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Church Services

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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United Methodist Church

Groton and Conde

Sunday, March 28, 2021

9:00 AM: Conde Worship

10:00 AM: Sunday School

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

Monday, March 29, 2021

7 a.m.: Daily Devotions on Facebook

7 p.m.: Groton Lenten Small Group

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

7 a.m.: Daily Devotions on Facebook

6 p.m.: Conde Lenten Small Group

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

7 a.m.: Daily Devotions on Facebook

Thursday, April 1, 2021

7 a.m.: Daily Devotions on Facebook

Friday, April 2, 2021

7 a.m.: Daily Devotions on Facebook

Sunday, April 4, 2021 (Easter Sunday)

Worship, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Groton

Sunday, March 28

9am Worship

Milestones 4yr old's & Juniors

Monday, March 29

6:30 am Bible Study

Thursday, April 1

7 p.m.: Maundy Thursday Worship

Friday, April 2

7 p.m.: Good Friday Worship

Sunday, April 4 (Easter Sunday)

7 a.m.: Sunrise service w/ Communion

9 a.m. & 11 a.m. Service W / Communion

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton &

St. Joseph Catholic

Groton and Turton

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

7 p.m.: Living Stations

Thursday, April 1, 2021

7 p.m.: Holy Thursday Mass

8 p.m. to 10 p.m.: Adoration

Friday, April 2, 2021

3 p.m.: Traditional Good Friday Service in Groton

7 p.m.: Stations/Cross veneration in Turton

Saturday, April 3, 2021

8:15 p.m.: Easter Vigil in Groton

Sunday, April 4, 2021 (Easter Sunday)

8:30 a.m.: Mass at SEAS, Groton

11 a.m.: Mass at St. Joseph, Turton

St. John's Lutheran Church

Groton

Thursday, April 1, 2021

7 p.m.: Maundy Thursday Service

Friday, April 2, 2021

7 p.m.: Good Friday Worship

Saturday, April 3, 2021

4 p.m.: Circuit Easter Vigil Service

Sunday, April 4, 2021 (Easter Sunday)

7:30 a.m.: Worship at Zion Lutheran, Andover

9 a.m.: Worship at St. John's Lutheran, Groton

Heaven Bound Ministries

Pierpont

Buffalo Lake Lutheran

Rural Eden

Saturday, March 28: Worship at Pierpont, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 29: Worship at Buffalo Lake 10:30 a.m.

Saturday, April 3: Worship at Pierpont, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, April 4: Worship at Buffalo Lake 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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Redemption code:

DF-CD-NP-Q121

Reply by:

April 15, 2021

We're available 24/7. See if you qualify for same-day service!

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

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

General: Additional charges may apply in areas that require guard response service for municipal alarm verification. System remains property of ADT. Local permit fees may be required. Prices and offers subject to change and may vary by market. Additional taxes and fees may apply. Satisfactory credit required. A security deposit may be required. Simulated screen images and photos are for illustrative purposes only.

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DF-CD-NP-Q121



Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

How medical marijuana is playing out among South Dakota's neighbors

By: Bart Pfankuch

If medical marijuana becomes legal starting July 1, 2021, in South Dakota, as proposed so far, the state will join 36 other U.S. states where medicinal pot is legal, including neighboring states North Dakota, Montana and Minnesota.

Iowa and Nebraska do not allow marijuana in any form; Wyoming has no legal-marijuana laws, and a legislative effort in the 2021 session to legalize both medical and recreational pot appears to have died.

South Dakota voters in November 2020 also approved a constitutional amendment to legalize recreational marijuana sales, possession and use by adults, but that measure is facing a legal challenge that seems likely to delay its scheduled implementation date of July 1.

North Dakota lawmakers considered legislation that would legalize the use and tax the sales of recreational marijuana in the state, but that measure appeared to fail in late March.

Here is a look at how medical marijuana legalization has fared in neighboring states.



It took almost two years for North Dakota to implement its medical marijuana program that was approved by voters in 2016. Photo: Stock

image

wrote the measure intended to set up a program that put people in illegal possession when they bought products, but that is in effect what the initiated measure did."

NORTH DAKOTA

South Dakota's neighbor to the north is the most recent of nearby states to approve a medical marijuana program.

In North Dakota, 64% of voters approved an initiated measure in November 2016 to legalize medical marijuana, but lawmakers suspended the act the following January before passing a new, more detailed measure approving medicinal pot that took effect in April 2017. The Legislature felt compelled to overturn and redo the medical marijuana act because the ballot language, copied from a similar measure passed in Delaware, did not account for changes needed in other laws, and would have made legitimate medical marijuana users subject to felonies for possession if laws were not updated.

"When we talk about an initiated measure that did need some work, there were a lot of things that were in that initiated measure that needed some work," said Jason Wahl, director of the North Dakota Division of Medical Marijuana. "I don't believe the people who

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Wahl said state research indicated that it took from 18 to 24 months in most states to set up medical marijuana programs once legalization took effect. In North Dakota, it took just less than two years from approval to the first legal marijuana sales.

The first of two state-approved cannabis cultivation, processing and packaging plants opened in September 2018, and the first marijuana dispensary opened in March 2019. State law caps the manufacturing plants at two and dispensaries at eight, and both limits have been reached.

The state Department of Health was put in charge of marijuana regulation and revenue collection, and a new Division of Medical Marijuana was created, Wahl said. The department has five full-time positions; state documents show that the medical marijuana division had expenses of \$597,000 in Fiscal 2020 and collected \$743,000 in fees. Sales data for medical marijuana is confidential under state law, Wahl said, and a North Dakota taxation official said sales tax does not apply to prescription medicines, including medical marijuana.

Most of the companies that are manufacturing and selling marijuana are owned by North Dakota entities, Wahl said.

Two years after sales of medical marijuana began, North Dakota has about 5,000 patients with prescriptions, Wahl said, exceeding the state's initial projection of 4,000 cardholders by June 2021.

North Dakota began its program with a list of 13 debilitating medical conditions that could qualify a patient for a medical marijuana prescription from a certified doctor, including cancer, epilepsy, PTSD, terminal illness, seizures, muscle spasms, spinal stenosis or chronic back pain, and severe pain that does not respond to other medications. In 2019, the state expanded the list with 12 more qualifying conditions, including anxiety disorder, migraines, autism and rheumatoid arthritis. State data indicate that anxiety disorder has become the most commonly cited condition, followed by back pain or stenosis, severe pain and PTSD.

South Dakota's legislation allows patients with certain medical conditions to get a card that allows them to obtain, possess and use medicinal marijuana.

South Dakota Initiated Measure 26 defines qualifying conditions as: a chronic or debilitating disease or medical condition or its treatment that produces one or more of the following: cachexia or wasting syndrome; severe, debilitating pain; severe nausea; seizures; or severe and persistent muscle spasms, including those characteristic of multiple sclerosis; or any other medical condition or its treatment added by the department. The program also allows more conditions to be added by the Department of Health after implementation.

Wahl said North Dakota took a deliberate, thoughtful approach to creating a regulatory framework and distribution system for cannabis that has functioned well and drawn supportive comments from lawmakers and medical marijuana patients.

"From the beginning, the goal from our standpoint was to implement a well-regulated program, and I think we've accomplished that goal," he said.

MINNESOTA

Medical marijuana became legal in Minnesota in July 2015, about 14 months after the state Legislature approved the program and the governor signed it into law. The program is seen as one of the most restrictive and expensive in the nation and has allowed for relatively few prescriptions given the state's population of roughly 5.6 million.

As of March 2021, about 45,000 patients had obtained medical marijuana prescriptions in Minnesota;



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about 32,000 were considered active enrollees in the program, state data show. More than half are in the 35-65-year-old age group.

The program began with nine medical conditions that could qualify patients for a medical marijuana prescription, including cancer, glaucoma, seizures, persistent muscle spasms and terminal illness. Over the past four years, the state has added six more qualifying conditions, including intractable pain, PTSD, autism, sleep apnea, Alzheimer's and chronic pain. The state has so far rejected a request to add anxiety to the list. Through 2020, the top five conditions cited by approved patients include intractable pain, which accounts for almost 60% of all prescriptions, followed by PTSD, muscle spasms, cancer and sleep apnea.

The state charges most patients \$200 for a medical card that must be prescribed by one of about 1,850 certified practitioners across the state. Minnesota has 13 approved dispensaries spread out across the state; home cultivation of marijuana is not allowed.

MONTANA

Montana was among the first dozen or so U.S. states to vote to legalize medical marijuana when voters approved a ballot measure in 2004 (California was first in 1996), but the road to legal sales and use of medical marijuana in Montana has been bumpy since then.

In 2011, the Legislature cracked down on medical marijuana sales with a sweeping bill that made it harder to get a prescription and severely limited opportunities to purchase marijuana. A years-long court challenge ensued until 2016, when a subsequent statewide initiative eliminated the strictest limits on obtaining a prescription and marijuana products, and added chronic pain and PTSD as qualifying conditions.

The current laws allow for a prescription to be obtained by patients with one of 11 qualifying conditions, including PTSD, severe chronic pain, painful neuropathy (severe nerve pain), intractable nausea, cancer, glaucoma and epilepsy. By far, the top condition cited by patients is severe chronic pain, followed by PTSD and painful neuropathy.

As of December 2020, the state with a population of about 1 million people had about 42,000 medical pot cardholders and about 360 certified medical providers. The state has about 355 dispensaries. Patients can grow their own marijuana and legally possess a pound of usable marijuana at their residence.

About 57% of Montana voters approved a statewide ballot measure in November 2020 to legalize adult recreational use of marijuana. Licenses for growth and sale of recreational marijuana will be offered starting in October 2021, with the first legal sales of recreational marijuana set to begin in January 2022.

ABOUT BART PFANKUCH



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

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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...

1 PETER 3: 17, 18

"The Crucifixion" by Johann Gottfried Flegel (1873)

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BIBLE TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

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

2. What type of musical accompaniment is given as instructions for recitation of Psalms 4? *Flutes, Stringed instruments, Shofars, Mandrakes*

3. From Matthew 6, what did Jesus say not to use when we pray? *Loud curses, Impure thoughts, Vain repetitions, Wandering shifts*

4. 1 Chronicles starts with how many chapters of genealogy? *3, 5, 7, 9*

5. From Esther 1, King Ahasuerus lived in what city? *Ur, Shushan, Antioch, Tarsus*

6. Who was the first son of Moses and Zipporah? *Haggai, Gershom, Mark, Zebudah*

ANSWERS: 1) Old; 2) Stringed instruments; 3) Vain repetitions; 4) 9; 5) Shushan; 6) Gershom

Comments? More Trivia? Gift ideas? Visit www.TriviaGuy.com

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Ham and Scalloped Potatoes

Scalloped potatoes as they were intended to taste! Just fill your slow cooker and forget about it until dinnertime. What could be easier?

3 cups diced extra-lean ham
6 1/2 cups thinly sliced cooked potatoes
1 cup diced onion
1 1/2 cups shredded, reduced-fat Cheddar cheese
1 (10 3/4-ounce) can reduced-fat cream of celery soup
2 tablespoons fat-free half and half
1 teaspoon dried parsley flakes

1. Spray a slow-cooker container with butter-flavored cooking spray. Layer half of the ham, half of the potatoes, half the onions and half the cheese in prepared container. Repeat layers.

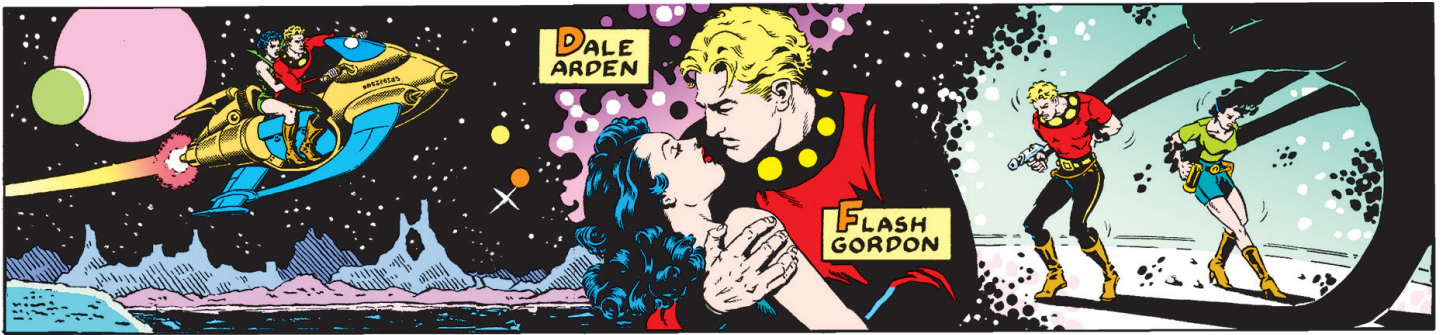
2. In a small bowl, combine celery soup, half and half, and parsley flakes. Spoon soup mixture evenly over top of potato mixture. Cover and cook on LOW for 4 hours. Mix well before serving. Makes 8 (1 cup) servings.

* Each serving equals: About 230 calories, 6g fat, 18g protein, 26g carb., 876mg sodium, 2g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 2 1/2 Meat, 1 1/2 Starch.

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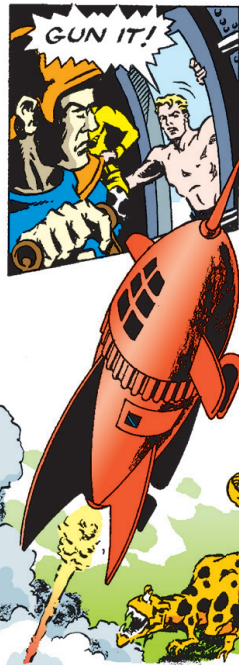
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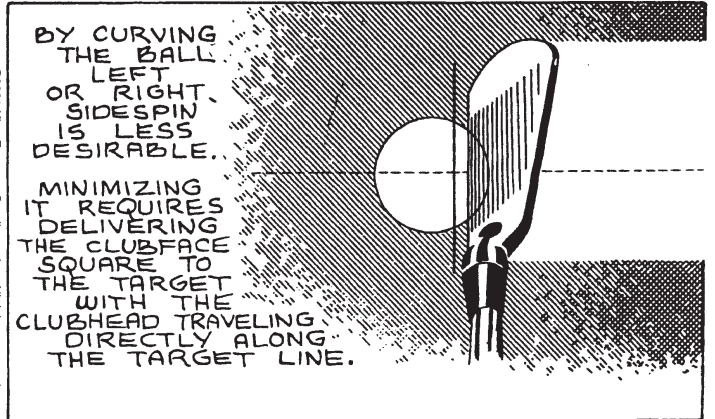
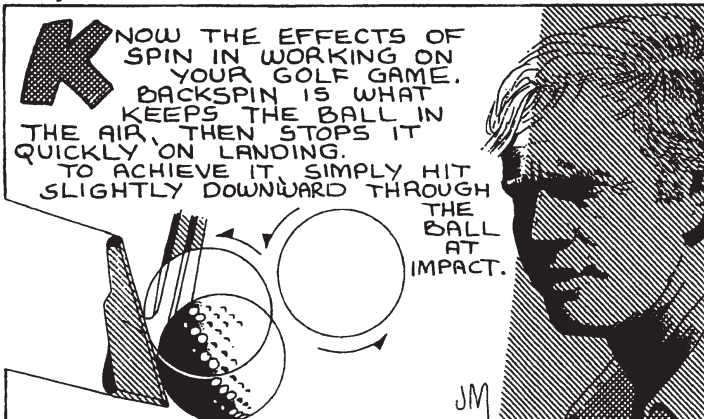
FLASH GORDON

By JIM KEEFE

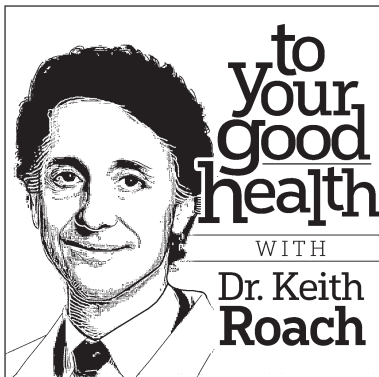
3-21



Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



Strategies to Reduce Risk of Colon Cancer



DEAR DR. ROACH: I am 70 years old. I seem to be getting more polyps (which are removed). In the past five years, I have gone from one diverticulum to extensive diverticulosis throughout my entire colon. I try to have a high-fiber diet and use psyllium in my oatmeal daily. What more can I do? Eliminate red meat entirely and go vegan? -- J.D.

ANSWER: Polyps in the colon confer a higher risk of colon cancer, and the more polyps a person has, the more frequently they should be screened, preferably with colonoscopy. There are some lifestyle changes most people can make to reduce the risk of polyps and of colon cancer.

Regular exercise and eating plenty of fruits and vegetables are clearly shown to reduce colon cancer risk. Fiber has long been thought to be protective, but the results of trials have been contradictory.

Among the many other possible protections to colon cancer, aspirin probably has the most benefit, but aspirin has other risks as well. People at high risk for colon cancer should discuss the use of aspirin with their doctors.

DEAR DR. ROACH: My husband and I are both 72 and of normal weight. I have fought high cholesterol and triglycerides for many years and have taken various statins for a long time. My triglycerides still trend high, but my other numbers are now normal.

My husband eats a ton of processed meats, all the fat he wants and drinks three to five beers per day. His lipid panel results came back today, and his total cholesterol is 167, his LDL is 90, his HDL is 71, and his triglycerides are 29! He has never been on statin drugs. His only med is lisinopril for slightly high blood pressure.

What I am concerned about is a CT scan done as part of a study we participated in. My husband's results have mentioned calcification of heart arteries over the years, and the most recent says he has "SEVERE calcification of coronary arteries." I want him to go to a cardiologist, but his family doc says that this is not a problem and as long as he keeps his blood pressure low, he can live a long time with this. He is satisfied with that answer.

I'm really anxious to hear your thoughts about him needing to see a specialist. I hope you will be able to shed some light on the calcification and the reason why it happens with such good cholesterol readings. -- D.B.

ANSWER: There are several important lessons in your story.

The most important is that a poor diet increases the risk for heart disease even in a person with normal or good cholesterol results. Of people with a heart attack, 21% had cholesterol levels that would not trigger treatment with a statin drug. I suspect, but can't be sure, that your husband has blockages in his coronary arteries; the severe calcification of the coronary arteries is an indicator that it is very likely.

I would add my recommendation to yours that your husband see a cardiologist. He has a LOT of work to do at improving his diet, he is drinking more alcohol than recommended and because of the coronary artery calcification, I suspect his new cardiologist would be strongly considering medication treatment to reduce heart disease risk.

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

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George Clooney plays a hotshot, know-it-all, stock-picking financial influencer with his own TV show in the 2016 thriller “Money Monster.” Jack O’Connell plays a viewer who storms the set, taking everyone hostage after a tip from the “Money Monster” ruined his personal finances. Scary, no? That’s the stock market for you. Big money, big risk and sometimes tragedy.

What’s got me thinking about money is the stimulus check I got last week and the wild few minutes that I felt relatively rich — before I paid my bills and made respectable purchases like the adult that I am. Here are five stock-market movies to put you on a wild, vicarious financial ride.

The Big Short — Based on a true story — during a period in time of which many of us are painfully aware — this is a funny and informative take on the central players in the 2007-2008 housing bubble collapse. Independent hedge fund managers and bank reps see the inevitable tanking of the housing market and commit to cashing in on it by betting against repayment of subprime mortgages through complicated financial instruments called CDOs. Stars Christian Bale, Steven Carrell, Brad Pitt and Ryan Gosling.

The Wolf of Wall Street — Leonardo DiCaprio at his wicked, decadent, corrupt best, stars as Jordan Belfort, a relentless and hard-partying broker who has it all, loses it all and then reclaims it again before being targeted by the feds. Jonah Hill plays Donnie Azoff, a partner in Jordan’s fraudulent brokerage that they populate with young, brash hucksters pressed hard to make the sale.

Wall Street — The quintessential stock-market flick. Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) is an ambitious young buck who idolizes the uber successful Gordon Gecko (Michael Douglas). He snags a spot as Gecko’s apprentice, but only by skirting the law and assisting in underhanded, insider trading tactics. Oftentimes, a meteoric rise comes with a mighty fall.

Boiler Room — Seth (Giovanni Ribisi) is recruited as a junior broker trainee with the promise that with a little effort and some loose morals, he can get rich quick and impress his judge father and the ladies. It happens, but he finds out the firm’s dirty little secret: They are experts at the “pump and dump,” a technique that uses pressure tactics to drive the price up on a worthless stock that will inevitably crash. Also stars Vin Diesel, Ben Affleck and Nia Long.



Paramount Pictures

Dan Ackroyd, Eddie Murphy in “Trading Places”

Trading Places — Two unconscionable stockbroker brothers, Mortimer and Randolph Duke, bet on a social experiment: Can a street-smart hustler do just as well in the high-falutin’ world of finance, and will a prosperous and privileged snob keep his feet when faced with adverse circumstances — i.e., after he’s set up for a crime he didn’t commit and loses all his advantages? It’s a prince and pauper classic comedy starring Eddie Murphy and Dan Ackroyd.

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1. Who released "A House Is Not a Home" in 1964?
2. Name the singer who released "Heaven Is a Place on Earth."
3. Sheryl Crow, Suzanne Vega, Peter Frampton, Elton John, Michael McDonald, Les Paul and R.E.M. all have what disaster in common?
4. What was Yusuf Islam's name before he changed it in 1978?
5. Name the song that includes this lyric: "Sometimes I live in the country, Sometimes I live in town, Sometimes I have a great notion to jump in the river and drown."

Answers

1. Dionne Warwick. Another version of the song, by Brook Benton, was released in a film by the same

name.

2. Belinda Carlisle, in 1987. The song received a Grammy nom for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance and topped the charts around the world.

3. They were some of many whose original audio master tapes were destroyed in a fire at Universal Studios in 2008. It's believed that up to 175,000 master tapes created by at least 700 musical artists were destroyed in the fire.

4. Cat Stevens. He's now dropped the Islam last name.

5. "Goodnight, Irene," by the Weavers in 1950. The "jump into the river and drown" line was the inspiration for Ken Kesey's 1964 novel, "Sometimes a Great Notion."

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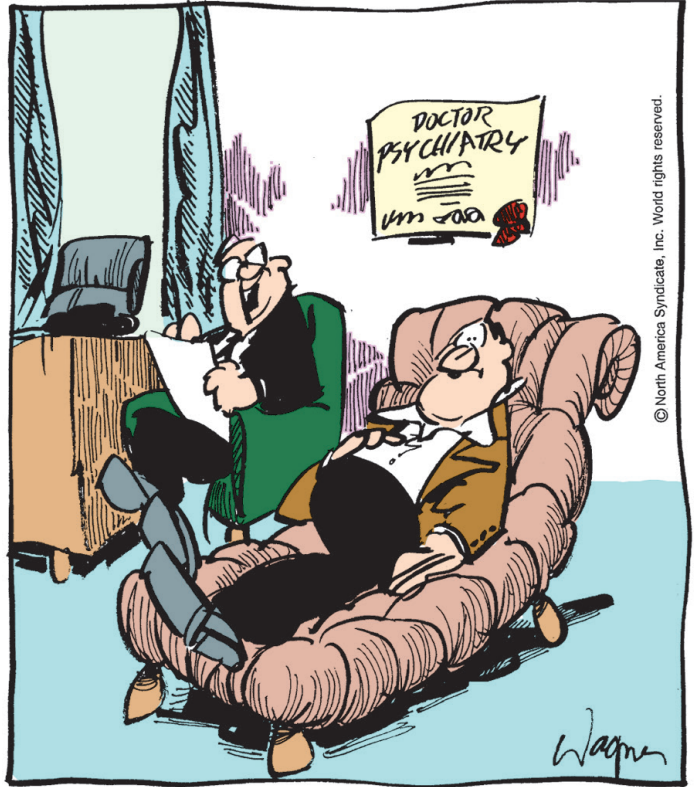
Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



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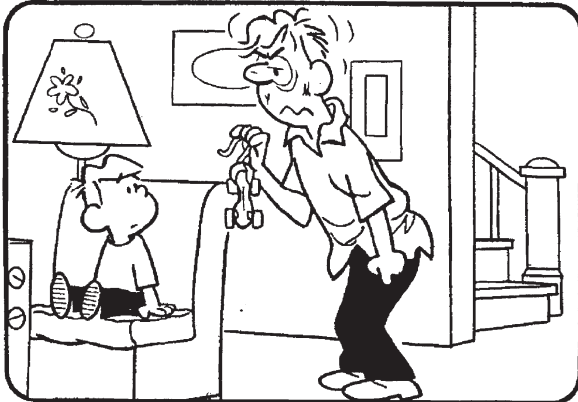
GRIN and BEAR IT ^{by Wagner}



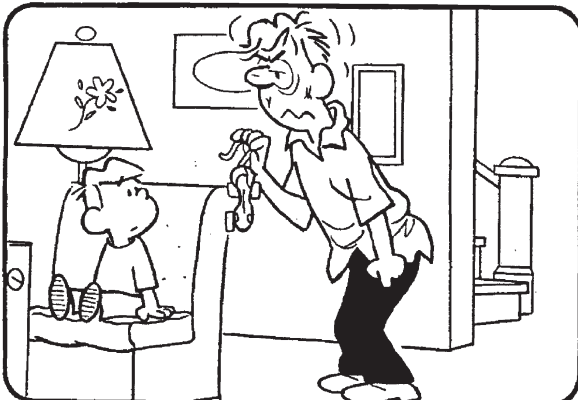
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Lamp is different. 2. TV dial is missing. 3. Stairs are moved. 4. Pants are different. 5. Skate wheel is missing. 6. Frame is thinner.

"One of your personalities has stolen the identity of one of your other personalities."



- Do you store plastic wrap in the refrigerator? Many home experts will tell you that storing plastic wrap in your fridge or freezer can help with the stickiness factor — the plastic is easier to manipulate and get into place when cold, but still stays put. Try it and see!

- Keep soap scum at bay on your glass shower doors with a layer of car wax. But do NOT let the wax get on your shower floors. That could be unsafe.

- Want delicious fried chicken crust but not the dripping oil? Baste chicken pieces with mayonnaise, then dredge in crushed cracker crumbs mixed with a bit of flour. Bake and enjoy.

- From L.D.W. in Illinois: “When I have a recipe, I put all the ingredients on the counter, and as I use each one, I put it away. My daughter and daughter-in-law like the idea, as they at one time

or another, have forgotten an item.” I like that one, too, L.D.W. A well-prepared cook makes a delicious meal.

- Laundry soap — liquids, powder and pacs — should be added to the water before clothing. This allows the soap to disperse correctly throughout the water and also can avoid “grease spotting” that sometimes occurs when detergents land on dry fabric.

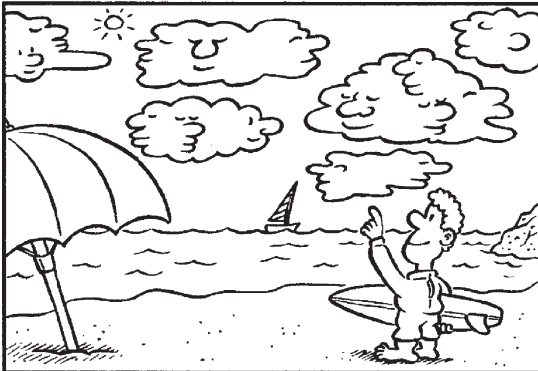
- “Many people have freezers in a garage or storage space that is not temperature or moisture controlled. To keep rust at bay, how about waxing the outside of your standing freezer periodically. Hey, it works for the car!” — *G.C. in North Carolina*

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

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HEADS IN THE CLOUDS! With a little imagination, you should be able to pick out at least 15 people who have their heads in the clouds.

Junior Whirl

by Charles Barry Townsend

1.	T						E
2.		T					E
3.			T			E	
4.				T	E		
5.			E			T	
6.		E					T
7.	E						T

FIND THE BIG WORDS

Using the definitions and anagrams below, you must find the seven eight-letter words that fit into the framework pictured on the left.

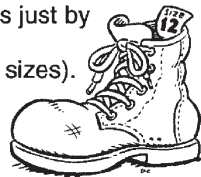
The letters in the two anagram words, for each definition, must be unscrambled and used to form the word asked for.

TIME OUT! One night, during a storm, lightning struck the Town Hall clock, sending the face of the clock to the ground, where it broke into three pieces. On examination, it was noted that the numbers on each piece added up to 26. Can you figure out how the face of the clock was broken?

Piece 1 had the numbers 11, 12, 1, 2, Piece 2 had 9, 10, 3, 4, Piece 3 had 5, 6, 7, 8.

YOUR AGE IS! Did you know that you can tell how old a person is just by knowing what their shoe size is? Here's how:

1. Have the person write down his or her shoe size (forget half sizes).
2. Tell him to multiply the size by 2.
3. Have him add 5 to the result.
4. Next, he must multiply the sum by 50.
5. Now tell him to add the "magic number" 1748 to the product.
6. Finally, tell him to subtract the year of his birth from the previous sum.



You now ask him what number he is left with. You'll find that the last two digits will be the person's age on his birthday this year. (Each year the magic number is increased by 1. This year, 1998 is 1748; next year, 1999 is 1749, etc.)

Definitions:

1. Fellow member
2. Liquids separator
3. Cashew casing
4. Appreciative
5. People mover
6. Easily broken
7. Large animal

Anagrams:

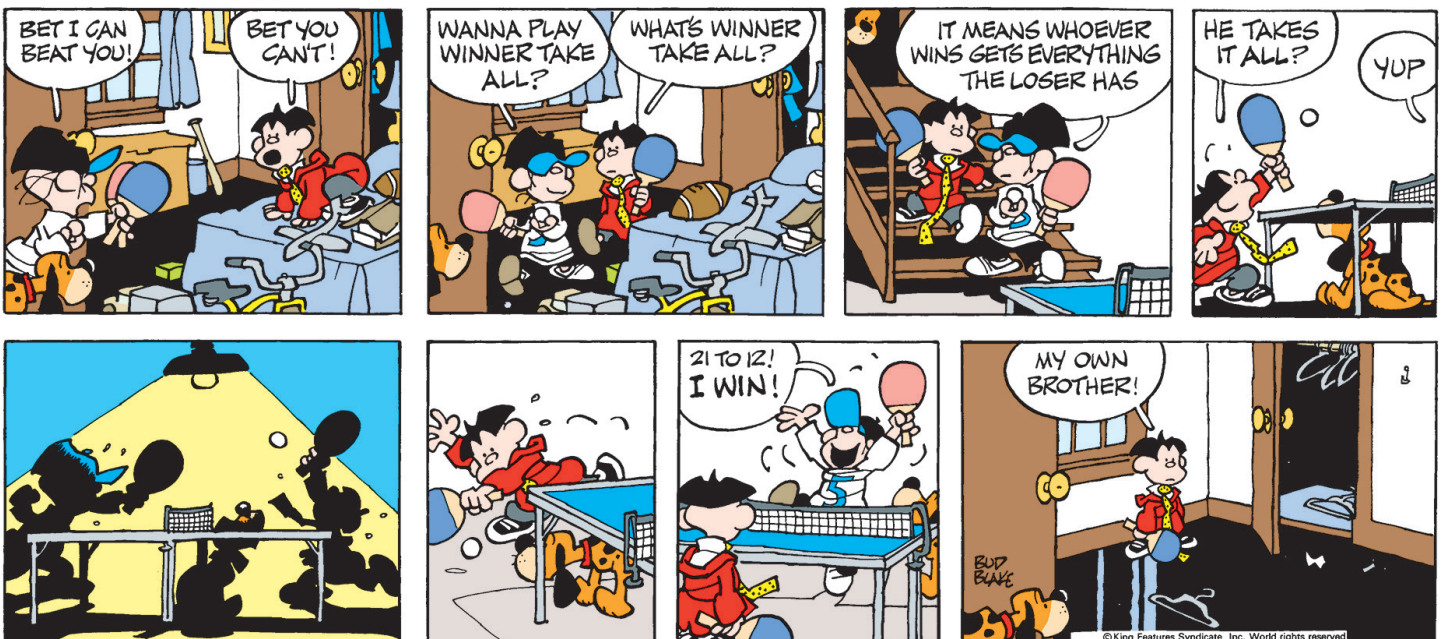
- meat + tame
nits + rare
shun + tell
gulf+ tear
rove + tale
date+ lice
neat + help

Time limit: 2 min. each.

1. Teammate, 2. Strainer,
3. Nutshell, 4. Grateful,
5. Elevator, 6. Delicate,
7. Elephant.

TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Tub session
- 5 Petrol
- 8 Microwaves
- 12 Jai —
- 13 Dadaist artist
- 14 Vicinity
- 15 Home to the
Buccaneers
- 17 Fish feature
- 18 Evening hrs.
- 19 Whirl
- 21 Jazz genre
- 24 Crossword
hint
- 25 Former mates
- 26 Turquoise-like
color
- 30 Mimic
- 31 Rib
- 32 Ltr. holder
- 33 Pentagon
VIPs

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

- 35 Broad
- 36 The Eternal
City
- 37 Golfer's wear
- 38 Calms
- 41 Actor
Holbrook
- 42 Canal zone
- 43 Dorm room
sleepers
- 48 Curved mold-
ing
- 49 Corn spike
- 50 Pakistani lan-
guage

- 51 Office plant
 - 52 Reuben bread
 - 53 Grate
- DOWN**
- 1 Cudgel
 - 2 Pie — mode
 - 3 Highland hat
 - 4 Zoo heavy-
weights
 - 5 Yaks
 - 6 Coach
Parseghian
 - 7 Small tele-
scope
 - 8 Capital of
 - 9 Operatic solo
 - 10 Hide
 - 11 Auction
 - 16 Sound booster
 - 20 Year-end cel-
ebration
 - 21 Tempo
 - 22 Big fair, for
short
 - 23 Pager sound
 - 24 Stop
 - 26 Trucker in a
union
 - 27 Floral rings
 - 28 Nullify
 - 29 Always
 - 31 Helen's home
 - 34 Impudent
 - 35 Orville's
brother
 - 37 Moving day
rental
 - 38 Starting
 - 39 Olympic sled
 - 40 Lusty look
 - 41 Employ
 - 44 Path
 - 45 Epoch
 - 46 License to
drill?
 - 47 Dine

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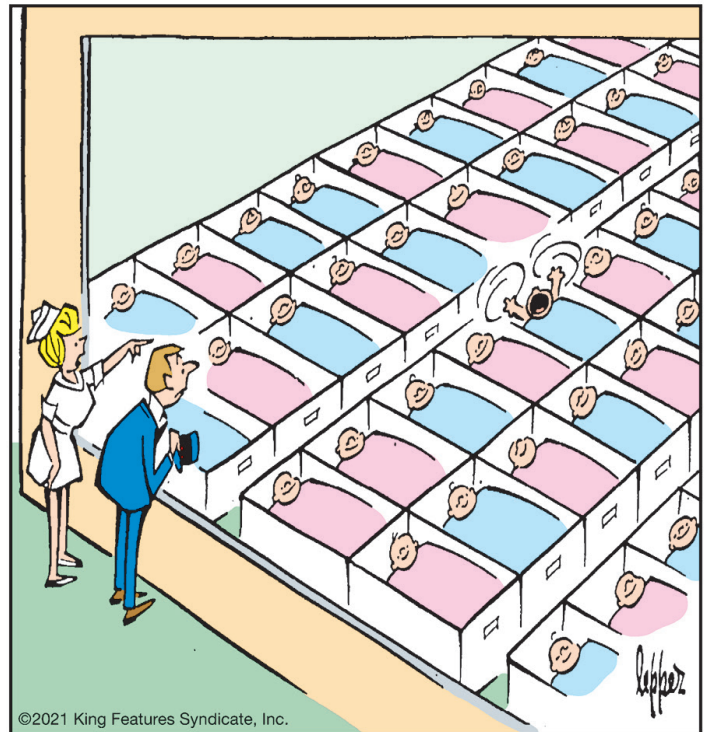
— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

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

LAFF - A - DAY



"That's yours over there—the troublemaker!"

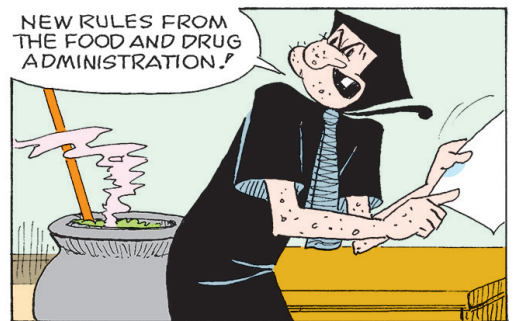
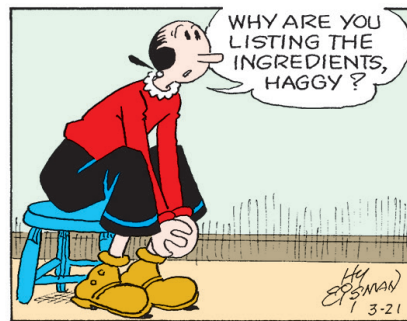
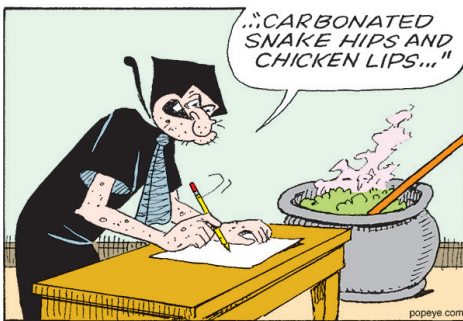
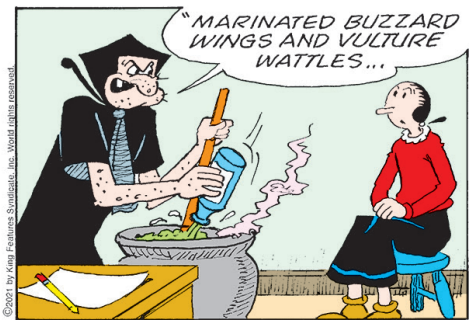
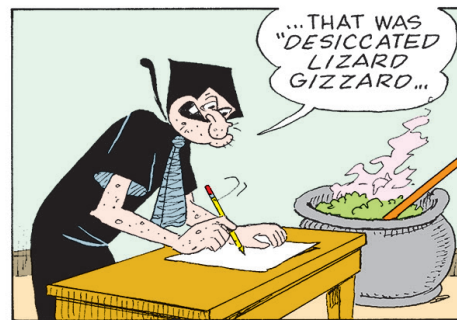
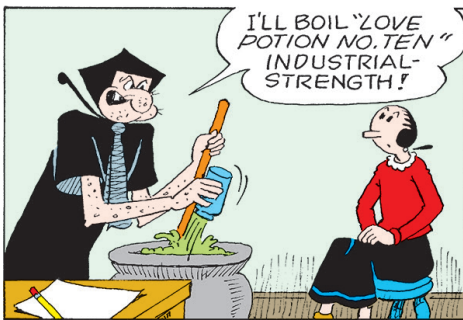
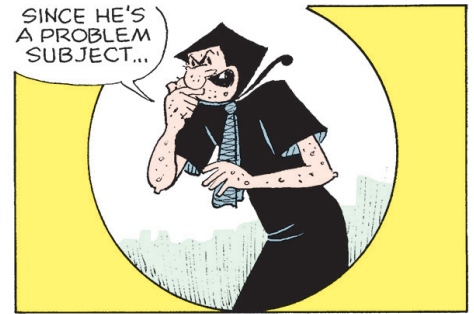
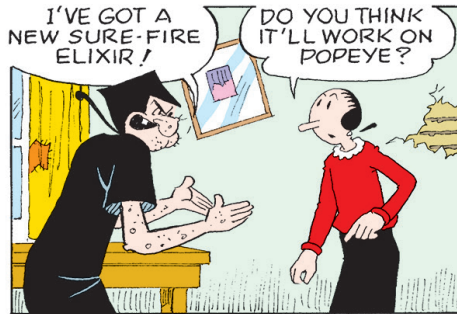
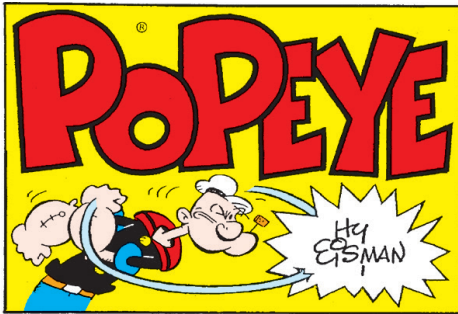
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



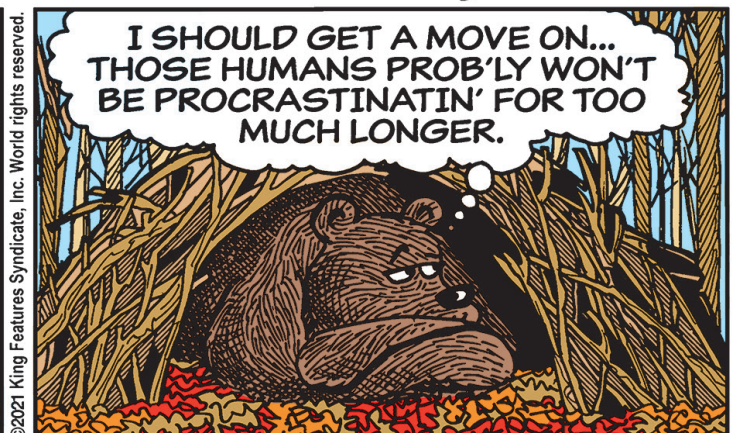
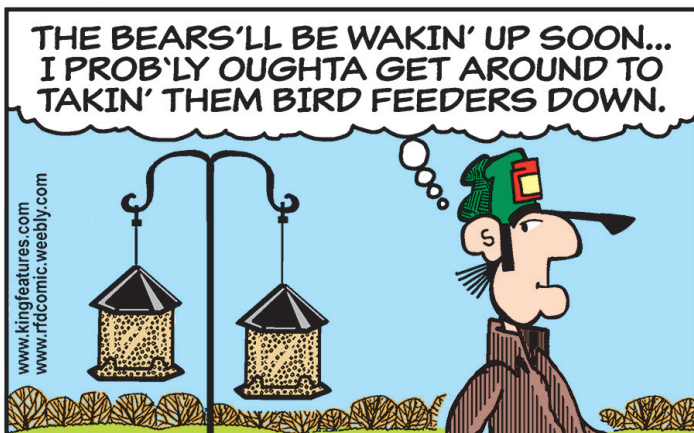
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R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



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Walt Foster's Prince Valiant
BY GIANNI AND SCHULTZ

TROLLENBERG LEADS VAL IN A PERILOUS DESCENT DOWN TO THE RIVER THAT TOOK IG AND GAWAIN.

THE RAGING WATER SEPARATES THEM FROM THE SURVIVING KIDNAPPED LADIES. TROLLENBERG CONFESSES HE IS NO SWIMMER.

AND SO IT FALLS TO VAL TO BRAVE THE TORRENT.

WITH TRAILING LINE ATTACHED, HE STEPS IN AT A SHALLOW POINT.

BUT THE SWIFT CURRENT SWEEPS HIM FORWARD...

... AND FORCES HIM UNDER! TROLLENBERG HOLDS HIS BREATH...

... UNTIL THE PRINCE REAPPEARS A WAYS DOWNSTREAM AT THE FAR BANK!

VAL WORKS QUICKLY TO SECURE THE LINE FOR HIS COMRADE'S CROSSING...

... WHEN A HIDEOUS SHAKING BEGINS.

THE RUMBLING GROWS AND THE STONES HEAVE AND FALL - EARTHQUAKE!

NEXT:
The deepest tomb

The Spats

by Jeff Pickering

I KEEP MAKING THE SAME MISTAKES OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

WHAT SHOULD I DO??

FIND SOME NEW MISTAKES.

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Stimulus Payment Merry-Go-Round

A third round of stimulus payments are on their way. But has your second one shown up yet? Next question: Did you file last year's 2019 taxes on paper instead of e-filing? If so, that might well be the reason you don't have your money yet.

The IRS got behind on processing the paper tax forms we sent a year ago. If all had gone well, those who were eligible should have received a \$600 stimulus check (the second one) by Jan. 29, 2021.

The IRS has a specific page for you to check the status of your stimulus payment, but it's only good for the third stimulus check. All information for your first and second stimulus money has been removed from their website.

Confused yet? You're not alone.

Start with www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment and scroll to Get My Payment. Click on it and fill out the information. You'll go to a page that tells you the status of the payment you're to receive now, the third pay-

ment. If it says that payment information is Not Available, it means you're not going to receive a payment the easy way (and might be why your second payment is still missing). On the Get My Payment page, click on Frequently Asked Questions to see what applies to you.

Even if you don't normally file, you'll need to file for 2020 (preferably e-file) if you want that stimulus money quickly. Look for Line 30 on the Form 1040 or 1040-SR. It's called the Recovery Rebate Credit. If you received Notice 1444 or 1444B in the mail from the IRS, it will tell you what figures to use.

If you did receive the money but your financial situation has changed and you should have received a different amount, click on Recovery Rebate Credit.

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1. Nicknamed “Mr. DeMarathon,” what Olympic bronze medalist won the Boston Marathon seven times?

2. Which NFL defensive back finished his career with more interceptions: Rod Woodson or Charles Woodson?

3. Name the three members of the Los Angeles Dodgers who shared World Series MVP honors in 1981.

4. What World Golf Hall of Famer and South Korean native won the McDonald’s LPGA Championship tournament in 1998, 2002 and 2006?

5. The annual award presented to the best female college ice hockey player in the U.S. is named after what Princeton University hockey standout?

6. Elmer Layden, NFL commissioner from 1941-46, played fullback for what college football team?

7. Jordan “Jet” Temkin, Paul “Nurk” Nurkkala and Alex Vanover are former champions in what sports league?



by Ryan A. Berenz

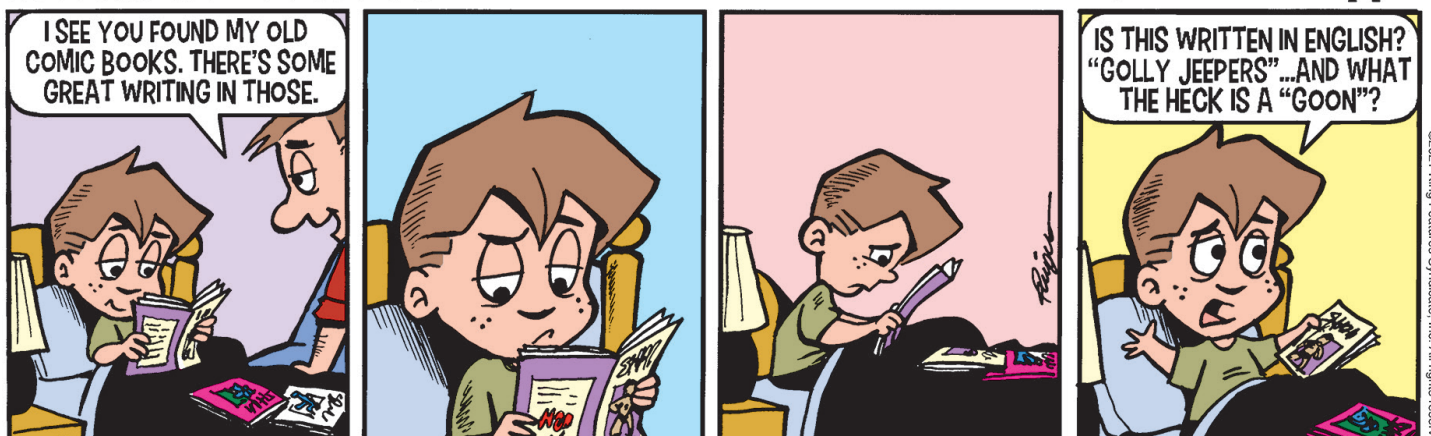
Answers

1. Clarence DeMar.
2. Rod Woodson, with 71 (Charles Woodson had 65).
3. Ron Cey, Pedro Guerrero and Steve Yeager.
4. Se-ri Pak.
5. Patty Kazmaier.
6. The Notre Dame Fighting Irish.
7. Drone Racing League (DRL).

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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Sun Exposure Nearly Does in Guinea Pigs

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I have two guinea pigs. Yesterday, I took them outside to get some sun. When I came back outside about 15 minutes later, they were both lying in their cage, completely stiff, as if they had been dead for hours. I thought they were dead. I brought them inside and was getting everything ready to bury them when one of them stirred very slowly, and then the other. Today, they are not as active, and they aren't eating and only taking a little water when I give it to them through a dropper. What happened to them? Will they be OK? — *Analia R., via email*

DEAR ANALIA: Guinea pigs, also known as cavies, cannot regulate their body temperature very well. They should never be put into direct sunlight or a hot room. Your pets suffered heat-

stroke from being out in the sun, even though it was just a few minutes. This is most often fatal. I'm very surprised that they are both alive.

They need to be treated very gently for the next several days. Contact their veterinarian (one who specializes in exotic pets), but do not bring them until the vet tells you to do so. Moving them can be very stressful. Continue gently giving them water through a dropper or syringe a few drops at a time. Place little bits of cucumber, lettuce or melon nearby; these have high water content and some nutrients.

Cavies are extremely sensitive to sudden temperature changes, loud noises or rough handling. Be gentle with them and keep them in a comfortable location, out of direct sunlight.

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

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* Johnny Cash's estate was approached by an advertising company asking for permission to use "Ring of Fire" in an ad for hemorrhoid cream. The request was refused.

* Tulips can continue to grow as much as an inch per day after being cut.

* A man with severe OCD and a phobia about germs attempted to commit suicide with a gun to his head. Instead of killing him, the bullet eliminated his mental illness without any other damage.

* Nobody knows how the Academy Awards came to be referred to as "the Oscars." The earliest mention was in 1932 and became official in 1939.

* In 1911, Elmer McCurdy robbed a passenger train he thought contained thousands of dollars, and was shot by lawmen after making off with just \$46. His unclaimed corpse was then embalmed and sold to a traveling carnival. It would be used as a prop or attraction in haunted houses and wax museums for the next 66 years (even showing up on the set of "The Six Million Dollar Man"), until he was finally buried at the famous Boot Hill cemetery in Dodge City, Kansas.

* Vanilla flavoring is sometimes made with beaver urine.

* A statue of Nikola Tesla in Silicon Valley radiates free Wi-Fi. It was created as an homage to his vision for wireless communication.

* By the time they have been retired for two years, 78% of former NFL players have gone bankrupt or are under financial stress because of joblessness or divorce.

* A company in the U.K. offers "being hungover" as a valid reason for calling in sick to work.

Thought for the Day: "The beautiful thing about life is that we will never reach an age where there is nothing left to learn, see or be; it's magical, really." -- Dulce Ruby

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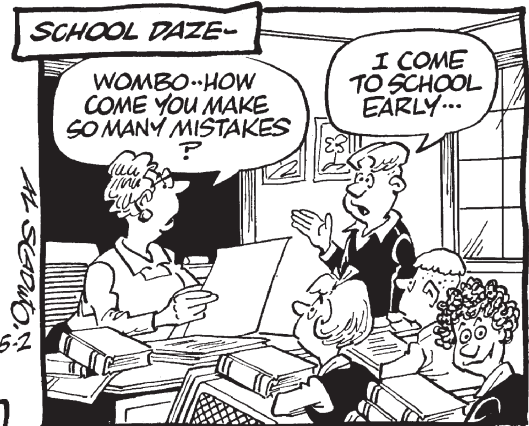
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THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

SORRY I ASKED DEPT-



BY AL SCADUTO



Thank to JOY PARTAIN, HOUSTON, TEXAS

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EVER HAPPEN TO YOU?
THE DRESS IN THE WINDOW, YOU JUST LOVE AND ARE READY TO BUY, IS SALE PRICED AT ONLY \$39... BUT...



“Christ’s Thorn” plant

The *Ziziphus spina-christi* is an evergreen tree found in the valleys and lowlands of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea along its southern coasts. Wood from this plant appears to have been in use during the times of the pharaohs, as well as parts of the plant used for medicine, and its fruits were used to make a type of bread which is still made in these lands today. Traditions say that these trees are sacred, and no harm from the spirit world will befall any who sleep beneath them.

- Brenda Weaver

Source: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

The Colonel's Legacy

"I'm astonished," Sarge said when we met outside the coffee shop back door. "All on their own they set up a schedule for bathroom cleaning, cooking dinner, doing dishes, shower times. They worked it out themselves," he said, obviously proud of the formerly homeless veterans who'd moved in upstairs. "Come look at this."

I trailed him up the narrow staircase to the attic dormitory. "Look how they keep it. Pristine."

And it was. Beds made, pillows fluffed, not a thing out of place. Since I'd been up there last, Sarge had brought in a couch, two recliners, and a 35-inch television.

"Computer and internet's next," he said. "One guy's ready to start remote college classes. I found out he was only six credits away from an accounting degree before he went homeless.

The V̄A screwed up his payments, he lost his apartment and his wife, and it was downhill from there."

I asked Sarge how he was able to pay for all this, finishing and furnishing the attic, feeding four hungry guys and only charging them \$10 a week rent. He'd gotten an inheritance years ago when his father died, he said. The money had been sitting in the bank.

Sarge went quiet for long minutes and then he said, "My father was a colonel during one of our ugly wars. Every Thursday night when I was growing up, he wasn't at dinner with us. He'd come home, jump into civvies, and dash to the VA hospital to help with ... whatever. Change bed pans, play chess, feed the ones who couldn't hold a fork, write letters home, help guys figure out how to get up off the floor while they learned how to walk on their new legs, talk to the ones who woke up screaming ... whatever. The veterans never knew he was a full bird colonel."

Sarge looked around the dormitory. "The colonel," he said with a small smile, "would be happy about this."

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



The Next Big Thing

Over the last two months, Speaker Pelosi has passed one large bill after another. From the federalization of state elections to immigration reform, we've just about seen it all.

I'm eager to move past the first 100 days of the session and hopeful we can move on to legislation that has a chance of passing in the Senate. So what's the next big thing Congress will tackle?

At the beginning of the Congress, I was newly appointed to the Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee. T&I is known for its bipartisan work – every five years this committee tackles a highway reauthorization package, and this year will be no different. Both Republicans and Democrats have started to lay the groundwork for what's to come.

Yesterday, I joined Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg in a committee hearing on the new administration's priorities for the highway bill. Secretary Buttigieg highlighted the bipartisan approach the committee has taken in the past because "every citizen, regardless of political affiliation, shares the need for reliable roads." I share that sentiment.

But actions speak louder than words. Nancy Pelosi and the Biden Administration have shown, through legislation and executive orders, that they prioritize "environmental justice" over small business owners and rural communities. I believe there is a lot of room for environmentally-sound policies in the transportation space, but Secretary Buttigieg's plan will have a price tag of \$3 trillion. Incredibly, that's ten times the price tag of the last five-year highway bill.

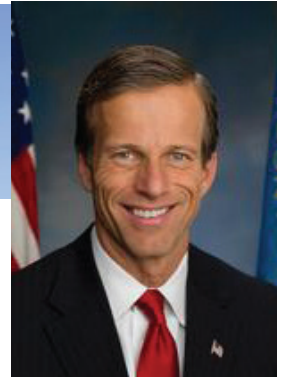
Infrastructure is popular. So it worries me that like the last COVID package, the Biden Administration is using it to advance \$2 trillion of the proposed spending is completely unrelated to roads, bridges and even broadband.

As I mentioned, the last bipartisan five-year highway reauthorization, which occurred under the Obama Administration, cost \$305 billion. While hundreds of billions is by no means small, why can't we move forward in the same, more appropriately sized manner?

I'm hopeful we can get on track and push forward a highway bill that meets the middle of the road. We need to ensure American infrastructure stays competitive and accessible, that our permitting process is fair and certain, and that rural roads receive the updates they desperately need.

President Biden promised unity and that he would work on behalf of all people, I hope he maintains that promise of bipartisanship as we begin our work on the reauthorization of the highway bill. It only happens every five years, we need to get it right.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



It's Time to Expose Big Tech Bias

This Congress, I have the privilege to serve as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband. Among many other important issues, this assignment allows me to continue my work to hold social media platforms accountable, particularly in the news and information space. Consumers have become increasingly troubled about the way their information is used by social media platforms, and how these sites decide what news and information we see. And there are increasing numbers of anecdotes to suggest that some social media platforms are moderating content in a biased or political way.

Currently, content moderation on social media platforms is governed by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which was enacted into law 25 years ago, long before the advent of social media. Section 230 provides internet sites that host user-generated content – sites like YouTube or Twitter or Facebook – with immunity for the content users post on their sites. For example, if somebody posts a video on YouTube that contains illegal content, YouTube isn't held legally responsible for that content.

Today, federal law does not require that social media sites be at all accountable to consumers for those content moderation decisions. That's why I introduced the bipartisan Platform Accountability and Consumer Transparency Act, or the PACT Act. My bill would preserve the benefits of Section 230 – like the internet growth and widespread dissemination of free speech it has enabled – while increasing accountability and consumer transparency around content moderation.

Content moderation is certainly not all bad. The problem is that content moderation has been – and largely continues to be – a black box, with consumers having little or no idea how the information they see has been shaped by the sites they're visiting.

The PACT Act would address this problem by increasing transparency around the content moderation process. Until relatively recently, sites like Facebook and Twitter would remove a user's post without explanation and without an appeals process. And even as platforms start to shape up their act with regard to transparency and due process, it's still hard for users to get good information about how content is moderated.

Under the PACT Act, if a site chooses to remove your post, it has to tell you why it made that decision, and it must explain how your post violated the site's terms of use. The PACT Act would also require sites to have an appeals process – so if Facebook, for example, removes one of your posts, it would not only have to tell you why, but it would have to provide a way for you to appeal that decision.

We've seen increased concern lately about news articles being removed from social media sites. Under the PACT Act, a newspaper whose article was posted on Facebook or Twitter and then removed by one of those platforms could challenge Facebook or Twitter, which would have to provide a reason for removing the article and allow the newspaper to appeal the decision.

My legislation would also help us develop the data necessary to demonstrate whether social media platforms are removing content in a biased or political fashion. The PACT Act requires detailed transparency reports every six months from large social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, which will help to provide the data needed to determine whether and where biased moderation exists.

My bill is a serious, bipartisan approach to the issue of Section 230 reform. It would go a long way toward making social media platforms more accountable to consumers and increasing transparency around the content moderation process.

South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Fairness in Women's Sports

Everyone knows that I am willing to fight for what I believe in. Some have even accused me of fighting too much! And one fight that I've taken on for years is fairness in women's sports. And it's a very simple fight: only girls should play girls' sports.

This is very personal for me. I've been a 15-year-old girl in a locker room. Thankfully, I never had to worry about having a boy in that locker room next to me. My daughters, Kassidy and Kennedy, both played sports in college. If my girls had been playing against men, their ability to compete would have been dramatically limited.

Kassidy is pregnant with a baby girl right now. I want that baby – my granddaughter – to have the same opportunities that I had and that my daughters had.

And it's a fight that I've taken on in the past. When the federal government tried to force boys and girls to compete against each other in 4-H rodeo, I stood up to protect fairness. Other leaders stayed out of that fight. But we won. We protected fairness in rodeo.

When we take on these important fights, we have to do so in a smart way. Throughout the COVID pandemic, I always made sure that I knew what my authorities were, and what they were not. We have to fight these important battles in smart ways, based on the authorities that we do have. We have to take actions that actually do good for the people of South Dakota, not just pick fights that feel good.

We have to do this right. If we lose, we could set back protections for our girls. And that's not what anybody wants.

We are going to continue to protect women's sports in South Dakota. We're working to protect them at the K-12 level. And we're building a coalition to take on the NCAA so that we can ensure protections at the collegiate level as well. To join that coalition, you can go to DefendTitleIXnow.com and sign our compact.

Again, the issue is very simple: only girls should play girls' sports. Let's take on this fight in a way that we can win, and let's keep working together to build a coalition to make sure that the NCAA protects fairness as well.



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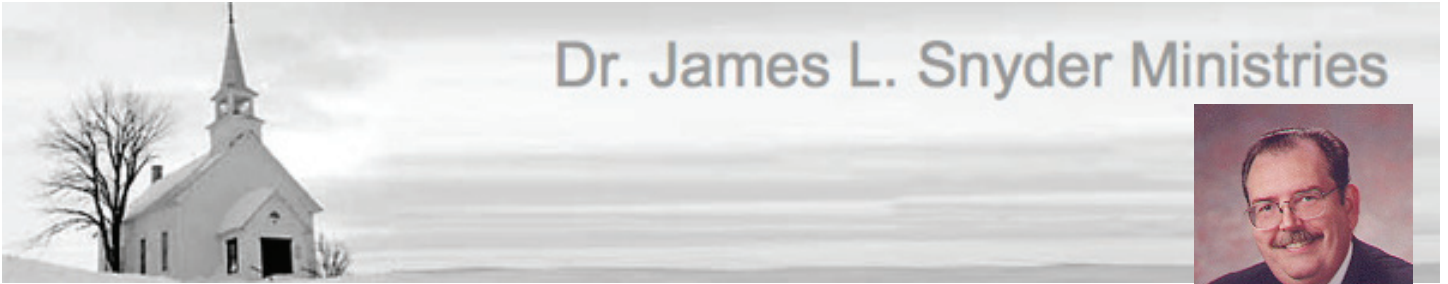
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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries



Ants, Ants, Ants, Where's the Uncles

I have learned in my life that the small things are the ones that get you down.

You would think the big things are the ones to steal most of your time. But those big things call attention to themselves from the very beginning. You know they're there, you know you have to do something about it, and so you do.

The little things in life, usually unnoticed and ignored, cause most of the problems.

Everybody has their definition of what a "small problem" really is.

A small problem for me is finding the pen I need for a particular project. I have a different pen for each project, and I don't like to mix them up. Someone in the family thinks it's crazy for me to have that kind of a problem. But everybody is crazy in some way.

Another small problem for me would be finding the right book to do some research for the day. Believe me, that small problem can become a huge problem towards the end of the day.

But then there is the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.

She never met a problem she can't fix and fix right away. No problem, in her mind, goes without being fixed right now.

Sometime this year, we will be celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary. For 50 years, I have lived with her, and I have learned some things about her.

For example, when something isn't working right, she stops whatever she is doing and fixes it, and if it can't be fixed, then it really isn't broken.

This is quite different from me. There is nothing I can fix. If it isn't broken, I can't even fix it. That's why we make an excellent team.

There is nothing I can't break and there is nothing she can't fix. What a team we make.

There is nothing too big that she cannot fix and fix right away. I've always appreciated that, and I can't imagine how much money we have saved by not hiring fix-it people to come and fix something.

The truth be known, I never noticed anything is broken until after my wife fixes it. What would our home be if she wasn't around?

But then recently I discovered something new about her.

My wife and her daughter and granddaughter spent three days doing some thrift store shopping in St. Augustine. That meant I was in charge of the house for three days. I still don't understand why she left me in charge for that long of a period, but I don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Anyway, I was in charge, and I tried to be as careful as possible, so I wouldn't get into any trouble. However, someone in the house dropped some cat food by the door as they fed the cats. I'm not at liberty to reveal that person's name.

I never encountered any problem those three days and enjoyed myself; at least, I thought I was enjoying myself.

My wife came home on a Thursday, and that night we went to bed, and early the following morning, as I was shaving, I heard a loud voice coming from the kitchen area.

"What are you doing in here?"

I almost cut myself shaving, thinking we had an intruder, and I better get out there to see what's happening.

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When I got to the kitchen my wife was at the door, looking down with some can of spray in her hand, yelling, "Get out of here and never come back."

I did not know what she was talking about or who she was talking to. As I got closer, I looked down at the floor, and much to my surprise, there was a whole colony of ants that had invaded her kitchen. I have never seen so many ants in all my life.

I was afraid to ask what I could do because she probably would've told me.

I try supporting her for the next hour as she was getting those ants out of her kitchen. Most of them did not survive. When she was done, I thought that would be over, and we could get on with our life. After all, an ant is a tiny thing and, to my mind, easily disposed.

By afternoon, I had forgotten all about that morning incident.

We went to bed that night, as usual, thinking everything was okay.

The following morning as I was in the bathroom shaving, I again heard her screaming, "You're not back again, are you?"

I had forgotten about yesterday, so I ran out to the kitchen to see what was going on in the world.

There at the door, my wife was looking down and yelling and spraying something, and I noticed it was the ants again.

"I told you not to come back again!"

They were back again, and for the next few days, they returned every morning. Eventually, my wife had her way, and the ants disappeared. I have no idea where they went, but I'm hoping they don't come back again, or they will be in real trouble.

During the day, I happened to think of the Bible verse that said, "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer" (Proverbs 30:25).

Ants are so little, and yet they can create such a big problem if not taken care of. Where are the uncles?

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From the Editors of E - The Environmental Magazine



Dear EarthTalk: Besides generating seasonal allergens, do any plants actually reduce air quality or cause air pollution?

-- Mike T., San Juan, PR

While many of us thought Ronald Reagan sounded crazy back in 1981 when he told America that "trees cause more pollution than automobiles do," the then-President may have been on to something.

Researchers from the University of California at Berkeley recently unveiled the results of a study in which they determined that certain trees and plants common in Southern California off-gas natural yet nevertheless harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs)—to attract pollinators, protect against environmental stressors, and repel herbivores—especially during the hottest months of the year. This so-called particulate matter pollution is not only dangerous in and of itself to breathe in as the tiny molecules can get lodged in the lungs, but it also leads to the formation of ground-level ozone and smog.

While Reagan's comment may have been an utter falsehood back then, who knew it would take the electrification of the transport sector to make it actually ring true today? The only way researchers could have any way of knowing that these plants are a significant contributor to air pollution would be by the elimination of the vast majority of fossil-fuel-derived "background noise" that we are no longer subject to as we breathe in the air around the streets of California—where the nation's strictest automotive fuel efficiency standards have driven many to Teslas, Bolts, Volts, Leafs, Polestars, e-Trons, Priuses and other green rides—and elsewhere.

The researchers found that over the past two decades, concentrations of these VOCs fell by 50 percent between 1999 and 2012, and then to undetectable levels during the cooler months thereafter. But when the mercury rose, even without additional automotive emissions, so did concentrations of airborne VOCs. Four out of five excessive heat days (with air temps topping 100°) led to unsafe VOC levels outside.

With transportation emissions off the hook as the culprit, researchers looked to the plant community for answers. One of the worst offenders is the iconic and ubiquitous fan palm, but sycamores, poplars, willows and many oaks and pines also off-gas their fair share of VOCs when the weather heats up — which will be happening more frequently as we warm the atmosphere with greenhouse gases. Backyard planners and landscape designers concerned about air quality and the environment might want to steer clear of these species when choosing plants.

"I am not suggesting that we get rid of plants, but I want people who are thinking about large-scale planting to pick the right trees," says Ronald Cohen, the Berkeley atmospheric chemist who led the research effort. "They should pick low-emitting trees instead of high-emitting trees." If you have the luxury of choosing which trees to plant and/or replace, and you care about your community's air quality, some good choices include alders, magnolias, manzanitas, birches, hazelnuts, ginkgos, apples and elms.

Palms are among several tree species that off-gas natural but potentially harmful air pollution when the weather heats up. Credit: Pixabay.

EarthTalk® is produced by Roddy Scheer & Doug Moss for the 501(c)3 nonprofit EarthTalk. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org.

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#398 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're in some trouble. It doesn't appear to be uniform across the country, but that means it's much worse where it's bad. The overall picture is that we're up to 30,240,300 total cases so far in the pandemic in the US, which is 0.2% more than yesterday. There were 62,000 new cases reported today. That brings our seven-day new-case average higher; it's been increasing for just a week now: On March 20, we were at 54,314, not exactly a minute number; but we're now up in a week by 12 percent to 61,773. This is so seriously not a good direction. Hospitalizations are slightly down to 40,325. We reported 775 new deaths today, bringing us to 548,364, which is 0.1% more than yesterday.

Here's what I'm seeing—and I'll apologize to those following my daily reporting on NRP's Covid-19 heat map for repeating some things: We have a Northeast stuck in unchecked transmission. New York, Rhode Island, and New Jersey haven't been below 25 daily new cases/100,000 residents for four months, and they're looking worse today than they did last week. We'll add to that "unchecked transmission" group Michigan, a recent entrant which has just blown up in the past week; Massachusetts; New Hampshire, also a recent arrival; Connecticut; and Delaware. New Hampshire and Delaware are on the line, so they might drop out of this category in upcoming days, but their direction has not been good lately, so I'm not counting on it. And Vermont is poised to join them, with Minnesota and Florida (at 23/100,000) not far behind. I just really do not like the way this is shaping up. I think—although I do not yet know—that the variants might have caught up to our vaccination program. If so, then we're going to have that short, but ugly, surge I've been nattering on about, and more folks will die than would otherwise have done. We just cannot seem to get this right, even after a year of suffering.

March 27, 2020, one year ago today, was the day the US went over 100,000 cases to 101,819. New York City alone had a quarter of those. The states of New York and New Jersey accounted for over half of these cases; no one else was close to their numbers. Cases were also coming up in Michigan and Louisiana. Prisons and jails were hotbeds of infection; some states were doing early releases of non-violent offenders to ease crowding. There had been 1619 deaths in the US, mostly in New York; we set a record for daily deaths at 253. The FDA had authorized a couple of point-of-care rapid tests; but testing capacity was still far less than adequate. The TSA screened eight percent of its usual number of air travelers on this day; at the beginning of the month, it was slightly above last year.

This was the first day I'd heard the suggestion—from The Federalist—that we should be having "Covid parties," like the old-timey chickenpox parties where parents got their children together with an infected kid in the hopes of everyone catching it so they could "get it over with." They gave this the sciencey-sounding name, controlled voluntary infection, or CVI—because if you have an initialism for it, it sounds somewhat less insane, I guess, and were shooting for herd immunity, that situation where you have enough people immune that a virus will stop transmitting in the population. The kink in the CVI works, of course, is that chickenpox is generally a mild infection and has a mortality rate something like 0.0014 percent—never heard of a kid ending up on a ventilator with chicken pox, whereas Covid-19 has at least a 0.2-0.4 mortality rate and can land you in ICU. If you add to that the number of people we'd need to have "volunteer" for CVI, after you take out the over-55s and people with chronic diseases, you'd need pretty much everyone else to step up. And you'd need a whole lot more ICU beds and coffins. I wrote, "Stupid, stupid, stupid." Because I was already short of patience back then.

The controversy began on this day over whether transmission of this virus is airborne or not. There had been a paper published showing the virus could linger in aerosols (tiny, very light particles) for up to three hours, but the WHO declared the experiment on which it was based to be too unrelated to real-world situations, so concluded it didn't offer evidence of airborne transmission. They and the CDC remained focused on droplets (larger airborne bits of moisture) and fomite transmission (via objects and surfaces) for a long while yet. The debate went on for months; amidst mounting evidence and increasing pressure from scientists, it wasn't until October that the CDC finally caved and acknowledged the (blindingly) obvious; the WHO came along later yet. Some things shouldn't be this difficult.

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Worldwide, we were over 540,000 cases, an increase of about 50,000 in 24 hours, and more than 24,000 deaths, 2000 more than the prior day. Italy was up to 86,498 cases with 9134 deaths; there were 969 deaths in the last 24 hours. Fifty-one Italian doctors had died from this infection. There were 64,059 cases and 4858 deaths in Spain. Iran had 32,332 cases and 2378 deaths.

I have more from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation report from yesterday: "The majority of states in the northern half of the country now have increasing transmission, with the most pronounced increases in Michigan. The increases are likely related to the combination of the spread of the B.1.1.7 variant and recent increases in mobility." This translates to real concern. I've been hollering for at least a couple of weeks about the threat posed by new variants in this country, particularly B.1.1.7, the one first seen in the UK which is at least twice as transmissible and probably more lethal as well as the D614G variant which currently (but not for long) predominates in the US. "Increases in mobility" refers to the fact that, as states relax restrictions, folks are running thither and yon without a care in the world. I've been hollering about that too—pretty much since the pandemic hit us. We refuse to learn from the past, so we're going to have a mini-repeat of it—at least, I most sincerely hope it is mini, not bigger than that. I had so hoped we might outrun these variants, but it's looking more and more as though at least some parts of the country will fail at that. There's more dying to come.

There's been a significant outbreak at a child care center in Nebraska with over 100 cases associated so far. According to a Douglas County Health Department news release yesterday, there were cases of B.1.1.7 in the outbreak, and Health Director Dr. Adi Pour said, "It is crucial that childcare providers get vaccinated." It is a problem in outbreaks like these that a large share of cases in children are asymptomatic, so you it is most difficult to nail down sources of transmission.

I generally focus on US Covid-19 news simply because I don't have the bandwidth to keep up with the rest of the world, but there's no way to ignore the horror playing out in Brazil. Keep in mind as you look at these numbers that Brazil's population is about two-thirds ours; an equivalent outbreak here would have these numbers 50 percent higher. Fostered by an inept, incompetent, ignorant, and denialist approach from their President, the country is in Covid hell. Their new-case numbers are where we were at our worst over the winter: 3650 new cases yesterday makes it the second time they've recorded over 3000 deaths in 24 hours. They've lost 307,112 people to the virus. Their total number of infections is 12,404,414 with 82,245 reported just yesterday. That looks like an enormous death rate proportionate to the number of reported cases, so either they're failing to identify a whole lot of cases, which is running their case fatality rate (number of deaths per diagnosed cases) artificially high, or their infection fatality rate (number of deaths per total cases) is sky-high, perhaps due to an overwhelmed and sinking health care system. Hospitals are in crisis, and ICU beds are pretty much filled up across the country. They're running out of supplies, even oxygen and necessary medications. Patients are dying lying on floors because there are no beds for them.

Vaccines have barely begun to roll out due to a lack of federal attention to either securing a supply of vaccines or to organizing a vaccination effort; only around two percent of the population is vaccinated in a country which has been a model for vaccination in the past. The P.1. variant, which is dominant there undoubtedly plays some sort of role in all of this; but so does the refusal of their national government to coordinate any kind of consistent messaging or response and its interference with attempts by states and cities to implement mitigation measures. Either way this looks so much like where we've been, it's simply agonizing to watch. Miguel Nicolelis, professor of Neurobiology at Duke University, who's been working with some of the governors and mayors, said he expects total deaths to reach a half-million this summer and to top the US's losses by year's end. I'll note an aside that Europe's looking pretty scary these days as well. Doesn't make me feel any better about our own troubles, and it ignites further concern about mutation rates. All this unchecked transmission across the world—including right here at home—is a very, very bad thing.

I saw a succinct summary of just what would happen if or when the folks monitoring new variants decide we need our vaccines modified. The first thing we should realize is that modifying an existing vaccine is a whole lot easier and faster matter than coming up with one in the first place—and that's good news

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considering how fast we came up with the first ones. Remember that Moderna's scientists designed and produced a vaccine over a weekend last January immediately after a Chinese scientist shared the virus's genome with the world. They had samples in the hands of the NIH on Monday.

The mRNA vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech) will be the fastest to modify. For these, it's a simple matter of modifying the genetic code in the formula to reflect whatever mutations the new variants are presenting. If you can design the whole thing over a weekend, maybe you can modify it on your lunch hour, huh? (I doubt it would really happen quite that fast, but still.) Then it's a matter of running up a few batches of vaccine to test and getting approval to do that. The Janssen/Johnson & Johnson and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines would take a little longer because once they'd switched out the old genetic code for the new one (DNA this time, but not more technically difficult than for RNA), they would then have to insert the new gene into adenoviruses and grow them.

Clinical trials for this sort of thing are typically much abbreviated and much smaller scale. The FDA has already said they expect what we'd have is a few hundred volunteers injected with the modified vaccine and then tested for a sufficient antibody response to this new material. Something similar (although the actual vaccine platform is different) is what happens every year when influenza vaccine is updated for new strains; so regulators are well-versed in how to manage this sort of authorization.

As to how often we're going to need to update vaccines, that's anyone's guess. This is not a rapidly-mutating virus like influenza virus, so it seems likely, supposing we ever get a handle on transmission, genetic variation's going to slow down too. I don't believe anyone thinks we're going to have to modify as often as we do for influenza; but if we just let this keep roaring across the world without far more serious efforts at containment everywhere, we could have a very different picture. I guess we'll see as time goes on.

The Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City would be just the place to receive your vaccination: They serve up concerts with their shots in the same space that was utilized a year ago as a field hospital, transforming the space from a place of desperation into a place of hope. They're offering two-hour concerts each day at the Javits Center in an effort to serve the people being vaccinated and also the musicians, many of whom haven't worked in a year. The concerts resulted from a cooperative effort between a nonprofit Sing for Hope, an organization, according to its website, that uses a variety of creative programs to "bring hope, healing, and connection" to people in various spaces worldwide, and nonprofit Music and Medicine, which according to its website, seeks to provide work to artists "while providing healing, restoration, and the joys of music" to many venues during the pandemic.

On one recent day, there was a string quartet and a piano playing Vivaldi and Mozart; other days, there are other artists playing different music. Importantly, all of them are being paid: For artists who've been forced in some cases to sell some of their most prized instruments—the very items they need to make a living—in order to pay the bills, the work is a gift; so is the opportunity to practice their art. Pianist Barbara Podgurski told the AP, "There were three months when I didn't play the piano because I felt hopeless. The reaction . . . I haven't heard in a year. You realize how much people need music in their lives, to feel beauty and magic, It gives them hope." Feels right to me to put the ugliness we're all still living through to rest with beauty. Perhaps soon there will be concerts again. Let's do our part to make that happen.

Be well. Get vaccinated. I'll be back.

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- **Critical dates** for Medicare eligibility
- **Options** that can help keep more money in your pocket
- **Medicare benefits** many retirees may not be aware of

Information will be provided by Physicians Life Insurance Company

We are not connected with, nor endorsed by, the U.S. Government or the Federal Medicare Program. I understand I have no obligation. This is a solicitation of insurance. A licensed agent/producer may contact you. Policy form number L030, L035, L036, L037, L038, F001, F002 (OK: L0300K, L0350K, L0360K, L0370K, L0380K; TN: L030TN, L035TN, L036TN, L037TN, L038TN, F001TN, F002TN)

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
▲						
Aurora	457	437	895	15	Minimal	6.3%
Beadle	2857	2772	6116	40	Substantial	6.9%
Bennett	386	372	1200	9	Minimal	0.0%
Bon Homme	1514	1479	2149	26	Minimal	3.3%
Brookings	3785	3626	12515	37	Substantial	2.9%
Brown	5276	5119	13165	91	Moderate	6.4%
Brule	700	688	1919	9	Minimal	13.3%
Buffalo	423	409	907	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	1006	979	3313	20	Moderate	6.7%
Campbell	131	127	268	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1342	1271	4067	21	Substantial	8.6%
Clark	410	375	970	5	Substantial	34.5%
Clay	1857	1806	5611	15	Substantial	5.6%
Codington	4190	4000	9985	80	Substantial	14.5%
Corson	475	460	1020	12	Minimal	9.5%
Custer	779	757	2794	12	Moderate	10.9%
Davison	3085	2934	6803	66	Substantial	11.6%
Day	679	640	1847	29	Moderate	3.0%
Deuel	490	472	1170	8	Moderate	22.7%
Dewey	1435	1408	3913	26	Moderate	0.0%
Douglas	443	428	945	9	Minimal	8.3%
Edmunds	490	472	1095	13	Minimal	5.3%
Fall River	564	538	2722	15	Moderate	2.8%
Faulk	363	349	709	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	1007	942	2330	42	Moderate	9.4%
Gregory	570	523	1335	30	Moderate	8.8%
Haakon	260	248	559	10	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	742	691	1858	38	Moderate	18.5%
Hand	354	339	861	6	Moderate	4.0%
Hanson	376	368	753	4	Moderate	6.3%
Harding	92	91	188	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2357	2296	6788	37	Moderate	4.7%
Hutchinson	823	770	2459	26	Moderate	1.9%

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Hyde	138	136	429	1	Minimal	10.0%
Jackson	284	269	926	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	275	256	574	16	None	0.0%
Jones	91	89	234	0	Minimal	28.6%
Kingsbury	718	643	1729	14	Substantial	20.8%
Lake	1287	1212	3531	18	Substantial	15.1%
Lawrence	2886	2818	8721	45	Moderate	1.5%
Lincoln	8165	7881	21013	77	Substantial	13.6%
Lyman	624	598	1922	10	Moderate	4.5%
Marshall	364	344	1254	6	Substantial	7.2%
McCook	780	736	1720	24	Substantial	11.5%
McPherson	240	235	574	4	None	0.0%
Meade	2685	2626	7956	31	Moderate	6.2%
Mellette	255	253	752	2	None	0.0%
Miner	286	269	601	9	Moderate	6.3%
Minnehaha	29491	28345	81197	342	Substantial	11.6%
Moody	623	602	1809	17	Minimal	1.7%
Oglala Lakota	2082	2018	6738	49	Moderate	4.0%
Pennington	13226	12881	40586	191	Moderate	7.5%
Perkins	351	334	840	14	Minimal	10.5%
Potter	387	380	867	4	Moderate	3.4%
Roberts	1305	1226	4282	37	Substantial	18.1%
Sanborn	337	330	711	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	821	785	2197	26	Moderate	8.7%
Stanley	339	336	967	2	Minimal	8.7%
Sully	136	133	329	3	None	0.0%
Todd	1220	1189	4205	29	Minimal	8.3%
Tripp	733	702	1526	17	Moderate	17.1%
Turner	1127	1039	2822	53	Substantial	13.5%
Union	2115	2002	6553	41	Substantial	15.0%
Walworth	750	717	1864	15	Moderate	15.1%
Yankton	2904	2809	9640	28	Substantial	9.5%
Ziebach	338	326	883	9	Minimal	0.0%
Unassigned	0	0	1919	0		

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South Dakota



RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
White, Non-Hispanic	87663	75%
Native American, Non-Hispanic	13736	12%
Unknown, Non-Hispanic	5516	5%
Hispanic	4249	4%
Black, Non-Hispanic	2617	2%
Other, Non-Hispanic	1693	1%
Asian, Non-Hispanic	1511	1%

COVID-19 Variant	# of Cases
B.1.1.7	14
B.1.429	5
B.1.351	1
B.1.427	0
P.1	0

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	60876	909
Male	56205	1024

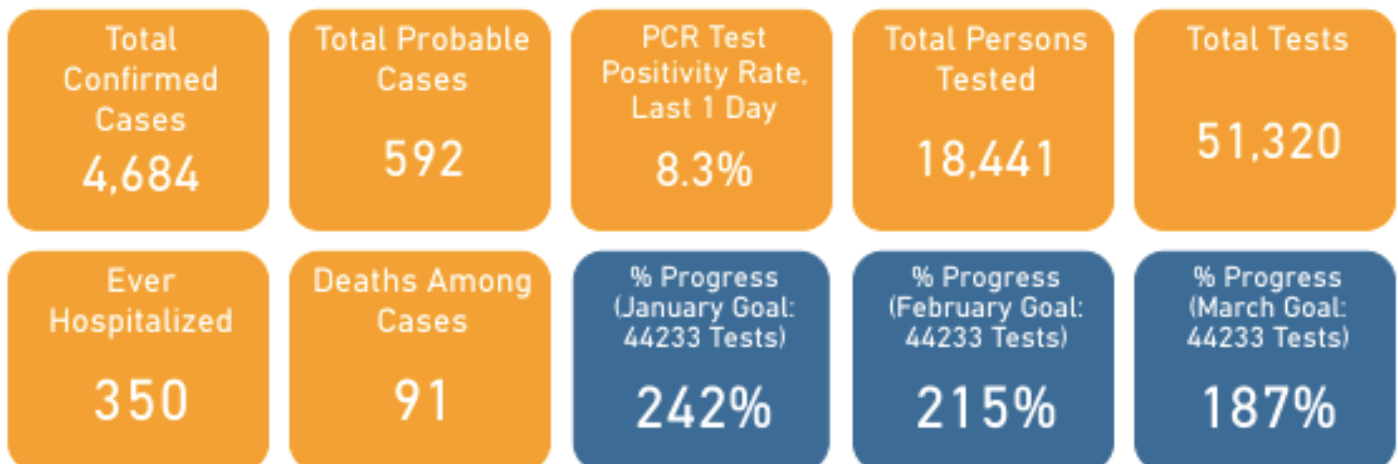
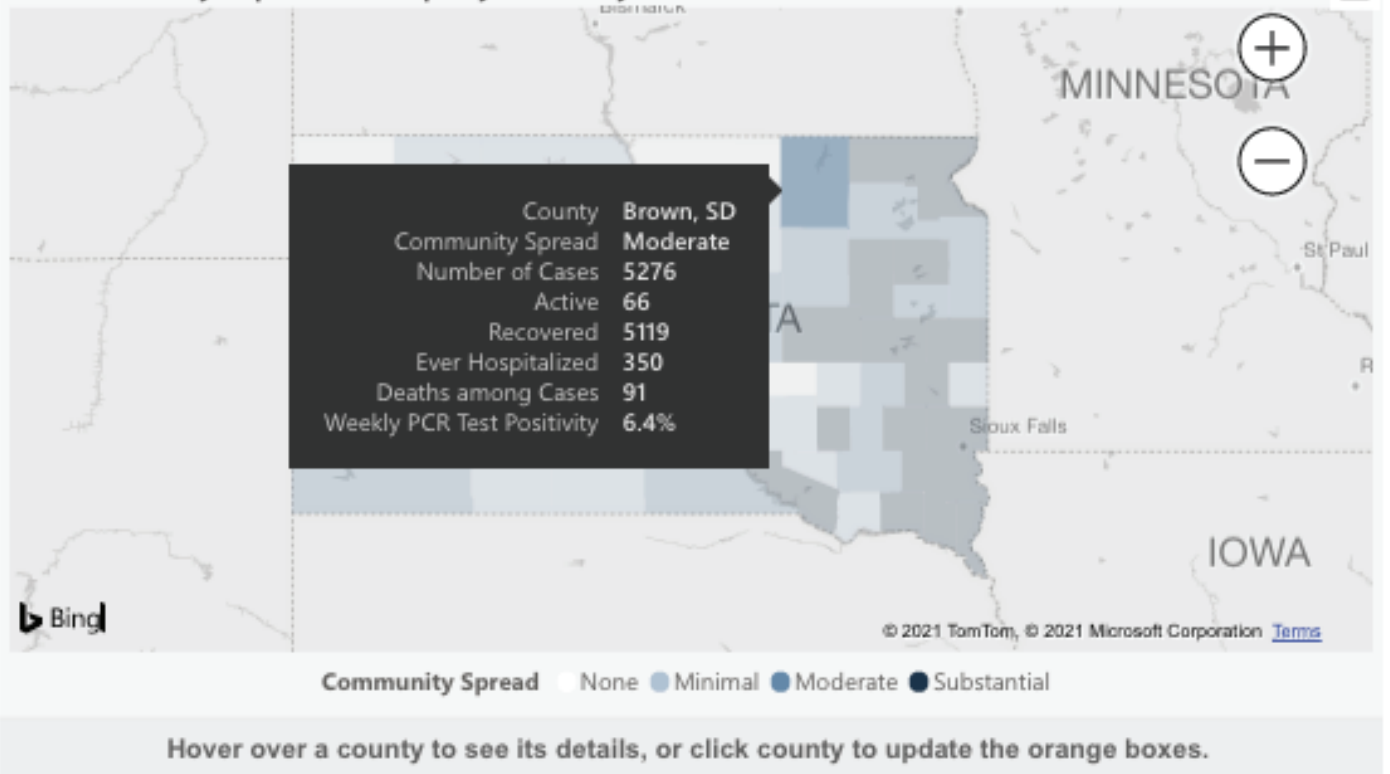
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



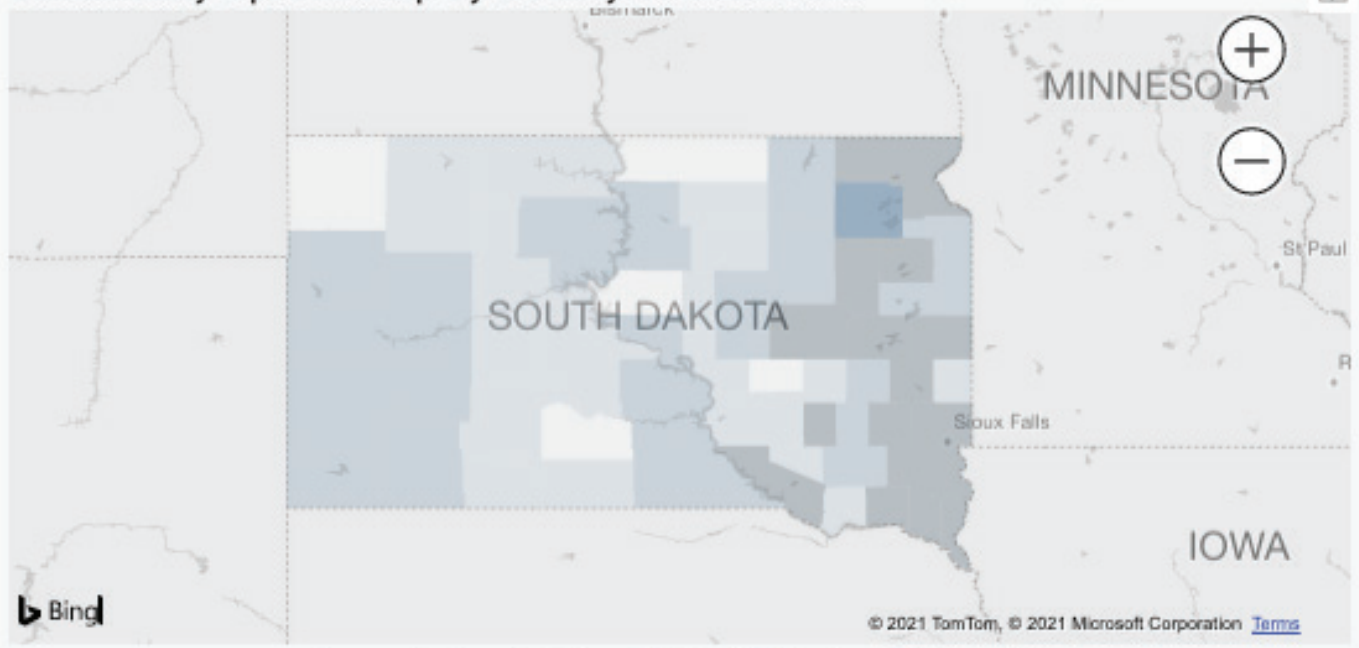
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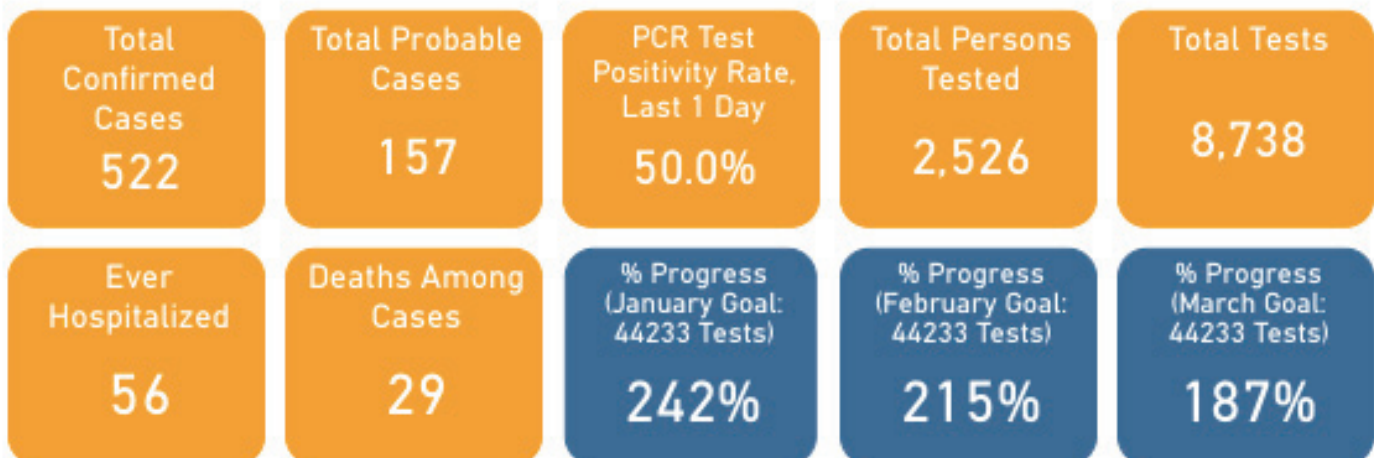
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

392,186

State Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	7,244
Moderna	187,057
Pfizer	197,885

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

242,294

State Allocation

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	7,244
Moderna - 1 dose	45,537
Moderna - Series Complete	70,760
Pfizer - 1 dose	39,644
Pfizer - Series Complete	79,120

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

41%

State & Federal Allocation

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	41.12%
Series Complete	26.88%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,173	423	375	798
Beadle	8,467	2,484	2,991	5,475
Bennett*	563	143	210	353
Bon Homme*	4,346	836	1,755	2,591
Brookings	12,878	3,820	4,529	8,349
Brown	18,333	4,497	6,918	11,415
Brule*	2,150	484	833	1,317
Buffalo*	144	84	30	114
Butte	2,800	894	953	1,847
Campbell	1,244	182	531	713
Charles Mix*	3,809	1,165	1,322	2,487
Clark	1,608	496	556	1,052
Clay	6,575	2,135	2,220	4,355
Codington*	12,572	3,646	4,463	8,109
Corson*	336	74	131	205
Custer*	3,537	777	1,380	2,157
Davison	9,394	2,720	3,337	6,057
Day*	3,172	798	1,187	1,985
Deuel	1,894	558	668	1,226
Dewey*	425	59	183	242
Douglas*	1,456	426	515	941
Edmunds	1,729	393	668	1,061
Fall River*	3,163	645	1,259	1,904
Faulk	1,330	350	490	840
Grant*	3,666	714	1,476	2,190
Gregory*	2,128	548	790	1,338
Haakon*	638	116	261	377

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Hamlin	2,202	622	790	1,412
Hand	1,789	561	614	1,175
Hanson	628	198	215	413
Harding	138	46	46	92
Hughes*	9,902	2,467	3,717	6,184
Hutchinson*	4,246	1,139	1,553	2,692
Hyde*	645	151	247	398
Jackson*	477	107	185	292
Jerauld	1,115	315	400	715
Jones*	756	140	308	448
Kingsbury	3,068	958	1,055	2,013
Lake	5,630	1,948	1,841	3,789
Lawrence	10,552	3,266	3,643	6,909
Lincoln	31,320	5,986	12,666	18,652
Lyman*	953	263	345	608
Marshall*	2,236	736	750	1,486
McCook	2,827	649	1,089	1,738
McPherson	299	69	115	184
Meade*	7,851	1,765	3,043	4,808
Mellette*	57	9	24	33
Miner	1,118	286	416	702
Minnehaha*	99,499	20,056	39,718	59,774
Moody*	2,249	719	765	1,484
Oglala Lakota*	207	51	78	129
Pennington*	45,458	8,858	18,300	27,158
Perkins*	771	259	256	515
Potter	1,183	345	419	764
Roberts*	5,117	1,053	2,032	3,085
Sanborn	1,264	366	449	815
Spink	3,614	788	1,413	2,201
Stanley*	1,489	339	575	914
Sully	490	130	180	310
Todd*	203	45	79	124
Tripp*	2,440	404	1,018	1,422
Turner	4,260	984	1,638	2,622
Union	4,150	1,492	1,329	2,821
Walworth*	2,335	391	972	1,363
Yankton	12,445	2,689	4,878	7,567
Ziebach*	64	14	25	39
Other	7,609	2,283	2,663	4,946

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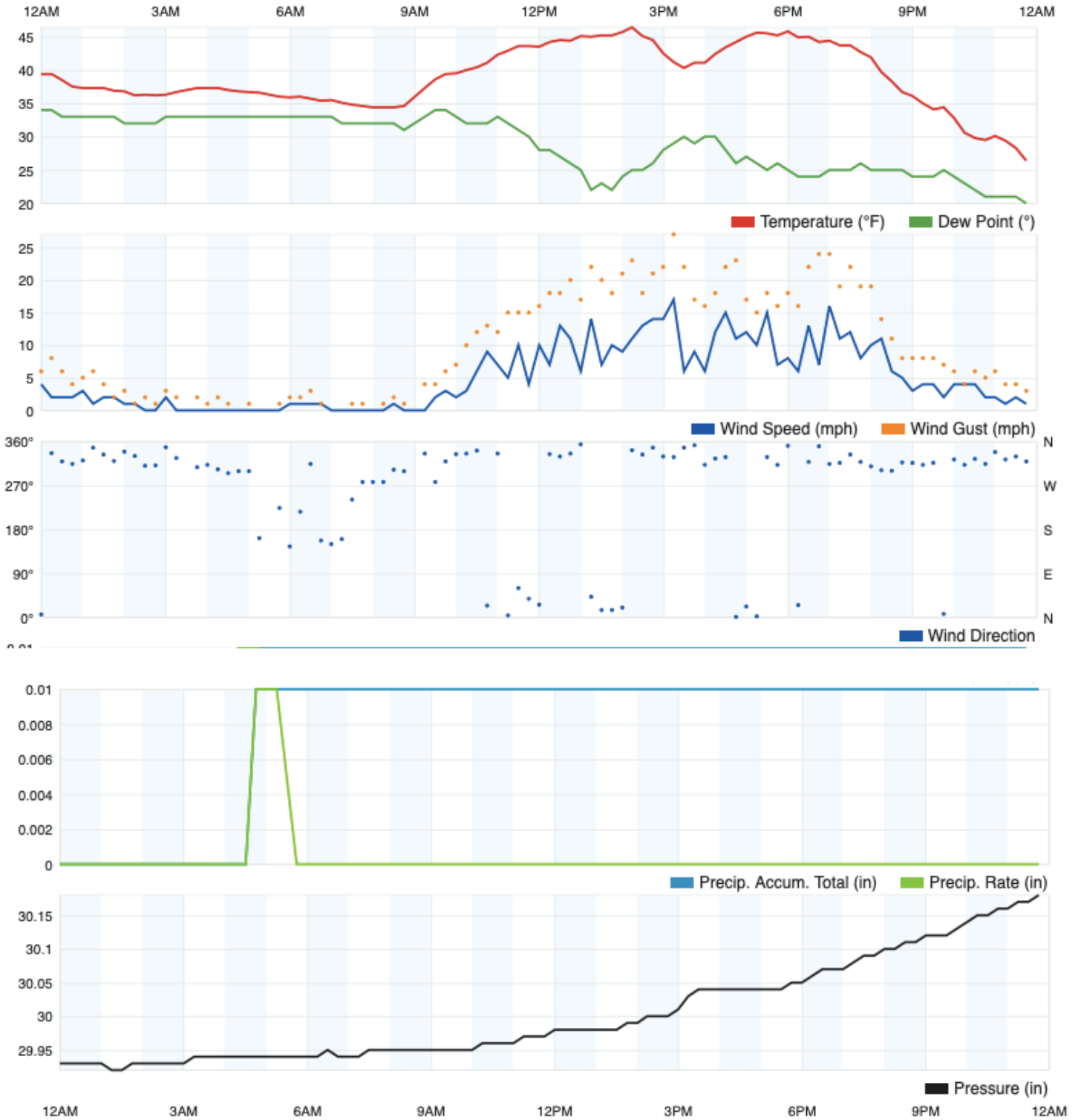
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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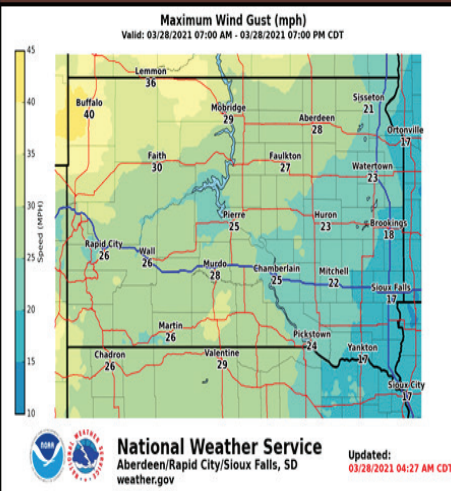
Today	Tonight	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
				
Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy and Blustery	Sunny and Breezy
High: 59 °F	Low: 38 °F	High: 74 °F	Low: 23 °F	High: 39 °F

High to Very High Fire Danger This Afternoon

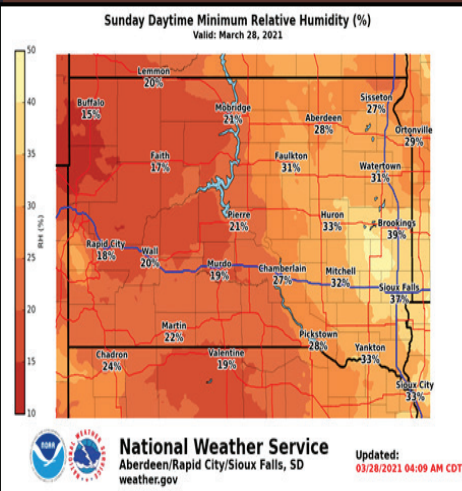
- Increasing south to southwest winds today.
- Dry air mass begins moving in.
- Lowest humidity over central SD.
- Stronger winds on Monday with low humidity.



Estimated Peak Wind Gusts This Afternoon (mph)



Forecast Minimum Humidity This Afternoon



Today begins a stretch of a few days with fire danger concerns. For this afternoon, the main focus is on central South Dakota. South to southwest winds will increase through the day, eventually becoming breezy and gusty across central South Dakota. A dry air mass will also begin moving into the region with relative humidity dropping to around 20 percent along the Missouri River. Much stronger winds are expected on Monday, with humidity remaining rather low. Thus, expect another day of fire danger concerns.

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Today in Weather History

March 28, 1977: A slow-moving storm system affected South Dakota from March 28th through March 30th, 1977. The storm produced heavy snow in the west and thunderstorms in the east. Northerly winds gusting to 50 miles an hour in the West created blizzard conditions as the snow totals mounted. Some areas in western Butte, Pennington, northern Shannon, and Lawrence counties received over 20 inches of snow. With drifts exceeding 6 to 8 feet many people in western South Dakota thought it was the worst blizzard in a quarter century. A few locations in the northern Black Hills received over 4 feet of snow. Because of blocked roads, westbound traffic was halted on I-90, and many schools and businesses were forced to close for several days. Across the eastern portion of the state rains of over 1" fell in many areas. Milbank even reported walnut size hail.

1917 - Thane Creek, AK, reported a snow cover of 190 inches. (The Weather Channel)

1920 - The worst tornado disaster of record occurred in Chicago IL as a tornado killed 28 persons and caused three million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1984 - A violent outbreak of tornadoes hit the Carolinas. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes during the late afternoon and evening hours which killed 57 persons and injured 1248 others. Nearly half the deaths occurred in mobile homes. A tornado from near Tatum SC to southern Cumberland County NC was 2.5 miles in width at times. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A blizzard raged from southern Nebraska to central Iowa. Snowfall totals ranged up to 17 inches at Blue Hill NE. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Carroll IA. High winds produced snow drifts twenty feet high in western Iowa, and produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero in Nebraska. The snowfall total of 9.4 inches at Omaha NE was a record for the date. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms in central Oklahoma produced hail up to four inches in diameter causing 35 million dollars in southern Oklahoma County. Baseball size hail and seven inches of rain caused another eighteen million dollars damage in Stephens County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the Southern and Central Plains to the Atlantic coast. Eighteen cities reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 81 degrees at Beckley WV was a record for March, and the high of 90 degrees in downtown Baltimore MD tied their March record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A storm system brought heavy snow to the west central and southern mountains of Wyoming, and high winds to the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah. Snowfall totals in Wyoming ranged up to ten inches at the Snowy Ski Range Area, and the storm pushed the snowfall total for the month at Cheyenne above 37 inches, surpassing their previous record for March of 35 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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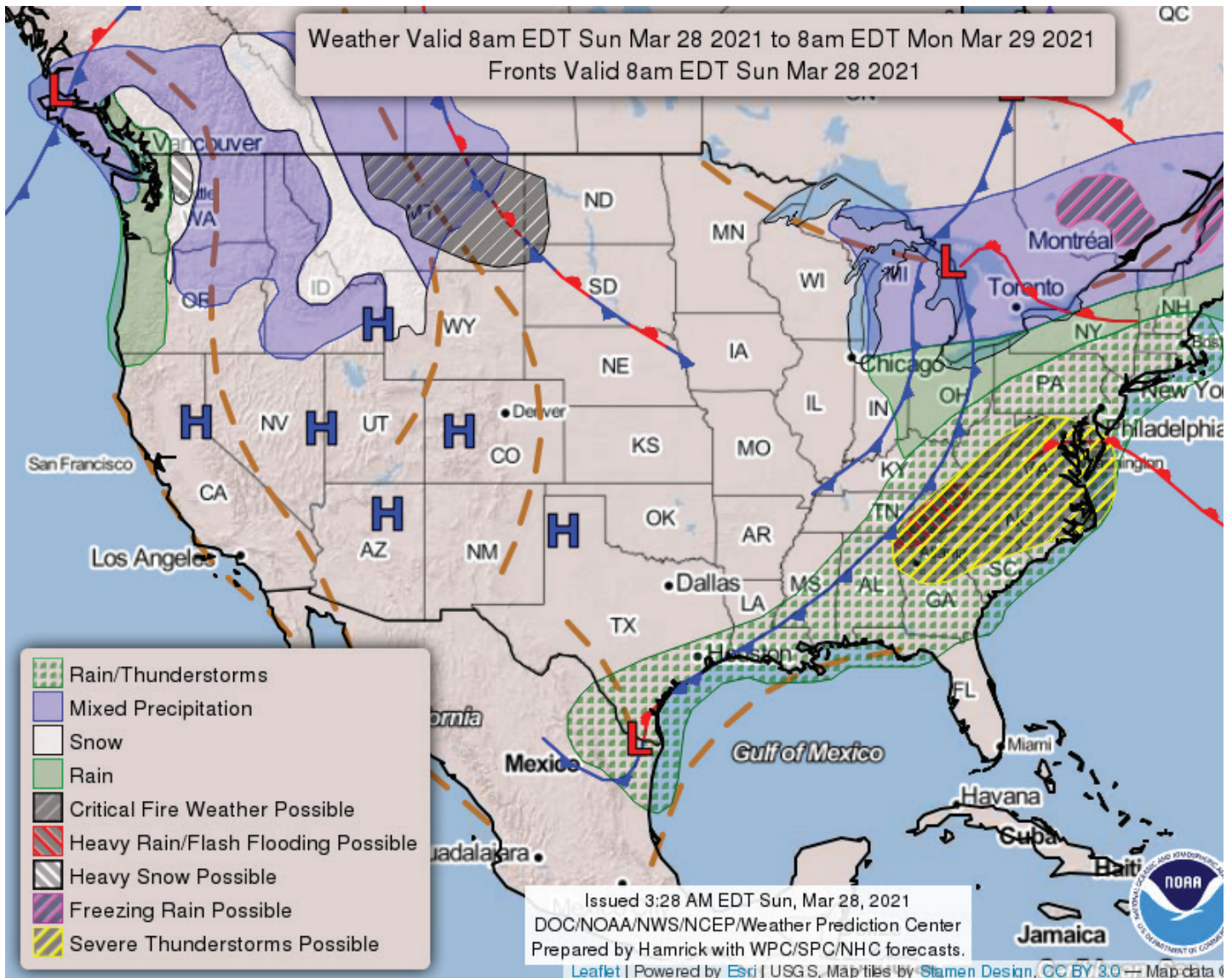
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 47 °F at 2:11 PM
Low Temp: 26 °F at 11:58 PM
Wind: 32 mph at 6:32 PM
Precip: .01

Today's Info

Record High: 82° in 1946
Record Low: -10° in 1913
Average High: 46°F
Average Low: 25°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.97
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.36
Average Precip to date: 1.99
Precip Year to Date: 0.54
Sunset Tonight: 7:57 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:19 a.m.



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WHY WORSHIP AND SING PRAISES?

Each church has its own "temperament." There are those where you find happiness and hope, a warm fellowship, and a welcoming spirit. Others are cold and closed, old and tired. In between are some that are looking for an identity and try one thing and then another.

Psalm 33 is filled with enthusiasm for God. And it has some great advice on how people and "churches" are to worship God. "Sing joyfully," said the Psalmist. "Praise the Lord with the harp and the ten-stringed lyre," he continues. But why?

One reason is that "The Word of the Lord is right and true." No one has ever rejected the Bible because it contradicts itself but because it contradicts the reader. "The only objection against the Bible is a bad life," said Wilmot the infidel when he was dying.

"The plans of the Lord stand true," is another reason to worship and praise God. A father said to his son, "Go to the third step and jump. I'll catch you!" But he didn't and his son fell to the floor. "Now get up and remember," he said, "don't trust anyone – not even your father." Our Heavenly Father never tricks us with false promises or tempts us to do anything that is not in our best interests. He is faithful in all things and at all times.

Finally, "The eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear Him. No army has ever saved a king," said David. Warriors work together and combine their strength but are often defeated. But "God delivers His own from death and keeps them alive in famine."

Humanists depend on human beings. Christians depend on Jesus Christ. We believe that He will "deliver" and "nourish" them. And when He does – all praise goes to Him.

Prayer: Father, may our hearts and lives be centered on worshiping You in songs of joy and shouts of praise. May we glorify You for Your goodness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Let the godly sing for joy to the Lord; it is fitting for the pure to praise him. Psalm 33:1

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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

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-08-10-28-35

(one, eight, ten, twenty-eight, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$93,000

Lotto America

03-23-35-50-51, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 3

(three, twenty-three, thirty-five, fifty, fifty-one; Star Ball: ten; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$4.31 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$152 million

Powerball

06-14-38-39-65, Powerball: 6, Power Play: 3

(six, fourteen, thirty-eight, thirty-nine, sixty-five; Powerball: six; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$238 million

Two KXL protesters in South Dakota face criminal charges

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A pair of people protesting the Keystone XL pipeline are facing criminal charges in South Dakota.

Construction on the long-disputed oil pipeline planned by Canada-based TC Energy halted in January as President Joe Biden revoked its permit on his first day in office, but a small group of protesters plan to maintain an encampment on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation nearby the pipeline route until all pipeline infrastructure is removed, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The protest group says the pipeline is being built on unceded treaty land and will cause environmental damage. However, residents of Philip, a nearby town, said they were disappointed the pipeline permit was canceled because it would have brought a temporary economic boost.

Two of the protesters, Oscar High Elk and Jasilyn Charger, face criminal charges from confrontations with law enforcement, TC Energy workers and local residents. Charger faces a misdemeanor charge for allegedly trespassing on property and attaching herself to a pump station last year.

High Elk, who had a preliminary hearing this week, faces an aggravated assault felony charge and 11 misdemeanors for several incidents last year. He plans to plead not guilty, calling them false charges that were brought to target him because of the protest.

NDSU, USD football game canceled after virus case

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Officials canceled a football game Saturday between North Dakota State University and the University of South Dakota after a positive COVID-19 test among North Dakota State's staff and athletes.

Contact tracing among North Dakota State's athletes, coaches, managers and staff contributed to the decision, according to Bryan Boettcher, the Sports Information Director at the University of South Dakota.

The Missouri Valley Football Conference indicated the game would not be rescheduled.

1st all-Black starting lineup graces South Dakota prep hoops

By BRIAN HAENCHEN Sioux Falls Argus Leader

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RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — It is not uncommon for high school basketball teams to plug a new piece into their starting lineup in the final game of a state tournament.

But by having Angok Akot join Akok Aguer, Eli Williams, Tahj Two Bulls and Mikele Kambalo for last weekend's Class AA third-place game vs. Yankton, the Sioux Falls Washington Warriors are believed to be the first team in state history to start five Black players.

Akot, who had been on the cusp of joining the starting lineup throughout the season, came off the bench the day before to score 10 points in a loss to intra-city rival O'Gorman, which rallied from 10 points down with six minutes left.

"It speaks for the whole diversity of Washington and the way that all the students and all the staff treat each other there. It's just amazing," Washington boys basketball coach Craig Nelson said. "Our guys are so looked up to amongst the entire school. These kids have just done things the right way, treated people the right way. They've embodied what the 'Circle of Courage' is at Washington and we're so proud of them."

The top-seeded Warriors wound up losing 62-55 to Yankton. Afterward, Williams and Aguer spoke to the significance of the team's starting lineup, the Argus Leader reported.

"You never really see many all-five Black lineups," said Williams, who finished with four assists. "We wanted to let everyone know that there's color here. There is diversity. We wanted everybody to know that we care and that there are other people out there who care about us, too."

Added Aguer: "In basketball, it doesn't matter what color you are or anything like that. It just matters about your family and who you are as a person."

Nelson said he and assistant coach Tim Reck have built such a strong relationship with this group of players that they are able to have discussions about race and diversity, as well as social issues. "It's just a unique situation that we have that we've become that close and can talk about anything and everything," he said.

"It means everything," Williams said of his role as an athlete in bringing attention to social justice issues. "I get to show and speak out for those who are scared, the ones who go to predominantly-white schools and are scared to speak out for what they think is right. I know they get picked on. When they see us on the screen showing that we care and that we want to speak out and make sure that everything is known, it means a lot and I know it means a lot for our coaches to do it, too."

Asked to reflect upon his time as a Washington Warrior, Williams said: "It means the world. I'll never get to play for a team like this ever again. I love these boys from the bottom of my heart. I'm just sad I don't get to play another year with them."

Suicide bomb hits Palm Sunday Mass in Indonesia, 20 wounded

By YUSUF WAHIL and NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

MAKASSAR, Indonesia (AP) — Two attackers blew themselves up outside a packed Roman Catholic cathedral during a Palm Sunday Mass on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, wounding at least 20 people, police said.

A video obtained by The Associated Press showed body parts scattered near a burning motorbike at the gates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi province.

Rev. Wilhelmus Tulak, a priest at the church, said he had just finished celebrating Palm Sunday Mass when a loud bang shocked his congregation. He said the blast went off at about 10:30 a.m. as a first batch of churchgoers was walking out of the church and another group was coming in.

He said security guards at the church were suspicious of two men on a motorcycle who wanted to enter the building and when they went to confront them, one of the men detonated his explosives.

Police later said both attackers were killed instantly and evidence collected at the scene indicated one of the two was a woman. The wounded included four guards and several churchgoers, police said.

The attack a week before Easter in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation came as the country was on high alert following December's arrest of the leader of the Southeast Asian militant group, Jemaah Islamiyah, which has been designated a terror group by many nations.

Indonesia has been battling militants since bombings on the resort island of Bali in 2002 killed 202

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people, mostly foreign tourists. Attacks aimed at foreigners have been largely replaced in recent years by smaller, less deadly strikes targeting the government, police and anti-terrorism forces and people militants consider as infidels.

President Joko Widodo condemned Sunday's attack and said it has nothing to do with any religion as all religions would not tolerate any kind of terrorism.

"I call on people to remain calm while worshipping because the state guarantees you can worship without fear," Widodo said in a televised address.

He offered his prayers to those injured and said the government would cover all costs of medical treatment. He said he had ordered the national police chief to investigate the attack and crack down on any militant network that may be involved.

At the end of Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, which opened Holy Week ceremonies at the Vatican, Pope Francis invited prayers for the victims of violence. He cited in particular "those of the attack that took place this morning in Indonesia, in front of the Cathedral of Makassar."

At least 20 people were wounded in the attack and had been admitted to hospitals for treatment, said Mohammad Mahfud, the coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs.

"The perpetrators or terrorist groups behind this attack will continue to be pursued," Mahfud said.

Indonesia's National Police spokesperson Argo Yuwono said police were still trying to identify the two attackers on the motorbike and whether they were linked to a local affiliate of the banned Jemaah Islamiyah network or were acting independently.

Indonesian forces in December arrested the group's leader Aris Sumarsono, also known as Zulkarnaen. Over the past month the country's counterterrorism squad has arrested about 64 suspects, including 19 in Makassar, following a tipoff about possible attacks against police and places of worship.

While Jemaah Islamiyah has been weakened over the past decade by a sustained crackdown, in recent years a new threat has emerged in militants who fought with the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria and returned to Indonesia or those inspired by the group's attacks abroad.

Indonesia's last major attack was in May 2018, when two families carried out a series of suicide bombings on churches in the second-largest city of Surabaya, killing a dozen people including two young girls whose parents had involved them in one of the attacks. Police said the father was the leader of a local affiliate of the Islamic State group known as Jemaah Anshorut Daulah.

Karmini reported from Jakarta, Indonesia.

Path from Clinton to Biden takes U-turn on debt, trade, more

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Bill Clinton spoke of how to build a bridge to the 21st century, it was to be constructed with balanced budgets, welfare recipients who found jobs and expanded global trade.

Three decades later, President Joe Biden is dealing with harsh 21st century realities and his approach has been the exact opposite: Borrow to spur growth, offer government aid without mandating work and bring global supply chains back to the United States.

This change in Democratic policy reflects the unique crises caused by the pandemic, as well as decades-old trends such as the rise of economic inequality, the downward slope of interest rates that made borrowing easier and globalization's pitfalls as factories departed the Midwest. White House aides are comparing the scope of Biden's policy ambitions to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's after the Great Depression.

All of these factors coalesced in Biden's \$1.9 trillion relief package that his administration is now selling nationwide to voters. And even grander designs are still to come for an infrastructure package and investments in workers that Biden will probably detail in a speech Wednesday in Pittsburgh.

"The underlying goal of how do we deepen, broaden and secure America's middle class has changed with the times," says Heather Boushey, a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisers. "What happened in 2020 was this huge unmasking of all these fragilities and vulnerabilities in our economy."

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Biden's relief package — which comes on top of roughly \$4 trillion in aid already approved to address the coronavirus fallout — is an effort to strengthen the social safety net that many in his own administration had helped stitch during Clinton's second term.

White House chief of staff Ron Klain held the same job for Clinton's vice president, Al Gore. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen was Clinton's chief economist. Gene Sperling, who oversees the release of the relief money, was director of the National Economic Council back then. Deputy chief of staff Bruce Reed had been the head of Clinton's Domestic Policy Council.

At the time, the Clinton administration seemed to have found a winning formula. The 1996 welfare overhaul signed during the heat of a reelection campaign was designed to end welfare as an entitlement and move aid recipients into jobs, while globalization offered the potential for greater profits for employers.

"We begin a new century, full of enormous possibilities," Clinton said as he accepted the Democratic nomination that year in his "Bridge to the 21st Century" speech. "We have to give the American people the tools they need to make the most of their God-given potential. We must make the basic bargain of opportunity and responsibility available to all Americans, not just a few."

The U.S. economy seemed solid after Clinton's reelection. Record highs were set in the percentage of Americans working. The federal budget was running a \$236 billion surplus by 2000. U.S. companies could reach new markets through trade pacts and China's admission into the World Trade Organization.

But the stock bubble in internet companies burst as the Clinton era ended. Factories quickly relocated to China, while assistance meant to retrain the newly unemployed never fully delivered as intended. The seeds of inequality became apparent after home prices inflated in the ensuing years and then plunged, causing a financial crisis in 2008 followed by a grindingly slow recovery.

Democratic voters have also evolved since the peak of Clintonism in the 1990s. They became more diverse, more likely to hold a college degree and more likely to live in an affluent city or suburb. That progression was easily overlooked until Donald Trump won the presidency in 2016 on the promise of scrapping trade deals, declaring that the government had stiffed the public and vowing to return the country to a past blue-collar identity.

"That happened without Democrats really taking it into their politics until Trump comes along and he is the wakeup call," said Elaine Kamarck, a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution who served in the Clinton White House. "Democrats were slow to realize this, but Biden was not. Biden was probably the best about this."

Celinda Lake conducted polling for both the Clinton and Biden campaigns. Clinton was a relatively young 46 when he became president, the first baby boomer to take the reins of national leadership. Baby boomers, by contrast, had practically grown up with Biden in one office or another. An experienced hand in a crisis, he spent 36 years in the Senate and eight as vice president to Barack Obama.

"It was the inverse choice in terms of leadership — in 1992, they went for the next generation, the new thing," Lake said. "In 2020, they went for the steady leader."

At 78 years old, Biden can remember an older Democratic Party that believed big government was not inherently bad government. The child tax credits in his relief package let aid flow to families without imposing work requirements. His \$1,400 direct checks go to each partner in a couple earning as much as \$150,000, effectively expanding the social safety net beyond the poor to 158.5 million households.

The pandemic relief is financed entirely by debt, something made possible by interest rates hovering near historic lows. Despite the growth of the national debt since Clinton's presidency, the federal government spent a smaller share of gross domestic product servicing the debt last year than during the Clinton era. This has made it possible so far for the government to borrow such large sums, though long-term debt pressures remain.

The Biden administration is now challenging China, which never embraced the values of democracy as trade advocates once believed it would. The White House has made it a priority to ensure the United States has a steady supply of vital goods such as computer chips, a sector increasingly dominated by China. A chip shortage is stifling auto production around the world, making it a threat to U.S. manufacturing jobs.

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Robert Lawrence, a Harvard University professor who served on Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers, doubts that the factory jobs can all return as automation has reshaped the economy. But he sees the Biden administration as pursuing new policies to help workers.

"If you think about Biden, we're going back to big government and we're going back to a new form of welfare — which includes the middle class," Lawrence said. "These are really revolutionary changes."

Al From, founder and former CEO of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, said the Clinton era was also about helping workers and reflected that moment when welfare had created dependency and investors saw the U.S. debt as excessive. Even if Biden's policies seem to break with that era, the values are the same.

"You have policies that are trying to achieve the same goals," From said. "They may be different, but they're consistent with the long-term principles of the Democratic Party."

Did COVID-19 stress, uncertainty stall anti-smoking push?

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A year after COVID-19 upended life for millions of Americans, there are troubling signs that the coronavirus may have also slowed progress against another deadly health threat: smoking.

Fewer smokers called quit-smoking hotlines last year and some smoked more, contributing to an unusual bump in cigarette sales — all in the middle of the stress, anxiety and uncertainty from the pandemic.

"It's hard for folks to quit using tobacco in the best of times, so what happens when life is suddenly turned upside down?" said Jen Cash, who oversees Minnesota's anti-tobacco programs.

Researchers are already concerned about COVID-19's impact on cancer screenings and opioid overdoses as many Americans were cut off from routine care and examinations. But services to help smokers quit -- delivered via phone and online -- would seem well-positioned to withstand the disruptions of the pandemic. The programs help with devising a plan and often provide free nicotine gums and patches.

Yet, calls to states routed through a national hotline fell 27% last year to about 500,000 — the biggest drop in a decade, according to the North American Quitline Consortium. In a recent report, the coalition of anti-smoking counselors cited the pandemic and the drop in public awareness messaging.

"It's really disturbing to see that the quit line calls have gone down so much because they're exactly what I hoped would be going up," said Dr. Nancy Rigotti of Harvard Medical School, who was not involved in the report.

In a separate survey of 1,000 adult smokers, Rigotti and her colleagues found about a third reported smoking more during the first six months of the pandemic.

Alli Comstock of Los Angeles had been smoke-free for seven years when she lost her child care job last March because of the pandemic. Facing her first long-term stretch of unemployment, she started smoking again, out of a combination of boredom and anxiety.

"It just felt like something else to do and it made me feel calmer," said Comstock, 32, adding that she knows cigarettes, which contain the stimulant nicotine, don't help relieve anxiety.

Comstock eventually quit again after months of feeling like "we were in a time when it didn't matter."

"In November, I realized it did matter and that I was a smoker, and I didn't want to be that," she said.

Research has linked other traumatic events to relapses among ex-smokers, including after the 9/11 attacks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it's too early to gauge the pandemic's impact on smoking rates. In a statement, the CDC noted that although cigarette sales spiked around the first lockdowns last March, they have since fallen back to earlier levels. That suggests the rise was mainly smokers stocking up on cigarettes.

The U.S. smoking rate has held steady at around 14% in recent years after a decades-long decline from over 40% in the 1960s. Smoking, which can cause cancer, strokes and heart attacks, is blamed for about 480,000 annual deaths.

Because smoking overlaps with many other forms of addiction, the data on quit attempts is being closely watched by doctors who treat people who abuse drugs and alcohol, many of whom also suffer from de-

pression and anxiety.

Dr. Brian Hurley of Los Angeles County's health department says those with addictions are less likely to recover if they continue to smoke. Last year's drop in hotline calls suggests "a maelstrom of worse outcomes" said Hurley, a board member of the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

Quitting, though, is notoriously difficult with just 7% succeeding, according to CDC figures. Many smokers are referred to quit-smoking hotlines at their annual checkup. Those appointments largely stopped last spring along with most other non-essential care.

Still, last year's data on quit-smoking calls includes glints of positive news. Smokers who called Minnesota's hotline reported smoking more, but also said they were more motivated to quit because of COVID-19. That mirrored national data showing smokers are aware that smoking can make them more vulnerable to serious illness from a coronavirus infection.

Experts seeking to explain last year's trends also point to a drop in anti-smoking advertising campaigns from public health departments. In many cases, those promotions were replaced by messages about masking, social distancing and hand-washing.

The CDC recently resumed its national "Tips from Smokers" advertising campaign and is conducting its annual surveys of tobacco use among adults and teenagers, the definitive snapshot of U.S. smoking and vaping.

Prior to the virus outbreak, much of the focus was on the alarming rise in electronic cigarette use among high schoolers and middle schoolers. Survey data conducted before classrooms closed showed teen vaping was already falling compared to 2019, following new flavor bans and raising the legal age to buy them.

With teenagers unable to attend school or regularly socialize with their friends, researchers speculate the pandemic may have further slowed the social spread of vaping.

"I have a feeling it may have had a positive effect on teen vaping, but a negative effect for adult smoking," said Rigotti.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP_FDawriter

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

2 tugboats speed to Egypt's Suez Canal as shippers avoid it

By JON GAMBRELL and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

SUEZ, Egypt (AP) — Two additional tugboats sped Sunday to Egypt's Suez Canal to aid efforts to free a skyscraper-sized container ship wedged for days across the crucial waterway, even as major shippers increasingly divert their boats out of fear the vessel may take even longer to free.

The massive Ever Given, a Panama-flagged, Japanese-owned ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, got stuck Tuesday in a single-lane stretch of the canal. In the time since, authorities have been unable to remove the vessel and traffic through the canal — valued at over \$9 billion a day — has been halted, further disrupting a global shipping network already strained by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Dutch-flagged Alp Guard and the Italian-flagged Carlo Magno, called in to help tugboats already there, reached the Red Sea near the city of Suez early Sunday, satellite data from MarineTraffic.com showed. The tugboats will nudge the 400-meter-long (quarter-mile-long) Ever Given as dredgers continue to vacuum up sand from underneath the vessel and mud caked to its port side, said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, which manages the Ever Given.

Workers planned to make two attempts Sunday to free the vessel coinciding with high tides, a top pilot with the canal authority said.

"Sunday is very critical," the pilot said. "It will determine the next step, which highly likely involves at least the partial offloading of the vessel."

Taking containers off the ship likely would add even more days to the canal's closure, something authori-

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ties have been desperately trying to avoid. It also would require a crane and other equipment that have yet to arrive.

The pilot spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to brief journalists.

On Saturday, the head of the Suez Canal Authority told journalists that strong winds were "not the only cause" for the Ever Given running aground, appearing to push back against conflicting assessments offered by others. Lt. Gen. Osama Rabei said an investigation was ongoing but did not rule out human or technical error.

Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement maintains that their "initial investigations rule out any mechanical or engine failure as a cause of the grounding." However, at least one initial report suggested a "blackout" struck the hulking vessel carrying some 20,000 containers at the time of the incident.

Rabei said he remained hopeful that dredging could free the ship without having to resort to removing its cargo, but added that "we are in a difficult situation, it's a bad incident."

Asked about when they expected to free the vessel and reopen the canal, he said: "I can't say because I do not know."

Speaking on Sunday to the pro-government Egyptian television channel Extra News, Rabei said Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi had ordered the canal authority to prepare for all options, including taking containers off of the vessel. He said officials had been in talks with the U.S. about that possibility, without elaborating.

Shohei Kisen Kaisha Ltd., the company that owns the vessel, said it was considering removing containers if other refloating efforts failed.

The Ever Given is wedged about 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) north of the canal's Red Sea entrance near the city of Suez.

A prolonged closure of the crucial waterway would cause delays in the global shipment chain. Some 19,000 vessels passed through the canal last year, according to official figures. About 10% of world trade flows through the canal. The closure could affect oil and gas shipments to Europe from the Middle East. Already, Syria has begun rationing the distribution of fuel in the war-torn country amid concerns of delays of shipments arriving amid the blockage.

As of early Sunday, over 320 ships waited to travel through the Suez, either to the Mediterranean or the Red Sea, according to canal services firm Leth Agencies. Dozens of others still listed their destination as the canal, though shippers increasingly appear to be avoiding the passage.

The world's biggest shipping company, Denmark's A.P. Moller-Maersk, warned its customers that it would take anywhere from three to six days to clear the backlog of vessels at the canal. Already, the firm and its partners have 22 ships waiting there.

"The current number (of) redirected Maersk and partner vessels is 14 and expected to rise as we assess the salvage efforts along with network capacity and fuel on our vessels currently en route to Suez," the shipper said.

Mediterranean Shipping Co., the world's second-largest, said it already had rerouted at least 11 ships around Africa's Cape of Good Hope to avoid the canal. It turned back two other ships and said it expected "some missed sailings as a result of this incident."

"MSC expects this incident to have a very significant impact on the movement of containerized goods, disrupting supply chains beyond the existing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic," it said.

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Associated Press writers Isabel DeBre and Malak Harb in Dubai contributed to this report.

Myanmar protests continue a day after more than 100 killed

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Protesters in Myanmar returned to the streets Sunday to press their demands for a return to democracy, just a day after security forces killed more than 100 people in the bloodiest day

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since last month's military coup.

Protests were held in Yangon and Mandalay, the country's two biggest cities, as well as elsewhere. Some of the demonstrations were again met with police force.

At least 114 people were killed Saturday as security forces cracked down on protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, according to the online news service Myanmar Now. The reported fatalities included several children under 16 years old.

Similar tallies of the death toll were issued by other Myanmar media and researchers, far exceeding the previous highest death toll on March 14. The number of killings since the coup is now more than 420, according to multiple counts.

The coup reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule and has again made Myanmar the focus of international scrutiny.

The Saturday killings by police and soldiers took place throughout the country as Myanmar's military celebrated the annual Armed Forces Day holiday with a parade in the country's capital, Naypyitaw.

The bloodshed quickly drew international condemnation, both from diplomatic missions within Myanmar and from abroad.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was shocked by the killings of civilians, including children.

"The continuing military crackdown is unacceptable and demands a firm, unified & resolute international response," he wrote on Twitter.

In the United States, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a tweet that his country was "horrified by the bloodshed perpetrated by Burmese security forces, showing that the junta will sacrifice the lives of the people to serve the few."

The military chiefs of 12 nations issued a joint statement condemning the use of force against unarmed people.

"A professional military follows international standards for conduct and is responsible for protecting — not harming — the people it serves," it said. "We urge the Myanmar Armed Forces to cease violence and work to restore respect and credibility with the people of Myanmar that it has lost through its actions."

The statement was issued by the defense chiefs of Australia, Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The human rights group Amnesty International revived criticism that the international community was not doing enough to end the state violence in Myanmar.

"U.N. Security Council member states' continued refusal to meaningfully act against this never-ending horror is contemptible," said Ming Yu Hah, the organization's deputy regional director for campaigns.

The Security Council has condemned the violence but not advocated concerted action against the junta, such as a ban on selling it arms. China and Russia are both major arms suppliers to Myanmar's military as well as politically sympathetic, and as members of the council would almost certainly veto any such move.

In recent days the junta has portrayed the demonstrators as the ones perpetrating violence for their sporadic use of Molotov cocktails. On Saturday, some protesters in Yangon were seen carrying bows and arrows. It has said its use of force has been justified to stop what it has called rioting.

Longest-serving bookseller among 25,000 Czech virus victims

By KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

PELHRIMOV, Czech Republic (AP) — A year after the Czech Republic recorded its first death from the coronavirus, the central European nation paused to remember all the citizens who lost their lives in the pandemic. By the end of the day, the number had surpassed 25,000.

Bells tolled across the country at noon last Monday to mark the anniversary of when the pandemic's first Czech casualty, a 95-year-old man, died in a Prague hospital. On March 22, 2020 and for some days to come, the Czech Republic reported daily COVID-19 deaths in the single digits. Few imagined then that the nation of 10.7 million eventually would have one of the world's highest per capita death tolls.

But it's not just grim statistics that have torn the fabric of Czech life. There's always a personal story

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behind each life lost. And the deaths of some people affected entire communities.

Jaromir Vytopil's was one of them. Without him, the town of Pelhrimov won't be the same.

As the country's longest-serving bookseller, Vytopil had served the town's readers for almost six decades. They came to his eponymous shop to buy books, maps and music, or just to have a chat with him when they passed by. Books and customers literally were his life: He got into the trade at age 15, studied at a special school for booksellers and worked in six different towns before settling in Pelhrimov in 1963.

He died at the age of 83 on Nov. 9, another grim day during the month that until Saturday was the Czech Republic's deadliest of the pandemic, Marie Vytopilova, says both of them likely caught the virus in the bookstore.

"We didn't expect that to happen," she said of her husband's death. "He was still full of life."

The Czech Republic was spared the worst of the pandemic in the spring only to see its health care system near collapse in the fall and again in January and March after the coalition government led by Prime Minister Andrej Babis repeatedly let down pandemic guards despite warnings by experts.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the Czech Republic has 240.7 cumulative deaths per 100,000 people, the world's second-highest mortality rate after the microstate of San Marino.

Activists painted thousands of white crosses on the cobblestones of Prague's Old Town Square this week for all of the people who died. They blamed the government for an inadequate response to the pandemic. One of the crosses honored Vytopil.

As the news of Vytopil's death spread in November, people placed flowers and lit candles in front of the bookstore, turning it into an impromptu memorial. About 600 mourners expressed their sorrow on the store's Facebook page.

"A legend has gone, the only citizen everybody knew in Pelhrimov," resident Petr Kostka commented.

"People like him form the heart of the town," Milan Pavlicek added.

Vytopil used to leave his family's home in a nearby village on his scooter at 7 a.m. On the way, he stopped to have a coffee and to read newspapers. Then, he was ready to greet his customers.

"What was shining from him was an appetite for life and an effort to give people what he knew well, and that was the books," Marie Vytopilova recalled. "He used to read a lot, really a lot, and over the course of the years, you accumulate knowledge."

U.S. poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who died last month at age 101, was among the bookseller's favorite authors along with Czech writers Josef Skvorecky and Bohumil Hrabal. But he praised the people who visited his store for their choices and if needed, offered recommendations.

"Many times, I laughed and called him a walking encyclopedia," his wife said.

Vytopil's mission as a bibliophile extended beyond his shop. He advised Pelhrimov's public library on what titles to acquire, helped organize readings and book signings with authors, and once a year dressed up as a king to welcome children into the order of readers during a ceremony in which they received library cards, director Iva Rajdlova said.

"He was young at heart," Rajdlova said. "He was interested in everything, and it was so nice to talk to him about anything, not just about books. He was interested in people and anything that was going on. Simply, he was a very good man."

Promoting books and literacy, however, could be a dangerous pursuit during the communist era of Vytopil's country. Private ownership of bookstores was prohibited. After the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia that crushed liberal reforms known as the Prague Spring, the hardline regime banned numerous authors and ordered bookstores to purge their works from store shelves.

"My dad hid all the banned books he could, so when we attended high school, we were reading his favorite, Skvorecky, and also (Milan) Kundera and other banned writers," Vytopil's son Jan said.

Martin Vana, who visited Vytopil's bookstore for the first time in 1978, said he wasn't surprised by local reaction to his death. Vana, who works for the regional public radio station, approached Vytopil about 13 years ago to ask him to present new books on the air. For about 10 years, he had a popular show mixing the books and stories from his life.

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"He was such a distinctive personality. We didn't go to a bookstore, but instead we went to Vytopil's," Vana said. "In the course of his years in business, his name became synonymous with bookseller."

After the 1989 anti-communist Velvet Revolution, Vytopil finally could open his own family bookstore, which he and his wife did on July 1, 1991.

"He did exactly what he liked and did it right, no matter what it was," his wife said. "When we started, I remember his enthusiasm for the business. It was him who was carrying the weight of it."

Despite his age, he didn't plan to retire, according to son.

"The bookstore was all his life," he said. "He used to say he only wanted to be carried out of it. That wish turned true, in a way."

The family announced in January they were putting the bookstore up for sale because they realized they didn't want to run it "without our dad, husband and its soul" any more.

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UK variant hunters lead global race to stay ahead of COVID

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — On March 4, 2020, when there were just 84 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the U.K., professor Sharon Peacock recognized that the country needed to expand its capacity to analyze the genetic makeup of the virus.

The Cambridge University microbiologist understood that genomic sequencing would be crucial in tracking the disease, controlling outbreaks and developing vaccines. So she began working with colleagues around the country to put together a plan. Within a month, the government had provided 20 million pounds (\$28 million) to fund their work.

The initiative helped make Britain a world leader in rapidly analyzing the genetic material from large numbers of COVID-19 infections, generating more than 40% of the genomic sequences identified to date. These days, their top priority is finding new variants that are more dangerous or resistant to vaccines, information that is critical to helping researchers modify the vaccines or develop new ones to combat the ever-changing virus.

"They've show the world how you do this," said Dr. Eric Topol, chair of innovative medicine at Scripps Research in San Diego, California.

Genomic sequencing is essentially the process of mapping the unique genetic makeup of individual organisms — in this case the virus that causes COVID-19. While the technique is used by researchers to study everything from cancer to outbreaks of food poisoning and the flu virus, this is the first time authorities are using it to provide real-time surveillance of a global pandemic.

Peacock, 62, heads Britain's sequencing effort as executive director and chair of the COVID-19 UK Genomics Consortium, known as COG-UK, the group she helped create a year ago.

During the first week of this month, COG-UK sequenced 13,171 viruses, up from 260 during its first 12 days of operation in March last year, according to weekly reports on the group's website.

Behind that growth is a system that links the science of genomic sequencing with the resources of Britain's national health care system.

Positive COVID-19 tests from hospitals and community testing programs around the country are sent to a network of 17 laboratories where scientists spend their days extracting the genetic material from each swab and analyzing it to identify that virus' unique genetic code. The sequences are then cross-referenced with public health data to better understand how, where and why COVID-19 is spreading.

When mutations in the virus correspond with an otherwise unexplained increase in cases, that's a clue that a new variant of concern is circulating in the area.

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The importance of genomic sequencing became obvious late last year as the number of new infections began to spike in southeastern England. When cases continued to rise despite tough local restrictions, public health officials went to work to find out why.

Combing through data from genome sequencing, scientists identified a new variant that included a number of mutations that made it easier for the virus to hop from one person to another.

Armed with this information, Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed a national lockdown, scrapping a strategy of local restrictions that had failed to contain the new variant.

The scientific sleuthing is crucial, but it's like looking for a needle in a haystack because researchers must sift through the genetic sequences from thousands of harmless variants to find the rare dangerous ones, Peacock said.

"It's vital so that we can understand what variants are circulating, both in the United Kingdom and around the world, and therefore the implications of that on vaccine development and the way that we may have to adapt vaccines," she said.

The effort is a worldwide collaboration, with more than 120 countries submitting sequences to GISAID, a data-sharing hub originally created to track influenza viruses.

Iceland, Australia, New Zealand and Denmark actually sequence a higher percentage of their COVID-19 cases than Britain, and Denmark does the work faster. But COG-UK'S work, combined with Britain's size and high number of cases, have made it the world leader in sequencing COVID-19. The U.K. has submitted 379,294 of the almost 898,000 sequences in the GISAID database.

That work is paying dividends even for advanced countries like Denmark, where scientists use tools developed in Britain to analyze their own data, said Mads Albertsen, a professor at Denmark's Aalborg University who is part of the country's genomic sequencing effort.

"What the U.K. has just done by far best is the whole setup," Albertsen said. "So they have many more researchers and a much more professional structure around how to use the data."

The U.S. is also trying to learn from Britain as the Biden administration reverses the anti-science policies of his predecessor that slowed the country's sequencing efforts, said Topol at Scripps Research. Representatives from COG-UK took part in a recent call with American researchers and the Rockefeller Foundation aimed at building capacity in the United States.

"To Peacock and the crew's credit, they didn't just stop at sequence," Topol said. "They organized labs to do this other work, which is actually very intensive lab assessment. And then there's the epidemiologic assessment, too. So everything has to fire on every cylinder, you know. It's like a car with 12 cylinders. They all have to fire to move."

The U.K.'s sequencing success was built on the foundation of groundbreaking genetic science in Britain, stretching back to the work of James Watson, Francis Crick and Rosalind Franklin, who were credited with discovering the chemical structure of DNA. Other British scientists developed early sequencing techniques and later new technology that slashed the time and cost of sequencing.

That success attracted investment, such as the Wellcome Trust's 1992 decision to create the Sanger Centre to help map the human genome, further expanding the pool of expertise in Britain. And Britain's National Health Service provided a wealth of data for researchers to study.

Yet colleagues say Peacock personally deserves much of the credit for COG-UK's success, though she prefers to highlight the work of others.

A ferociously good organizer, she glued the nation's DNA detectives together through goodwill and chat-rooms. Part of the trick was persuading eminent scientists to put aside their egos and academic rivalries to work together to help fight the pandemic, said Andrew Page, an expert in computer analysis of pathogen genomics who is working with COG-UK.

Peacock's work on the project has earned her notoriety and the moniker of variant-hunter-in-chief. But she prefers a simpler term.

"I consider myself, first and foremost a scientist that's doing their best to try and help both the population in the United Kingdom and elsewhere to control the pandemic," she said. "Perhaps there's a better

phrase for that, but scientist will do it.”

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Expelled from US at night, migrant families weigh next steps

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

REYNOSA, Mexico (AP) — In one of Mexico’s most notorious cities for organized crime, migrants are expelled from the United States throughout the night, exhausted from the journey, disillusioned about not getting a chance to seek asylum and at a crossroads about where to go next.

Marisela Ramirez, who was returned to Reynosa about 4 a.m. Thursday, brought her 14-year-old son and left five other children — one only 8 months old — in Guatemala because she couldn’t afford to pay smugglers more money. Now, facing another agonizing choice, she leaned toward sending her son across the border alone to settle with a sister in Missouri, aware that the United States is allowing unaccompanied children to pursue asylum.

“We’re in God’s hands,” Ramirez, 30, said in a barren park with dying grass and a large gazebo in the center that serves as shelter for migrants.

Lesdny Suyapa Castillo, 35, said through tears that she would return to Honduras with her 8-year-old daughter, who lay under the gazebo breathing heavily with her eyes partly open and flies circling her face. After not getting paid for three months’ work as a nurse in Honduras during the pandemic, she wants steady work in the U.S. to send an older daughter to medical school. A friend in New York encouraged her to try again.

“I would love to go, but a mother doesn’t want to see her child in this condition,” she said after being dropped in Reynosa at 10 p.m.

The decisions unfold amid what Border Patrol officials say is an extraordinarily high 30-day average of 5,000 daily encounters with migrants. Children traveling alone are allowed to remain in the U.S. to pursue asylum while nearly all single adults are expelled to Mexico under pandemic-era rules that deny them a chance to seek humanitarian protection.

Families with children younger than 7 are being allowed to remain in the U.S. to pursue asylum, according to a Border Patrol official speaking to reporters Friday on condition of anonymity. Others in families — only 300 out of 2,200 on Thursday — are expelled.

Reynosa, a city of 700,000 people, is where many migrants are returned after being expelled from Texas’ Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. The Border Patrol has said the vast majority of migrants are expelled to Mexico after less than two hours in the United States to limit the spread of COVID-19, which means many arrive when it’s dark.

In normal times, migrants are returned to Mexico under bilateral agreements that limit deportations to daytime hours and the largest crossings. But under pandemic authority, Mexicans and citizens of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras can be expelled to Mexico throughout the night and in smaller towns.

Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott acknowledged in an interview last year that agreements limiting hours and locations for deportations are suspended “on paper” but said U.S. authorities try to accommodate wishes of Mexican officials. The U.S. also coordinates with nongovernmental organizations.

“I would never sit here and look at you and say Tijuana is not dangerous, Juarez is not dangerous, Tamaulipas (state) is not dangerous,” Scott said. “However, a lot of it is like any other U.S. city. There are certain U.S. cities that there are pockets of it that are very dangerous and there are pockets of it that aren’t.”

Tamaulipas, which includes Reynosa, is among five Mexican states that the U.S. State Department says American citizens shouldn’t visit. A U.S. travel advisory says heavily armed criminal groups patrol Reynosa

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in marked and unmarked vehicles.

More than 100 fathers, mothers and children who were expelled overnight waited in a plaza outside the Mexican border crossing at sunrise Saturday, many bitter about the experience and scared to venture into the city. Several said they left Central America in the past two months because they could finally afford it, but information about President Joe Biden's more immigrant-friendly policies contributed to their decisions. Some reported paying smugglers as much as \$10,000 a person to reach U.S. soil.

Michel Maeco, who sold his land in Guatemala to pay smugglers \$35,000 to bring his family of five, including children aged 15, 11 and 7, said he was going home after a 25-day journey. He left Guatemala after hearing "on the news" that Biden would allow families to enter the United States.

Maeco's family was expelled to the streets of Reynosa at 3 a.m. Saturday.

"Supposedly (Biden) was going to help migrants, but I see nothing," said Maeco, 36.

A Honduran woman who declined to give her name said she left two months ago because her home was destroyed in Tropical Storm Eta and she heard Biden would "open the border" for 100 days — unaware that the president's 100-day moratorium on deportations, suspended by courts, doesn't cover new arrivals. She planned to send her 9-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son across alone to live with their aunt in Alabama while she returns to Honduras.

Underscoring the dangers, the Border Patrol said Friday that a 9-year-old Mexican girl died crossing the Rio Grande near the city of Eagle Pass.

Mexico's migrant protection agency, Grupos Beta, persuaded many overnight arrivals to be bused to a distant shelter. Crowds at the nearby park had thinned from a few hundred migrants days earlier.

Felicia Rangel, founder of the Sidewalk School, which gives educational opportunities to asylum-seeking children in Mexican border cities, sees the makings of a squalid migrant camp like in nearby Matamoros, which recently closed.

"If they get a foothold in this gazebo, this is going to turn into an encampment," she said as a church distributed chicken soup, bread and water to migrants for breakfast. "They do not want another encampment in their country."

Martin Vasquez is among the migrants staying for now. The 19-year-old was expelled after being separated from his 12-year-old brother, who was considered an unaccompanied child and will almost certainly be released to a grandfather in Florida. He said he was inclined to return to Guatemala, where he worked for a moving company, but wanted to wait a while "to see what the news says."

Eddie Murphy inducted into NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Eddie Murphy was inducted into the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame at the organization's show that highlighted works by entertainers and athletes of color.

After Murphy accepted his induction award Saturday night, the actor-comedian said he was "very moved" by the honor. He was presented the award by his longtime friend and "Coming 2 America" co-star Arsenio Hall.

"I've been making movies for 40 years now ... 40 years. This is the perfect thing to commemorate that and be brought into the hall of fame," he said. "Thank you very much. I'm very moved."

Murphy went on to send a message to Hall about his famous red leather suit from his 1983 stand-up special "Delirious."

"My red suit was not that tight Arsenio," Murphy said. "I get a lot of cracks about that red suit. When I was rocking that red suit, that (expletive) was fly."

The hall of fame induction is bestowed on an individual who is viewed as a pioneer in their respective field and whose influence shaped the "profession for generations to come."

Previous inductees include Oprah Winfrey, Stevie Wonder, Spike Lee, Ray Charles and Sidney Poitier. The most recent honorees to be inducted were Cheryl Boone Isaacs and Paris Barclay in 2014.

Murphy began his career as a stand-up comic while as a teenager and eventually joined the cast of

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"Saturday Night Live." He starred in the box office hit "48 Hours" and made his mark in a slew of films such as "Beverly Hills Cop," "Coming to America," "The Nutty Professor," "Dr. Dolittle" and "Dolemite Is My Name." His latest film "Coming 2 America" was released on Amazon this month.

The awards ceremony virtually aired live on BET. It was also simulcast on CBS, MTV, VH1, MTV2, BET HER and LOGO.

"Black-ish" star and comedian Anthony Anderson hosted the show for the eighth consecutive year.

The late Chadwick Boseman won best actor in a motion picture for his role in "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." The actor, who also starred in the blockbuster Marvel film "Black Panther," died at 43 last year after he privately battled colon cancer.

"As always, he would give all honor and glory to the most high God," said the teary-eyed Simone Ledward Boseman, the actor's wife, who accepted the award on his behalf. "He would thank his mom and dad. And he would give honor to his ancestors as we now honor him. Thank you NAACP for always giving him his flowers. He was an uncommon artist and an even more uncommon person."

Boseman spoke about how common Black people have been diagnosed with or died from colon cancer. She urged Black people over the age of 45 to get screened.

"Don't put it off any longer," she said. "Please, get screened. This disease is beatable if you catch it in its early stages. So you don't have anytime to waste, even if you don't have any family history. If you think nothing is wrong, and younger than 45, please be proactive about your health. Know the signs. Know your body. Listen to your body."

LeBron James received the President's Award for his public service achievements. He thanked the NAACP for recognizing his efforts beyond the basketball court.

The Los Angeles Lakers superstar was recognized for his efforts through his LeBron James Family Foundation and his I PROMISE School, a co-curricular educational initiative. Last year, he launched More Than a Vote — a coalition of Black athletes and artists — that is dedicated to educating and protecting Black voters.

James ventured into the entertainment realm with The SpringHill Company, which unites three companies he co-founded with Maverick Carter including athlete empowerment brand UNINTERRUPTED, film and television production company SpringHill Entertainment and The Robot Company, the brand and culture consultancy.

"This award is so much more than myself," James said. "I'm here receiving it, but this dives into everything that I'm a part of."

DJ D-Nice took home entertainer of the year in a competitive category against big names such as Regina King, Tyler Perry, Viola Davis and Trevor Noah.

During the pandemic's early stage, D-Nice created a virtual remedy for anyone dealing with the lockdown blues. He hosted Homeschool at Club Quarantine on his Instagram Live, where he spun popular tunes on the turntables at his home. An array of celebrities tuned in: Rihanna, Oprah Winfrey and Mark Zuckerberg popped in for a listen.

"It's been an honor to provide entertainment and inspiration during one of the darkest times we've experienced," D-Nice said.

Michelle Obama presented Stacey Abrams with the first Social Justice Impact award. Abrams was honored for being a political force and her voting rights work that helped turn Georgia into a swing state.

Abrams paid homage to her parents for her upbringing.

"They taught me and my five siblings that having nothing was not an excuse for doing nothing," she said. "Instead, they showed us by word and deed to use our faith as a shield to protect the defenseless, to use our voices to call out injustices, and to use our education and our time to solve the problems that others turn away from."

Viola Davis took home best actress for her film and television roles in "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" and "How to Get Away with Murder."

Jazmine Sullivan gave the awards show's first performance with "Pick Up Your Feelings." Maxwell later performed "Ascension (Don't Ever Wonder)."

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Close range: Baylor grinds to Elite 8 in 62-51 win ova 'Nova

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — That ice that seemed to be forming across the 3-point arc was hardly enough to throw Baylor off course.

Some rugged defense and a newly discovered love for points in the paint helped the top-seeded Bears find the formula for a 62-51 victory over Villanova on Saturday and a trip to the Elite Eight.

Adam Flagler was the surprise leading scorer, with 16 points, and Baylor (25-2), which came in as the nation's leading 3-point shooting team at 41.5%, won despite making only 3 of 19 against Villanova's ever-shifting 2-3, man-to-man combo on D.

Baylor, which started the season 18-0 and won its first-ever Big 12 regular-season title, is one win from the Final Four for the first time since 2012. The Bears will play Arkansas in the South regional final on Monday.

Davion Mitchell, a 46% shooter from 3 this season, went 0 for 3 from long range on a 14-point day. The team's other two high-powered guards didn't fare better. Jared Butler scored nine points on 1-for-9 shooting from 3, and MaCio Teague had five points without a 3.

"When we are 2 for 12 at half, we figured we've got to get inside," coach Scott Drew said of the team's 3-point shooting. "We got good looks but not great looks. The guards did a great job of not settling and probing more."

Because of that, Baylor shot 53% in the second half, even though it made only one 3.

"Coach said we're not going to win if we keep shooting the off-dribble 3," Mitchell said. "He told us to trust the defense and get in the paint."

The game changed midway through the second half when Baylor took Drew's words to heart and started pounding inside. The Bears took a six-point lead with a 14-2 run during which not a single point came from outside the arc. Baylor outscored 'Nova 40-32 in the paint for the game.

Defense picked up, too.

Constantly harassing Villanova shooters who'd carved out space in the first half, Baylor held Villanova to 37.5% shooting in the second and 0 for 9 from 3. Baylor had four of its five blocked shots after halftime. During one stretch in the decisive run, Baylor forced five straight turnovers on 'Nova possessions. The Wildcats finished with 16 turnovers, almost double their nation-best season average (8.8).

Coach Jay Wright's team scored 10 points over the final 11 minutes.

"We were good enough to beat them but they just played better down the stretch," Wright said. "I think their defense got into us and wore us down and it made the difference in the game."

The Wildcats got 16 points from Jermaine Samuels, but only three from Caleb Daniels on 1-for-11 shooting.

Villanova (18-7) came in without injured point guard Collin Gillespie and with a middling defense at best, but looked to be turning things around over the first weekend of the tournament. There were mini-victories in this one, too, in part because Wright's deft mix of defenses kept Baylor off the mark. This marked only the second time this season anyone has held that high-powered offense under 65 points.

Shooting struggles aside, 2021 still has the makings of being Baylor's year, and any residue from the pandemic-related breaks that halted the Bears' momentum after a perfect start appear to have faded.

"You've got to take advantage of every opportunity, and obviously we have an opportunity to go to the Final Four," Drew said. "Hopefully, we'll put our best foot forward."

NO SCREENPLAY TODAY

In the stands at Hinkle Fieldhouse was Bobby Plump, whose game-winning shot in the 1954 high school state title game was the inspiration for the hoops classic "Hoosiers." He's a semi-regular at the arena where the climax of the movie was filmed. He was joined by screenwriter Angelo Pizzo, who also wrote another underdog tale: "Rudy."

ANOTHER MAN DOWN

It was hardly what Villanova needed. Forward Brandon Slater left the game about midway through the second half after landing awkwardly during a fight for a rebound. Slater only had four points, but was a

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presence on defense, with two blocks and a few more that he altered.

"Certain guys were struggling with matchups on their quick guards, and that's when it kind of turned — when he went out," Wright said.

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

Williams, Bueckers lead UConn past Iowa in NCAA Sweet 16

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — The game was billed as a marquee matchup of uber-talented freshmen Paige Bueckers and Caitlin Clark. While those two didn't disappoint, it was Christyn Williams and UConn's other upperclassmen who stepped up and helped the Huskies advance.

Williams scored 27 points and Bueckers added 18 to lead No. 1 UConn to a 92-72 win over fifth-seeded Iowa on Saturday in the Sweet 16 of the women's NCAA Tournament.

"The fact there was so much hype on those two kids. Part of it was unfair and comes with the territory," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "Like I told the team before the game, in all these matchups, it comes (down) to somebody else. ... Our defense as bad as it was at times, was really, really good when it had to be. Christyn Williams, Evina Westbrook and Olivia (Nelson-Ododa), our three juniors were amazing, played the way you wanted your upperclassmen to play. It was not going to be easy on either Caitlin or Paige to play their normal game."

Bueckers and Iowa's Clark had taken the women's basketball world by storm this season. Bueckers became the third freshman ever to earn All-America honors. Clark led the nation in scoring and came into the regional semifinals averaging 29 points in the tournament.

"I was super excited for this game, just because of the spotlight on it," said Bueckers, who also had nine rebounds and eight assists. "And I know everybody hyped it up to be Caitlin versus Paige, but I was so excited for our team because I knew that people were going to come and notice and watch our whole team play."

Evina Westbrook just missed the 18th triple-double in NCAA women's tournament history, with 17 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds for UConn (27-1). Nelson-Ododa added 11 rebounds and seven assists along with four points. Freshman Aaliyah Edwards added 18 points.

"I kind of knew that they were going to be extra aggressive, especially on (Williams) and Paige, so that kind of makes it easier on the rest of us with them being a big focus," Westbrook said.

Clark, shadowed on defense by Williams on almost every possession, finished with 21 points — below her nearly 27-points-per-game average. She was 7 for 21 from the field.

"I thought we played a great team basketball game," Williams said. "I think we were working on all cylinders today. So, I don't want to get all the credit, because this was a total team effort."

The game marked the return of Auriemma, who missed the opening two rounds while recovering from the coronavirus. Auriemma arrived in San Antonio on Wednesday.

Associate head coach Chris Dailey, who guided the team through the opening two wins, moved back to her customary seat at his side where she's been for their entire time at UConn.

Williams missed five of her first seven shots before getting going on offense. She made six straight in the second quarter, to give UConn a 49-35 halftime lead. The junior wing had 14 of her points in the period.

Iowa (20-10), behind Clark, was able to get within nine twice in the fourth quarter but Bueckers answered with a 3-pointer each time and Iowa could get no closer.

"This season was truly special, and I think for this team it's only up from here. I know a lot of girls dream about going to all those blue bloods but I think playing for your home state is really something special and creating something is really special and that's my goal here," Clark said. "Obviously I still have three years left to do a lot of special things."

UConn, which was playing in its 27th straight Sweet 16, faces Baylor — which beat Michigan 78-75 in overtime — on Monday night in the River Walk regional final.

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For the first time in the tournament, the general public was allowed to attend the Alamodome. Each game was allowed to have 17% of capacity, which was around 4,800 fans. In the previous two rounds, teams were given six tickets per person in the travel party.

LAST LAUGH

While Bueckers didn't guard Clark much at all in the game, on Iowa's last possession, she drew a charge on her friend and patted her on the butt as the two exchanged smiles when the Hawkeyes freshman helped her up.

"Obviously me and Caitlin are good friends, so just me taking that charge on her, yeah, we exchanged some words, I guess," said a giggling and smiling Bueckers.

UNSELFISH

UConn had 30 assists on its 40 baskets, which led to the Huskies shooting nearly 55% (40 for 73) from the field.

STILL OUT

UConn freshman guard Nika Muhl missed her second straight game while recovering from a sprained right ankle she injured in the opening round win over High Point. She was averaging 5.0 points, 2.7 assists, 2.4 rebounds and 1.8 steals.

More AP women's college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-college-basketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Myanmar forces kill scores in deadliest day since coup

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — As Myanmar's military celebrated the annual Armed Forces Day holiday with a parade Saturday in the country's capital, soldiers and police elsewhere killed scores of people while suppressing protests in the deadliest bloodletting since last month's coup.

The online news site Myanmar Now reported late Saturday that the death toll had reached 114. A count issued by an independent researcher in Yangon who has been compiling near-real time death tolls put the total at 107, spread over more than two dozen cities and towns. That's more than the previous high on March 14, which ranged from 74 to 90.

The killings quickly drew international condemnation, including a joint statement from the defense chiefs of 12 countries.

"A professional military follows international standards for conduct and is responsible for protecting — not harming — the people it serves," it said. "We urge the Myanmar Armed Forces to cease violence and work to restore respect and credibility with the people of Myanmar that it has lost through its actions."

The European Union's delegation to Myanmar said that the 76th Myanmar Armed Forces Day "will stay engraved as a day of terror and dishonor."

"The killing of unarmed civilians, including children, are indefensible acts," it added.

U.S. Ambassador Thomas Vajda in a statement said "security forces are murdering unarmed civilians."

"These are not the actions of a professional military or police force," he wrote. "Myanmar's people have spoken clearly: they do not want to live under military rule."

The death toll in Myanmar has been steadily rising as authorities grow more forceful in suppressing opposition to the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule.

Figures collected by the Yangon researcher, who asked not to be named for his security, have generally tallied with the counts issued at the end of each day by the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners, which documents deaths and arrests and is widely seen as a definitive source. The Associated Press is unable to independently confirm the death tolls.

Up through Friday, the association had verified 328 deaths in the post-coup crackdown.

Junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing did not directly refer to the protest movement when he gave his nationally televised Armed Forces Day speech before thousands of soldiers in Naypyitaw. He referred

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only to "terrorism which can be harmful to state tranquility and social security," and called it unacceptable.

This year's event was seen as a flashpoint for violence, with demonstrators threatening to double down on their public opposition to the coup with more and bigger demonstrations. The protesters refer to the holiday by its original name, Resistance Day, which marks the beginning of a revolt against Japanese occupation in World War 2.

State television MRTV on Friday night showed an announcement urging young people — who have been at the forefront of the protests and prominent among the casualties — to learn a lesson from those killed during demonstrations about the danger of being shot in the head or back.

The warning was widely taken as a threat because a great number of the fatalities among protesters have come from being shot in the head, suggesting they have been targeted for death. The announcement suggested that some young people were taking part in protesting as if it was a game, and urged their parents and friends to talk them out of participating.

In recent days the junta has portrayed the demonstrators as the ones perpetrating violence for their sporadic use of Molotov cocktails. On Saturday, some protesters in Yangon were seen carrying bows and arrows. In contrast, security forces have used live ammunition for weeks against what have still been overwhelmingly unarmed and peaceful crowds.

The U.S. Embassy said shots were fired Saturday at its cultural center in Yangon, though no one was injured.

The military government does not issue regular casualty counts, and when it has released figures, the totals have been a fraction of what independent parties such as the U.N. have reported. It has said its use of force has been justified to stop what it has called rioting.

In his speech Saturday, Min Aung Hlaing used the occasion to try to justify the overthrow of Suu Kyi's government, accusing it of failing to investigate irregularities in last November's general election, and repeating that his government would hold "a free and fair election" and hand over power afterward.

The military has claimed there were irregularities in the voting rolls for the last election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won in a landslide.

The junta detained Suu Kyi on the day it took power, and continues to hold her on minor criminal charges while investigating allegations of corruption against her that her supporters dismiss as politically motivated.

Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for New York-based Human Rights Watch, said Saturday's events showed that the military, known in Myanmar as the Tatmadaw, should be prosecuted in international courts of law.

"This is a day of suffering and mourning for the Burmese people, who have paid for the Tatmadaw's arrogance and greed with their lives, time and time again," he said.

No timeline given for extracting wedged ship from Suez Canal

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

SUEZ, Egypt (AP) — A giant container ship remained stuck sideways in Egypt's Suez Canal for a fifth day Saturday, as authorities made new attempts to free the vessel and reopen a crucial waterway whose blockage is disrupting global shipping and trade.

Meanwhile, the head of the Suez Canal Authority said strong winds were "not the only cause" for the Ever Given running aground on Tuesday, appearing to push back against conflicting assessments offered by others. Lt. Gen. Osama Rabei told a news conference Saturday that an investigation was ongoing but did not rule out human or technical error.

The massive Ever Given, a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, got stuck in a single-lane stretch of the canal, about six kilometers (3.7 miles) north of the southern entrance, near the city of Suez.

Rabei said he could not predict when the ship might be dislodged. A Dutch salvage firm is attempting to refloat the vessel with tugboats and dredgers, taking advantage of high tides.

Rabei said he remained hopeful that dredging could free the ship without having to resort to removing

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its cargo, but added that "we are in a difficult situation, it's a bad incident."

Asked about when they expected to free the vessel and reopen the canal, he said: "I can't say because I do not know."

Shoei Kisen, the company that owns the vessel, said it was considering removing containers if other refloating efforts failed.

Two attempts to free the vessel failed Saturday, according to Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, the ship's management company, and a canal services provider, Leth agencies, despite hopes that a high tide might give the vessel a boost.

Bernhard Schulte had said earlier that "significant progress" was made late Friday at the ship's stern where its rudder was released from sediment.

It said around a dozen tugboats were working Saturday alongside dredging operations that were removing sand and mud from around the left side of the vessel's bow.

Some 9,000 tons of ballast water had been already removed from the vessel, the canal chairman said.

Since the blockage began, a maritime traffic jam had grown to more than 320 vessels waiting on both ends of the Suez Canal and in the Great Bitter Lake in the middle of the waterway.

Peter Berdowski, CEO of Boskalis, the salvage firm hired to extract the Ever Given said Friday said the company hoped to pull the container ship free within days using a combination of heavy tugboats, dredging and high tides.

He told the Dutch current affairs show Nieuwsuur on Friday night that the front of the ship is stuck in sandy clay, but the rear "has not been completely pushed into the clay and that is positive because you can use the rear end to pull it free."

"The combination of the (tug) boats we will have there, more ground dredged away and the high tide, we hope that will be enough to get the ship free somewhere early next week," he said.

If that doesn't work, the company will remove hundreds of containers from the front of the ship to lighten it, effectively lifting the ship to make it easier to pull free, Berdowski said.

A crane was already on its way that can lift the containers off the ship, he said. Bernhard Schulte also confirmed that a Dutch and an Italian tugboat were scheduled to arrive in Egypt on Sunday.

Egypt Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly called the ship's predicament "a very extraordinary incident," in his first public comments on the blockage.

The Suez Canal Authority organized the first media trip Saturday to the site where the vessel was stuck. From a distance, a flotilla of tugboats and other salvage equipment appeared minuscule compared to the vessel, a reminder of the scale of effort needed to reopen the canal.

Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement said Friday that its initial investigation showed the vessel ran aground due to strong winds and ruled out mechanical or engine failure. However, Rabei seemed to be pushing back against that assessment Saturday, saying that all possibilities, including human and technical errors, were being investigated.

A prolonged closure of the crucial waterway would cause delays in the global shipment chain. Some 19,000 vessels passed through the canal last year, according to official figures. About 10% of world trade flows through the canal. The closure could affect oil and gas shipments to Europe from the Middle East.

Some vessels began changing course and dozens of ships were still en route to the waterway, according to the data firm Refinitiv.

It remained unclear how long the blockage would last. Even after reopening the canal that links factories in Asia to consumers in Europe, the waiting containers are likely to arrive at busy ports, forcing them to face additional delays before offloading.

Associated Press writer Mike Corder at The Hague, Netherlands, contributed to this report.

2 in Seattle, San Francisco face anti-Asian hate charges

By DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Prosecutors in Seattle and San Francisco have charged men with hate crimes in separate incidents that authorities say targeted people of Asian descent amid a wave of high-profile and sometimes deadly violence against Asian Americans since the pandemic began.

Hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Los Angeles and throughout the San Francisco Bay Area on Saturday, the latest in a series of rallies in response what many said has become a troubling surge of anti-Asian sentiments.

“We can no longer accept the normalization of being treated as perpetual foreigners in this country,” speaker Tammy Kim told a rally in LA’s Koreatown.

At rally attended by more than 1,000 people in San Francisco’s Civic Center, the city’s police chief, Bill Scott, drew loud applause when he said, “Hate is the virus, and love is the vaccination.”

On Friday, prosecutors in King County, Washington, charged Christopher Hamner, 51, with three counts of malicious harassment after police say he screamed profanities and threw things at cars in two incidents last week targeting women and children of Asian heritage, The Seattle Times reported Saturday.

In San Francisco, Victor Humberto Brown, 53, made a first court appearance after authorities say he repeatedly punched an Asian American man at a bus stop while shouting an anti-Asian slur.

Brown was initially booked on misdemeanor counts, but prosecutors recently elevated the case to a felony, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. He said in court that he has a post-traumatic stress disorder.

In Seattle, according to court documents, Hamner yelled profanities and threw things at a woman stopped at a red light with her two children, ages 5 and 10, on March 16. Three days later, authorities say Hamner cut off another car driven by an Asian woman, yelled a profanity and the word “Asian” at her and then threw a water bottle at her car after charging at her when she pulled into a parking spot.

Hamner was being held on \$75,000 bail on Saturday. It wasn’t immediately clear if Hamner, who has not yet made a court appearance, had retained an attorney or would be assigned a public defender.

In the first instance, the woman told her 10-year-old daughter to try to take a cellphone photo of the man. The woman, identified by KIRO-TV as Pamela Cole, posted about the incident on social media and a friend’s husband identified Hamner as a possible suspect.

The second woman who was accosted had a dashboard camera in her vehicle that captured the license plate of the other car, which is registered to Hamner, according to court documents. The police detective investigating the case reviewed the video and determined the women’s assailant “was clearly Hamner,” according to the charges.

Cole, who said she identifies as part Chinese and part Malaysian, told KIRO-TV she felt like “a sitting duck” when Hamner approached her car, hitting his fists together and screaming at her to “Get out! Get out!” while spewing profanities about her Asian heritage.

“I was in complete shock. Are you talking to me?” Cole told the station.

“He jumps out the car, and he’s charging at us,” she said. “That was the scariest part for me.”

In San Francisco, Ron Tuason, an Army veteran of Filipino, Chinese and Spanish descent, told the Chronicle he was at a bus stop in the city’s Ingleside neighborhood on March 13 when Brown approached him, yelling “Get out of my country” before using a racial slur meant to denigrate Asian people. Tuason said Brown also said, “It’s because of you there’s a problem here.”

Tuason, 56, said he believes Brown was referring to the coronavirus. Brown punched him multiple times, he said, knocking him to the ground. He suffered a black eye and a swollen cheek as a result of the attack and said he’s also experiencing memory loss.

Police found Brown shortly after Tuason called 911.

Now vaccinated, older adults emerge from COVID hibernation

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Bill Griffin waited more than a year for this moment: Newly vaccinated, he embraced his 3-year-old granddaughter for the first time since the pandemic began.

“She came running right over. I picked her up and gave her a hug. It was amazing,” the 70-year-old said

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after the reunion last weekend.

Spring has arrived with sunshine and warmer weather, and many older adults who have been vaccinated, like Griffin, are emerging from COVID-19-imposed hibernation.

From shopping in person or going to the gym to bigger milestones like visiting family, the people who were once most at risk from COVID-19 are beginning to move forward with getting their lives on track. More than 47% of Americans who are 65 and older are now fully vaccinated.

Visiting grandchildren is a top priority for many older adults. In Arizona, Gailen Krug has yet to hold her first grandchild, who was born a month into the pandemic in Minneapolis. Now fully vaccinated, Krug is making plans to travel for her granddaughter's first birthday in April.

"I can't wait," said Krug, whose only interactions with the girl have been over Zoom and FaceTime. "It's very strange to not have her in my life yet."

The excitement she feels, however, is tempered with sadness. Her daughter-in-law's mother, who she had been looking forward to sharing grandma duties with, died of COVID-19 just hours after the baby's birth. She contracted it at a nursing home.

Isolated by the pandemic, older adults were hard hit by loneliness caused by restrictions intended to keep people safe. Many of them sat out summer reunions, canceled vacation plans and missed family holiday gatherings in November and December.

In states with older populations, like Maine, Arizona and Florida, health officials worried about the emotional and physical toll of loneliness, posing an additional health concern on top of the virus.

But that's changing, and more older people are reappearing in public after they were among the first group to get vaccinated.

Those who are fully vaccinated are ready to get out of Dodge without worrying they were endangering themselves amid a pandemic that has claimed more than 540,000 lives in the United States.

"Now there's an extra level of confidence. I am feeling good about moving forward," said Ken Hughes, a 79-year-old Florida resident who is flying with his wife for a pandemic-delayed annual trip to Arizona in April.

Plenty of older adults are eager to hop on a jet to travel. Others are looking forward to the simpler things like eating at a restaurant, going to a movie theater or playing bingo.

Sally Adams, 74, was among several older people who showed up for "parking lot bingo" in Glendale, Arizona. She felt safe because she'd been vaccinated and because she was in her car at the first bingo event in more than year.

Once she fulfills the time to reach peak immunity, she plans to indulge in little things like eating out. Both her and her husband, who is also vaccinated, have only done takeout. Now, they feel like it will be OK to even eat indoors — as long as it's not crowded.

"We'll probably go in and take the farthest table from other people just to be on the safe side," she said.

Indeed, many older adults are taking a cautious approach, especially when the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declined to ease recommendations for travel.

Frequent traveler Cindy Charest was so excited about the prospect of jetting away for the first time in more than a year that she posted an airplane emoji with a photo of her being vaccinated on social media.

But she's taking a wait-and-see attitude after the CDC recommended against nonessential air travel, for now.

"I think I got prematurely excited about it," said Charest, 65, of Westbrook, Maine. But she's ready to jump when the time comes. She's watching for changing guidance.

Others are also cautious.

"We're still in the thick of it," said Claudette Greene, 68, of Portland, Maine. "We've made a lot of progress but we're not done with this."

Kathy Bubar said she and her husband are completely vaccinated but are in no hurry to push things. The 73-year-old Portland resident is planning to wait until fall before planning any major travel. She hopes to go on a safari in December.

"My goal in all of this is to not be the last person to die from COVID. I'm willing to be patient and take as long as it takes," she said.

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The Griffins were also cautious before they were reunited with their granddaughter.

Bill Griffin, of Waterboro, didn't dare have close contact with family members until after being vaccinated because he has lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease and high blood pressure, all factors that pushed him into a high-risk category for COVID-19.

"Everybody wants to live for the moment, but the moment could have been very deadly. We listened to the scientists," he said.

Associated Press writers Adriana Gomez Licon in Miami and Terry Tang in Phoenix contributed to this report.

US waives FBI checks on caregivers at new migrant facilities

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The Biden administration is not requiring FBI fingerprint background checks of caregivers at its rapidly expanding network of emergency sites to hold thousands of immigrant teenagers, alarming child welfare experts who say the waiver compromises safety.

In the rush to get children out of overcrowded and often unsuitable Border Patrol sites, President Joe Biden's team is turning to a measure used by previous administrations: tent camps, convention centers and other huge facilities operated by private contractors and funded by U.S. Health and Human Services. In March alone, the Biden administration announced it will open eight new emergency sites across the Southwest adding 15,000 new beds, more than doubling the size of its existing system.

These emergency sites don't have to be licensed by state authorities or provide the same services as permanent HHS facilities. They also cost far more, an estimated \$775 per child per day.

And to staff the sites quickly, the Biden administration has waived vetting procedures intended to protect minors from potential harm.

Staff and volunteers directly caring for children at new emergency sites don't have to undergo FBI fingerprint checks, which use criminal databases not accessible to the public and can overcome someone changing their name or using a false identity.

HHS issued a statement Friday saying that direct care staff and volunteers "must pass public record criminal background checks." Public records checks generally take less time but are reliant on the subject providing correct information.

The agency says those giving direct care are supervised by federal employees or others who have passed fingerprint-based background checks. "In the Emergency Intake Sites, HHS is implementing the standards of care used for children in an emergency response setting," the agency said.

During former President Donald Trump's administration, HHS for months did not ensure FBI fingerprint checks or child welfare screenings were done for workers at a large camp in Tornillo, Texas. An Associated Press investigation in 2018 also found staff at another camp at Homestead, Florida, were not given routine screenings to rule out allegations of child abuse or neglect.

HHS' inspector general warned then that FBI fingerprint checks "provide a unique safeguard" over most commercial background checks that search a person's name.

"While the various background checks could identify some past criminal convictions or sexual offenses, these checks were not as extensive as the FBI fingerprint background checks," the inspector general found.

Laura Nodolf, the district attorney in Midland, Texas, where HHS opened an emergency site this month, said that without fingerprint checks, "we truly do not know who the individual is who is providing direct care."

"That's placing the children under care of HHS in the path, potentially, of a sex offender," Nodolf said. "They are putting these children in a position of becoming potential victims."

Dr. Amy Cohen, a child psychiatrist who is executive director of the immigration advocacy group Every Last One, noted that HHS requires fingerprint checks of relatives who seek to take in children as part of a vetting process that takes more than 30 days on average.

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"Failure to check fingerprints of frontline facility staff exposes vulnerable migrant children to a significant danger of physical and sexual abuse," she said.

The Biden administration has 18,000 children and teenagers in its custody, a figure that has risen almost daily over the last several weeks. While Biden continues to expel most adults and many families crossing the border, he has declined to reinstate expulsions of unaccompanied immigrant children, which stopped last year after a now-stayed federal court order.

More than 5,000 youths are in border custody, many of them in a South Texas tent facility with limited space, food and access to the outdoors. But Border Patrol is apprehending hundreds more minors than HHS is releasing every day — a difference of 325 just on Thursday.

At the downtown Dallas convention center, one of HHS' emergency sites, almost all of its 2,300 beds were filled just one week after it opened this month.

Child advocates say that rather than opening more unlicensed emergency facilities, the administration must speed up placing children with sponsors, especially the approximately 40% of youths in custody who have a parent in the country ready to take them.

HHS has tried to expedite processing of minors in recent weeks, allowing some youths to be placed with parents while fingerprint checks are pending and authorizing the use of government funds to pay for airfare when a child is released.

Ana, the mother of a 17-year-old teen detained in Dallas, told AP said her son fled gangs trying to recruit him in El Salvador and hoped to join her in Virginia. After an eight-day journey, the teenager crossed the U.S.-Mexico border on March 9. Eight days would pass until she heard from authorities at the border that they had him in custody.

She received a 10-minute call from him on March 20, after he was taken to the Dallas facility. It was the first time she's spoken to him since he entered the country. She says she has repeatedly called HHS' Office of Refugee Resettlement to ask if they would release him to her family, but they have refused, saying they have to process her case. In the meantime, she's ready to present documentation proving she is his mother and fit to take him.

"I don't understand why they are making it so difficult," said Ana, who is not being identified by her last name to protect her son's privacy. "I know that we are in a pandemic, but maybe I think that it is that they are behind schedule, that maybe there are a lot of people there."

Tornillo and Homestead were sharply criticized by Democrats and child welfare experts who warned of the potential trauma of detaining thousands of teenagers without adequate support.

Volunteers from the American Red Cross provided care at the first two emergency HHS sites, a converted camp for oil workers in Midland, Texas, and the Dallas convention center. Those volunteers are now being phased out.

The Red Cross and HHS for several days refused to acknowledge that the volunteers weren't given FBI fingerprint checks. The Red Cross first said that all of its volunteers underwent background checks when they joined the group. On Tuesday, the group said it was "refreshing" checks on about 300 volunteers sent to care for children and that it had not found any new red flags.

HHS spokesman Mark Weber said he could not yet identify which companies or groups will now step in. The department asked contractors in mid-March to submit bids to provide child care and transportation.

Leecia Welch, an attorney for the nonprofit National Center for Youth Law who monitors the treatment of immigrant children, said lawyers would pay "close attention to whether this temporary waiver becomes standard operating practice."

"Given the urgency of the current placement crisis, families deserve the same flexibility as the for-profit companies contracting with the federal government," she said.

Safety concerns have already been raised about the Midland camp. One official working there noted a lack of new clothes and caseworkers when teenagers initially arrived, and state regulators last week warned that the water on site may not be safe, forcing U.S. authorities to give teens bottles until they could arrange for water deliveries.

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Michelle Saenz-Rodriguez, a Dallas-based immigration lawyer, described the Dallas convention center as reminiscent of a barracks but "very welcoming." She visited the convention center in its first days as a volunteer for Catholic Charities and said that cots for more than 2,000 boys have been placed in socially distanced rows in a ballroom.

After being bused to the site, the boys get clean clothes, a pillow, a blanket and a COVID-19 test, Saenz-Rodriguez said. She saw them last week sitting together at tables, talking and playing card games. Most did not understand why they'd been brought to Dallas or what would happen to them next, she said.

"Their number one question is 'How long are we going to be here? What's going to happen to us?'" Saenz-Rodriguez said.

Associated Press journalist Jake Bleiberg in Dallas contributed to this report.

As daily deaths near 4,000, worst may lie ahead for Brazil

By DAVID BILLER and MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazil currently accounts for one-quarter of the entire world's daily COVID-19 deaths, far more than any other single nation, and health experts are warning that the nation is on the verge of even greater calamity.

The nation's seven-day average of 2,400 deaths stands to reach to 3,000 within weeks, six experts told the Associated Press. That's nearly the worst level seen by the U.S., though Brazil has two-thirds its population. Spikes of daily deaths could soon hit 4,000; on Friday there were 3,650.

Having glimpsed the abyss, there is growing recognition shutdowns are no longer avoidable -- not just among experts, but also many mayors and governors. Restrictions on activity they implemented last year were half-hearted and consistently sabotaged by President Jair Bolsonaro, who sought to stave off economic doom. He remains unconvinced of any need for clampdown, which leaves local leaders pursuing a patchwork of measures to prevent the death toll from spiraling further.

It may be too late, with a more contagious variant rampaging across Brazil. For the first time, new daily cases topped 100,000 on March 25, with many more uncounted. Miguel Nicolelis, professor of Neurobiology at Duke University who advised several Brazilian governors and mayors on pandemic control, anticipates the total death toll reaching 500,000 by July and exceeding that of the U.S. by year-end.

"We have surpassed levels never imagined for a country with a public health care system, a history of efficient immunization campaigns and health workers who are second to none in the world," Nicolelis said. "The next stage is the health system collapse."

The system is already buckling, with almost all states' intensive care units near or at capacity. Dr. José Antônio Curiati, a supervisor at Sao Paulo's Hospital das Clinicas, the biggest hospital complex in Latin America, said its beds are full, but patients keep arriving. The city's oxygen supply isn't guaranteed, and stocks of sedatives required for intubation in intensive care units will soon run out.

"Four thousand deaths a day seems to be right around the corner," Curiati said.

On March 17 in northeastern Piaui state, nurse Polyena Silveira wept beside a COVID-19 patient who died on the floor for lack of beds at her public hospital. A photo capturing the moment went viral and served as a national wake-up call.

"When he was gone, I had two minutes to feel sorry before moving to the next patient," Silveira, 33, told the AP. "In eight years as a nurse, I'd never felt as much pain as that night. I'm near my limit, physically and mentally."

Brazil's state-run science and technology institute, Fiocruz, on Tuesday called for a 14-day lockdown to reduce transmission by 40%. Natalia Pasternak, a microbiologist who presides over the Question of Science Institute, pointed to a local example of success: The mid-size city of Araraquara in Sao Paulo state last month implemented lockdown and has seen its cases and deaths recede.

Pasternak declined to estimate Brazil's looming daily death toll but said the trend is for continued growth if nothing is done.

"We need coordinated action, and that's probably not going to happen because the federal government

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has no real interest in pursuing preventative actions," Pasternak said. "(Mayors and governors) are trying to implement preventative measures, but separately and in their own ways. This isn't the best approach, but it's better than nothing."

Minas Gerais, Brazil's second most populous state, has closed nonessential shops. Espirito Santo state will enter lockdown Sunday. Brazil's two biggest cities, Rio and Sao Paulo, have imposed extensive restrictions on nonessential activities. Their state authorities brought forward holidays to create a 10-day period of repose, which started Friday.

Restrictive measures, however, are only as strong as citizens' compliance. And Bolsonaro continues to undermine their willingness by painting even partial shutdown as an assault on one's right to earn an honest day's wages. He has lashed out at local leaders, particularly governors, who dare defy him.

"We need to open our eyes and understand this is no joke," Rio's Mayor Eduardo Paes said in a recorded message on the eve of the 10-day shutdown, stressing that no mayor wants to cause unemployment. "People are dying and, if everything continues as is, nothing is done, God only knows what could happen. No one knows this disease's limit. No one knows how many variants could emerge."

Hundreds of protesters marched along Rio's Copacabana beach the next morning. Most sported green-and-yellow shirts that are a hallmark of pro-Bolsonaro rallies and many declined to wear masks. They chanted "We want to work!" and directed vitriol at Paes.

The World Health Organization's director, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on Monday called for everyone in Brazil to muster a serious response -- "whether it's the government or the people."

"It's a concerted effort of all actors that will really reverse this upward trend. It is actually very fast and accelerating really, really fast," he said. "Especially we're worried about the (weekly) death rate, which doubled in just one month from 7,000 to 15,000."

The virus's spread has been turbocharged by the more contagious P.1 variant that has become cause for concern beyond Brazil's borders, not just in South America. It has already been identified in the U.S., this week in New York. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, said Wednesday that his team will be meeting with Brazilian authorities and are "quite concerned" about the situation in Brazil.

The U.S. has seen its death toll plunge since late January amid a massive vaccine rollout, and its seven-day average has dipped below 1,000. By contrast, Brazil's vaccine rollout has been strained, at best. The government bet big on a single vaccine provider, AstraZeneca, while for months rejecting offers to purchase others. Only after delivery delays from AstraZeneca jeopardized rollout did Brazil's health ministry begin buying — but too late for most deliveries to arrive in the first half of this year.

The nation has fully vaccinated less than 2% of its citizens, which experts widely consider an embarrassment for a country long regarded as a global model for vaccination programs.

More than 500 of the nation's most influential economists and executives this week wrote an open letter calling for mass vaccination and decrying the situation. They said that controversy regarding economic impacts of social distancing is a false dilemma and all levels of government should be prepared to implement emergency lockdown.

While Brazil's economy didn't contract as much as regional peers last year, the worsening health crisis casts a shadow over the 2021, according to William Jackson, chief emerging markets economist at Capital Economics. GDP will return to pre-crisis levels late this year, at earliest, marking a rather weak recovery relative to other emerging markets.

Monica de Bolle, a Brazilian senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, is more pessimistic, and expects another recession in 2021. Exactly how bad things become in coming months hinges on whether the P.1 variant is already dominant nationwide, and is proven to cause reinfections or be more severe.

Either way, there's no time left to delay decisive action, she said.

"All in all, it's a huge disaster," said de Bolle, who has done postgraduate studies in immunology and genetics. "Could have been avoided; wasn't. Very difficult to fix now. The only real fix is a very harsh lockdown with the population really abiding by it, which may be a hard sell."

Savarese reported from Sao Paulo. AP reporter Marcelo de Sousa and videojournalist Mario Lobão contributed from Rio.

Balky sign-ups complicate virus vaccinations for blind, deaf

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Unable to see, Carla McQuillan typically uses a program that converts the letters on a screen into audible words when she wants to read something online. The tool wouldn't work when she tried to schedule an appointment to get a COVID-19 vaccine, however.

"When I clicked, it wouldn't tell me what the date was. I could have tapped on something, but I wouldn't have known what it was," said McQuillan, who operates a Montessori school and serves as president of the National Federation of the Blind of Oregon. Her husband, who can see, eventually helped out.

In Alabama, Donte Little helped 20 blind and deaf people who had trouble signing up for vaccinations and getting to a clinic for shots.

"It's been a challenge for anybody. Add deafness or blindness on top of it and it's that much more of one," said Little, who is visually impaired and directs a regional center for the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind.

The confusing maze of websites, phone numbers, emails and paper documents required to sign up for an immunization in the United States is presenting a challenge for people who are visually impaired or hard of hearing. Providers are using multiple different systems that can vary by state and even cities, they say, often forcing the disabled to rely on others to help them get in line.

Federal laws require communications in an understandable format and accommodations to assist people who might face obstacles, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has laid out instructions that include having local health departments provide staff to address accessibility needs and plans.

But the National Federation of the Blind wrote to every U.S. governor last month complaining about hurdles posed by balky sign-up systems and vaccine distribution methods including drive-up clinics, which it said are largely inaccessible to people who can't see. The group has yet to receive a "substantive" response from any state, spokesman Chris Danielsen said.

Separately, the National Association of the Deaf said problems including confusing and complex information, phone systems that can't be used by hard of hearing and a lack of interpreters is making it difficult for people who can't hear to make appointments for immunizations. Chief Executive Howard A. Rosenblum said the group has asked the Biden administration for help.

"The process continues to be very haphazard and confusing for everyone, but particularly for people with disabilities due to the lack of foresight on accessibility," he said in an email.

Such problems could affect millions.

The CDC reports that an estimated 12 million Americans over the age of 40 have impaired vision, including 1 million who are blind, and the National Association of the Deaf said a 2011 study found that 48 million Americans are deaf or hard of hearing. The National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness estimated in 2008 that about 40,000 U.S. adults were both deaf and blind.

Tara L. Invidiato, a director with the American Association of the DeafBlind, said members trying to sign up for vaccines have faced multiple problems including glitchy websites, inaccessible notifications and the speed required to fill out forms while reading Braille.

"I had to rely on someone who can see and that is unsettling because we the DeafBlind aim for independent living and we know we can do things by ourselves for the most part," she said in an email interview.

Robert Weinstock, who is profoundly deaf, said clunky telephone systems are posing problems for some who can't hear because some appointment hotlines don't have workers who understand how to use video services that allow for communication by sign language. That leads to frustration and calls that end with hang-ups, he said.

"Also, some sites will accept pre-registration online, but conduct the actual scheduling via telephone, leaving voice messages even when the deaf person has explicitly requested contact via text or email. This

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can be a significant barrier," said Weinstock, director of public relations at Gallaudet University, a school for the deaf.

Alicia Wooten, who works with a COVID-19 team at Gallaudet, which is in Washington, D.C., said simply getting the word out to deaf people about vaccination availability is a problem because so much notification is done by platforms including radio.

"This means the Deaf community has a delay in getting information, so that by the time they try to register, vaccines are already reserved. The cycle is then repeated," she said in an email.

But there are cases where the system is working. Weinstock said both he and his wife went to vaccination locations and got shots with relative ease because there were interpreters and people had been trained.

"Every single person I spoke with, from check-in to 'recovery,' whipped out their smartphones and used a notes app to converse with me, or wrote on paper, or otherwise made sure I was fully included," Weinstock, who lives in Maryland, said in an email exchange.

Robert Jaquiss, who is blind, experienced problems firsthand when he tried to get an appointment for a shot in Missoula, Montana. He was eventually able to snag a time with the help of a friend who can see, but Jaquiss said the sign-up system isn't built to accommodate people unable to navigate quickly during the process.

"I can't just zip-zip through," Jaquiss, 67, said in a phone interview. "When they say a site link opens up at 1 p.m., they mean 1 p.m., and if you're not Johnny on the spot the appointments are gone."

Charlottesville mayor's poem about city, racism 'hits nerve'

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

America's Black politicians have a long history of calling out the nation's racism. But few have taken to poetry and written that their city is "void of a moral compass" and "rapes you of your breaths."

Nikuyah Walker, the first Black woman to be mayor of Charlottesville, Virginia, has posted poetry on Twitter and Facebook that has drawn national attention for descriptions of a picturesque college town that is indelibly linked to a slave-owning U.S. president and a deadly white nationalist rally.

"Charlottesville: The beautiful-ugly it is," Walker wrote on Wednesday. "It rapes you, comforts you in its (expletive) stained sheet and tells you to keep its secrets."

The mayor of the majority-white city in the Blue Ridge Mountain foothills followed up with a longer and cleaner version. Charlottesville, she wrote, "lynched you, hung the noose at city hall and pressed the souvenir that was once your finger against its lips."

It ends by stating that the city of 47,000 "is anchored in white supremacy and rooted in racism. Charlottesville rapes you and covers you in sullied sheets."

Walker's words have resonated with some who said she captured the Black experience while communicating in the same way many people do these days: through artful expression on social media.

"This is a new era of Black electeds," said Wes Bellamy, a friend of Walker's, a former Charlottesville vice mayor and interim chair of Virginia State University's political science department.

"We don't follow the same playbook that individuals used before," said Bellamy, who has come under fire for his own tweets in years past. "We emote in different ways. We utilize technology in different ways to get our points across."

But others, including two of Walker's fellow council members, said her rape metaphor was "hurtful to victims of sexual assault and rape, and deeply unfair in how it presents Charlottesville to the world."

"We should not gloss over our difficult history of race relations," City Council members Heather Hill and Lloyd Snook said in a joint statement. "But as elected officials, we must choose our words carefully."

Hill and Snook, who are both white, said they were "appalled" at the threats Walker has received from the post. And they said they can "only dimly understand the present-day impact of America's history of slavery, lynching and sexualized violence toward Black people in general, and toward Black women in particular."

Charlottesville is home to the University of Virginia. It's where Thomas Jefferson, the third U.S. president, lived and owned Black Americans who were enslaved. They included Sally Hemings, who is widely believed

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by historians to have given birth to several of Jefferson's children.

Walker did not respond to an email from The Associated Press requesting comment. But on Thursday night, she offered no apologies during a Facebook live interview with Bellamy.

"It did exactly what I was hoping that it would do, besides the everybody-across-the-country-talking-about-it part," she said of her social media posts. "But I wanted it to hit a nerve."

Walker grew up in Charlottesville and earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Virginia Commonwealth University, according to her bio on the city's website.

The mother of three spent years working as a social justice advocate and held nonprofit jobs that included substance abuse clinician and HIV prevention educator. She was also employed by the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

Walker ran for office as an independent and was elected to Charlottesville's five-member City Council just a few months after the Unite the Right Rally in 2017.

Hundreds of white nationalists had descended on the city in part to protest the planned removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. Violence prompted authorities to force the rally to disband. Afterward, a woman was killed and dozens were injured when a car driven by a self-avowed white supremacist plowed into a crowd of peaceful counterprotesters.

Walker said on Facebook Live that she was clear about who she was from the beginning.

"You all said you wanted something different," she said. "You all said you were open to being challenged."

Bellamy, who lives in Charlottesville, told the AP that the city has made a lot of improvements in recent years. But he said there are still many Black people who lack hope and feel they have no opportunities.

"I've had a lot of people say she told it exactly like it is," he said of Walker. "And I've had some people say, 'Help me understand why she used that language.' But I haven't heard a person I've spoken to, specifically a Black person, say that they did not agree with what she said."

Nadia Brown, a political science professor at Purdue University, said her research has found that many black female leaders, especially within their own communities, are seen as relatable figures. And many have taken to social media to advance social justice causes, such as Black Lives Matter.

"And so in this way, Mayor Walker is 100% in line with Black women elected officials, not just mayors but those who are serving in Congress," Brown said.

But, Brown added, Walker's words could also provide fuel to those pushing back against the nation's current reckoning with its past.

Some of Virginia's Republican gubernatorial candidates are already responding to Walker's posts. Among them is Peter Snyder, an entrepreneur and former Fox News contributor who lives in Charlottesville.

"Unfortunately, this insanity has become more common among our extremist leaders in Richmond and across Virginia," Snyder said, adding that "woke liberals focus, foster, and coddle Critical Race Theory and this kind of extremism."