now."

Around 64% of the vote had been counted by early Wednesday, leaving the outcome underdetermined. A small Islamist party was hovering just below the threshold to enter parliament, and whether it made the cut could affect the distribution of pro- and anti-Netanyahu blocs in the Knesset.

Updated exit polls on two channels forecast an evenly divided parliament. The third station gave Netanyahu's opponents a one-seat advantage.

Exit polls have been imprecise in the past, meaning the final results, expected in the coming days, could still shift the balance of power. Still, there is no guarantee that Netanyahu or his opponents will succeed in putting together a coalition.

"All three options are on the table: a Netanyahu-led government, a change coalition that will leave Netanyahu in the opposition, and an interim government leading to a fifth election," said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute.

Several right-wing parties have vowed never to sit in a government with Netanyahu. And Naftali Bennett, a former Netanyahu ally turned harsh critic, refused to endorse either side during the campaign.

Bennett shares Netanyahu's hard-line nationalist ideology and would seem to be more likely to ultimately join the prime minister. But Bennett has not ruled out joining forces with Netanyahu's opponents.

In a speech to his supporters, Bennett declined to take sides. He vowed to promote right-wing values but also took several veiled swipes at the prime minister's leadership style.

"Now is the time for healing," he said. "The norms of the past will no longer be acceptable." He said he would move the country "from leadership that is interested in itself to a professional leadership that cares."

Bennett has indicated he will drive a hard bargain with Netanyahu, demanding senior Cabinet ministries and perhaps even a power-sharing arrangement that includes a stint as prime minister.

In addition, their partners would also include a pair of ultra-Orthodox religious parties and the "Religious Zionists," a party whose leaders are openly racist and homophobic. One of its leaders, Itamir Ben-Gvir, is a disciple of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose Kach party was branded a terrorist group by the U.S. for

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its anti-Arab racism before Kahane was assassinated in New York in 1990.

Relying on the party could be deeply embarrassing for Netanyahu on the international stage, particularly as he tries to court the new Biden administration.

The election campaign was largely devoid of substance and was seen instead as a referendum on Netanyahu's divisive rule.

During the campaign, Netanyahu emphasized Israel's highly successful coronavirus vaccination campaign. He moved aggressively to secure enough vaccines for Israel's 9.3 million people, and in three months the country has inoculated some 80% of its adult population. That has enabled the government to open restaurants, stores and the airport just in time for election day.

He also tried to portray himself as a global statesman, pointing to the four diplomatic accords he reached with Arab countries last year. Those agreements were brokered by his close ally, then-President Donald Trump.

Netanyahu's opponents say the prime minister bungled many other aspects of the pandemic, particularly by allowing his ultra-Orthodox allies to ignore lockdown rules and fuel a high infection rate for much of the year.

Over 6,000 Israelis have died from COVID-19, and the economy continues to struggle with double-digit unemployment.

They also point to Netanyahu's corruption trial, saying someone who is under indictment for serious crimes is not fit to lead the country. Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals that he dismisses as a witch hunt by a hostile media and legal system.

Even Netanyahu's reputation as a statesman has suffered in recent days. The United Arab Emirates, the most important of the four Arab nations to establish official diplomatic ties with Israel, last week made clear that it did not want to be used as part of Netanyahu's reelection bid after he was forced to call off a visit to the country. The Biden administration also has kept its distance, a contrast to Trump's support.

Netanyahu's Likud party was projected to emerge as the largest individual party, with just over 30 seats in the 120-seat parliament, followed by the centrist opposition party Yesh Atid, with some 17 seats.

The remainder of the parliament would be divided between some 10 other small parties. These range from an Arab party to left-wing secular parties to a pair of secular, right-wing parties that oppose Netanyahu.

Altogether, Netanyahu and his allies were projected to control 53 to 54 seats, while his opponents are expected to control some 60 or 61, with Bennett controlling the remainder.

Netanyahu's opponents included a diverse array of parties that had little in common beyond their shared animosity toward him. Even if his opponents end up controlling a majority of seats, it will be difficult for them to bridge their ideological differences on such lightning rod issues as Palestinian statehood and the role of religion in the country.

They also were hurt by the disintegration of the main Arab party in parliament. A renegade member ran separately but appeared not to win enough seats to enter parliament, robbing the alliance of key votes.

Tuesday's election was sparked by the disintegration of an emergency government formed last May between Netanyahu and his chief rival at the time. The alliance was plagued by infighting, and elections were forced after they failed to agree on a budget in December.

Netanyahu's opponents have accused him of fomenting deadlock in hopes of bringing about a friendlier parliament that will grant him immunity from prosecution.

After the results come in, attention will turn to the country's figurehead president, Reuven Rivlin.

He will hold a series of meetings with party leaders and then choose the one he believes has the best chance of forming a government as his prime minister-designate. That could set off weeks of horse-trading.

Voting in Jerusalem on Tuesday, Rivlin said the deadlock has had a price.

"Four elections in two years erode public trust in the democratic process," he said, even as he urged Israelis to vote again. "There is no other way."

AP correspondent Ilan Ben Zion contributed reporting.

California groups track face masks, gloves bound for ocean

By HAVEN DALEY Associated Press

PACIFICA, Calif. (AP) — Disposable masks, gloves and other types of personal protective equipment are safeguarding untold lives during the coronavirus pandemic. They're also creating a worldwide pollution problem, littering streets and sending an influx of harmful plastic and other waste into landfills, sewage systems and oceans.

In Northern California, environmental groups are tracking the issue along the coast — and trying to do something about it.

The Pacific Beach Coalition recently noticed a dramatic increase in discarded PPE on beaches in and around the city of Pacifica, south of San Francisco, where it's been doing monthly cleanups for nearly 25 years.

Volunteers record what they pick up to gauge what might end up in the ocean. Until 2020, the litter was mostly cigarette butts and food wrappers.

"What are we going to do? We got masks. We got gloves. We got all those hand wipes, the sani wipes. They're everywhere. They're in my neighborhood, in my streets. What can we do?" asked Lynn Adams, the coalition's president.

The group and others are calling attention to the issue, saying what's recorded is likely only a fraction of the personal protective equipment hitting beaches and oceans.

Larger mammals can ingest PPE, and plastic from the items can disrupt the ocean's food chains. "They're all made of plastic," Adams said.

A report last year by the advocacy group OceansAsia found nearly 1.6 billion masks would flood oceans in 2020 alone, based on global production estimates and other factors. OceansAsia said masks could take as long as 450 years to break down.

The Marine Mammal Center, a conservation group that rescues and rehabilitates mammals, conducts research and provides education, said animals can get trapped in discarded PPE, or mistake it for food.

"Obviously, PPE is critical right now, but we know that with increased amounts of plastic and a lot of this stuff getting out into the ocean, it can be a really big threat to marine mammals and all marine life," said the center's conservation educator, Adam Ratner.

One small thing Ratner suggests is cutting the loops before discarding a mask, which can help prevent animals from getting tangled in them.

Sophia Woehl was among those volunteering in the cleanup at a beach in Pacifica last week.

"We want to keep ourselves safe, but we also want to keep the rest of the environment safe, too, and we're not doing that right now with just leaving them on the ground," she said.

Associated Press writer Juliet Williams contributed to this report.

Spa killings prompt new proposals from Georgia Democrats

By JEFF AMY and BEN NADLER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Democratic lawmakers in Georgia have introduced a slate of legislation in response to the recent shootings at massage businesses in metro Atlanta that left eight people dead, including six women of Asian descent — though it's unlikely the bills will see movement anytime soon.

The proposals would require a five-day waiting period for gun purchases, establish a statewide translation system for 911 calls and create enhanced training for law enforcement emphasizing outreach in other languages. Democrats say they're responding to news reports that suggest people who couldn't speak fluent English had trouble communicating with responding officers, as well as reports that the suspect bought a gun the morning of the shootings.

The bills have little chance of passing this year because they're too late for procedural deadlines and only days remain in a legislative session set to end March 31. Also, any proposals that limit gun sales are likely to face staunch opposition in the Republican-controlled legislature.

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"We're definitely looking more toward next session, just because of the way that the process is," said Democratic state Rep. Marvin Lim, who is among the Asian American lawmakers sponsoring the bills. "But that's not the point. We needed to act now and send a message" to the grieving communities, as well as to start a conversation with law enforcement agencies about accessibility, he said.

"The three bills aim to respond to various failures in the system," Lim said.

Robert Aaron Long, a 21-year-old white man, is accused of killing eight people at three separate Atlanta-area massage businesses. Another person was shot but survived.

Democratic Rep. Sam Park is the primary House sponsor for the proposal to institute a five-day waiting period for gun purchases.

"Myself, along with my colleagues, view this as a common-sense measure to reduce gun violence, based on impulsiveness, based on rage," Park said. "I think we're just astounded that this guy, the shooter, was able to obtain a gun and then kill eight people within a matter of hours."

Park acknowledged that the bill was unlikely to pass in Georgia, where Republicans control the General Assembly and the governorship. But he said that gun control will "without a doubt" be an issue in the 2022 statewide election, when all those offices will be on the ballot.

"It's important to demonstrate to the community that we're fighting for them, that we're fighting to protect our community to ensure that these sorts of horrific incidents do not happen again," Park said.

Republican state Sen. Tyler Harper, who has sponsored legislation broadening gun rights in the past, says he opposes a five-day waiting period.

"I think it's just an unnecessary burden on law-abiding citizens being able to access and exercise their constitutional rights," Harper said.

Two other bills introduced by Democrats in the wake of the shootings aim to increase communication between minority communities and law enforcement. One proposal would direct the Georgia Emergency Communications Authority to implement a statewide translation system for 911 calls. The other would direct the group that administers law enforcement training in Georgia to offer community response and proactive outreach training in languages other than English.

Democratic Sen. Sheikh Rahman is a Bangladeshi immigrant who was the first person of Asian descent elected to the Georgia state Senate.

"I have people from more than 100 different countries, speaking 100 different languages. The reporting is a big issue in our community," said Rahman, whose first language is Bengali.

While leaders of 911 centers acknowledge translation is an issue, they say many 911 centers have already overcome it through the use of on-call translation services.

William Wright, the manager of Barrow County E-911, is the secretary of the Georgia Emergency Communications Authority, a state agency that works to improve emergency communications in Georgia. He said every emergency dispatch center is locally operated and can be different, but said the use of translation services is common statewide.

"There's a number the dispatcher can call and an interpreter will get on the line," Wright said.

He said that's a more practical alternative than trying to hire operators fluent in multiple languages. "Our area and our nation is so diverse now that that it's very difficult to staff a 911 center with someone who can speak every language," Wright said.

Rahman said he wanted "some basic training" for law enforcement officers, plus easy access to interpreters. He suggested officers could carry a quick reference card with some basic phrases in common foreign languages, "just to get the communication started."

"You don't have to be a language expert," Rahman said.

Park said the detention of Mario Gonzalez, the husband of shooting victim Delaina Ashley Yaun, is just one argument for why police need to be better at dealing with minorities. Gonzalez, who survived the rampage, has said police detained him in handcuffs for four hours after the attack.

The Georgia Public Safety Training Center, which trains many police officers statewide, didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

The Democrats sponsoring the slate of legislation issued a joint statement Tuesday calling for action.

"We look to our history, and where this country has been, and we look forward to the change we need to see," the statement said.

Haunted by mass violence, Colorado confronts painful history

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press Writer

DENVER (AP) — Dawn Reinfeld moved to Colorado 30 years ago to attend college in the bucolic town of Boulder. Enchanted by the state's wide-open spaces, she stayed.

But, in the ensuing decades, dark events have clouded her view of her adopted home. The 1999 massacre at Columbine High School. The 2012 massacre at the Aurora movie theater. On Wednesday, Reinfeld was reeling from the latest mass shooting even closer to home, after authorities say a 21-year-old gunned down shoppers at a local grocery store.

"I could see at some point leaving because of all this," said Reinfeld, a gun control activist. "It's an exhausting way to live."

Colorado has long been defined by its jagged mountains and an outdoor lifestyle that lure transplants from around the country. But it's also been haunted by shootings that have helped define the nation's decades-long struggle with mass violence. The day after the latest massacre, many in the state were wrestling with that history — wondering why the place they live seems to have become a magnet for such attacks. Why here — again?

"People now say, 'gee, what is it about Colorado?'" said Tom Mauser, whose son Daniel was killed at Columbine High School in 1999.

Mauser, now a gun control advocate, was fielding phone calls in the wake of the new attack — among them was a panicked call from a friend whose daughter was shopping in the supermarket and just escaped the shooting. Again, the violence felt so close.

"It just effects so many people. It's become pervasive," he said.

Colorado isn't the state with the most mass shootings — it ranks eighth in the nation, in the same tier as far larger states like California and Florida, according to Jillian Peterson, a criminology professor at Hamline University in Minnesota.

But it is indelibly associated with some of the most high-profile shootings. The massacre at Columbine High School is now viewed as the bloody beginning of a modern era of mass violence. The Aurora shooting brought that terror from schools to a movie theater.

And there are others with less national prominence. In 2006, a gunman killed a 16-year-old girl after storming a high school in the mountain town of Bailey. The next year, a gunman killed four people in two separate attacks on evangelical Christian churches in suburban Denver and Colorado Springs. Three people died during a 2015 attack on a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs. In 2017, three people were killed at a Walmart by a shooter whose motives were never known. In 2019, 18-year-old Kendrick Castillo was killed fending off an armed attack by two classmates at a suburban Denver high school.

The search for answers leaves no easy explanations. Despite its Western image, Colorado has a fairly typical rate of gun ownership for the country, and its populated landscape has more shopping centers than shooting ranges. It's close to the middle of the pack in terms of its rate of all types of gun violence — 21st in the country, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

Peterson, who has written about mass shootings as a viral phenomenon where one gunman is inspired by coverage of other attacks, says the Columbine attack may be one reason Colorado has suffered so much. Two student gunmen killed 13 and "created the script" that many other mass shooters seek to emulate. The attackers died in the massacre but landed on the cover of Time Magazine and were memorialized in movies and books.

"Columbine was the real turning point in this country, so it makes sense that, in Columbine's backyard, you'd see more of them," Peterson said.

The attack was nearly a generation ago — the man police named Tuesday as the gunman in the Boulder massacre, Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, was born three days before the Columbine shooting.

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Like many young Coloradans, Esteban Luevano, 19, only learned about Columbine in school, as a tragedy that occurred before he was born. But its long shadow terrified him as a child who wondered whether gunmen could storm his school, too.

Then, when Luevano was 11, another gunman opened fire at a movie theater near his house in Aurora, east of Denver and on the opposite side of the metro area from Columbine's leafy suburbs. Twelve people were killed and 70 wounded.

The theater has since been torn down and rebuilt. It sat empty on Tuesday, shuttered during the pandemic, as snow began to swirl and Luevano bundled up to head into a mall across the street. He was still reeling from the idea that the latest Colorado community to join the grim brotherhood was the tony, college town of Boulder.

"It's pretty fancy, so it kind of shocked me that someone would shoot out there," Luevano said.

Colorado has taken some action to restrict access to guns.

After each of Colorado's biggest massacres, the local gun control movement has gained heartbroken new recruits. Survivors of Columbine and family of the victims there helped push a ballot measure that required background checks for guns purchased at gun shows. After the Aurora attack, the state's newly Democratic Legislature passed mandatory background checks for all purchases and a 15-round limit for magazines.

Those measures led to the recall of two state senators, but the laws endured. After the 2018 Parkland shooting in Florida, the Colorado Legislature passed laws allowing for the confiscation of guns from people engaged in threatening behavior. There has been rebellion from some rural sheriffs, but no recalls now.

Three years ago, the city of Boulder went further and banned assault weapons. A court blocked the measure just 10 days before Monday's rampage.

Gun control activists say one place to observe the impact of mass shootings is in the state's politics. The Republican congressman who represented Aurora was replaced in 2018 by Democratic Rep. Jason Crow, a gun control proponent. In November, the Democratic governor who signed the post-Aurora gun control measures, John Hickenlooper, won a U.S. Senate seat from Colorado's last major statewide elected Republican.

Still, the appetite for gun rights supporters has not dissipated completely. Coloradans last year also elected Lauren Boebert, a Republican from a rural district who said she wanted to carry a firearm on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Democrat Tom Sullivan, whose son Alex was killed during the Aurora shooting, was elected to a previously-Republican state house district in 2018. On Monday afternoon, he was out with a friend and didn't hear about the latest attack until he came home.

When he did, he turned on the television to watch, something he described as a "pause" to take in all the pain and life stories of the victims.

"It's not that we're numb to this, it's that we have a lot of practice," Sullivan said in an interview.

Sullivan argued that Colorado doesn't have an unusually high number of mass shootings. It's just that the relatively wealthy state's backdrop makes the attacks more sensational. "The ones that are happening here in Colorado are happening in a little more affluent areas," Sullivan said. "It's happening in other places, too, we just can't get people to report on that."

Not all touched by the state's history of massacres have become gun control backers. Brian Rohrbough, whose son Daniel was killed at Columbine, said he gets frustrated every time political activists pick up the issue after massacres. Instead, the solution is moral education, he argues.

"We're reaping what we've sown because we're afraid, as a state, as a country, to call evil evil," Rohrbough said.

The 'disturbing influence' of presidential news conferences

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — He'd led allied armies in the defeat of Nazi Germany only to find himself, a decade

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later, a tad intimidated before the cameras in an echoey room of the Old Executive Office Building, ready to make history again.

"Well, I see we're trying a new experiment this morning," President Dwight Eisenhower told the press corps. "I hope that doesn't prove to be a disturbing influence." It was the first presidential news conference captured for broadcast by television. In the scratchy black and white of 1955 TV sets, Americans saw those trademark Ike grins and heard him beef about being asked a "loaded question."

With that, an enlightening, contentious and often showboating tradition came into the modern age, one President Joe Biden carries on Thursday with his first White House news conference. Stay tuned for any disturbing influences.

Depending how you count, Biden is a little or a lot behind his recent predecessors in opening himself to questions in what historian Martha Joynt Kumar calls the "high-risk, high-reward" enterprise of presidential news conferences.

The last four presidents, back to Bill Clinton, each held one solo White House news conference in their first 60 days, picking up the pace to varying degrees later.

Adding in the joint, often very brief news conferences with visiting foreign leaders, Donald Trump held at least five news conferences by that point, Clinton at least four, and Barack Obama two. The pandemic has kept foreign leaders away from the White House this year.

The Biden White House is a notably tight ship, fully aware of his history of flubs, as is Biden himself, a self-described "gaffe machine."

He went through the 2020 campaign with infrequent news conferences and often hunkered down in the pandemic. Yet he debated fellow Democrats a dozen times and Trump three times without apparent harm to his prospects or the country.

In one of the president's few extended and open-ended sessions with the media before Thursday, an interview with ABC News, Americans gained insight into his thinking about Russian President Vladimir Putin — Biden called him a killer who "will pay a price" for U.S. election interference — as well as the surge of young migrants at the border, a possibly delayed troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, and more.

Eisenhower's news conference Jan. 19, 1955, was one benchmark among several in the history of presidential news conferences tracked by Kumar, an authority on White House practices.

Until his administration, the news conferences were off the record, meaning presidents gave the public information about the country's affairs and the workings of government without necessarily letting their name be used.

Woodrow Wilson gave the first presidential news conference in 1913. Calvin Coolidge made a habit of them, holding nearly 73 a year on average, explaining "the people should have a fairly accurate report of what the president is trying to do."

Franklin Roosevelt, a radio pioneer who mastered communications on all fronts and nearly matched Coolidge's unrivaled pace of news conferences, regularly summoned his favored reporters to his office, consigning the ones he didn't like to his "dunce club."

Off the record often meant giving the president a chance to clean up his remarks, unheard of today. At a March 1950 news conference, Harry Truman declared that Sen. Joseph McCarthy, the audacious canceler of communists real and imagined in U.S. government and society, was the Kremlin's "best asset."

"When one of the reporters commented that the president's observation would 'hit page one tomorrow,' Truman realized he had better soften the statement," Kumar writes. "He 'worked' with reporters and allowed the following as a direct quotation: 'The greatest asset that the Kremlin has is the partisan attempt in the Senate to sabotage the bipartisan foreign policy of the United States.'"

Such manipulation became untenable when Eisenhower put the news conferences on the record and let broadcasters record them. Even so, segments were only televised later.

Although wanting to take advantage of the nascent medium of TV, Eisenhower did so with a partial step. Press secretary James C. Hagerty told AP at the time that live telecasts would not be allowed.

It was John F. Kennedy who ushered in the age of live, televised news conferences, and he thrived in

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the practice.

Smooth talking, authoritative and funny, Kennedy reached living rooms about twice a month with his news conferences.

But for all of JFK's charms and smarts, he encountered a more aggressive White House press corps, Kumar says. In part that was because the previous administration had been caught in a lie, at first telling Americans the Soviets had shot down a U.S. weather plane when it was a spy plane. Even so, open secrets about Kennedy's behavior with women and his health problems stayed off limits in the coverage.

Through the cascade of lies about Vietnam and Watergate, the adversarial relationship between the press and power took deeper root. So did the performative nature of the exercise, with the cameras watching.

Richard Nixon, like Trump after him, called the press an "enemy." Yet Nixon was the first to hold White House news conferences in prime time. (Nixon's famous cry of grievance in 1973, "I'm not a crook," came in a question-and-answer session with newspaper editors at an Associated Press meeting in Florida, not in a White House news conference.)

Ronald Reagan also favored the big audiences and cachet of prime time, using the glamorous East Room as the backdrop just as Nixon did.

Through these years news conferences became as much about watching a president think on his feet as about the policy substance, if not more.

There's been preening — think Trump. Think, for example, of the haranguing, hourlong or longer theatrical, stream-of-consciousness monologues as that president searched openly for friendly questions, ridiculed tough ones and pedaled theories based on things he saw on TV.

There's been squirming, as when Gerald Ford was asked whether his pardon of Nixon should be taken to mean the disgraced president was guilty. "Uh, the acceptance of a pardon," Ford said very slowly, "uh, I think can be construed by many if not all as an admission of guilt."

There have been plenty of flashes of anger.

Obama in 2015 didn't take kindly to being asked why he was "content" to trumpet the newly achieved nuclear deal with Iran when that country was still holding four Americans on fabricated grounds. His face wore a smile that wasn't a smile.

"The notion that I'm content, as I celebrate with American citizens languishing in Iranian jails," he said, "that's nonsense and you should know better."

The long-ago question that Eisenhower found "loaded" in the Indian Treaty Room of the sprawling executive office building that now bears his name was innocuous by today's standards. He was merely asked if he might appraise his first two years in office and "tell us something of your hopes for the next two or maybe even the next six."

Contrast that with a Feb. 6, 1998, Clinton news conference the month after he lied in a televised speech that "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky," as the evidence built for his impeachment that fall.

He was asked in that news conference at what point he might decide the crisis was too much to put his family through anymore and resign.

"Never," he said, stone-faced.

Clinton was flanked by the British prime minister, Tony Blair, who smiled the smile of a man who wanted to be somewhere — anywhere — else in that moment.

Associated Press multimedia editor Kevin S. Vineys contributed to this report.

Colorado shooting victims: Store staffers, cop, photographer

By JENNIFER PELTZ, COREY WILLIAMS and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

Three were gunned down while putting in a day's work at a Colorado supermarket. Another was a police officer who raced in to try to rescue them and others from the attack that left 10 dead.

A picture of the victims of Monday's shooting began to emerge a day later, when the suspect in the

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killings was booked into jail on murder charges after being treated at a hospital.

Those who lost their lives at the King Soopers store in Boulder ranged from 20 years old to 65. They included a magazine photographer, a Medicare agent with a passion for theater and others going about their days at a busy shopping plaza.

They were identified as Denny Stong, 20; Neven Stanistic, 23; Rikki Olds, 25; Tralona Bartkowiak, 49; police Officer Eric Talley, 51; Suzanne Fountain, 59; Teri Leiker, 51; Kevin Mahoney, 61; Lynn Murray, 62; and Jodi Waters, 65.

Leiker, Olds and Stong worked at the supermarket, said former co-worker Jordan Sailas, who never got the chance to bring his baby son into the store to meet them.

ERIC TALLEY

He joined the police force in Boulder in 2010 with a background that included a master's degree in computer communications, his father said.

"At age 40, he decided he wanted to serve his community," Homer "Shay" Talley, 74, told The Associated Press from his ranch in central Texas. "He left his desk job. He just wanted to serve, and that's what he did. He just enjoyed the police family."

Eric Talley was the first to arrive after a call about shots being fired and someone carrying a rifle, Boulder Police Chief Maris Herold said.

Talley was "by all accounts, one of the outstanding officers" in the department, Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty said.

Talley's father said his son — who had seven children, ages 7 to 20 — was a devoted father who "knew the Lord."

"When everyone else in the parking lot was running away, he ran toward it," Shay Talley said.

"We know where he is," he added. "He loved his family more than anything. He wasn't afraid of dying. He was afraid of putting them through it."

Talley graduated from high school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1988. The school superintendent there expressed condolences and praised "the example Officer Talley leaves us all."

LYNN MURRAY

Murray was shopping at King Soopers, where a friend's daughter had seen her. Word made it to her husband, John Mackenzie, who drove to the store and started texting his wife.

After getting no answer in about five minutes, "I just fell over in my chair," he said, choking up.

Murray had a long career taking photos for magazines including Cosmopolitan and Vogue, Mackenzie said.

"She charmed the pants off me" when they met at a photography studio in New York City years ago, he said. Computer backgammon games soon evolved into a relationship and eventually, two children.

"She's the kindest person I ever knew, hands down. She had an aura about her that was the coolest freakin' thing you'd ever want to know. She was just a cool chick," Mackenzie said. "She had it all together — she really did."

He said he spent hours consoling their children before he "lost it" Tuesday morning. Mackenzie offered a message:

"Don't live in fear. My wife, none of the victims, would ever want you to live in fear. They'd want you to be bolder and live bolder. That's what this place is about."

SUZANNE FOUNTAIN

Fountain was an actress and a mother who later won loyal clients as a Medicare agent, doing extensive research to find the right supplemental coverage for older adults signing up for the federal health insurance program, her life partner Phi Bernier said.

"She never skimped, she never did something because it was easier," he said.

Fountain trained at the Circle in the Square Theater School and the two first met while they were playing lead roles in "The Glass Menagerie" about 30 years ago, Bernier said. They dated for a time and then reconnected after Fountain came to see him in a play in 2013.

Up until the pandemic, Fountain was also the manager of eTown, a nonprofit live music venue in Boulder.

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"Suzanne was a bright light to all she met, and we were proud to have her represent eTown in our community as she welcomed people into our space hundreds and hundreds of times," the organization said in a Facebook post.

Fountain won praise for her acting from both reviewers and those who worked with her.

"She was absolutely lovely, a natural, someone you simply didn't forget," Brian Miller, who worked with her on a show, told The Denver Post.

A Boulder Daily Camera review said her 2002 performance as a nurse in "Wit," a Pulitzer Prize-winning play about a woman dealing with cancer, brought "a simple but crucial compassion to the play."

RIKKI OLDS

A front-end manager at King Soopers, Olds aspired to work her way up the ranks at the store, her family said.

"She was 25 years old, just kind of starting life, bubbly and energetic and charismatic," her uncle Robert Olds said.

He said he still remembers the preschool-age niece who would tag along with him and his sons to baseball tournaments and ask to go to McDonald's afterward.

"We are devastated," Robert Olds said. He added that the family had heard from one of her friends that she had been trying to lock the store doors after the shooting began in the parking lot.

Her grandmother choked up on the phone as she described the young woman she played a large role in raising.

"She was just a very kind and loving, bubbly person who lit up the room when she walked in," said Jeanette Olds, 71, of Lafayette, Colorado.

KEVIN MAHONEY

He "represents all things Love," his daughter Erika Mahoney said in a poignant tweet that featured a wedding photo and drew wide attention on social media.

"I'm so thankful he could walk me down the aisle last summer," added Mahoney, who is the news director at a California public radio station.

She also posted that she's pregnant and knows her father "wants me to be strong for his granddaughter."

TERI LEIKER

The longtime King Soopers employee loved to watch the University of Colorado marching band perform in a kickoff celebration called the Pearl Street Stampede on Friday nights before home football games on the Boulder campus, band director Matt Dockendorf told The Denver Post.

"She was there even before we started gathering, which is half an hour before the stampede started," Dockendorf said. "She was just a staple. She was kind of a personal cheerleader for the band."

Associated Press writers Patty Nieberg in Boulder, Colorado, and Susan Montoya Bryan in Albuquerque, New Mexico, contributed. Nieberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

AP journalist, other media workers return to Myanmar court

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Associated Press journalist Thein Zaw and several other members of the media who have been charged under a public order law while covering anti-coup protests in Myanmar are returning to court Wednesday.

It is the second round of hearings for the journalists, who were arrested on Feb. 27 and face up to three years behind bars. Thein Zaw's lawyer, Tin Zar Oo, said after the first hearing on March 12 that she might be able to submit an application for bail on Wednesday.

About 40 members of the media have been detained since the coup, and roughly half of them remain in custody, according to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Seven, including Thein Zaw, were arrested on Feb. 27.

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

"Associated Press journalist Thein Zaw and all other journalists wrongly detained in Myanmar should be immediately and unconditionally released," Shawn Crispin, senior representative for Southeast Asia of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists said after the March 12 hearing. "The abuse of vague criminal charges to jail journalists is tantamount to making all news reporting a crime. Myanmar's junta must stop detaining journalists and allow reporters to do their jobs without fear of reprisal."

Thein Zaw and others are charged under Sub-Section 505(A) of the Penal Code, which criminalizes "any attempt to cause fear, spread false news, or agitate directly or indirectly a criminal offense against a government employee."

Section 505 covers seditious activities, and was amended by the junta to include a broader range of offenses and extend the maximum prison term from two years to three.

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

Lawyer Tin Zar Oo said Wednesday's hearing will take place at a special court in Insein Prison in northern Yangon, where Thein Zaw has been held since his arrest. The prison has been notorious for decades for holding political detainees, and hundreds of people arrested during the latest crackdown are jailed there.

At the previous hearing, Tin Zar Oo and one of Thein Zaw's brothers were allowed into the courtroom to take part in the 10-minute videoconference, along with a representative from the U.S. Embassy and his translator.

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

Tin Zar Oo said that her client looked healthy at the March 12 hearing, but suffered from asthma at night. She said Thein Zaw's brother commented that he had lost weight.

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

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

The U.S. government, in addition to criticizing the coup and the violence by Myanmar's security forces, has been supportive of press freedom in the Southeast Asian nation.

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

Even during deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi's time in office, journalists were often targeted for their reporting.

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

Biden's disciplined agenda rollout tested by the unexpected

By ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has taken tremendous pride in methodically unveiling its

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agenda, particularly the \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief measure the president hopes to trumpet over the next several weeks. But a growing list of unforeseen challenges is beginning to scramble the White House's plans.

In less than a week, two mass shootings have overshadowed President Joe Biden's "Help is Here" tour at which he planned to herald the ways his administration is helping Americans recovering from the pandemic. The White House has also struggled to respond to the growth in unaccompanied minors crossing the U.S.-Mexico border or blunt a nationwide effort by Republican legislatures to tighten election laws.

Biden's meticulous approach to the presidency is intended to serve as a stark departure from the chaos of his predecessor, Donald Trump. But the rapid developments over the past week are a reminder that even the most disciplined administration can only control so much.

"Every president and their staff make plans but every day the plans get blown up by reality," said Ari Fleischer, who was press secretary to George W. Bush when that administration's priorities were suddenly swamped by the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. "Outside events intervene and force you to play defense or improvise or change your plans nearly every day. If you can't juggle, you don't belong in the White House."

The juggle is intensifying at a particularly critical moment for Biden. The most valuable asset of presidents is their time, especially in their opening months in office, when the concerns of future elections are most distant. There were signs on Tuesday that the patience of Biden's diverse coalition may be fraying.

Two Democratic senators, Tammy Duckworth of Illinois and Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, condemned the lack of diversity in Biden's Cabinet. Scrutiny of those advising Biden has intensified after last week's shooting in Atlanta, which killed eight people, including six women of Asian descent. The violence came during a wave of attacks against Asian Americans over the past year.

Duckworth said she raised her concerns with the White House on Tuesday and she and Hirono threatened to withhold their votes on nominations until the administration addressed the matter. In a Senate that's evenly divided, such a move could have significant ramifications.

However, the two senators set aside their block on the nominees late Tuesday after securing the Biden administration's assurances more would be done. Press secretary Jen Psaki said the White House will add a senior-level Asian American Pacific Islander liaison "who will ensure the community's voice is further represented and heard."

Biden could soon face another fight if he follows through with his commitment to tighten gun regulations. After Monday's shooting at a Boulder, Colorado, supermarket that killed 10 people, Biden urged Congress to close loopholes in the background check system and ban assault weapon and high-capacity magazines.

Biden homed in on closing what is known as the Charleston loophole — provision in federal law that gives a gun seller discretion on whether to proceed with a sale if the FBI fails to determine within three business days whether a buyer is eligible to purchase a gun.

"That's one of the best tools we have right now to prevent gun violence," Biden said.

Biden, as a candidate, promised rapid action on gun control, including some steps on his first day in office. But the polarizing issue was quietly sidelined by the focus on the virus effort and the imperative to prioritize his agenda with narrow Democratic majorities in Congress and the legislative filibuster in place.

During the general election, Biden managed to quell much of the intraparty divisions that have so often riven Democrats by rallying them around a central purpose: defeating Trump.

After his election, his team adopted the same principle to unite the Democratic factions by again organizing around a common motivation: passing the massive \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill. There was to be no debate about priorities, Biden's aides made clear to Democrats. The pandemic relief, which emphasizes vaccines and unemployment benefits, had to come first at a time of historic crises.

Publicly, Democratic lawmakers and groups signed on even as the behind-the-scenes jockeying began over what would come next. Biden aides have acknowledged that fighting over the sequence could become fierce, with disparate groups pushing for gun control, immigration, voting rights and climate change to become the centerpiece of the next White House push.

After the shootings, and a growing challenge at the southern border, West Wing aides in the last few days have held a series of meetings and virtual calls to strategize on how to proceed on the hot button

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issues, according to two White House aides not authorized to discuss private discussions. Biden urged advisers to move on gun control, the aides said.

West Wing aides privately acknowledge they were caught off guard by the increase in migrants at the border and the furor over the conditions of their detention. After only muted opposition to a pandemic relief bill none of them voted for, Republican lawmakers have seized on the border situation.

That's making Democrats nervous. Some Democratic lawmakers have called for more transparency at the border while fearing such disclosure would allow Republicans to block the White House's momentum.

Just before news of the Colorado shooting, White House aides leaked preliminary word about their next priority, a potentially \$3 billion package with money for developing roads, hospitals, schools and green energy systems. But for that program, like other legislative priorities, the White House faces tough prospects for any Republican support and would be forced to proceed along a party-line vote.

That would require keeping all Democrats in line and deploying procedural maneuvers to pass legislation without Republican votes.

Biden, a Senate institutionalist, has long opposed modifying the filibuster, though aides have said he would give priority to his agenda over preserving the legislative tool if it comes to that.

But the move would face fierce opposition from Republicans in the minority and could also encounter headwinds among moderate Democrats like Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, suggesting more political fights ahead.

Associated Press writer Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

'Virginia Woolf,' 'Goldbergs' star George Segal dies at 87

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — George Segal, the banjo player turned actor who was nominated for an Oscar for 1966's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and worked into his late 80s on the ABC sitcom "The Goldbergs," died Tuesday in Santa Rosa, California, his wife said.

"The family is devastated to announce that this morning George Segal passed away due to complications from bypass surgery," Sonia Segal said in a statement. He was 87.

George Segal was always best known as a comic actor, becoming one of the screen's biggest stars in the 1970s when lighthearted adult comedies thrived.

But his most famous role was in a harrowing drama, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," based on Edward Albee's acclaimed play.

He was the last surviving credited member of the tiny cast, all four of whom were nominated for Academy Awards: Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton for starring roles, Sandy Dennis and Segal for supporting performances. The women won Oscars, the men did not.

To younger audiences, he was better known for playing magazine publisher Jack Gallo on the long-running NBC series "Just Shoot Me" from 1997 to 2003, and as grandfather Albert "Pops" Solomon on the "The Goldbergs" since 2013.

"Today we lost a legend. It was a true honor being a small part of George Segal's amazing legacy," said "Goldbergs" creator Adam Goldberg, who based the show on his 1980s childhood. "By pure fate, I ended up casting the perfect person to play Pops. Just like my grandfather, George was a kid at heart with a magical spark."

In his Hollywood prime, he played a stuffy intellectual opposite Barbra Streisand's freewheeling prostitute in 1970's "The Owl and the Pussycat;" a cheating husband opposite Glenda Jackson in 1973's "A Touch of Class;" a hopeless gambler opposite Elliot Gould in director Robert Altman's 1974 "California Split;" and a bank-robbing suburbanite opposite Jane Fonda in 1977's "Fun with Dick and Jane."

Groomed to be a handsome leading man, Segal's profile had been rising steadily since his first movie, 1961's "The Young Doctors" in which he had ninth billing. His first starring performance came in "King Rat" as a nefarious inmate at a Japanese prison camp during World War II.

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In "Virginia Woolf," he played Nick, one half of a young couple invited over for drinks and to witness the bitterness and frustration of a middle-aged couple.

Director Mike Nichols needed someone who would get the approval of star Elizabeth Taylor, and turned to Segal when Robert Redford turned him down.

According to Nichols' biographer Mark Harris, the director said Segal was "close enough to the young god he needed to be for Elizabeth, and witty enough and funny enough to deal with all that humiliation."

Segal died 10 years to the day after Taylor.

He rode the film to a long run of stardom. Then in the late 1970s, "Jaws" and other action films changed the nature of Hollywood movies, and the light comedies that Segal excelled in became passe.

"Then I got a little older," he said in a 1998 interview. "I started playing urban father roles. And that guy sort of turned into Chevy Chase, and after that there was really no place to go."

Except for the 1989 hit "Look Who's Talking," Segal's films in the 1980s and 1990s were lackluster. He turned to television and starred in two failed series, "Take Five" and "Murphy's Law."

Then he found success in 1997 with the David Spade sitcom "Just Shoot Me" in which he played Gallo, who despite his gruff manner hires his daughter (Laura San Giacomo) and keeps Spade's worthless office boy character on his payroll simply out of a sense of affection for both.

Series co-star Brian Posehn was one of many paying Segal tribute Tuesday night.

"I grew up watching him, total old school charm, effortless comedic timing," Segal's "Just Shoot Me" Posehn said. "Doing scenes with him was one of the highlights of my life, but getting to know him a little and making the legend laugh was even cooler."

Throughout his long acting career, Segal played the banjo for fun, becoming quite accomplished on the instrument he had first picked up as a boy. He performed with his own Beverly Hills Unlisted Jazz Band.

Born in 1934 in Great Neck, New York, the third son of a malt and hops dealer, Segal began entertaining at the age of 8, performing magic tricks for neighborhood children.

He attended a Quaker boarding school in Pennsylvania and as an undergraduate at Columbia University organized "Bruno Linch and His Imperial Band," for which he also played banjo.

After graduating Segal worked non-salary at the New York theater Circle in the Square, doing everything from ticket taking to understudy acting. He studied drama with Lee Strasberg and Uta Hagen, and made his first professional acting appearance off-Broadway in Moliere's "Don Juan." It lasted one night.

After a stint on Broadway in Eugene O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh," he was drafted into the Army. Discharged in 1957, he returned to the stage and would begin getting small film roles.

In 1956 Segal married television story editor Marion Sobel and they had two daughters, Elizabeth and Polly, before divorcing in 1981.

He married his second wife, Linda Rogoff, in London in 1982 and was devastated when she died of a stomach disease 14 years later.

"It was a time when I said, 'It's not adding up; I don't get it anymore,'" he recalled to an interviewer in 1999. "With Linda dying, I lost interest in everything. I worked just to make a living. Acting, like life, became a joyless job."

Eventually he reconnected with Sonia Schultz Greenbaum, who had been his girlfriend in high school some 45 years earlier. They talked on the telephone, sometimes as long as six hours, and were married just a few months after reuniting.

"She helped me through the worst days of my life just listening to me unload," Segal said in 1999. "It was magic."

The late AP Entertainment Writer Bob Thomas contributed biographical material to this story.

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

White House: North Korea conducted short-range missile test

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By AAMER MADHANI and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — North Korea fired short-range missiles this past weekend, just days after the sister of Kim Jong Un threatened the United States and South Korea for holding joint military exercises.

The missile tests were confirmed by two senior Biden administration officials who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity. They come as North Korea has ignored offers from the new administration to resume negotiations, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week pressed China to use its "tremendous influence" to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear program.

The officials, however, sought to downplay the significance of the missile tests, noting that they are not covered by U.N. Security Council resolutions meant to deter North Korea from pursuing a nuclear program.

Biden himself told reporters the missile tests were not a provocation. "There's no new wrinkle in what they did," he said.

South Korea's military said in a statement Wednesday that it had detected two suspected cruise missile launches by North Korea on Sunday morning. It said the launches were made off North Korea's west coast and said South Korea is analyzing them.

The statement said South Korea is closely monitoring North Korean missile activities in cooperation with the United States, but noted it doesn't publicize all its information about North Korea.

South Korean lawmaker Ha Tae-keung said in a Facebook posting that he was told by agency officials from Seoul's spy agency that the North fired two cruise missiles off its western seaport of Nampo around 6:36 a.m. Sunday. Ha, an executive secretary of the National Assembly's intelligence committee, which regularly receives closed-door briefings from the spy agency, said he was told that the U.S. and South Korean militaries had detected the launches but had agreed not to publicize them.

The Biden administration has been open about its desire to engage the North in negotiations even as the regime has batted away calls for the two nations to talk. In North Korea's first comments directed at the Biden administration, the North Korean leader Kim's powerful sister earlier this month warned the United States to "refrain from causing a stink" if it wants to "sleep in peace" for the next four years.

Kim Yo Jong's statement was issued as Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Asia to talk with U.S. allies Japan and South Korea about North Korea and other regional issues.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said Sunday's launches were North Korea's first missile firings since April 2020. U.N. Security Council resolutions ban North Korea from engaging in any ballistic activities, but not cruise missile tests. Cruise missiles fly at a lower altitude and slower speed than ballistic missiles, making them easier to intercept, but they are still considered more accurate.

Relations between the U.S. and North Korea, once hailed as potentially promising after President Donald Trump's three meetings with Kim, have been tense with no substantive contact for more than a year.

The last face-to-face talks between senior officials from the two countries were held in Sweden in October 2019 and efforts by the Biden administration to resume a dialogue have been rebuffed since February.

Since Trump's first meeting with Kim in Singapore in 2018, the North has not conducted nuclear or long-range missile tests, although analysts believe they have pressed ahead with their programs on both. And, the North has not given up short- and medium range missile testing.

North Korean officials have not been in contact with U.S. government officials in more than a year, spanning two administrations, one of the senior administration officials noted.

Biden administration officials have been consulting with Trump administration officials who took part in the Singapore talks as well as a second meeting between Kim and Trump in February 2019. Some Trump officials in their talks with the Biden team speculated that the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and a broader reconsideration of engagement with the United States could explain the North's radio silence, according to one official.

Kim is in the midst of the toughest crisis of his nine-year rule as the already-troubled economy was hit by pandemic-related border closings that have sharply reduced the North's external trade. The North also faced a spate of natural disasters last summer not to mention the persistent U.S.-led sanctions.

But a Biden administration officials added that the Biden administration does not view the weekend's missile tests as closing the door to such talks.

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National security adviser Jake Sullivan is also scheduled to meet next week with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts for talks about the way forward with North Korea.

Associated Press writers Kim Tong-hyung and Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul and Josh Boak in Washington contributed to this report.

Colorado suspect got assault weapon 6 days before shooting

By PATTY NIEBERG, THOMAS PEIPERT and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — The suspect accused of opening fire inside a crowded Colorado supermarket was a 21-year-old man who purchased an assault weapon less than a week earlier, authorities said Tuesday, a day after the attack that killed 10 people, including a police officer.

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa bought the weapon on March 16, just six days before the attack at a King Soopers store in Boulder, according to an arrest affidavit. It was not immediately known where the gun was purchased.

Alissa, who is from the Denver suburb of Arvada, was booked into the county jail Tuesday on murder charges after being treated at a hospital. He was due to make a first court appearance Thursday.

Investigators have not established a motive, but they believe Alissa was the only shooter, Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty said.

A law enforcement official briefed on the shooting said the suspect's family told investigators they believed Alissa was suffering some type of mental illness, including delusions. Relatives described times when Alissa told them people were following or chasing him, which they said may have contributed to the violence, the official said. The official was not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The attack was the nation's deadliest mass shooting since a 2019 assault on a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas, where a gunman killed 22 people in a rampage that police said targeted Mexicans.

In Washington, President Joe Biden called on Congress to tighten the nation's gun laws.

"Ten lives have been lost, and more families have been shattered by gun violence in the state of Colorado," Biden said at the White House.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed to bring forward two House-passed bills to require expanded background checks for gun buyers. Biden supports the measures, but they face a tougher route to passage in a closely divided Senate with a slim Democratic majority.

The shooting came 10 days after a judge blocked a ban on assault rifles passed by the city of Boulder in 2018. That ordinance and another banning large-capacity magazines came after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 people dead.

A lawsuit challenging the bans was filed quickly, backed by the National Rifle Association. The judge struck down the ordinance under a Colorado law that blocks cities from making their own rules about guns.

Supermarket employees told investigators that Alissa shot a man multiple times outside the Boulder grocery store before going inside, according to the affidavit. Another person was found shot in a vehicle next to a car registered to the suspect's brother.

The gunfire sent terrorized shoppers and employees scrambling for cover. SWAT officers carrying ballistic shields slowly approached the store while others escorted frightened people away from the building, which had some of its windows shattered. Customers and employees fled through a back loading dock to safety. Others took refuge in nearby shops.

Multiple 911 calls paint a picture of a chaotic, terrifying scene, according to the affidavit.

One caller said the suspect opened fire out the window of his vehicle. Others called to say they were hiding inside the store as the gunman fired on customers. Witnesses described the shooter as having a black AR-15-style gun and wearing blue jeans and maybe body armor.

By the time he was in custody, Alissa had been struck by a bullet that passed through his leg, the affidavit said. He had removed most of his clothing and was dressed only in shorts. Inside the store, he had left the gun, a tactical vest, a semiautomatic handgun and his bloodied clothing, the affidavit said.

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After the shooting, detectives went to Alissa's home and found his sister-in-law, who told them that he had been playing around with a weapon she thought looked like a "machine gun," about two days earlier, the document said.

No one answered the door at the Arvada home believed to be owned by the suspect's father. The two-story house with a three-car garage sits in a relatively new middle- and upper-class neighborhood.

When he was a high school senior in 2018, Alissa was found guilty of assaulting a fellow student in class after knocking him to the floor, then climbing on top of him and punching him in the head several times, according to a police affidavit.

Alissa "got up in classroom, walked over to the victim & 'cold cocked' him in the head," the affidavit read. Alissa complained that the student had made fun of him and called him "racial names" weeks earlier, according to the affidavit. He was sentenced to probation and community service.

One of his former wrestling teammates, Angel Hernandez, said Alissa got enraged after losing a match in practice once, letting out a stream of invectives and yelling he would kill everyone. Hernandez said the coach kicked Alissa off the team for the outburst.

"He was one of those guys with a short fuse," Hernandez said. "Once he gets mad, it's like something takes over and it's not him. There is no stopping him at that point."

Hernandez said Alissa would also act strangely sometimes, turning around suddenly or glancing over his shoulder. "He would say, 'Did you see that? Did you see that?'" Hernandez recalled. "We wouldn't see anything. We always thought he was messing with us."

Arvada police Detective David Snelling said officers investigated but dropped a separate criminal mischief complaint involving the suspect in 2018 and cited him for speeding in February. "Our community is obviously concerned and upset that the suspect lived here," he said.

"We'd absolutely prefer not to have publicity we're getting here," said Matt Benz, who lives several houses away from the home that was searched overnight. He said dozens of FBI agents wearing night-vision goggles swarmed the area using a bullhorn to order everyone out of the home and was interviewing the home's occupants.

The slain officer was identified as Eric Talley, 51, who had been with the force since 2010. He was the first to arrive after responding to a call about shots fired and someone carrying a gun, she said.

Homer Talley, 74, described his son as a devoted father who "knew the Lord." He had seven children, ages 7 to 20.

"We know where he is," his father told The Associated Press from his ranch in central Texas. "He loved his family more than anything. He wasn't afraid of dying. He was afraid of putting them through it."

The other dead ranged in age from 20 to 65. They were identified as Denny Stong, 20; Neven Stanisic, 23; Rikki Olds, 25; Tralona Bartkowiak, 49; Suzanne Fountain, 59; Teri Leiker, 51; Kevin Mahoney, 61; Lynn Murray, 62; and Jodi Waters, 65.

Well after dark Tuesday night, about 100 people milled about at a makeshift memorial near the supermarket that was adorned with wreaths, candles, banners reading "#Boulderstrong" and 10 crosses with blue hearts and the victims' names. Four young girls huddled in the cold, one of them crying as she reminisced about how they had protested the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Leiker, Olds and Stong worked at the supermarket, former co-worker Jordan Sailas said.

Olds' grandmother choked up on the phone as she described the young woman she played a large role in raising. "She was just a very kind and loving, bubbly person who lit up the room when she walked in," said Jeanette Olds, 71, of Lafayette, Colorado.

The attack in Boulder, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northwest of Denver and home to the University of Colorado, stunned a state that has seen several mass shootings, including the 1999 Columbine High School massacre and the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting.

Monday's attack was the seventh mass killing this year in the U.S., following the March 16 shooting that left eight people dead at three Atlanta-area massage businesses, according to a database compiled by

the AP, USA Today and Northeastern University.

It follows a lull in mass killings during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which had the smallest number of such attacks in eight years, according to the database, which tracks mass killings defined as four or more dead, not including the shooter.

Biden announced that flags nationwide would be lowered in memory of the victims — an order that comes just as a previous flag-lowering proclamation expired for those killed in the Atlanta-area shootings. Together the two orders mean near-continuous national mourning for almost two weeks.

Slevin reported from Denver. Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo in Washington, Jim Anderson in Denver and AP staff members from around the U.S. contributed to this report. Nieberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Brazil court rules Car Wash judge was biased in Lula case

By MARCELO SILVA DE SOUSA Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazil's Supreme Court on Tuesday ruled that former judge Sergio Moro was biased in the way he oversaw former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's corruption trial, providing vindication for the leftist leader who has long claimed political persecution.

The decision further darkens the shadow over the reputation of Moro and the sweeping Car Wash corruption investigation he presided over for years. He sentenced hundreds of business and political leaders previously believed to enjoy impunity, and transformed himself into one of the Brazil's best-known public figures. Some hailed him as a hero while others accused him of being a zealot.

"In this case what is discussed is something that for me is key: everyone has the right to a fair trial, due legal process, and the impartiality of the judge," said Justice Carmen Lucia, who cast the tie-breaking vote.

Leaked messages published by The Intercept Brasil in 2019 showed apparent collusion between Moro and Car Wash prosecutors during the process that ultimately jailed da Silva for corruption and money laundering. His conviction on appeal sidelined him from the 2018 presidential elections, pursuant to the rules of Brazil's Clean Slate law, and allowed fringe lawmaker Jair Bolsonaro to cruise to victory. Moro quickly became Bolsonaro's justice minister.

Tuesday's ruling follows a separate decision from Justice Edson Fachin on March 8 to annul da Silva's two convictions, on the grounds that he was tried in a court without proper jurisdiction, and establishing that he could be retried in federal court in capital Brasilia.

Da Silva's attorneys, Cristiano Zanin Martins and Valeska Martins, said in a statement that the decision was "historic and reinvigorating."

"We proved that Moro never acted as a judge, but as a personal and political adversary of former President Lula," they said. Da Silva is universally known as Lula in Brazil. "We suffered all sorts of illegalities in the Car Wash, some of them described in the ruling that recognized the bias of the former judge, such as the illegal monitoring of our phones so members of the investigation could follow the defense strategy in real time."

While the decision earlier this month cleared the way for da Silva to face off against Bolsonaro in 2022 elections, it was also interpreted by legal experts as a means to head off a ruling on allegations of Moro's bias, and in so doing preserve the convictions and credibility of Car Wash. Another justice called for a vote on the pending matter regardless.

With their 3-2 decision on Tuesday, the justices prohibited evidence gathered in the Car Wash probe about da Silva's alleged ownership of a triplex in the beach town of Guarujá from being used in any eventual trial. The justices didn't rule whether evidence gathered previously could be used when retrying da Silva's other conviction, or in his other two unresolved criminal cases.

Michael Mohallem, coordinator of the Justice Center of the Getulio Vargas Foundation, said the ruling brings any corruption proceedings against da Silva back to square one, and solidifies his 2022 candidacy.

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But it also provides a glimmer of hope for others who have been jailed.

"Lula will be able to say he was persecuted by a judge who wanted to convict him. For the political campaign, that's very valuable," Mohallem added. "The fear is that many inmates will present cases to annul their sentences. The ruling opens that discussion."

Far-right party set to gain new influence after Israeli vote

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — An alliance of far-right groups including openly racist and homophobic candidates appears poised to enter Israel's parliament, possibly as an indispensable member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition, according to exit polls Tuesday.

The Religious Zionist Party includes a new incarnation of the Kahanist movement, a Jewish extremist group outlawed as terrorists by Israel, the United States and other Western countries decades ago over its incitement to violence against Arabs.

Exit polls by Israel's three main television channels projected the Religious Zionist Party will win six to seven seats, the best-ever showing by an extreme right-wing party. With Netanyahu and his opponents deadlocked after four elections in two years, he will likely need the group if he succeeds in assembling a narrow majority in the 120-member Knesset, Israel's parliament.

Its rise heralds a further shift to the right in Israel, where parties that support Jewish settlements and oppose the creation of a Palestinian state already dominate the political scene. A solidly right-wing government would likely find itself on a collision course with U.S. President Joe Biden's administration, which has pressed for the revival of peace efforts.

The Religious Zionist Party is led by Bezalel Smotrich, a longtime activist and former transport minister who has organized anti-gay protests and recently compared gay marriage to incest. In 2016, he tweeted in support of segregating Jewish and Arab women in maternity wards.

"It's only natural my wife would not want to lie next to someone who just gave birth to a baby that might murder her baby in another 20 years," he wrote.

He has also expressed hostility to more liberal strains of Judaism and said Israel should be governed by religious law.

He is allied with Itamar Ben Gvir, head of the far-right Jewish Power party. He is a disciple of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, who incited violence against Arabs, called for Israel to be governed by Jewish religious law and advocated the expulsion of Arabs and other non-Jews from Israel and the occupied territories. Joining them is the openly homophobic Noam faction.

As a teenager in the 1990s, Ben Gvir became active in the Kach movement founded by Kahane, who was assassinated by an Egyptian-American in New York in 1990.

In a TV interview in 1995, Ben Gvir boasted of stripping an ornament off then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's Cadillac, saying "We'll get Rabin too." Weeks later, Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist opposed to his peace efforts with the Palestinians. Ben Gvir later became a lawyer who represented Jewish extremists suspected of attacking Palestinians.

Until recently, he had a portrait hanging in his living room of Baruch Goldstein, a Kahane disciple who gunned down 29 Palestinians as they prayed in a West Bank mosque in 1994. Ben Gvir has said he favors the expulsion of Arabs who are hostile to the state.

In the lead-up to the election Ben Gvir sought to distance himself from Kahane's most extreme views. In an interview with Channel 13 after the exit polls, he said Kahane had done "many good things," adding: "I don't agree with everything Kahane said."

The National Religious Party is a strong supporter of Jewish settlements and of annexing the occupied West Bank, which Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war. The Palestinians want the West Bank to form the main part of their future state and view the settlements as an obstacle to peace, a position with wide international support.

Netanyahu pressed the three far-right factions to unite to ensure they would pass the minimum electoral

threshold. They fell short in last year's election, meaning votes that could have helped Netanyahu went to waste. Now he will need them if he hopes to remain in office and pursue immunity from prosecution on a raft of corruption charges.

Their presence in what would likely be a narrow coalition government has raised alarms across Israel's political spectrum, with critics arguing that Netanyahu will be beholden to their radical agenda for his political survival.

"The Kahanists want to join the government not just for the ministers' plush seats, the salary and car, an army of aides and funding for their supporters. They have an agenda," Nahum Barnea, a veteran columnist for the Yediot Aharonot newspaper, wrote ahead of the election.

"First of all, it means freedom for Jewish terrorists to operate in the territories. Second, it means destroying the justice system. Third, it means apartheid within Israel; racial separation at hospitals, universities, the civil service and the (military). Fourth, it means gender discrimination. Fifth, it means enforcing national-Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) religious codes. They aren't playing around."

The 15 jurors selected for the trial of Derek Chauvin

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Fifteen jurors have been selected for the case against Derek Chauvin, a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death.

Twelve jurors and two alternates will actually hear the evidence, but a 15th person was chosen in case one of the other panelists is unable to serve when opening statements begin Monday. That 15th person will be dismissed at the start of trial if the rest of the jury remains intact.

The panel includes six men and nine women; nine of the jurors are white, four are Black, and two are multiracial, according to the court. They include a chemist, a nurse, a social worker and a grandmother.

Here is a closer look at the panel, in the order in which jurors were selected. They are identified by juror number only; the judge has ordered their names withheld until after the trial due to the high-profile nature of the case. Their races and approximate ages were provided by the court.

JUROR NO. 2

Juror No. 2 is a white man in his 20s who works as a chemist. With a combined degree in environmental studies and chemistry, he works in a lab where he tests samples for contaminants that may be harmful to the environment or worker hygiene. He said he enjoys outdoor activities, including Ultimate Frisbee, backpacking and biking. He and his fiancée visited George Floyd Square because Floyd's arrest was such a "transformative event for that area."

Juror No. 2 said he worked for seven or eight summers at a camp through his childhood synagogue. He considers himself to be a logical thinker, and is the only juror on the panel who said he has never seen bystander video of Floyd's arrest.

JUROR NO. 9

Juror No. 9 is a multiracial woman in her 20s who has Type 1 diabetes. She grew up in northern Minnesota and has an uncle who is a police officer in that area. She described herself as a "go-with-the-flow, open-minded type of person" and said she was "super excited" to get her jury notice.

She said she has only watched the bystander video once, and it gave her a "somewhat negative" impression of Chauvin. She said "that video just makes you sad. Nobody wants to see somebody die, whether it was his fault or not." She said there could be other possible explanations for Chauvin's actions, suggesting that Floyd might have been resisting, or civilian lives may have been in danger.

JUROR NO. 19

Juror No. 19 is a white man in his 30s. He is an auditor who said he tries to resolve conflict and make decisions based on facts, not emotions. He has a friend who is a canine officer with the Minneapolis Police Department.

He said he supports Black Lives Matter as a general concept but disagrees with some of the ways group members go about things. He has an unfavorable opinion of Blue Lives Matter. He wrote in his question-

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naire that he heard Floyd was on hard drugs, but said he doesn't believe it should have much impact on the case. "Whether you are under the influence of drugs doesn't determine whether you should be living or dead," he said.

JUROR NO. 27

Juror No. 27 is a Black man in his 30s who immigrated to America more than 14 years ago. He went to school in Nebraska and moved to Minnesota in 2012. He manages eight people at his job in IT security, and speaks multiple languages including French. He and his wife have a dog, but no children. He is a big Minnesota Gophers fan and loves the Vikings.

He said he had a somewhat negative view of Chauvin, based on clips of bystander video he saw on TV. He said he talked with his wife about Floyd's death: "We talked about how it could have been me, or anyone else," he said. Juror No. 27 said he hopes to learn more about events that led up to Floyd's arrest.

JUROR NO. 44

Juror No. 44 is a white woman in her 50s, a single mom of two teenage boys. She is an executive in the nonprofit sector, working in health care advocacy. She said she had prior professional dealings with Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison in her job, but said it would not affect her impartiality.

She said she was exposed to a lot of news about this case, adding that the media is biased and doesn't have all the facts. She saw only part of the bystander video and said she has empathy for both Floyd and Chauvin. She said she had a somewhat negative view of Chauvin and a neutral opinion of Floyd, saying he was not a model citizen but didn't "deserve to die."

She said she strongly agrees that the criminal justice system is biased against racial and ethnic minorities. "Not all police are bad," she said. "I don't want them terrorized or disrespected. But bad police need to go."

JUROR NO. 52

Juror No. 52 is a Black man in his 30s. He describes himself as a friendly, positive person. He works in banking and likes sports, especially basketball. He coaches youth sports and writes creatively for a hobby, including scripts and poetry.

He said he had neutral opinions on Chauvin and Floyd. He said he has not seen the bystander video in its entirety but has seen clips of it two or three times. He hasn't posted about it on social media but has talked with family and friends and he wrote in his questionnaire that his opinion has been "why didn't the other officers stop Chauvin."

"I don't know if he was doing something wrong or not, but somebody died ... Even if you have no intention of doing something and something happens, somebody could've still intervened and prevented that," he said. He has a very favorable view of Black Lives Matter, saying, "Black lives just want to be treated as equals and not killed or treated in an aggressive manner simply because they are Black."

JUROR NO. 55

Juror No. 55 is a white woman in her 50s who is a single parent of two children. Her youngest is a teenager. She works as an executive assistant at a health care clinic and sells Pampered Chef. She enjoys riding motorcycles, saying she picked it up because her late husband was interested in it and she rides with him now "in the spirit."

She said she was "disturbed" by the bystander video and "I just couldn't watch it anymore." She said she has a somewhat unfavorable view of Chauvin because she feels he could've handled the situation differently. Still, she said she wouldn't be able to form an opinion until she has all of the facts. She has a basic trust in police officers, and a somewhat unfavorable view of Black Lives Matter, saying, "All lives matter to me. It doesn't matter who they are or what they are."

JUROR NO. 79

Juror No. 79 is a Black man in his 40s, a father who works in management and has lived in the Twin Cities area for about two decades after immigrating to America. He said he lives in a suburb and his home was burglarized once and police responded appropriately, even though the suspect was never caught.

He said he trusts police, but also feels it's appropriate for jurors to evaluate an officer's actions: "I would say it's another pair of eyes and a new mind just looking at the action," he said. He has a son about to take driver's education. He said he would tell his son that when police stop him, he should cooperate.

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When asked if people who don't cooperate have themselves to blame, he said "cooperation is good. ... You help everybody."

JUROR NO. 85

Juror No. 85 is a multiracial woman in her 40s, who is married and has a small child. She grew up in a river town and attended college in western Wisconsin. She is a consultant who helps companies with reorganizations and other transitions.

She said she has a neutral view of Floyd, writing in her questionnaire that she knew he died "as a result of this encounter" but did not know what his actions were before it happened. When pressed if she thought Chauvin was responsible, she said: "No, I never heard what a cause of death was."

She said she has a pretty strong faith in police, but they are human and can make mistakes. She said she would generally agree that if someone does not cooperate, he or she might have themselves to blame. "You respect police and you do what they ask," she said.

JUROR NO. 89

Juror No. 89 is a white woman in her 50s who lives in a suburb. She is a registered nurse currently working with patients on ventilators, including those with COVID-19, and has prior experience in cardiac care.

She was questioned extensively about her experience as a nurse, whether she has ever resuscitated anyone and how she would view medical evidence in the case. The woman said she would draw upon her knowledge to evaluate medical testimony, but said she'd refrain from using her knowledge in the jury room.

She said she somewhat disagrees that it's not right to second-guess decisions officers make.

JUROR NO. 91

Juror No. 91 is a Black woman in her 60s. She is a grandmother of two who studied child psychology and worked in marketing before she retired, and she felt strongly that being on a jury was her civic duty. The woman, who volunteers with underserved youth, said she watched the bystander video of Floyd's arrest for about four or five minutes, then shut it off because "it just wasn't something that I needed to see."

She grew up about 10 or 15 blocks from the site of Floyd's arrest, but said she moved decades ago and has no reason to revisit the area. She had a very favorable view of Black Lives Matter, writing in her questionnaire "I am Black and my life matters," though she said she is not familiar with the organization. She has a relative who is a police officer with Minneapolis.

JUROR NO. 92

Juror No. 92 is a white woman in her 40s who works in the commercial insurance business.

She said she has experience with someone who struggled with alcohol, and might view someone who uses drugs cautiously, out of fear they could act violently or aggressively when under the influence. Still, she said, she doesn't agree that someone who uses drugs or doesn't cooperate with police should be treated poorly. "If someone uses drugs, I don't think there should be ramifications of violence for that," she said.

JUROR NO. 96

Juror No. 96 is a white woman in her 50s, who had a job in customer service but is between jobs. She has done volunteer work with the homeless and wants to work on affordable housing issues. She said she has only seen clips of the video of Floyd's arrest, and said she needs to learn more about what happened beforehand.

She said she has never personally seen police officers respond to Black people or minorities with more force than white people. She also said a person should have nothing to fear from police if they cooperate and comply with commands – though she stopped short of saying that means a person deserves to be harmed.

"If you're not listening to what the commands are, obviously something else needs to happen to resolve the situation," she said of officers' actions. "I don't know how far the steps need to go."

JUROR NO. 118

Juror No. 118 is a white woman in her 20s, who was married in October and recently got a goldendoodle puppy. She has been a social worker for five years, and currently coordinates in-home services for people of all ages and mental health diagnoses to help them live independently.

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She said she has had conversations with others about police reform and said she thinks "there are things that should be changed." But she also described police and their jobs as important, and said she is "always looking at every side of things."

JUROR NO. 131

Juror No 131, a white man in his 20s, is an accountant who is married and has a Bernese mountain dog puppy. He is a sports fan who enjoys March Madness and plays sports himself, including tennis. He said he approaches things with an analytical mind.

He said he initially formed a somewhat negative opinion of Chauvin, saying the duration of his restraint on Floyd was longer than necessary. He said Floyd's death sparked discussions about racism at work, and he decided to read a book about the subject.

He said he respects police and views Black Lives Matter somewhat favorably, but noted he believes some frustrations contributed to violent unrest in Minneapolis. He also said he understands that professional athletes who kneel during the national anthem are trying to start a dialogue on race, but "I would prefer if someone would express their beliefs in a different manner."

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

Missteps could mar long-term credibility of AstraZeneca shot

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — AstraZeneca's repeated missteps in reporting vaccine data coupled with a blood clot scare could do lasting damage to the credibility of a shot that is the linchpin in the global strategy to stop the coronavirus pandemic, potentially even undermining vaccine confidence more broadly, experts say.

The latest stumble for the vaccine came Tuesday, when American officials issued an unusual statement expressing concern that AstraZeneca had included "outdated information" when it reported encouraging results from a U.S. trial a day earlier. That may have provided "an incomplete view of the efficacy data," according to the statement.

AstraZeneca responded that the results, which showed its shot was about 79% effective, included information through Feb. 17 but appeared to be consistent with more up-to-date data. It promised an update within 48 hours.

An independent panel that oversees the study scolded the company in a letter Monday for cherry-picking data, according to a senior administration official. The panel wrote to AstraZeneca and U.S. health leaders that it was concerned the company chose to use data that was outdated and potentially misleading instead of the most recent findings, according to the official, who discussed the contents on the condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the matter.

"This will likely cause more vaccine hesitancy," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia.

Even if the damage is limited to AstraZeneca itself, it would have far-reaching effects since the shot is cheaper and easier to store than many of its rivals' and thus is expected to be widely used in the developing world. International health agencies have repeatedly said the vaccine is safe and effective, but it's not the first time the company has run into problems with public trust.

Partial results from its first major trial — which Britain used to authorize the vaccine — were clouded by a manufacturing mistake that researchers didn't immediately acknowledge. Insufficient data about how well the vaccine protected older people led some countries to initially restrict its use to younger populations before reversing course. U.S. officials suspended an AstraZeneca study for an unusual six weeks while they sought details about problems reported in Britain before deciding the vaccine wasn't to blame. Meanwhile, the European Union has complained about delays in vaccine deliveries from the company.

Then last week, more than a dozen countries temporarily halted their use of the AstraZeneca shot after reports of rare blood clots in some people who received it. The European Medicines Agency concluded the shot did not increase the overall incidence of clots, but the unwanted attention appears to have left a mark.

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In Norway, a top official warned Monday it might not be able to resume its use of the vaccine because so many people were rejecting it.

"People clearly say that they do not want the AstraZeneca vaccine," Marte Kvittum Tangen, who heads a Norwegian doctors' association, told broadcaster NRK.

Last week in Bucharest, Romania, vaccination coordinator Valeriu Gheorghita said 33,000 AstraZeneca immunization appointments had been canceled in 24 hours and that about a third of the 10,000 people scheduled to receive the vaccine did not show up. In Belgrade, Serbia, a sprawling exhibition center set up for people to get the AstraZeneca vaccine was mostly deserted on Monday.

"This is unfortunately more about perception than it is the science," said Dr. Bharat Pankhania, an infectious diseases specialist at Britain's University of Exeter.

"We have now seen, on several parameters, that the AstraZeneca vaccine provides protection and is safe," he said. "But the narrative for the public has not been as clear."

France is a prime example of the confusion.

French President Emmanuel Macron initially suggested the vaccine wasn't effective for older people, before backtracking. Still, France only authorized AstraZeneca's vaccine for use in adults 65 and under, citing a lack of data. Then the government changed its mind, based on new data, and said it's fine for all adults. But when there were reports of rare blood clots in some vaccine recipients, the government suspended use of the shot all together. When France restarted AstraZeneca, it banned the shot for anyone under 55.

The whiplash-inducing messages come at a time when France — like much of continental Europe — is struggling to speed up its vaccination drive while also facing a spike in cases that is close to overwhelming its hospitals and prompting threats of new lockdowns.

At a European Parliament committee Tuesday in Brussels, Sandra Gallina, head of the European Commission's health directorate, described the situation with AstraZeneca as "a shame." She said the struggling vaccination campaigns across Europe were "made much more difficult by the bad performance of AstraZeneca."

The company has blamed delays in its deliveries on production issues.

Even if the drugmaker clears up the latest misunderstanding, it could have a lasting impact.

Julian Tang, a virologist at the University of Leicester, pointed to the decades-old controversy over the measles vaccine as a cautionary tale.

"There was absolutely no evidence to prove the (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine caused autism," he said. But despite the retraction of the paper that made that claim, Tang said some people still worry about the vaccine.

The tepid support for the AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe stands in contrast to governments in the developing world that are desperate for supplies.

Dr. Bruce Aylward, a senior adviser at the World Health Organization, said the U.N. agency has a long list of countries "very keen" to get the shot as soon as possible. "We simply cannot get enough of it," he said.

But some experts have worried that the skepticism in Europe could eventually cast a pall over the vaccine worldwide. They suggested one measure that could reassure a jittery public: a green light from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

"If the U.S. regulator looks at this data and authorizes AstraZeneca, that will carry a lot of weight," said Jimmy Whitworth, a professor of international public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

AstraZeneca said it would be submitting its data to the FDA within weeks.

It's still possible the vaccine can bury the doubts. At a vaccination center in Lisbon, 68-year-old Rui Manuel Martins dismissed the concerns, saying millions had been immunized with very few ill effects.

"There's always some cases of people rejecting any medications," he said before receiving his first dose. "It's better to be vaccinated rather than not."

Associated Press writers Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Angela Charlton in Paris, Stephen McGrath in Bucharest, Romania, Jamey Keaten in Geneva, Dusan Stojanovic in Belgrade, Serbia, Helena Alves in

Lisbon, Samuel Petrequin and Raf Casert in Brussels and Luran Neergaard in Washington contributed to this report.

This story has been updated to correct that France has now banned AstraZeneca for anyone under 55.

Spa witness, police reports detail carnage in Georgia

By KATE BRUMBACK and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — When he heard the first two gunshots, Marcus Lyon dove behind the bed where moments earlier the massage therapist had been rubbing his neck.

He was hiding when the third shot rang out. The woman who had been kneading the FedEx worker's sore muscles suddenly dropped to the floor. Lyon could see her, shot in the head, lying just a couple of feet from where he had taken cover.

"I'm thinking in my head, 'I'm about to die. I'm gonna die,'" he recalled. "I started thinking about my son."

Lyon waited in the room, less than a minute, he figures, until he heard the sound of bells signaling someone had opened the front door at Youngs Asian Massage. Hearing no more gunfire, he hurried back into his clothes and ran outside, grabbed a gun from his vehicle and made the first 911 call. Dispatchers took the call at 4:54 p.m.

"I wasn't scared in the moment because it was kind of too late to be scared," Lyon said in an interview. "I couldn't believe it was happening."

Lyon's eyewitness account and police reports released Tuesday reveal a closer look at the carnage of March 16. After killing four people and critically wounding another at the massage business in suburban Cherokee County, the lone gunman drove to neighboring Atlanta and opened fire inside two other spas, police say.

Eight people died altogether — seven of them women and six victims of Asian descent. All were slain within about an hour.

Security camera footage shows the young man sat in the shopping center parking lot for an hour before getting out of the SUV. His right hand in his back pocket, he walked into Youngs Asian Massage through the front door.

Police say the man captured on the security camera video was 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long. The footage shows he entered the spa more than an hour before the shooting started. Police haven't said what he was doing the rest of the time.

Rita Barron told deputies she heard screams and loud thumps coming from Youngs Asian Massage. Coats fell from the wall inside Barron's boutique next door.

She found a small, metal object on the floor, possibly a bullet. She and her husband called 911.

According to an incident report, Cherokee Sheriff's Office Cpl. Tommy Thompkins was patrolling nearby and rushed to the spa after hearing over his radio that there had been a shooting with multiple victims. He found Lyon, unharmed, holding the door open.

Other deputies arrived and swept the business, opening doors one at a time as they crept down a long hallway. Two women were lying partially in the doorways of separate rooms on the left side of the hall, both with gunshot wounds to the head but still breathing. Peering into a room on the right, officers saw a dead woman slumped against the back wall.

In a back room, deputies found a dead man who had been shot in the head.

Behind another closed door, deputies found Mario Gonzalez sitting on a bed. He looked scared and confused, but obeyed as deputies with guns drawn ordered him outside.

Detained in the back of a patrol car, Gonzalez told deputies he didn't see the shooter. He and his wife were nearing the end of hourlong massages, in separate rooms, when the shooting began. He said he didn't know what happened to her.

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Gonzalez's wife, Delaina Ashley Yaun, was among those found dead.

After the shootings at Youngs, the man police have identified as Long walked briskly to his vehicle, backed out of a parking space and headed south. The killing was just beginning.

A half-hour after being called to the scene in Cherokee County, authorities had a description of the suspect from security video. The white man wore a gray and red jacket, and drove a black Hyundai SUV. But before they could catch him, the shooting started again, this time in Atlanta, roughly 30 miles (50 kilometers) away.

It was 5:47 p.m. when a woman called 911 from Gold Spa, reporting what she thought was a robbery. "Hurry," the caller urged the operator. "They have a gun."

Ten minutes later, dispatchers received another 911 call from a business across the street. The caller said a man walked into Aromatherapy Spa and fired a gun, hurting at least one person.

Officers who arrived at Gold Spa found three women dead from gunshot wounds. Officers arriving at the second spa found one woman dead from a gunshot wound.

Police were aided in their capture of the suspect by Long's parents, who called authorities offering to help after recognizing their son in still images from the security video that the Cherokee County sheriff posted to social media.

Using cellphone information provided by the parents, authorities tracked the suspect to rural Crisp County about 140 miles (225 kilometers) south of Atlanta.

State troopers and sheriff's deputies spotted his SUV on Interstate 75, and one of them forced Long to spin to a stop by bumping his vehicle.

Once stopped, Long surrendered without a fight.

Once in custody, Long told investigators that he has a sex addiction and lashed out at businesses he viewed as a temptation. But many people, particularly in the Asian American community, believe the victims were targeted because of their race. Police say they are still trying to determine a motive.

The killings tore eight people from their families.

Yong Ae Yue, 63, cooked homemade Korean dishes for her family. Suncha Kim, 69, volunteered for charities. Soon Chung Park, a former dancer, remained youthful and fit at age 74. Xiaojie "Emily" Tan, 49, was an entrepreneur who owned Youngs Asian Massage and other businesses. Daoyou Feng, 44, was one of her employees.

Delaina Yaun, 33, was a new mother. Paul Michels, 54, installed security systems. Hyun Jung Grant, 51, worked at Gold Spa to support two sons.

"She loved me and my brother enough to work for us, to dedicate her whole life," said Grant's son, 22-year-old Randy Park.

Bynum reported from Savannah, Georgia.

Biden expands 'Obamacare' by cutting health insurance costs

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — President Joe Biden pledged Tuesday that his \$1.9 trillion rescue package would build on the promise of the Affordable Care Act, the hallmark legislation of Barack Obama's presidency that became law 11 years ago.

Biden's COVID-19 relief law pumps up "Obamacare" premium subsidies to address longstanding problems of affordability, particularly for people with middle-class incomes. More taxpayer assistance means, in effect, that consumers who buy their own policies through HealthCare.gov will pay hundreds of dollars less out of their own pockets.

"We have a duty not just to protect it, but to make it better and keep becoming a nation where health

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care is a right for all, not a privilege for a few," Biden said at the James Cancer Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. "Millions of families will be able to sleep a little more soundly at night because they don't have to worry about losing everything if they get sick."

Biden's speech in the capital of a political battleground state is part of a mini-blitz by the White House to highlight the relief package. Newly minted Health Secretary Xavier Becerra will echo Biden's comments Tuesday in Carson City, Nevada, and join a Florida-themed Zoom event. Second gentleman Douglas Emhoff will pitch the aid in Omaha, Nebraska.

Yet events interrupted the push, as Biden needed to also address a mass shooting in Boulder, Colorado, that left 10 people dead. He spoke about the shooting and need for background checks before leaving for Ohio. And while touring a cancer center in Columbus, Biden was asked if he had the political capital to move forward on new gun control measures.

"I hope so," said Biden, crossing his fingers. "I don't know. I haven't done any counting yet."

On health care, the numbers suggest that consumers' fears about medical costs could be eased by the new rescue package.

The COVID-19 legislation cuts premiums paid by a hypothetical 64-year-old making \$58,000 from \$1,075 a month to about \$413, based on Congressional Budget Office estimates. A 45-year-old making \$19,300 would pay zero in premiums as compared with about \$67 on average before the law. People who have even a brief spell of unemployment this year can get a standard plan for zero premium and reduced co-pays and deductibles.

"The ACA is over a decade old and this is literally the first time that Democrats have been successful at improving it," said analyst Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation. "Democrats have succeeded politically by selling the ACA's protections for preexisting conditions, but affordability has always been a challenge. And now Democrats have successfully improved the premium help available under the law."

New and existing customers will be able to take advantage of the savings starting April 1 by going to HealthCare.gov. States that run their own health insurance markets will offer the same enhanced assistance, although timetables for implementation may vary.

The administration announced Tuesday that people will now be able to enroll for subsidized HealthCare.gov coverage until Aug. 15, an extension of three months. Biden has opened up the health insurance markets as part of his coronavirus response.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which runs the insurance markets, also said that additional savings for people who've been dealing with unemployment will be available through HealthCare.gov starting in early July. The richer subsidies were incorporated in the COVID-19 relief bill.

By spreading the word about the higher subsidies, the White House is hoping to super-charge enrollment. But the 11 million people who already have private plans through the health law will also benefit.

Republicans see Biden's sweeter subsidies as an example of Democratic overreach on the COVID-19 bill. Policy consultant Brian Blase, a former health care adviser in the Trump White House, expects most of the additional taxpayer assistance will merely substitute for what private households would have otherwise paid.

Their complaints notwithstanding, Republicans may face a political dilemma. The higher health care subsidies are keyed to the pandemic and expire by the end of 2022. That will let Democrats set up election-year votes to make the new benefits permanent, or add even more.

The COVID-19 bill follows Biden's strategy of building on the Obama-era health law to move the U.S. toward coverage for all.

Another provision offers a dozen or so holdout states led by Republicans a financial inducement to expand Medicaid to more low-income adults. So far there have been no takers.

It's unclear how big a dent the Biden legislation will make in the number of uninsured people, which has risen to an estimated 33 million or more. But it represents the biggest expansion of federal help for health insurance since the ACA's enactment.

Justice Dept. probing prosecutor's Capitol riot interview

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By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

The former acting U.S. attorney in the nation's capital likely violated Justice Department rules when he gave an interview to CBS' "60 Minutes" about the investigation into the Jan. 6 Capitol attack, and has been referred to an internal office for review, a prosecutor said Tuesday.

The chief of the criminal division for the U.S. attorney's office in the District of Columbia made the comments after a federal judge scolded the Justice Department over the TV interview along with another recent news report and warned that further press statements could lead to a gag order or sanctions.

"These types of statements in the media have the potential to affect the jury pool and the rights of these defendants," U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta said during a hearing held via videoconference in the case against 10 members and associates of the far-right extremist group Oath Keepers, who are charged with conspiracy in the attack.

"Let this hearing serve as notice on the Department of Justice that I will not tolerate continued publicity in the media that I believe affects the fair trial rights of these defendants," the judge said.

The flap over the interview highlights the Justice Department's challenges in handling the sprawling case that involves hundreds of defendants from across the country. Prosecutors have sometimes struggled to maintain a consistent narrative across multiple cases, and have had to walk back some statements made in court hearings or papers because they weren't in line with what leaders were prepared to publicly argue.

Mehta said he was "surprised to say the least" to see Michael Sherwin, who until recently was leading the investigation into the Jan. 6 riot, discussing the cases on "60 Minutes." During the interview, which aired Sunday days after Sherwin was replaced as Washington's top prosecutor, Sherwin suggested that some of the rioters could face rarely used sedition charges.

"I personally believe the evidence is trending towards that, and probably meets those elements," Sherwin said.

Sherwin first floated the possibility of seditious conspiracy charges, which carry up to to 20 years in prison, in January and has said that a special group of prosecutors was examining whether they would apply to any of the rioters. But prosecutors have yet to levy the charge in any of the cases.

The criminal division chief, John Crabb, said the "60 Minutes" matter has been referred to the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility for investigation. Crabb said the Department also plans to investigate a New York Times article quoting anonymous sources that said prosecutors have been weighing bringing sedition charges against members of the Oath Keepers.

"We understand and we share the court's concerns about the media contacts and disclosures that have been made," Crabb said. "The Department has already taken steps with respect to both of those."

More than 300 people have been charged so far in the Jan. 6 riot and prosecutors have said up to 100 more people are expected to face charges. The most serious conspiracy charges have been brought against members of the Oath Keepers and fellow extremist Proud Boys faction, who authorities say came to Washington prepared to stop the peaceful transition of power.

Also on Tuesday, a federal judge ordered pretrial detention for Timothy Hale-Cusanelli, a man described by prosecutors as a white supremacist and Nazi sympathizer, charged with storming the Capitol.

Hale-Cusanelli, a military veteran, wore a "Hitler mustache" while on duty as a security contractor at at Naval Weapons Station Earle in Colts Neck, New Jersey, where he had a "secret" security clearance, prosecutors say. U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden concluded that Hale-Cusanelli poses a danger to the public, saying the defendant has a "well-documented" history of racist and violent rhetoric, including talk of another civil war.

Associated Press reporters Colleen Long and Michael Balsamo in Washington and Michael Kunzelman in College Park, Maryland contributed to this story.

Part of Wright brothers' 1st airplane on NASA's Mars chopper

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

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CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A piece of the Wright brothers' first airplane is on Mars.

NASA's experimental Martian helicopter holds a small swatch of fabric from the 1903 Wright Flyer, the space agency revealed Tuesday. The helicopter, named Ingenuity, hitched a ride to the red planet with the Perseverance rover, arriving last month.

Ingenuity will attempt the first powered, controlled flight on another planet no sooner than April 8. It will mark a "Wright brothers' moment," noted Bobby Braun, director for planetary science at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

The Carillon Historical Park in Dayton, Ohio, the Wrights' hometown, donated the postage-size piece of muslin from the plane's bottom left wing, at NASA's request.

The swatch made the 300 million-mile journey to Mars with the blessing of the Wright brothers' great-grandniece and great-grandnephew, said park curator Steve Lucht.

"Wilbur and Orville Wright would be pleased to know that a little piece of their 1903 Wright Flyer I, the machine that launched the Space Age by barely one quarter of a mile, is going to soar into history again on Mars!" Amanda Wright Lane and Stephen Wright said in a statement provided by the park.

Orville Wright was on board for the world's first powered, controlled flight on Dec. 17, 1903, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The brothers took turns, making four flights that day.

A fragment of Wright Flyer wood and fabric flew to the moon with Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong in 1969. A swatch also accompanied John Glenn into orbit aboard space shuttle Discovery in 1998. Both astronauts were from Ohio.

NASA's 4-pound (1.8-kilogram) helicopter will attempt to rise 10 feet (3 meters) into the extremely thin Martian air on its first hop. Up to five increasingly higher and longer flights are planned over the course of a month.

The material is taped to a cable beneath the helicopter's solar panel, which is perched on top like a graduate's mortarboard.

For now, Ingenuity remains attached to the rover's belly. A protective shield dropped away over the weekend, exposing the spindly, long-legged chopper.

The helicopter airfield is right next to the rover's landing site in Jezero Crater. The rover will observe the test flights from a distant perch, before driving away to pursue its own mission: hunting for signs of ancient Martian life. Rock samples will be set aside for eventual return to Earth.

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Disney shifts 'Black Widow' and doubles down on streaming

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Walt Disney Co. on Tuesday overhauled its upcoming film release plans, postponing some of its biggest films and shifting Marvel's "Black Widow," among other titles, to Disney+ the same time they arrive in theaters.

"Black Widow," once planned to debut in May 2020, had been set to kickoff the summer movie season on May 7. It will instead premiere July 9. And it will do so simultaneously on the company's streaming platform for a \$30 early-access fee.

For theaters, which are beginning to reopen after punishing months of closure due to the pandemic, the announcement was a blow to hopes of an imminent recovery. While bigger and bigger films have turned to streaming and premium-on-demand in recent months, Marvel movies are Hollywood's most bankable box-office behemoths.

Disney will instead launch its summer with "Cruella" on its previously scheduled date, May 28. The "101 Dalmatians" spinoff with Emma Stone will also premiere in both theaters and on Disney+ for \$30 — the same hybrid approach the studio took with the recent release of "Raya and the Last Dragon."

Disney has not announced viewing data on "Raya and the Last Dragon" but on Tuesday called its per-

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formance "successful."

"Today's announcement reflects our focus on providing consumer choice and serving the evolving preferences of audiences," said Kareem Daniel, Disney's distribution chief. "By leveraging a flexible distribution strategy in a dynamic marketplace that is beginning to recover from the global pandemic, we will continue to employ the best options to deliver The Walt Disney Company's unparalleled storytelling to fans and families around the world."

The Pixar film "Luca" will bypass theaters entirely. On June 18, it will debut exclusively on Disney+. In December when announcing an ambitious array of streaming programming, the company suggested that Disney+ would regularly be home to Pixar, among other brands.

Over the next few years, Disney is planning to premiere directly on Disney+ not just an armada of "Star Wars" and Marvel series but 15 live-action, Pixar and animated series, and 15 live-action, Pixar and animated movies.

The studio also postponed the releases of "Free Guy" (From May 21 to Aug. 13); "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" (from July 9 to Aug. 3); "Deep Water" (from Aug. 13 to January 2022); "The King's Man" (from Aug. 20 to Dec. 22); and "Death on the Nile" (from Sept. 17 to February 2022).

About half of North American theaters are currently open but many more are set to in the coming weeks. New York and Los Angeles, the two largest markets, recently allowed theaters to open at reduced capacities. On Tuesday, Cineworld Group, owner of the second-largest chain in the country, Regal Cinemas, said its theaters would reopen in early April.

Some studios have begun to move up, not postpone, their biggest films. Paramount Pictures moved "A Quiet Place Part II" from September to May 28.

Warner Bros. earlier set a release plan for 2021 that, like Disney will with "Black Widow," gives viewers the choice of paying for a movie at home or on the big screen. Warner's entire 2021 slate is debuting simultaneously on its streaming platform, HBO Max, and in theaters.

Yellen, Powell say more needed to limit US economic damage

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell told Congress on Tuesday that more must be done to limit the economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic.

Powell also reiterated that he does not expect programs aimed at reviving the economy will trigger unwanted inflation.

Both officials struck upbeat notes about the U.S. economy's outlook in their appearances Tuesday before the House Financial Services Committee. They said that, while there are encouraging signs of a rebound, it is important that government support continue in order to make sure the millions of people who have lost jobs can return to the labor market.

Several Republican lawmakers expressed worries that run-way inflation could be triggered by the more than \$4 trillion in support provided by Congress last year, the Biden administration's recently approved \$1.9 trillion support package, coupled with the Fed's ultra-low interest rates.

Addressing those concerns, Powell said that the Fed remains strongly committed to its two policies goals of achieving maximum employment and stable prices, which it interprets as price increases averaging 2% per year.

As progress is made against the virus and the economy opens, the Fed expects inflation will rise over the course of this year, he said.

"Our best view is that the effect on inflation will be neither particularly large or persistent," Powell said. And as he has done in the past, he said that if inflation did start to increase in worrisome ways, the Fed had the tools necessary through its control of interest rates to keep it under control.

Republicans lawmakers pressed Yellen about reports the administration is preparing a new \$3 trillion "Build Back Better" spending plan for infrastructure projects and improving education and job training.

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The measure would be partly financed by increasing taxes on the wealthy and corporations.

Yellen said that the administration is considering boosting the corporate tax rate from the current 21% to 28%. It was cut in the Trump administration from 35% as part of the 2017 tax bill.

"We have had a global race to the bottom in corporate taxation and we hope to put an end to that," Yellen said.

Rep. Barry Loudermilk, R-Ga., cited comments from critics that the administration's relief package was more than six times larger than it needed to be. Yellen said that the country has lost 9.5 million jobs and if discouraged workers are counted, the jobless rate now would be over 9%.

"We have a huge problem of joblessness" that needs to be addressed, Yellen said.

The Tuesday hearing marked the first joint appearance by Powell and Yellen in their current jobs and it was Yellen's first congressional appearance since taking over as Treasury secretary.

Yellen said the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan held out the prospect of returning the country to full employment next year.

"With the passage of the rescue plan, I am confident that people will reach the other side of this pandemic with the foundations of their lives intact," Yellen said.

The economy fell into a deep recession a year ago with an initial loss of 22 million jobs, many of them in service industries such as restaurants and retail stores.

Powell acknowledged that a recovery is far from complete.

The Fed will "not lose sight of the millions of Americans who are still hurting, including lower wage workers in the services sector, African Americans, Hispanics and other minority groups that have been especially hard hit," Powell said.

The Fed kept its benchmark interest rate at a record low of 0% to 0.25% at its meeting last week and even though it significantly boosted its economic forecast, it continued to signal that the benchmark rate would remain unchanged through 2023.

Under the March 2020 COVID-19 relief law, the Treasury secretary and Fed chairman are required to testify before Congress on a quarterly basis to provide updates. Powell and Yellen will appear Wednesday before the Senate Banking Committee.

Yellen on Tuesday pledged a rapid rollout from the Treasury of the new relief plan. She noted that within the first week after the legislation was signed into law, the Treasury and the IRS have distributed more than 90 million direct payments which provide \$1,400 to qualifying individuals.

Yellen said since she took office two months ago, she has been focused on making sure that relief gets quickly to the areas of greatest need such as the "smallest small businesses, which are disproportionately owned by women and people of color."

Yellen said the Paycheck Protection Program created by last year's legislation often did not reach the smallest businesses. She said Treasury is working with the Small Business Administration to "tweak" how the program is implemented so that the loans, which the government forgives if businesses don't lay off their workers, can reach millions more microbusinesses, especially those in rural and low-income areas.

The new relief package will also provide more than \$30 billion to help renters and homeowners at risk of being evicted, Yellen said. She said the Trump administration had put in place rules that required tenants and landlords to provide a large amount of documentation to get rental assistance, documentation that the Biden administration is reducing.

"We're cutting through the red tape for them, while still taking reasonable steps to prevent fraud and abuse," Yellen said.

Democrats vow vote on gun bills; Biden says 'we have to act'

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats said Tuesday that they are pushing toward a vote on expanded gun control measures as the nation reels from its second mass shooting in a week. President Joe Biden said "we have to act," but prospects for any major changes were dim, for now, in the closely divided Congress.

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Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed Tuesday morning to bring to the Senate floor legislation passed by the House that would require background checks for most gun sales and transfers. He said the Senate "must confront a devastating truth" after a lack of congressional action on the issue for almost three decades.

"This Senate will be different," Schumer, D-N.Y., said a day after a shooting at a crowded Boulder, Colorado, supermarket, killed 10 people, including a police officer. "The Senate is going to debate and address the epidemic of gun violence in this country."

While a Senate vote on new gun control would be the first in several years, Democrats do not have the votes to pass any significant reform. They are not even united themselves, as Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., told reporters Tuesday that he opposes the House legislation on background checks.

The Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing Tuesday on proposals for gun control. It is unclear whether any of the bills up for consideration — most of them involving more restrictive background checks — would have made a difference in the Colorado case. A 21-year-old man charged with killing eight people in the Atlanta area last week had purchased a 9 mm handgun hours before the murders, prompting advocates to push for longer waiting periods for purchases.

In brief remarks responding to the shooting, Biden urged Congress to move quickly to close the loopholes in the background check system and to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines — an effort that would be even more difficult to achieve politically. According to a police affidavit, the Colorado shooter had purchased an assault rifle six days earlier.

"It should not be a partisan issue," Biden said. "This is an American issue. It will save lives, American lives."

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who has aggressively pushed for expanded gun control since the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School that killed 20 children and six educators, expressed optimism about the chances for new laws with Biden in the White House and Democrats controlling the House and the Senate. He called it "the dawn of a new era."

Reality is likely more complicated. Senate Democrats do not currently have deep enough support among Republicans to pass new gun control legislation in the 50-50 Senate, as they would need 60 votes to do so. While expanding background checks is generally popular with the American public, even with some conservatives, Congress has been unable to find a successful compromise on guns in decades, making it one of the most intractable issues in American politics.

The gun debate also highlights a larger difficulty for Senate Democrats as they try to move forward on gun legislation and other policy priorities of the Biden White House. With the filibuster in place, forcing a 60-vote threshold for most legislation, House-passed bills on issues like gun control and voting rights are effectively nonstarters unless Democrats secure significant GOP support.

Some Republicans hinted that they would be open to negotiations, though it was unclear if there were any real bipartisan discussions. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said he was opposed to the House legislation, but "I'm certainly open to the discussion."

Manchin and Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, who have worked together for years to find compromise on background checks, both said they were opposed to the House legislation, which would close loopholes to ensure background checks are extended to private and online sales that often go undetected, including at gun shows, with some limited exemptions for family and other scenarios. A similar version Manchin and Toomey proposed just after the Sandy Hook shootings included a broader set of exemptions than the House bill.

The House also passed a second bill to extend a certain review period for background checks from three to 10 days. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., introduced the legislation after a shooter killed nine people at a Charleston, South Carolina, church in 2015.

Toomey said he would like to find legislation that could pass, but "that probably would require something that's a little bit different. So, we'll see if we can figure out how to thread that needle."

Manchin did not say whether he would restart negotiations, only that "we're going to try to do the responsible, reasonable thing."

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Schumer and Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy, a leading advocate for gun control, said they would meet this week to discuss a path forward. Schumer has not said when he will bring the House legislation up for a vote.

Democrats say they feel the environment around gun legislation has evolved, especially since that last major push in 2013. They point to troubles at the National Rifle Association, the long-powerful advocacy group that poured tens of millions of dollars into electing Donald Trump in 2016. The organization has been weakened by infighting as well as legal tangles over its finances.

"This is the moment to make our stand. NOW," tweeted Murphy as details of the Colorado shooting emerged Monday evening. "Today, our movement is stronger than the gun lobby. They are weak. We are potent. Finally, a President and a Congress that supports gun reform."

Democrats are hoping there is a gradual political shift among voters as well. A Pew Research Center poll in September 2019 showed a wide majority of Americans, 88%, supported making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks, which is what the House-passed bill would do. Ninety-three percent of Democrats and 82% of Republicans were in favor of the policy.

Many in the GOP base are still strongly opposed to gun control of any kind. In Tuesday's hearing, which was scheduled before the Colorado shooting, Republicans showed no signs of wavering. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said that every time there is a shooting, the Senate engages in "ridiculous theater," with Democrats proposing laws that he said could take guns away from law-abiding citizens. Republicans have argued that background checks would not stop most mass shootings and would prevent some lawful gun owners from purchasing firearms.

"We already know this pattern is predictable, over and over and over again," Cruz said.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro, Hannah Fingerhut and Michael Balsamo contributed to this report.

US colleges tout hopes for return to new normal this fall

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — Colleges throughout the U.S. are assuring students that the fall semester will bring a return to in-person classes, intramural sports and mostly full dormitories. But those promises come with asterisks.

Administrators say how quickly campus life comes back will depend on the success of the nation's COVID-19 vaccination efforts and the ability to avoid widespread outbreaks.

Universities saw their budgets hammered during the coronavirus pandemic, which emptied dorms and led to declines in enrollment, and are facing pressure to reopen fully. A flood of announcements from schools describing their plans has begun as high school seniors and returning students are making decisions about where they will be next fall.

Some students are waiting to decide until they know what to expect on campus, and others are still worried about the economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

Like many colleges, Ashland University in Ohio is seeing that freshmen who have been accepted are slower to enroll this year. To give them a push, the university is offering a semester of free tuition next spring for first-time students who come in the fall and promising no tuition increases over four years.

Many students are feeling "burned out" by a year of virtual classes and limited activities and asking themselves if they're willing to invest in another year if virus protocols are still in place, said Carlos Campo, president of Ashland, which is planning for almost all classes to be in person and for clubs, intramurals and Greek life to resume normal activities.

"We owe it to students to let them know what's coming," he said.

Casey Knutson skipped spring semester after starting her first year of college at Ohio University taking classes on Zoom from home in Tiffin last fall. Her grades were good, but "I realized I wasn't learning a single thing," she said. "It wasn't worth the money."

She's hopeful that she'll be on campus next fall for a somewhat normal college experience.

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"I really don't want to be stuck in my hometown," she said. "I think a lot of students feel like that."

Ultimately, the course of the pandemic will determine what campuses look like in the fall, said Terry Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, a Washington, D.C.-based trade association of college and university presidents.

"There are no guarantees, but we are more hopeful than we have been for a long, long time that colleges and universities will look like they usually do," Hartle said.

Schools have gotten a boost from about \$80 billion in federal coronavirus relief to colleges, universities and students. But there have been serious effects from the pandemic, including roughly 650,000 layoffs out of 3 million campus employees, he said.

"It will take several years for institutions to return to normal operations, and it will really be four or five years before we can sort out what the real impact has been," Hartle said.

University of Michigan President Mark Schlissel anticipates that most classes and student groups will be able to be met in person and fans will be allowed at games because the number of COVID-19 cases have dropped and vaccine supply is increasing.

Some large lecture classes are likely to remain online, and some dorm rooms will be kept open if students need to quarantine, school spokesman Rick Fitzgerald said.

"Will it be exactly the way it was before the pandemic? No," he said. "But it will be approaching what it was."

Seyoung Ree, a high school senior at Notre Dame Academy in Toledo, said some of the college reopening plans she's looked at have been vague. But whether a school starts fully with in-person classes won't affect her college choice, she said, adding that she'd be more worried if it doesn't have safe guidelines.

"I guess for us, we've already been through our senior year and part of our junior year wearing masks," she said of high school. "It's hard to imagine not wearing a mask to school and things going back to normal."

Local health rules also will determine how quickly colleges are buzzing with activity.

University of South Dakota President Sheila Gestring says the school plans to return this fall without social distancing rules or mask mandates as long as infection rates remain low.

The University System of Georgia has told the state's public universities to plan for normal operations even though most higher education employees are not yet eligible for the vaccine.

"We anticipate that we will have been able to vaccinate faculty and staff by that time," University of North Georgia Provost Chaudron Gille wrote to faculty in early March. "Of course, if this year has taught us anything, it is that we must be prepared for the unexpected."

At the University of Connecticut, where registration for fall classes began Monday, Provost Carl Lejuez said the school is aiming to offer 90% of classes in-person. But he said that will depend on widespread vaccinations and state guidelines, which now call for 6 feet (2 meters) of social distancing.

He said a message spelling that out is going out to prospective students this week.

"What we decided to do was approach the semester in a way where we would have as much in-person for registration as possible, but based on vaccinations, the virus rate, state guidelines and a variety of other factors," Lejuez said. "We've gotten really good at being flexible."

Associated Press writers Michael Melia in Hartford, Connecticut, and Jeff Amy in Atlanta contributed to this report.

Report: Extremist groups thrive on Facebook despite bans

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

A new outside report found that Facebook has allowed groups — many tied to QAnon, boogaloo and militia movements — to glorify violence during the 2020 election and in the weeks leading up to the deadly riots on the U.S. Capitol in January.

Avaaz, a nonprofit advocacy group that says it seeks to protect democracies from misinformation, identified 267 pages and groups on Facebook that it says spread violence-glorifying material in the heat of the

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2020 election to a combined following of 32 million users.

More than two-thirds of the groups and pages had names that aligned with several domestic extremist movements, the report found. The first, boogaloo, promotes a second U.S. civil war and the breakdown of modern society. The second is the QAnon conspiracy, which claims that Donald Trump is waging a secret battle against the "deep state" and a sect of powerful Satan-worshipping pedophiles who dominate Hollywood, big business, the media and government. The rest are various anti-government militias. All have been largely banned from Facebook since 2020.

But despite what Avaaz called "clear violations" of Facebook's policies, it found that 119 of these pages and groups were still active on the platform as of Feb. 24 and had just under 27 million followers. Facebook said late Monday that of the 119 that Avaaz found, only 18 "actually violated" Facebook's policies. Four had already been removed before Monday and Facebook has now taken down the remaining 14.

Facebook acknowledged that its policy enforcement "isn't perfect," but said the report distorts its work against violent extremism and misinformation.

The company said in a statement that it has done more than any other internet company to stanch the flow of harmful material, citing its bans of "nearly 900 militarized social movements" and the removal of tens of thousands of QAnon pages, groups, and accounts. It added that it is always improving its efforts against misinformation.

On Thursday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai are slated to testify before Congress about extremism and misinformation on their platforms.

Facebook has tightened its rules against violence, hate and misinformation in the past year. In October, it banned QAnon groups across its platform. Before that, it would remove them only if they expressly supported violence. It has also banned extremist and militia movements and boogaloo groups with varying degrees of success.

For instance, while Facebook banned "Stop the Steal" groups from its platform, Avaaz — like The Associated Press — found that such groups and the #stopthesteal hashtag remained active on the platform after the purge.

Facebook's failures, Avaaz said, "helped sweep America down the path from election to insurrection."

According to the report, the social network provided a "fertile ground" for misinformation and toxicity that contributed to radicalizing millions of Americans, helping create the conditions in which the storming of the Capitol became a reality.

This story has been corrected to show that the groups were still active on the platform as of Feb. 24, not March 18.

Damage from virus: Utility bills overwhelm some households

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writers

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — Millions of U.S. households are facing heavy past-due utility bills, which have escalated in the year since the pandemic forced Americans hunkered down at home to consume more power.

And now, government moratoriums that for months had barred utilities from turning off the power of their delinquent customers are starting to expire in most states. As result, up to 37 million customers — representing nearly one-third of all households — will soon have to reckon with their overdue power bills at a time when many of them are struggling with lost jobs or income.

A study done by Arcadia, which runs a service that helps households lower utility bills, found that the average past-due amount by those in its network was roughly \$850.

The crisis has emerged as one of the repercussions of the recession that was touched off by the viral pandemic. Though the economy has achieved considerable gains in recent months, about 9.5 million jobs remain lost. And many people have lost income even while remaining employed, leaving them unable to buy food, pay rent or afford utility bills.

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President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion rescue aid package, enacted into law this month, will provide some support. It includes \$5 billion earmarked for people who need help with power and water bills. Combined with other government financing allotted for energy aid since the pandemic began, the total available to help struggling households pay utility bills is about \$9.1 billion.

But all that assistance represents just a fraction of the \$27 billion in past-due balances of U.S. households, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, which helps low-income consumers. The aid will be distributed through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Caught in the squeeze are people like Paula Desper, who lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with her husband and the youngest two of their five children, ages 7 and 10. Desper worries about how her family will manage once the utility shutoff moratorium lifts soon in Pennsylvania.

"It's come to the point where I look at a bill, and either I'm going to pay a bill or I'm going to buy food," said Desper, 45. "I've got two little children. I will go without food. My children will not."

After the pandemic erupted, Desper's weekly hours and income were reduced by half. Her husband's work hours were cut, too. Unable to afford his car payments, he lost his vehicle.

With their sharply reduced income, Desper and her husband fell nearly \$700 behind on energy bills and more than \$1,100 behind on mortgage payments. In the meantime, she worries about being exposed to COVID at work, particularly because her 10-year-old daughter has asthma.

"I always wanted to do better for my children, and I feel guilty," Desper said. "I have my moments where I cry because I feel hopeless. I feel like I did something wrong, even though I know it wasn't my fault."

Officials at agencies involved in financial aid for energy customers say the problem has become an urgent one.

"We have never had debts of this size before," said Mark Wolfe, executive director for the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, which estimates that the total amount due has soared from roughly \$11 billion, owed by nearly 20 million U.S. households at the end of 2019, to the more than \$27 billion now.

Those findings mirror the study of electricity bills in 13 states and the District of Columbia by Arcadia, which helps households find renewable energy sources to lower their utility costs. It found that one-quarter of the households belonging to Arcadia's network in those states had past-due balances on their electricity bills as of January, with the average amount owed nearly \$850 — a 67% jump from the end of 2019.

Even bigger past-due bills have been emerging in New Jersey, said Kathy Kerr, director of utility assistance for the Affordable Housing Alliance. Before the pandemic, people who approached the organization seeking help typically had past-due balances of \$800 to \$1,000. Now, she said, it's not uncommon to see past-due balances ranging between \$2,000 to \$3,000, reflecting a crisis that cast millions of people out of jobs, especially at restaurants, gyms, concert venues and small businesses and left them consuming more electricity at home.

"People are at a crossroads," Kerr said. "Do I pay rent? Do I pay bills?"

Moratoriums on shutting off power for past-due households had existed in at least 35 states at some point during the pandemic. In response, some struggling consumers chose to funnel their money toward housing, food and other obligations because they knew they wouldn't lose their electricity or natural gas even if they skipped their utility payments.

Compounding the problem, American households have been using, on average, 10% more electricity during the pandemic lockdowns, which have kept them home more hours, with computers and other electronic devices, along with heat or air conditioning, swelling utility bills.

Now, the power shut-offs are beginning to lift, forcing customers to reckon with their piled-up bills. More than 30 states — including New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin — are ending shutoff moratoriums in March and April, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association. California and New Jersey will do so at the end of June.

Some customers now facing outside utility bills might have been lulled into the belief that they wouldn't have to pay for many additional months.

"There's a moratorium," said Tracey Capers, executive vice president of the Bedford Stuyvesant Resto-

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ration Corporation, a Brooklyn-based non-profit that offers financial aid and counseling. "It doesn't mean you never have to pay. That's the concern that we have for people."

Among them is Mikel Haye, who was forced into performing a financial triage after he lost all three of his part-time jobs after the pandemic struck. Suddenly, he was scrambling to pay the bills on a Brooklyn apartment he shares with his unemployed mother and two brothers while deciding how to spend whatever money was left: For food? Car insurance? The phone bill?

The utility bill often went unpaid, leaving him at one point with a past-due balance of \$500.

"We took a risk, thinking that hopefully they will extend more leniency when it came to paying that bill," said Haye, 24.

In the end, things did work out for him. With the help of the Bedford Stuyvesant organization, he managed to pay his electricity bill.

Not as fortunate, thus far, is Yomaira Romelina Heredia Melo, who was a hotel supervisor until she lost her job in the pandemic. Though she's managed to stay current on her utility bill, she has fallen \$10,000 behind on her Brooklyn rent. A mother of two, Melo worries about being able to continue paying her bills while her husband is stuck in the Dominican Republic awaiting clearance from immigration officials to return.

Utilities are sometimes willing to negotiate repayment plans with delinquent customers rather than cut off their power. Still, a more comprehensive solution is urgently needed, said Sen. Edward Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, who notes that Black and Hispanic households are disproportionately vulnerable. Markey said he expects Congress to draft legislation this year to provide further financial help to people struggling with utility and other bills.

"This is a crisis that wasn't created by consumers," Markey told The Associated Press. "It's potentially a tragedy for so many of these families that could have a traumatic impact on their lives."

The unpaid balances can also be a burden for utilities themselves, because the bills must often be written off as tax losses if they can't be collected. And Wolfe notes that if that happens, utilities will typically try to recover some of the money by pushing for rate increases that will affect all the households in their service areas, including low-income consumers who have managed to stay current on their bills.

Duke Energy, which owns utilities that provide power to about 25 million people across six Southeastern and Midwestern states, has warned that losses are likely from past-due accounts.

"I think we are going to have to find a way to forgive all this debt," Wolfe said. "People have run through their savings during the pandemic, and now they are stuck. Even if you threaten to turn off their power, you still aren't going to collect anything."

Bussewitz reported from New York.

Girl's solo journey to US border shows risks parents take

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MISSION, Texas (AP) — The Honduran girl, 7 years old and surrounded by strangers in the pre-dawn darkness, was determined to keep pace with the other migrants headed for the U.S. border.

Her father, she told an Associated Press journalist, had traveled with her by bus for 22 days across Mexico. Then, he went back to their homeland -- but not before he placed her in the hands of a young man who was to help her cross the river into Texas.

"He just said to go on my own and take care of myself," she said.

What happened to the man who was to be her guide is unclear, but the pony-tailed girl met up with a group and pressed on, vigorously swinging her arms to keep up as they trekked north through the Rio Grande Valley on Sunday under a half-moon. Temperatures had dipped into the mid-50s; the girl wore a yellow jacket decorated with cartoonish drawings of trains, and a black mask to protect her from COVID-19.

The AP is not using the girl's name. It does not normally name children without permission from their parents, and the identity of her father could not be obtained.

But her journey illustrates the extraordinary risks taken by migrant parents to get their children across

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the border, even if it means abandoning them for the most perilous part of the trip.

These desperate decisions represent a dilemma for the fledgling administration of President Joe Biden as it attempts to restore an orderly asylum system: In trying to adopt a more humane approach to protect minors traveling alone, more children may be put at risk.

Nearly 9,500 migrant children arrived at the border in February, up 60% from a month earlier. The government is rushing to set up more facilities to house them and speeding up the process to place them with relatives in the U.S. The city and county of San Diego said Monday that its downtown convention center would host migrant children for an average of 30 to 35 days.

Single adults are almost always expelled, while families are sometimes expelled and sometimes allowed to remain in the United States to pursue asylum.

The girl did reach the United States. A fellow Honduran migrant, 25-year-old Fernanda Solis, said she found her crying alone on a dirt path north of the Rio Grande after midnight, as a helicopter hovered overhead and border agents addressed migrants through a loudspeaker.

Solis tried to comfort the girl, who was cold, hungry and thirsty. She told her they could walk together to turn themselves over to Border Patrol agents and seek asylum.

The girl gained confidence as she walked a route commonly used by Central American migrants. She answered questions unhesitatingly: She turns 8 next month. She should be going into third grade, though she did not complete second because of the pandemic.

She pressed ahead to a country where she knows no one but a family member in South Carolina.

"That's how she acts. She is brave," Solis said.

The girl said her father had no more money to cross the border with her.

"He lost his job," she said, simply.

Solis said she was able to gather that the girl's father had recently tried to cross with her, but they were both quickly expelled back to Reynosa, Mexico, under pandemic-related powers the Trump administration invoked. Biden has kept the powers -- known as Title 42 for the section of an obscure public health law -- in place.

"The girl told me they had tried to cross together, but they were returned. This time, he just sent the girl for her to turn herself in," Solis said.

A federal judge halted expulsions of unaccompanied children in November, after the Trump administration had turned back at least 8,800. But an appeals court panel of three Trump-appointed judges ruled in January that they could resume. Biden, in a break with Trump, decided to release children to relatives with notices to appear in immigration courts.

The Honduran girl turned herself over to Customs and Border Protection; the agency did not respond to a request for information about her whereabouts.

Her story is being repeated again and again along the border. On Sunday, a Salvadoran man approached a journalist to ask whether his 13-year-old daughter would qualify to stay if she crossed on her own.

"The parents are saying 'We are not going to make it. We have to be very realistic here, but if I send my child up to the bridge, and they cross alone, they'll have to take them in,'" said Jennifer Harbury, a Texas-based human rights advocate.

Myanmar junta defends crackdown, accuses Suu Kyi of graft

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's military junta on Tuesday took the offensive to try to justify last month's coup and subsequent actions against those opposed to it, even as street demonstrations continued against the takeover.

At a news conference in the capital Naypyitaw, the military presented a video of a former political colleague of ousted national leader Aung San Suu Kyi claiming he had handed over large amounts of cash and gold to her personally, in what the military has characterized as corruption. Such allegations were previously denied by her lawyer.

Many of the protests Tuesday were staged in a way that avoided confrontations with authorities, who

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have not hesitated to use lethal force to break up demonstrations. Some marches were held before dawn in Yangon, the country's biggest city, and elsewhere and went unmolested. Other protests adopted the tactic of having signboards or other inanimate objects lined up in the street to serve as proxies for human demonstrators.

The independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners has verified 261 protesters' deaths nationwide but says the actual total, including cases where verification has been difficult, is probably much higher. It said 2,682 people have also been arrested or charged since the coup, with 2,302 still detained or sought for arrest.

In its news conference, the military presented displays of seized homemade weapons and videos of street battles to argue that the demonstrators are violent and that its efforts to stop them are justified. However, in the weeks since the Feb. 1 coup, protesters only began using organized violence after more than 100 demonstrators had been shot dead by police and soldiers.

The allegations against Suu Kyi made by former Yangon Chief Minister Phyo Min Thein were first mentioned by the military several weeks ago. Last week the military-controlled Myawaddy TV station aired a similar video with a construction magnate who also claimed to have made large payoffs to Suu Kyi. That video was replayed at Tuesday's news conference.

No supporting evidence for the allegations has been offered, and they are generally dismissed as an effort by the military to frame Suu Kyi so she can be discredited and tried on a serious criminal charge. She is already being held on several more minor charges.

A report in the state-controlled Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper on Tuesday said the junta has expressed fresh concern about civil servants, teachers and medical workers joining the Civil Disobedience Movement that is the vanguard group opposing last month's military takeover.

The report referred to the opposition group as CDM, the initials by which it is popularly known. The group encourages employees of key enterprises, such as government offices, to stay away from work.

In what was a relatively conciliatory tone compared with earlier threats, the junta at its Monday meeting was reported to have described failing to show up at work as "not a crime but a violation of the civil service disciplines." It said that for first offenses, civil servants would have to sign confessions, but further offenses would be dealt with according to civil service rules.

Previously, government employees have been detained for joining the CDM, and striking state railway workers have been kicked out of their government-supplied housing if they don't agree to go back to work.

Myanmar labor unions on March 7 issued a joint call for an extended nationwide work stoppage, with the goal of a "full, extended shutdown of the Myanmar economy." In a statement, they called for the strike to continue "until we receive our democracy back."

Tuesday's report of the junta's meeting also highlighted teachers' absences from work, saying some have joined the CDM, as have health workers.

The junta repeated its claims that civil servants, teachers and doctors joined the CDM under threat.

"They should make a complaint to the respective authorities about the matter," said the newspaper's account of the junta meeting. "Some teachers and doctors are still absent from work as they are worried that they may face punishment if they return to the unit," junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing was cited saying.

Although the CDM does not advocate violence, the movement has painted those who don't give it support as collaborators with the junta with blood on their hands, who may be ostracized.

AP-NORC poll: Learning setbacks a top concern for parents

By COLLIN BINKLEY and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Parents across the U.S. are conflicted about reopening schools. Most are at least somewhat worried that a return to the classroom will lead to more coronavirus cases, but there's an even deeper fear that their children are falling behind in school while at home.

Sixty-nine percent of parents are at least somewhat concerned that their children will face setbacks in

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school because of the coronavirus pandemic, including 42% who say they're very or extremely worried about it, according to a new poll from The University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Nearly as many, 64%, say they are at least somewhat concerned that in-person instruction will lead to more people being infected, but it's only 33% who say they are very or extremely worried about the risk.

That tension reflects the fears of a nation on the cusp of a widespread return to classroom teaching. More than a year after the pandemic started, more schools are now opening their doors to students or plan to do so in coming weeks.

Parents' concerns about their children falling behind were even stronger in an AP-NORC poll last July, after the school year was interrupted in the spring by the burgeoning pandemic. Concerns about the spread of the virus in general also have ticked down to a low point as many look hopefully to a chance to ease back to normal.

Pressure to reopen schools has come from parents, state officials and President Joe Biden, who has vowed to have most of the nation's elementary schools open five days a week in his administration's first 100 days. Even as many schools already offer some level of in-person teaching, there's growing demand to bring students back every day.

For parents, concerns about the pandemic's impact go beyond academics — most also worry at least some that their children will fall behind socially and lose access to school sports and other activities, the poll found.

Maria Sanchez, a mother of four in Hawthorne, California, said the past year has been especially trying for her youngest daughter, Naomi, who's now in sixth grade. Before the pandemic, Naomi was a star student who mostly earned As and Bs. But since classes moved online last year, it hasn't been uncommon to see Ds on her report cards, Sanchez said.

"It just seems so hard for her to understand anything," Sanchez said. Naomi logs on for every class, she added, but the comfort of home makes it harder to focus. "She doesn't take notes. She's not writing anything," Sanchez said. "She's not learning anything."

Sanchez welcomed the recent news that Naomi's school is planning a return to classroom instruction. But her relief was joined by fears about the virus spreading within the school district, where she works as a food services manager.

"Even though I'm happy they're opening the school and my daughter gets to go back and do her best, I'm still concerned about the virus," she said.

Last month the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released guidelines saying schools can safely reopen with masks, social distancing and other measures even if teachers have not received vaccines. Even in areas with higher virus rates, the agency said, younger students are generally safe to continue with classroom instruction.

Despite the CDC's guidance, however, Americans remain divided over what's needed for a safe reopening. Most say masks are important, but it's not a universal expectation: 62% say it's essential to require masks among students and teachers, while 22% say it's important but not essential, the poll found.

The CDC last week relaxed its social distancing guidelines in schools, saying it's safe to seat students as close as 3 feet (0.9 meters) apart. The agency previously recommended 6 feet (1.8 meters), leading many schools to reduce classes to half their usual size. Just under half of Americans said they think it's essential to limit class sizes, however, while another 4 in 10 said it's important but not required.

Hoping to speed up the return to the classroom, the Biden administration recently ordered all states to prioritize teachers and other school staff in their vaccine rollouts. The move was seen as a victory for teachers unions, some of which demanded vaccines even after the CDC said shots were not a requirement to reopen safely.

But Americans disagree on the need for teacher vaccines. About 4 in 10 say it's essential, while about a third say it's important but not essential.

The clashing opinions have translated to a patchwork of policies. While some states have already made

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vaccines available to all teachers, some have just started to make them eligible. And while many states continue to require masks in schools, states have lifted mandates, allowing districts to decide their own policies.

Biden's recently signed \$1.9 trillion relief bill includes more than \$120 billion to help schools reopen and recover from the pandemic. At least 20% of that must be spent on efforts to address learning setbacks worsened by the pandemic.

Most Americans embrace that kind of effort: 81% said they support government-funded summer school or tutoring to help students who fall behind, and just 6% are opposed. Another 12% didn't have an opinion.

Frustrations over online learning have also sparked hope among school choice advocates that more families will turn to education options beyond their traditional public schools. Several states have introduced legislation to create or expand voucher programs for that purpose, and many parents indicated support for those kinds of programs has ticked up.

Forty-six percent support tax-funded vouchers for low-income students to pay for tuition at private or religious schools, while 31% are opposed. In an AP-NORC poll in December 2019, Americans were more closely divided, with 42% in favor and 37% opposed.

Support is even higher among Black Americans, with 62% in favor, up somewhat from 53% in 2019.

Although parents' fears about learning setbacks seem to outweigh their fears of the virus, some families are in no rush to reopen schools.

Jessica Battle, of Hamtramck, Michigan, said her daughters, ages 5 and 7, have continued to learn while in online classes. Her older daughter, Sadie, is where she should be in reading and math, and her younger daughter, Clara, enjoys her prekindergarten program. In a recent school survey, Battle said she supports a return to school, but she's on the fence.

"I would be content keeping them at home the rest of the year, too," she said. "The teachers have been great at maintaining their classrooms, and both of my kids really like their teachers."

Fingerhut reported from Washington.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,076 adults was conducted Feb. 25-March 1 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 24, the 83rd day of 2021. There are 282 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 24, 1976, the president of Argentina, Isabel Peron, was deposed by her country's military.

On this date:

In 1765, Britain enacted the Quartering Act, requiring American colonists to provide temporary housing to British soldiers.

In 1882, German scientist Robert Koch (kohk) announced in Berlin that he had discovered the bacillus responsible for tuberculosis.

In 1913, New York's Palace Theatre, the legendary home of vaudeville, opened on Broadway.

In 1958, Elvis Presley was inducted into the U.S. Army at the draft board in Memphis, Tennessee, before boarding a bus for Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. (Presley underwent basic training at Fort Hood, Texas, before being shipped off to Germany.)

In 1965, Ranger 9, a lunar probe launched three days earlier by NASA, crashed into the moon (as planned) after sending back more than 5,800 video images.

In 1989, the supertanker Exxon Valdez (vahl-DEEZ') ran aground on a reef in Alaska's Prince William

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Sound and began leaking an estimated 11 million gallons of crude oil.

In 1995, after 20 years, British soldiers stopped routine patrols in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

In 1999, NATO launched airstrikes against Yugoslavia, marking the first time in its 50-year existence that it had ever attacked a sovereign country. Thirty-nine people were killed when fire erupted in the Mont Blanc tunnel in France and burned for two days.

In 2002, at the 74th Academy Awards, Halle Berry became the first Black performer to win a Best Actress Oscar for her work in "Monster's Ball," while Denzel Washington became the second Black actor, after Sidney Poitier, to win in the best actor category for "Training Day." "A Beautiful Mind" won four Oscars, including best picture and best director for Ron Howard.

In 2010, keeping a promise he'd made to anti-abortion Democratic lawmakers to assure passage of his historic health care legislation, President Barack Obama signed an executive order against using federal funds to pay for elective abortions covered by private insurance.

In 2015, Germanwings Flight 9525, an Airbus A320, crashed into the French Alps, killing all 150 people on board; investigators said the jetliner was deliberately downed by the 27-year-old co-pilot, Andreas Lubitz.

In 2019, Attorney General William Barr reported that special counsel Robert Mueller did not find evidence that President Donald Trump's campaign "conspired or coordinated" with Russia to influence the 2016 presidential election, but reached no conclusion on whether Trump obstructed justice. Democrats pointed out that Mueller had found evidence for and against obstruction, and they demanded to see his full report. (The report would be released in April.)

Ten years ago: The Census Bureau released its first set of national-level findings from the 2010 count on race and migration, showing that Hispanics accounted for more than half of the U.S. population increase over the previous decade, exceeding estimates in most states as they crossed a new census milestone: 50 million, or 1 in 6 Americans. A private funeral was held at Forest Lawn Cemetery for Elizabeth Taylor (the service began 15 minutes behind schedule in accordance with the actor's wish to be late for her own funeral).

Five years ago: A U.N. war crimes court convicted former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic of genocide and nine other charges for orchestrating a campaign of terror that left 100,000 people dead during the 1992-95 war in Bosnia; Karadzic was sentenced to 40 years in prison. (The sentence was later increased to life in prison.) Comedian Garry Shandling died at age 66; writer Earl Hamner Jr., creator of "The Waltons," died at age 92.

One year ago: The International Olympic Committee announced that the Summer Olympics in Tokyo would be postponed until 2021. President Donald Trump said he hoped the United States would be reopened by Easter, even as some public health officials called for tougher, not looser, restrictions. Amid hopes of a deal on a relief package for businesses and ordinary Americans, stocks soared, with the Dow industrials surging more than 2,100 points, or 11.4%, for their best day since 1933. Three of America's best-known national parks – Yellowstone, Grand Teton and Great Smoky Mountains – closed their gates to visitors. Tony-award winning playwright Terrence McNally died in Florida of complications from the coronavirus at the age of 81.

Today's Birthdays: Actor William Smith is 88. Fashion and costume designer Bob Mackie is 82. Former Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire is 74. Rock musician Lee Oskar is 73. Singer Nick Lowe is 72. Rock musician Dougie Thomson (Supertramp) is 70. Fashion designer Tommy Hilfiger is 70. Comedian Louie Anderson is 68. Actor Donna Pescow is 67. Actor Robert Carradine is 67. Sen. Mike Braun, R-Indiana, is 67. Former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer is 65. Actor Kelly LeBrock is 61. TV personality Star Jones is 59. Country-rock musician Patterson Hood (Drive-By Truckers) is 57. Actor Peter Jacobson is 56. Rock singer-musician Sharon Corr (The Corrs) is 51. Actor Lauren Bowles is 51. Actor Lara Flynn Boyle is 51. Rapper Maceo (AKA P.A. Pasemaster Mase) is 51. Actor Megyn Price is 50. Actor Jim Parsons is 48. Christian rock musician Chad Butler (Switchfoot) is 47. Actor Alyson Hannigan is 47. Former NFL quarterback Peyton Manning is 45. Actor Amanda Brugel (TV: "The Handmaid's Tale") is 44. Actor Olivia Burnette is 44. Actor Jessica Chastain is 44. Actor Amir Arison is 43. Actor Lake Bell is 42. Rock musician Benj Gershman (O.A.R.)

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is 41. Neo-soul musician Jesse Phillips (St. Paul & the Broken Bones) is 41. Actor Philip Winchester (TV: "Strike Back") is 40. Dancer Val Chmerkovskiy is 35. Actor Keisha Castle-Hughes is 31.