

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 1 of 95

- [1- Groton Area COVID-19 Report](#)
- [2- Groton Lions Club hosts Easter Egg Hunt](#)
- [3- MJ's Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [4- Good Friday Services](#)
- [4- Dirt piling up in ditches](#)
- [5- Drought Monitor](#)
- [6- SDHSAA AMENDS STATE TRACK & FIELD SCHEDULE, HOST SITES](#)
- [8- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [12- Yesterday's COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [19- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [20- Weather Pages](#)
- [24- Daily Devotional](#)
- [25- Tour Ad](#)
- [26- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [27- News from the Associated Press](#)



Groton Area School District
 Active COVID-19 Cases
 Updated April 1, 2021; 2:19 PM

J	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	S	T
K	G													t	t
														a	a
														f	f
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
 The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

Groton Lions Club hosts Easter Egg Hunt



Police Chief Stacy Mayou poses with the Easter bunny at the Easter Egg Hunt held last Saturday at the Groton City Park.



Photos by Bruce Babcock

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 3 of 95



Karyn and Bruce Babcock with the Easter Bunny.

Photos by Bruce Babcock

The Babcock extended family was in attendance of the annual Easter Egg Hunt.

NOW HIRING

MJ's Sinclair of Groton is looking for someone to work weekends and nights. Stop out and see Jeff for an application.

Groton Daily Independent

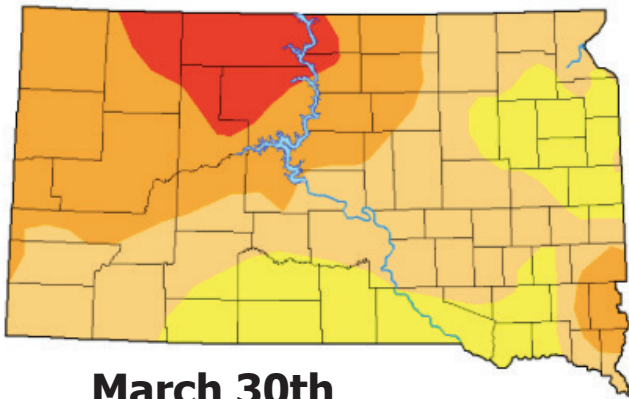
Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 4 of 95



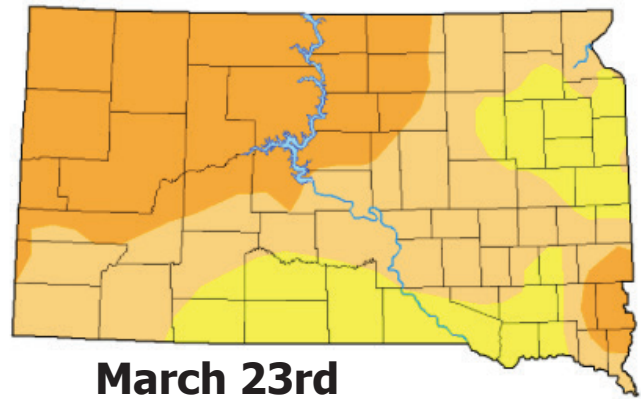
The drought across the high plains of the United States is taking a toll on fields as ditches are being filled in with the blowing dirt. This photo from the Stutsman County SCD & 319 Facebook Page.

Good Friday Service

Emmanuel Lutheran: 7 p.m.: Good Friday Worship
Catholic Parish: Traditional Good Friday Service in Groton, 3 p.m.; Stations/Cross veneration in Turton, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: 7 p.m.: Good Friday Worship



March 30th



March 23rd

Drought Monitor

Another dry week along with strong winds on March 29 resulted in a slight expansion of extreme drought (D3) across North Dakota and northern South Dakota. This expanding D3 area was based mostly on SPI at EDDI at various time scales. Soil moisture remains below the 5th percentile for much of North Dakota. Based on snow water content running near average and 6 to 12 month SPIs, D3 was improved by one category across north-central Wyoming. Following multiple changes during the previous two weeks across Colorado, only minor improvements were needed this week. Localized improvements were made to small areas of southern Colorado, based in part on WYTD (since Oct 1, 2020) precipitation.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 6 of 95

SDHSAA AMENDS STATE TRACK & FIELD SCHEDULE, HOST SITES

PIERRE – Due to ongoing concerns amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the SDHSAA has announced a pair of changes to the State Track & Field Championships to be held in the Black Hills.

Each classification will compete both days at their own sites: all Class AA Events will occur in Sturgis at Woodle Field, all Class A Events will occur at Lyle Hare Stadium on the campus of Black Hills State University in Spearfish, and all Class B Events will occur at O’Harra Memorial Stadium on the campus of SDSM&T in Rapid City.

Additionally, the schedule of events (found on Page Two of this release) has been modified to mitigate risk concerns of virus spread at the State Championships.

“This change is being done after consulting with our Site Hosts, Coaches and Administrators from across the state to formulate a meet that will allow us to hold a full, championship competition” stated Dr. John Krogstrand, SDHSAA Asst. Executive Director. “Our hope is these changes, both in terms of sites and schedule, will allow us to host a successful State Meet while also maintaining social distancing guidelines and health precautions.”

“Practice Day” at each site, scheduled originally for Thursday prior to the State Meet, will not be held.

To help with social distancing and mitigation efforts, the SDHSAA requests that all fans wear masks and remain socially distant from one another during the event as possible. Additionally, teams and school personnel will be asked to space out throughout the facility to assist with social distancing concerns.

FRIDAY				
RUNNING EVENTS			FIELD EVENTS	
Time	Evening Session	Heats	Time	Events
3:00 PM	Boys' 110 Hurdles	3 Heat Prelim	3:00 PM	Girls' Pole Vault
3:15 PM	Girls' 100 Hurdles	3 Heat Prelim		Boys' Discus
3:30 PM	Boys' 4X800 Relay	3 Heat Final		Girls' Triple Jump
4:05 PM	Boys' 100 Dash	3 Heat Prelim		Boys' High Jump
4:20 PM	Girls' 100 Dash	3 Heat Prelim		
4:35 PM	Girls' 4X800 Relay	3 Heat Final	*to follow*	Boys' Pole Vault
5:00 PM	Boys' 110 Hurdles	1 Heat Final		Girls' Discus
5:05 PM	Girls' 100 Hurdles	1 Heat Final		Boys' Triple Jump
5:15 PM	Boys' 4X200 Relay	3 Heat Final		Girls' High Jump
5:30 PM	Girls' 4X200 Relay	3 Heat Final		
5:45 PM	Boys' 3200 Run	1 Heat Final		
6:10 PM	Boys' 100 Dash	1 Heat Final		
6:15 PM	Girls' 100 Dash	1 Heat Final		
6:20 PM	Girls' 3200 Run	1 Heat Final		

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 7 of 95

SATURDAY				
RUNNING EVENTS			FIELD EVENTS	
Time	Morning Ssession	Heats	Time	Events
9:00 AM	Boys' 1600 Run	1 Heat Final	9:00 AM	Girls' Long Jump
9:10 AM	Girls' 1600 Run	1 Heat Final		Boys' Shot Put
10:20 AM	Boys' 4X100 Relay	3 Heat Final		
10:40 AM	Girls' 4X100 Relay	3 Heat Final		
10:50 AM	Boys' 400 Dash	3 Heat Final		
11:05 AM	Girls' 400 Dash	3 Heat Final		
11:20 AM	Boys' 300 Hurdles	3 Heat Final		
11:45 PM	Girls' 300 Hurdles	3 Heat Final	*to follow*	Boys' Long Jump
12:10 PM	Boys' Medley Relay	3 Heat Final		Girls' Shot Put
12:30 PM	Girls' Medley Relay	3 Heat Final		
	BREAK			
Time	Afternoon Session	Heats		
1:45 PM	Boys' 800 Run	3 Heat Final		
1:55 PM	Girls' 800 Run	3 Heat Final		
2:05 PM	Boys' 200 Dash	3 Heat Final		
2:20 PM	Girls' 200 Dash	3 Heat Final		
2:30 PM	Boys' 4X400 Relay	3 Heat Final		
2:45 PM	Girls' 4X400 Relay	3 Heat Final		

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 8 of 95

#403 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I'll wish you a happy Opening Day in the hope this baseball season will proceed in somewhat better order than the last one. Sadly, my team is not off to a stellar start; good thing there are another 161 games to go.

Not a great look tonight. There were 78,800 new cases reported today, perilously close to 80,000, a number we haven't seen in a month. We're up to 30,560,600 total cases in the US, 03% more than yesterday. There are 41,163 people hospitalized today. And we have now lost 552,585 people to this virus, 0.2% more than yesterday. There were 1060 deaths today.

On April 1, 2020, one year ago today, the US broke the 200,000-case mark. This seemed simply awful at the time because I hadn't the slightest what was coming. Probably a good thing it crept up on me; I might have given up in disgust if I'd known. And don't get me wrong: This was awful, just not when we stand it beside what followed. We were at 211,368 cases with 4838 deaths, over 900 of them in the past day, a record. A newborn died in Connecticut. Government modeling had up to 240,000 Americans dying in upcoming months. That actually looks pretty good from where we sit today.

A new report from the CDC on this day made it more clear that we were probably dealing with a virus which can spread from asymptomatic people; this changed the game considerably. The USS Theodore Roosevelt was up to 100 identified cases. We were starting to get that mask-wearing, while beset by challenges with supply, might be in important mitigation measure. We were getting more and more stories of people who died while on Facetime or some such with family members who were not permitted even a compassionate visit at the end of life.

The Wimbledon tournament was canceled. Worldwide there had been 883,225 cases and 44,156 deaths. Italy came in with 105,792 cases and 12,428 deaths, while Spain had 102,136 cases and 9053 deaths. China had dropped to fifth in the world.

We need to talk about these surges we're starting to see in parts of the country; they are very concerning. Our seven-day new-case average continues to grow, alarmingly so; we were under 55,000 (still a ridiculously high number) just over a week ago, and we're now 10,000 past that. We are seeing persistent high—and in some areas growing—new case numbers in the Northeast, and now we are also getting an ugly trend in Michigan. This has been the pattern throughout this pandemic; generally, it has been followed by surges in the South and then the West. I don't know whether this is where it's going now, but I do not see any reason to think that's impossible. Michigan's seeing big increases in B.1.1.7, the highly transmissible variant first identified in the UK, and now they've identified their first case of the also highly transmissible P.1, which was first identified in Brazil. Florida, with the largest number of B.1.1.7 cases and hordes of spring-breakers, looks poised to join Michigan in the trouble zone. New Jersey and Pennsylvania are seeing growing numbers of the variant as well.

Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota has been predicting dire consequences of all the increased activity and travel and the easing of restrictions. He hasn't been wrong much during the pandemic, and so I view his current assessment as something to which we should give our attention. On CNN this morning, he said, "I'm telling you right now . . . we are just beginning to surge. Denying it is not going to help us." He added that we do not have enough people vaccinated yet to stop this, and that we should not be opening up, but should be doubling down on precautions." Hate to say it, but that ship has sailed. We've decided as a society that we just don't care enough. Let's hope we can move vaccine fast enough to blunt this. Remains to be seen.

To wit, March was the biggest air travel month in over a year—38 million people through TSA check points. We've seen more than a million travelers each day for three full weeks now; this is about half the numbers traveling in March, 2019, before the pandemic. We will pay for that. People will die who would otherwise have lived.

The new CDC ensemble forecast was published yesterday, and we might have caught a break: It looks better. Last week's forecast was projecting up to 574,000 deaths by April 10; this week's projects 566,000, which means the dying's slowing down. Projection for April 24, which is as far as this model goes into the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 9 of 95

future, is for up to 585,000. That means we're looking at between 4100 and 9900 deaths per week; in the last week we recorded 6960.

We also have provisional cause-of-death data for 2020 from the CDC. It is important to remember that finalizing deaths information can take a good year; it's a more complex process than it would at first glance appear to be. What we have so far, though, in a report in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report makes it pretty clear Covid-19 was very likely the third-underlying cause of death after heart disease and cancer and that impact was disproportionate on communities of color, all of whom suffered more than double the virus-associated deaths as non-Hispanic White people. We knew this was coming; the numbers have been leaning this way for months. The US age-adjusted death rate increased by 15.9 percent, which is around 460,000, from 2019. The lion's share of that is going to be attributable directly to Covid-19. We have 378,000 attributed deaths on the year now, and I would guess excess-deaths analysis might yield a somewhat larger estimate as time goes on. You may recall that excess deaths are those that occur in excess of expected numbers based on five-year data. If you missed our earlier discussions of excess deaths analysis, have a look back at my Update #79 posted on May 12 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3587274557955591> for a basic explanation, Update #101 posted June 3 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3649991181683928> for some analysis from the UK early in the pandemic, Update #136 posted July 8 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3649991181683928> for a look at data from New York showing how non-Covid-19 deaths can be linked to the pandemic, and Update #315 posted January 3 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4314331798583193> for an example of how excess deaths analysis can be used to debunk some of the misinformation that's been circulating. We also had already heard life expectancy in the US had declined a full year just in the first half of 2020 to a figure last seen in 2006.

The CDC says we're up to an average of 2.9 million doses of vaccine administered per day, bringing us to 153,631,404 doses so far out of the 200,496,635 delivered—still getting them out in good order. More than one in six of us are fully vaccinated and three in ten have received at least one dose. We should be able to operate a while before we bump up against the reluctant; it is my sincere hope that by then some/many of these folks will have had enough friends and neighbors and family vaccinated to allay their fears, also that some of the educational efforts underway have a chance to bear fruit. Every dose that goes out makes all of us safer.

We have further good news on the vaccine front: Today Pfizer and BioNTech announced follow-up data to their phase 3 clinical trial for their vaccine. It looks like the vaccine continues to show high efficacy at six months in the 46,307 follow-up participants, indicating 91.3 percent efficacy in preventing symptomatic cases (92.6 percent in the US) and all or nearly all (depending on the definition used) severe cases. It should be noted that there were six trial participants who became infected with B.1.351, the variant first identified in South Africa, but none of these cases were in the vaccine arm of the trial. This provides an indication the vaccine is, indeed, effective against this worrisome variant. There were still no deaths. No new safety concerns turned up during this follow-up period. I will note that the data have not yet been independently reviewed. The company statement says these data "position us to submit a Biologics License application to the US FDA." This would be the full approval that would replace the emergency use authorization (EUA) under which the vaccine has been distributed and administered thus far. Big step because the EUA, as the name indicates, is good only while there's an emergency and can be revoked or changed as the FDA sees fit; licensure is formal and long-term. I'll add here that Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, mentioned to CBS's Gayle King that, based on what we know now about these vaccines, he "would not be surprised at all" if the other vaccines come up with results like this too when their follow-up data come in.

There are additional findings from a study at the University of Birmingham in the UK where this vaccine has been widely used. In a group of elderly people, ages 80 to 96, the vaccine elicited strong antibody responses, including a somewhat less robust, although still effective, response to P.1, the variant that was first identified in Brazil.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 10 of 95

And just to be sure (a stance I heartily support), Moderna has its clinical trial for its B.1.351-specific vaccine underway with the first doses administered yesterday to some of the 210 participants. While on current evidence, the already authorized vaccine is effective against this variant first identified in South Africa, it doesn't hurt to have a tested and proven vaccine ready to go, just in case. This one has been modified to account for the particular mutations characteristic of B.1.351. The trial will include people who have already received Moderna's vaccine as well as unvaccinated people; there will be eight cohorts, each receiving different doses and combinations in order to sort out just what is needed and what works.

Despite some early (and recent) production troubles and some doubt, it appears Janssen/Johnson & Johnson met its initial 20 million-dose commitment to deliver those doses by the end of March. The company told CNN yesterday they had hit their target. Now we'll see going forward how much the production problems at the plant in Baltimore with the quality control issues is going to affect their ability to deliver more in the future.

Likewise, Pfizer announced yesterday it has fulfilled its commitment for 120 million doses ready to ship to the US by the end of last month. 100 million of those have already shipped, and the remaining doses are apparently ready to go. The news release indicates they are also on track to meet its remaining commitments too—80 million more by the end of May and the remaining doses in its 300 million-dose contract by the end of July. So far, so good. They also announced they will have a new formulation of their vaccine available after mid-year, one that will no longer require adding a saline diluent before it can be administered; it will be ready-to-use right out of the package. This modification will require an amendment to their EUA, but that sort of thing is generally negotiated well in advance, so I'm going to presume they've already been talking with the FDA about it.

A new study that pooled data from 40 other studies in 17 different countries was published yesterday in *The Lancet*. The work assesses the impact of Covid-19 on pregnancy and childbirth, finding that overall, there were negative and major effects on outcomes. This includes increases by almost a third in stillbirths and maternal deaths and shows a six-fold increase in ectopic pregnancy, a life-threatening complication where the fertilized egg grows outside the uterus and can cause fatal hemorrhaging. This was apparently not so much due to the direct effects of the virus on the pregnant woman, but rather to the lack of access to pregnancy care because of an overwhelmed health care system and reluctance to visit the doctor due to worry about exposure to Covid-19. These effects were particularly seen in middle and low-income countries.

The CDC's been warning us for months that B.1.1.7, the highly-transmissible variant first identified in the UK, was coming for us; we've been expecting it to become the predominant variant for a while now. There is some evidence that time has come—or is right around the corner. One of the companies whose tests have been widely used to identify variants in our population, Helix's vice president of science, William Lee, told CNN, "I think we are there, but at the end of the day, it's hard to say for sure." Part of the reason it's hard to say is—big surprise here—we're not really testing enough.

This variant was apparently introduced to the US several times, starting back in November. It's proportion of cases in the US was expected to double every 10 days or so, and there is now strong evidence it is the predominant variant, accounting for the majority of new cases in Michigan, Georgia, and Florida and at or close to that level in southern California, Texas, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. It is important to recognize that Helix doesn't have enough data from much of the Northeast or the Midwest to make a call about them, so there could be more states as yet unidentified. The CDC is more conservative in its estimate, which is based on samples collected up to March 13; reporting around 26 percent of cases as B.1.1.7. Of course, if we consider doubling every 10 days, then by today, we'd be over half, wouldn't we? Much of this we did to ourselves; we had the capability to slow this down and simply chose not to.

Caroline Faber is 14, and like most kids her age, she was really struggling with loneliness after her school closed and she couldn't go places or be with her friends. Trying to think of ways to occupy her time, she started volunteering with an organization called Baked Back America that gave her the opportunity to read to children in homeless shelters. Looking for ways to do more, Faber hit on the idea to teach art classes

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 11 of 95

to these same kids over Zoom, so in May, she started a program she calls Craft With Me.

She figured out pretty early on that many of these kids didn't have much in the way of art supplies to do the crafts, and so she stepped up another notch, looking for donations to provide these supplies using an Amazon wish list and a GoFundMe account. She used the supplies to put together boxes with the help of family members and ships them to the homeless shelters for children's use. Each box contains paper, glue, scissors, watercolors, crayons, and markers, according to Faber. She told local news affiliate Fox5NY, "A lot of the kids don't have that much, but they're very appreciative."

Faber holds a few classes per week, fitting them in around her own school work, and she's gathered a corps of 45 volunteers to help with the teaching. There are now 100 kids enrolled in her program; she says she'll keep going as long as she has money for supplies. Baked Back America's founder, Melissa Subin, told Fox5NY, "Caroline's impact and her volunteers' has been hard to even put words to. We have this waiting list of children who call us now and say please can we have the art program." She's 14 and making a difference. That ought to motivate the rest of us.

Be well. We'll talk tomorrow.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 12 of 95

County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
▲						
Aurora	459	438	901	15	Minimal	12.0%
Beadle	2869	2791	6146	40	Substantial	10.7%
Bennett	386	372	1207	9	Minimal	3.6%
Bon Homme	1513	1479	2158	26	Moderate	5.0%
Brookings	3850	3668	12646	37	Substantial	6.0%
Brown	5314	5138	13262	91	Substantial	9.4%
Brule	702	689	1924	9	Minimal	2.7%
Buffalo	423	409	909	13	Minimal	5.3%
Butte	1010	983	3336	20	Minimal	1.3%
Campbell	131	127	268	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1348	1277	4107	21	Substantial	3.8%
Clark	418	388	981	5	Substantial	12.5%
Clay	1873	1818	5659	15	Substantial	9.7%
Codington	4219	4050	10076	80	Substantial	15.8%
Corson	476	462	1027	12	Minimal	0.0%
Custer	781	760	2810	12	Moderate	9.6%
Davison	3122	2961	6871	66	Substantial	17.9%
Day	677	640	1865	29	Moderate	16.0%
Deuel	494	478	1179	8	Moderate	0.0%
Dewey	1440	1408	3963	26	Minimal	2.0%
Douglas	448	431	952	9	Minimal	15.4%
Edmunds	493	472	1100	13	Minimal	6.7%
Fall River	566	540	2743	15	Moderate	7.6%
Faulk	365	351	713	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	1009	951	2356	42	Moderate	15.3%
Gregory	573	530	1343	30	Moderate	4.9%
Haakon	260	248	561	10	None	0.0%
Hamlin	747	698	1865	38	Moderate	6.2%
Hand	354	344	865	6	Minimal	0.0%
Hanson	379	372	761	4	Minimal	14.3%
Harding	92	91	188	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2370	2307	6836	37	Moderate	1.4%
Hutchinson	845	778	2474	26	Substantial	23.4%

Groton Daily Independent

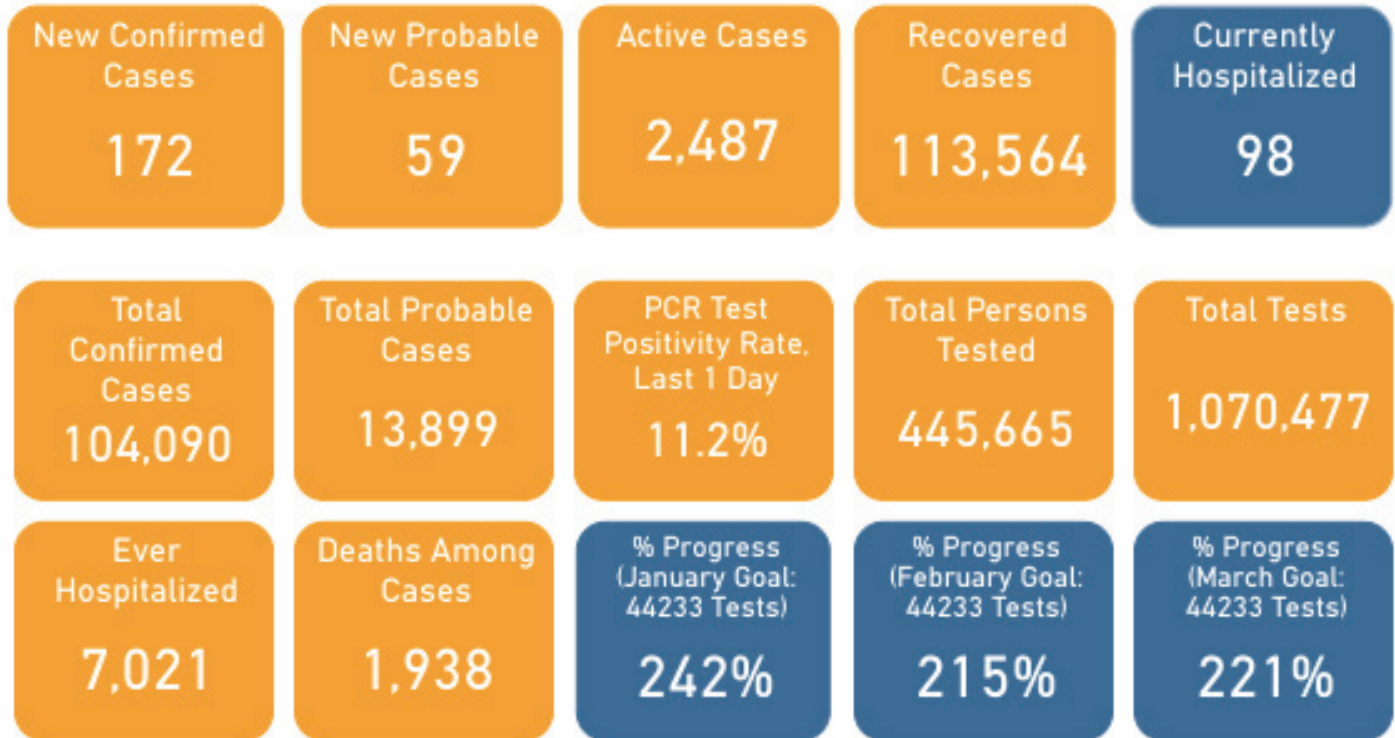
Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 13 of 95

Hyde	140	136	433	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	284	268	936	14	None	0.0%
Jerauld	275	257	579	16	Minimal	9.1%
Jones	93	91	238	0	Minimal	11.1%
Kingsbury	738	659	1752	14	Substantial	20.4%
Lake	1302	1231	3569	18	Substantial	18.0%
Lawrence	2892	2824	8791	45	Moderate	4.7%
Lincoln	8247	7957	21198	77	Substantial	13.1%
Lyman	625	603	1954	11	Moderate	10.8%
Marshall	364	350	1263	6	Moderate	0.0%
McCook	789	745	1735	24	Moderate	9.7%
McPherson	240	235	583	4	None	0.0%
Meade	2696	2636	7995	31	Moderate	7.1%
Mellette	254	252	761	2	None	0.0%
Miner	292	270	606	9	Moderate	15.4%
Minnehaha	29829	28611	81960	344	Substantial	13.9%
Moody	625	605	1820	17	Minimal	0.0%
Oglala Lakota	2086	2026	6804	49	Minimal	1.7%
Pennington	13253	12944	40786	191	Moderate	6.0%
Perkins	351	336	843	14	Minimal	5.9%
Potter	388	381	868	4	Minimal	4.0%
Roberts	1313	1240	4327	38	Substantial	12.9%
Sanborn	338	333	716	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	825	788	2209	26	Moderate	6.2%
Stanley	339	337	977	2	Minimal	4.8%
Sully	137	133	330	3	None	0.0%
Todd	1219	1187	4242	29	Minimal	0.0%
Tripp	740	708	1537	17	Moderate	9.1%
Turner	1132	1052	2843	54	Substantial	9.5%
Union	2145	2036	6623	41	Substantial	12.0%
Walworth	755	723	1878	15	Moderate	11.5%
Yankton	2937	2834	9658	28	Substantial	11.8%
Ziebach	340	327	894	9	Minimal	9.1%
Unassigned	0	0	1916	0		

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 14 of 95

South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4921	0
10-19 years	13607	0
20-29 years	20828	7
30-39 years	19448	19
40-49 years	16910	38
50-59 years	16581	116
60-69 years	13466	259
70-79 years	7068	443
80+ years	5160	1056

VARIANT CASES OF COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

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

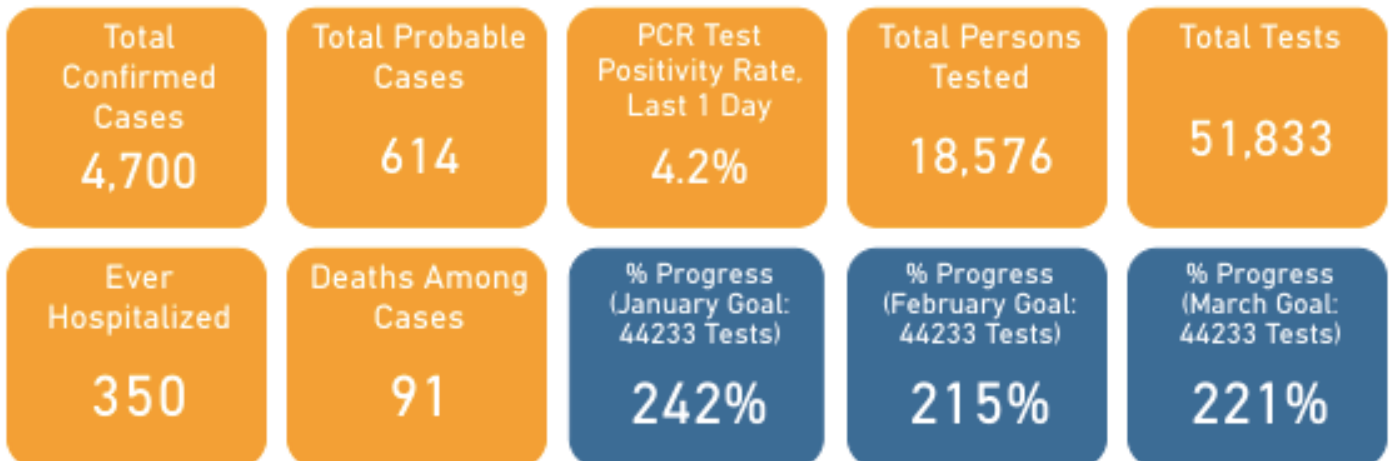
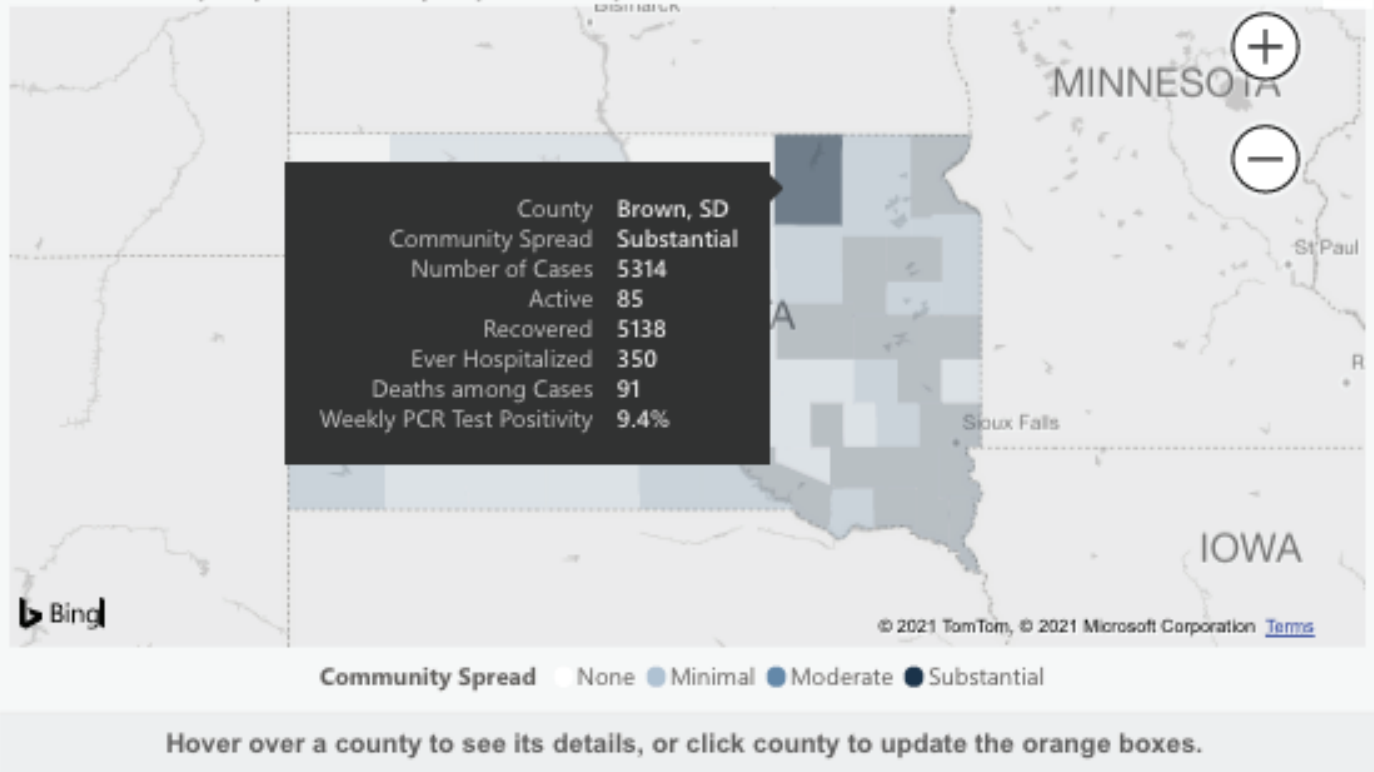
Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 15 of 95

Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



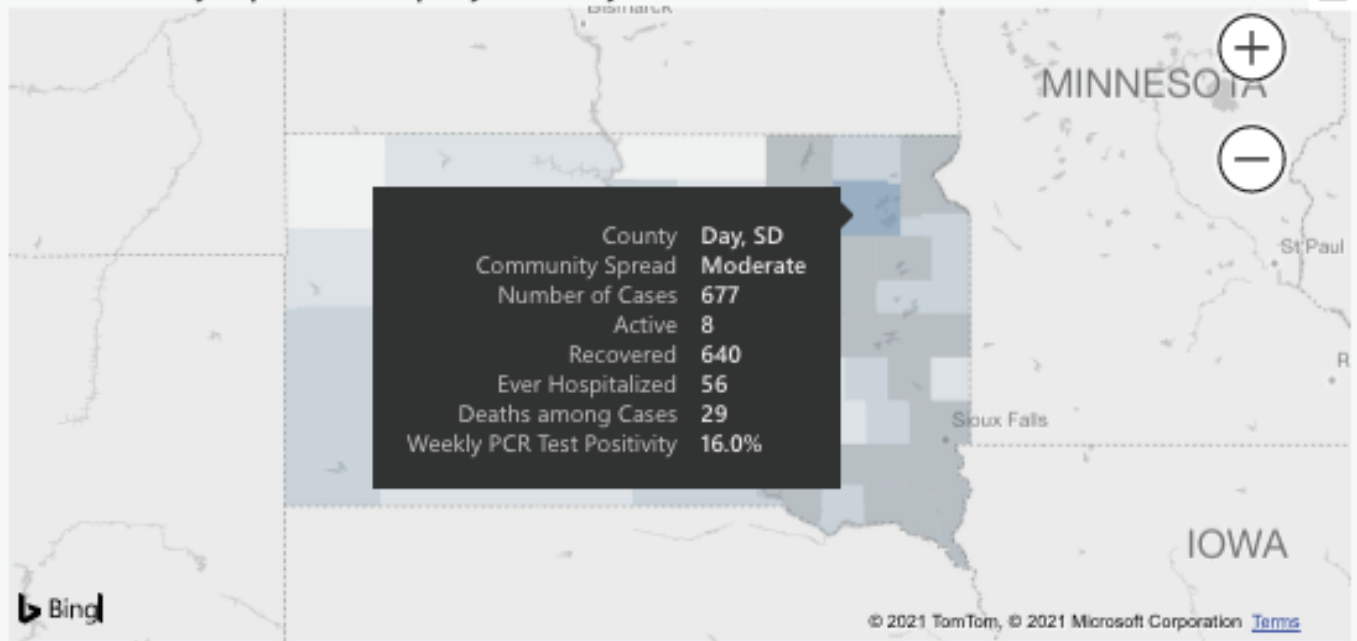
Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 16 of 95

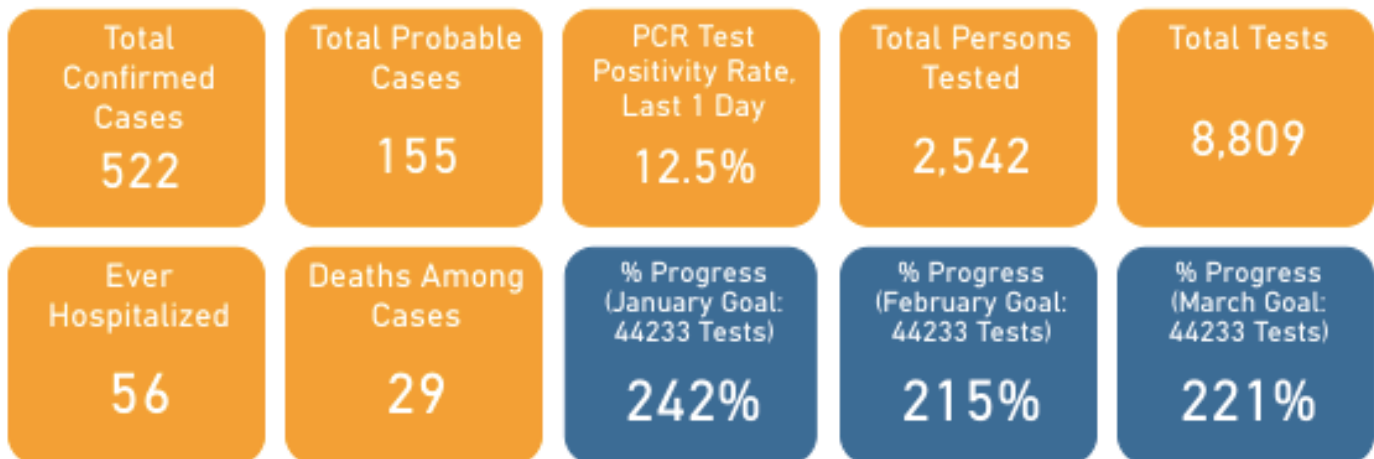
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 17 of 95

Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered*

420,012

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine*

257,886

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose**

44%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	8,566
Moderna	197,196
Pfizer	214,250

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	8,566
Moderna - 1 dose	44,924
Moderna - Series Complete	76,136
Pfizer - 1 dose	42,286
Pfizer - Series Complete	85,982

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	43.63%
Series Complete	29.15%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,225	445	390	835
Beadle	8,966	2,373	3,296	5,669
Bennett*	608	118	245	363
Bon Homme*	4,422	882	1,770	2,652
Brookings	13,648	4,088	4,780	8,868
Brown	20,037	4,263	7,887	12,150
Brule*	2,283	443	920	1,363
Buffalo*	154	78	38	116
Butte	3,060	850	1,105	1,955
Campbell	1,254	184	535	719
Charles Mix*	4,041	1,135	1,453	2,588
Clark	1,680	492	594	1,086
Clay	7,021	2,297	2,362	4,659
Codington*	13,037	3,819	4,609	8,428
Corson*	354	60	147	207
Custer*	3,761	713	1,524	2,237
Davison	10,308	3,198	3,555	6,753
Day*	3,310	830	1,240	2,070
Deuel	1,980	580	700	1,280
Dewey*	440	70	185	255
Douglas*	1,520	434	543	977
Edmunds	1,858	330	764	1,094
Fall River*	3,295	553	1,371	1,924
Faulk	1,386	358	514	872
Grant*	3,848	594	1,627	2,221
Gregory*	2,245	535	855	1,390
Haakon*	673	99	287	386

Groton Daily Independent

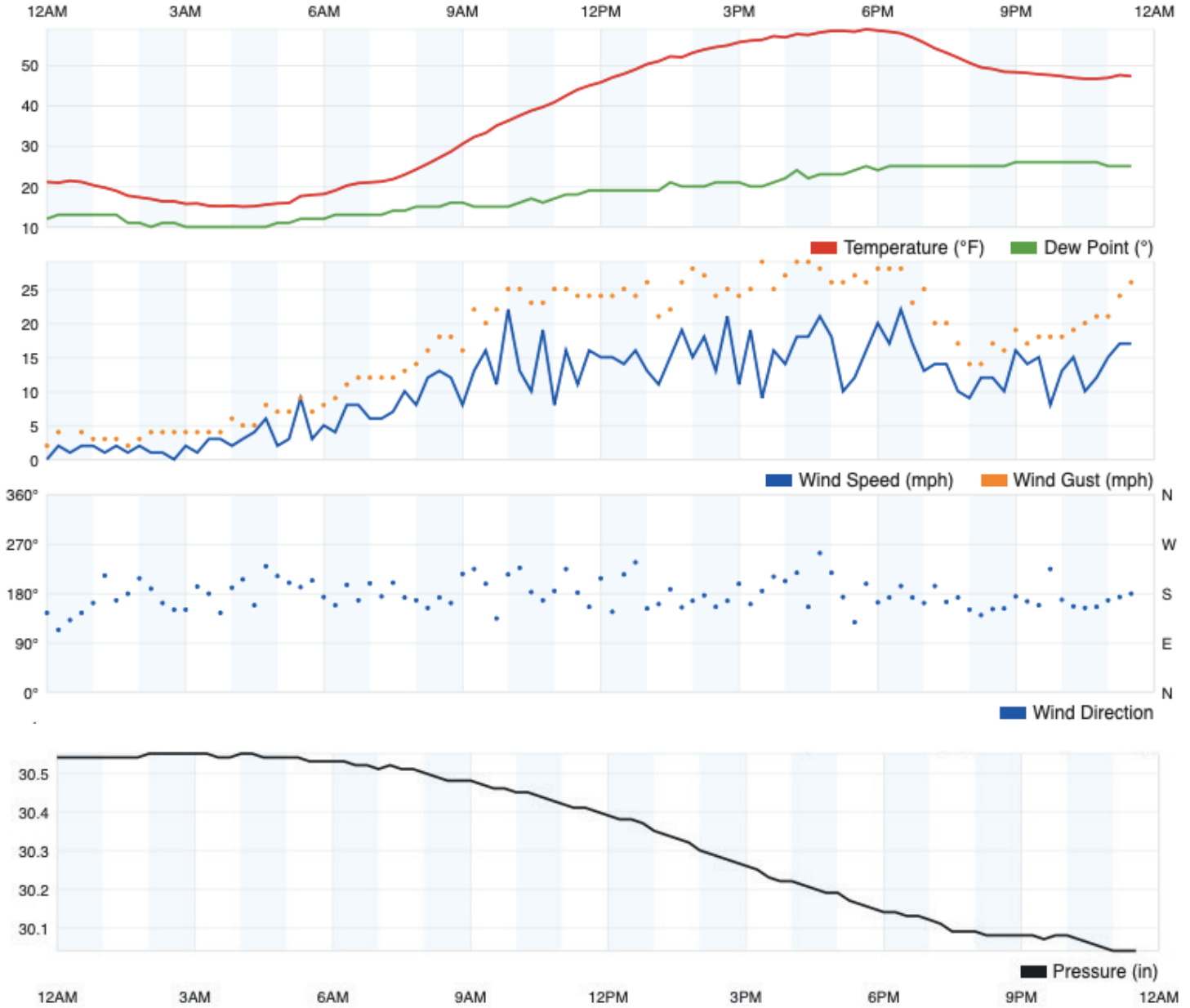
Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 18 of 95

Hamlin	2,346	656	845	1,501
Hand	1,938	546	696	1,242
Hanson	723	251	236	487
Harding	149	53	48	101
Hughes*	10,225	2,493	3,866	6,359
Hutchinson*	4,562	1,119	1,721	2,840
Hyde*	683	137	273	410
Jackson*	505	101	202	303
Jerauld	1,174	304	435	739
Jones*	776	134	321	455
Kingsbury	3,324	918	1,203	2,121
Lake	6,104	1,956	2,074	4,030
Lawrence	11,392	3,244	4,074	7,318
Lincoln	33,626	6,581	13,522	20,103
Lyman*	1,027	287	370	657
Marshall*	2,343	761	791	1,552
McCook	2,968	656	1,156	1,812
McPherson	332	58	137	195
Meade*	8,483	1,741	3,371	5,112
Mellette*	59	9	25	34
Miner	1,193	345	424	769
Minnehaha*	108,315	22,578	42,866	65,444
Moody*	2,494	634	930	1,564
Oglala Lakota*	229	47	91	138
Pennington*	48,567	8,695	19,936	28,631
Perkins*	795	239	278	517
Potter	1,271	309	481	790
Roberts*	5,466	956	2,255	3,211
Sanborn	1,364	394	485	879
Spink	3,924	668	1,628	2,296
Stanley*	1,522	328	597	925
Sully	501	127	187	314
Todd*	215	37	89	126
Tripp*	2,502	390	1,056	1,446
Turner	4,440	1,050	1,695	2,745
Union	4,575	1,559	1,508	3,067
Walworth*	2,378	426	976	1,402
Yankton	12,847	2,763	5,042	7,805
Ziebach*	73	15	29	44
Other	8,188	2,382	2,903	5,285

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 19 of 95

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 20 of 95

Today



Sunny

High: 73 °F

Tonight



Decreasing
Clouds

Low: 35 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 77 °F

Saturday
Night



Mostly Clear

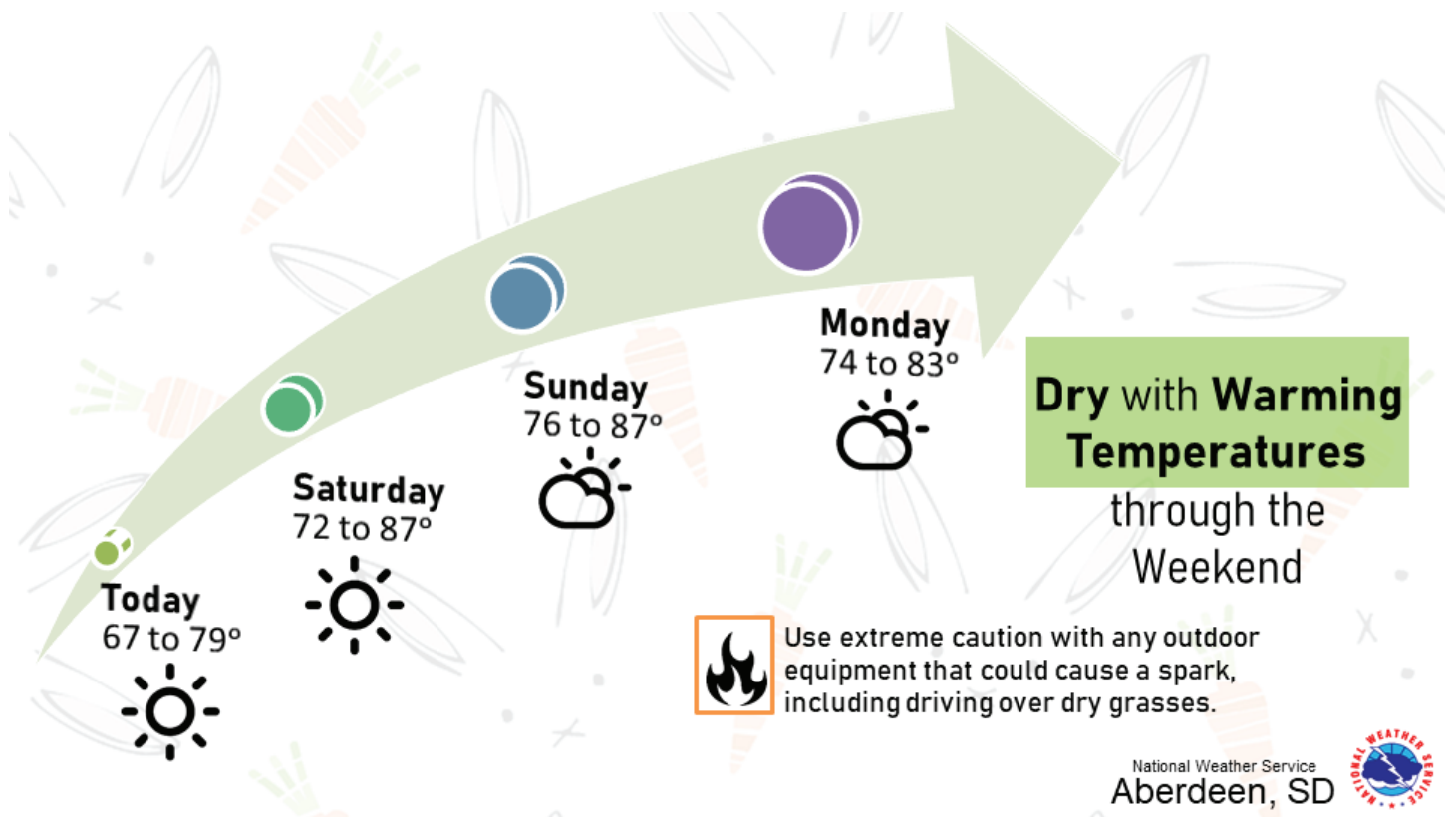
Low: 40 °F

Sunday



Mostly Sunny

High: 78 °F



Expect dry and warming temperatures through the weekend, with highs around 25 to 30 degrees above average for this time of year.

Broton Daily Independent

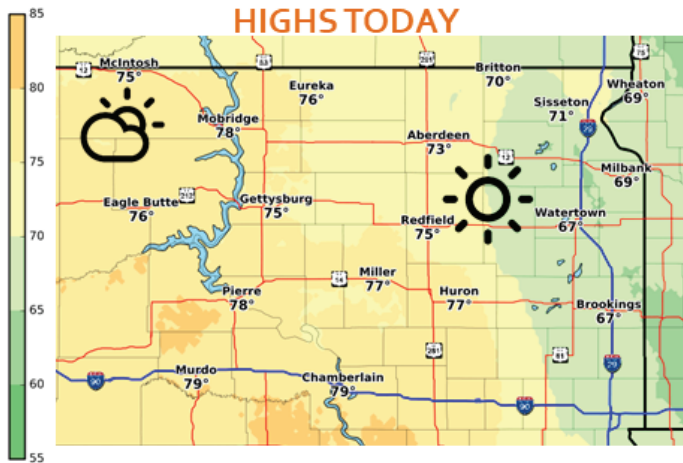
Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 21 of 95

Very Warm and Dry



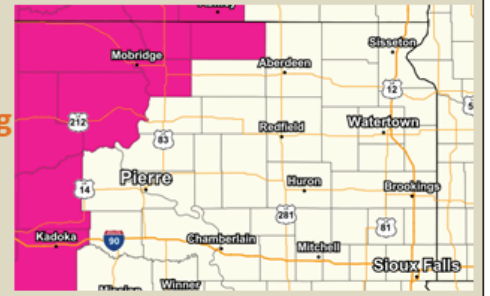
Warming Temperatures
through the Weekend

see current forecast at weather.gov/abr



Continued dry weather, low relative humidity, and breezy winds will create elevated fire weather concerns – especially western and north central South Dakota.

Red
Flag Warning
today



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 4/2/2021 4:12 AM Central

Critical fire weather conditions will be possible this afternoon for much of western and north central South Dakota. Highs today will mainly be in the 70s, as relative humidity values fall into the single digits to teens west of the James River, and into the 20 percent range east of the James River. Wind gusts will top out around 20 to 30 mph this afternoon, as they switch out of the northwest over north central South Dakota.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 22 of 95

Today in Weather History

April 2, 1998: The James River began to flood in early April from Columbia to Stratford. The James rose to around 1.5 feet above flood stage at Columbia and Stratford through April into May. The James River mainly flooded farmland, pastureland, and a few roads in the vicinity of the channel.

April 2, 2010: In South Dakota, a band of heavy snow set up across Corson and Dewey counties during the early morning hours of April 2nd. Along with heavy wet snow, northwest winds gusting up to 40 mph developed. By the time the storm ended in the late morning hours, 6 to 8 inches of snow had fallen. The heavy snow, combined with the strong winds, downed many power poles across the region along with making travel treacherous. Some snowfall amounts included; 4 inches at Eagle Butte; 6 inches at Timber Lake, McLaughlin, and 14 miles north of Isabel; 7 inches at Isabel and 6 miles southeast of McIntosh; 8 inches southwest of Keldron. More than 400 poles were lost to the heavy snow leaving approximately 800 people without power. Eighty linemen worked through the Easter weekend in the snow and mud. McLaughlin and Keldron were the hardest hit. Several hundred people were still without power on April 5th.

1936: An estimated F4 tornado cut a 15-mile path through Crisp County, GA. The hardest hit area was the town of Cordele, where 276 homes were destroyed in a five-block swath through the town. The storm was on a course that would have missed the center of town, but it made a left turn towards the end of its path. 23 people were killed and 500 injured. Total damage was \$3 million.

1957: An F3 tornado tore through Dallas, TX. 10 people were killed, and 216 were injured. Total damage was \$1.5 million. This tornado was among the most photographed and studied in history.

1982: Severe thunderstorms spawned fifty-six tornadoes in the central U.S., including seventeen in the Red River Region of Texas and Oklahoma. The tornadoes claimed thirty lives and injured 383 other persons. A violent tornado near Messer, Oklahoma left only the carpet tack strips on the slab of a house it destroyed and carried a motel sign thirty miles.

1975 - The northeastern U.S. was in the grips of a severe storm which produced hurricane force winds along the coast, and two to three feet of snow in Maine and New Hampshire. Winds atop Mount Washington NH gusted to 140 mph. (David Ludlum)

1975 - The biggest snowstorm of record for so late in the season paralyzed Chicago, IL. Up to 20 inches of snow fell in extreme northeastern Illinois, and 10.9 inches of snow closed Chicago's O'Hare Airport. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - Severe thunderstorms spawned fifty-six tornadoes in the central U.S., including seventeen in the Red River Region of Texas and Oklahoma. The tornadoes claimed thirty lives, and injured 383 other persons. A violent tornado near Messer OK left only the carpet tack strips on the slab of a house it destroyed, and carried a motel sign thirty miles. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1987 - Eleven cities in Florida reported record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee with a reading of 31 degrees. The low of 48 degrees at Key West smashed their previous record for the date by 13 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced up to nine inches of rain around New Orleans LA causing 18 million dollars damage. A tornado caused three million dollars damage at Slidell LA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Strong and gusty winds prevailed from California to Colorado and Wyoming. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Lancaster CA, and reached 85 mph at Berthoud Pass CO. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in the Colorado Rockies. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in North Carolina and Virginia during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail, and spawned a tornado near Chester VA which caused half a million dollars damage. A storm system produced snow and gale force winds across northern Michigan, with 8.3 inches of snow reported at Marquette. Temperatures in the north central U.S. soared from morning lows in the 20s and 30s to afternoon highs in the 60s and 70s. Eight cities reported record highs for the date, including Havre MT with a reading of 77 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

Groton Daily Independent

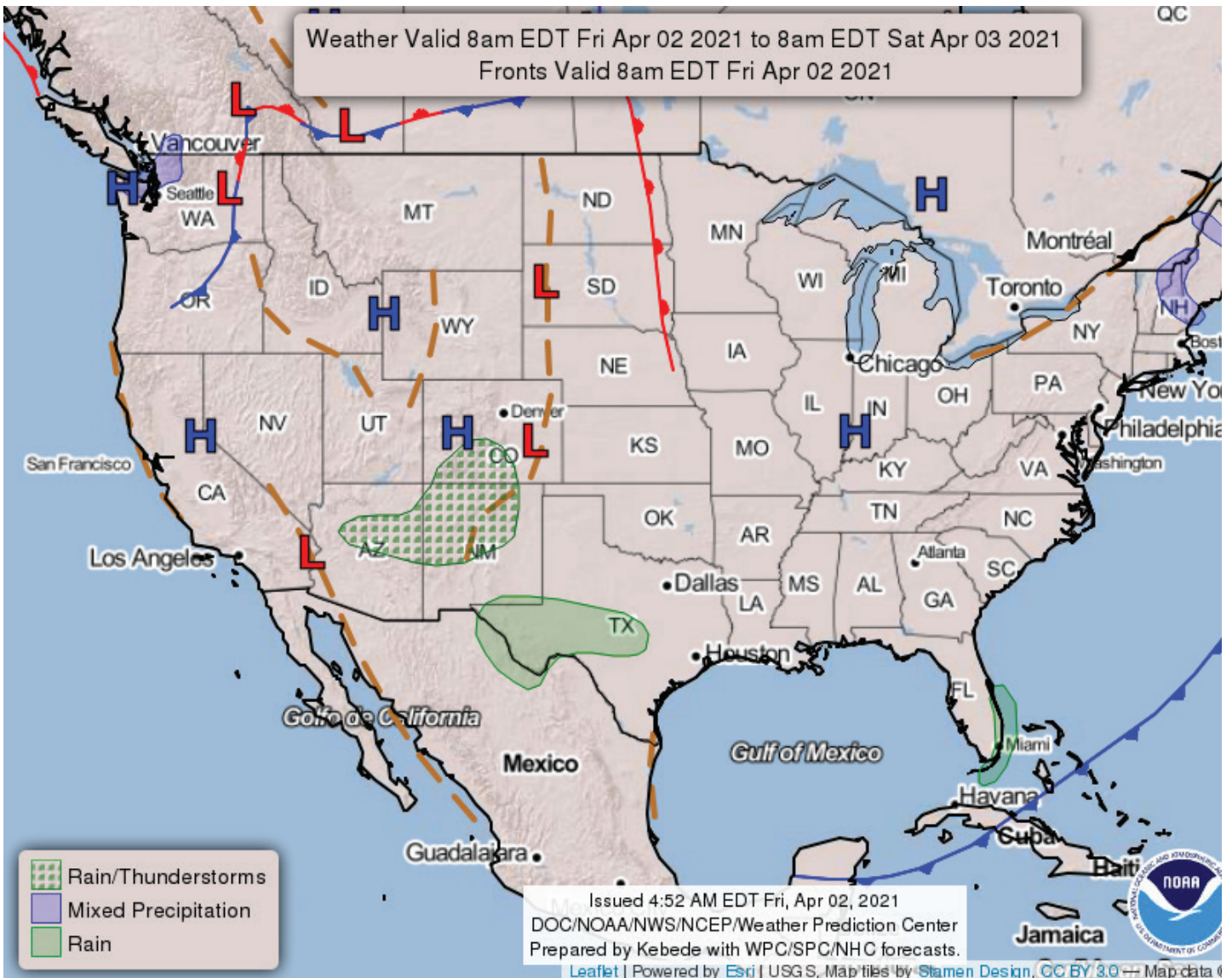
Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 23 of 95

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 59 °F at 5:50 PM
Low Temp: 15 °F at 4:19 AM
Wind: 29 mph at 3:22 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 84 in 1921
Record Low: 3° in 1899, 1975
Average High: 49°F
Average Low: 26°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 1.20
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.36
Average Precip to date: 2.22
Precip Year to Date: 0.54
Sunset Tonight: 8:04 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:10 a.m.





RECIPE FOR A GOOD DAY

Have you ever met anyone who awakened in the morning and said, "Today is going to be horrible! I know it. I feel it. It's in the air!" What a discouraging thought. Yet there are some who say, "Today's going to be the best day I've ever lived. I know God will be with me and bless me in all that I do." Is there a formula for having good, God-blessed days? Apparently so.

David said, "If you want to have good days," do these three things:

1. Keep your tongue from evil! That may be more difficult than it sounds. James said, "No human being can tame the tongue." Perhaps the best way to start a "good day" would be to ask God to control our tongue and use it to encourage others and praise Him.

2. Turn from evil and do good! Another way to have a good day is to ask God to make us sensitive to the temptations we are sure to face as the day unfolds. It was Jesus who encouraged us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." He knew that we would have to face temptation every day of our lives so He advised us to ask for God's help before we faced them. And don't forget the words of Paul, "It is possible," he said, "to escape temptation and avoid sin" if we call on God to give us strength before we are tempted.

3. Seek peace and pursue it. This does not mean we are to surrender and avoid conflict. It means that we can enjoy peace in the midst of conflict if the conflict comes from being obedient to His Word, doing His will, and following the path He has set before us.

Prayer: We all want this and every day to be a good day, Lord. So, we ask that You give us courage and wisdom and strength to obey Your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Then keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies! Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. Psalm 34:13-14

FREE DATE CHANGES ON 2021 TOURS*



FROM
\$1,449*
\$1,199*

ALASKA NORTHERN LIGHTS

7 days, departs Feb - Mar 2022

Anchorage • Talkeetna • Healy (Denali) • Fairbanks — Travel deep into the rugged Alaskan wilderness in pursuit of nature's most spectacular nighttime display. Chase after the vibrant lights of the aurora borealis while you enjoy Alaska's culture, nature, and wildlife.



FROM
\$2,599*
\$2,349*

BEST OF HAWAII FOUR-ISLAND TOUR

12 days, departs year-round

Oahu • Hawaii Island • Kauai • Maui — Enjoy a fully guided 4-island Hawaiian vacation with centrally located lodging in Waikiki on Oahu, and beachfront lodging on the “Big Island” of Hawaii, Kauai, and Maui. Guided throughout by our friendly Tour Directors—your local experts. Includes 3 inter-island flights.



promo code
N7017

CALL 1-844-962-4142

*Free date changes anytime up to 45 days prior to departure for land tours, up to 95 days prior to departure for cruise tours. Deposits and final payments remain non-refundable. Prices are per person based on double occupancy plus \$299 in taxes & fees. Single supplement and seasonal surcharges may apply. Add-on airfare available. Offers apply to new bookings only, made by 6/30/21. Other terms & conditions may apply. Ask your Travel Consultant for details.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 26 of 95

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

North Dakota tourist town evacuated because of wildfire

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Firefighters have stopped a wildfire from spreading in the western North Dakota tourist town of Medora, where its 100 residents were forced to evacuate, officials said.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or damaged structures in the community, which is on the doorstep of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Crews spared the Burning Hills Amphitheatre, home to the Medora Musical.

The blaze, which has consumed about 15 square miles (38 square kilometers), started a few miles southwest of the city Thursday, with the wind blowing the flames toward the community, according to Misty Hayes, Medora district ranger for the Little Missouri National Grassland.

Officials said Thursday night that crews had stopped the blaze from spreading, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum declared a statewide fire emergency Thursday because of drought conditions.

Burgum said the North Dakota National Guard would deploy two Black Hawk helicopters to assist in battling the Medora blaze. Multiple agencies responded to the fire. A 45-mile (72-kilometer) stretch of Interstate 94, from Belfield to Beach, was temporarily closed but reopened Thursday night.

The state has seen a growing number of wildfires with extreme drought conditions across the state. Burgum had placed the National Guard on standby earlier Thursday.

The fire began shortly before 1:30 p.m. local time, according to Billings County Chief Deputy Maj. Dean Wyckoff.

"It was an electrical line that sagged and arced and started the fire," he said.

The National Drought Mitigation Center report shows nearly half the state is seeing drought conditions. The North Dakota Forest Service has tracked than 140 wildfires that have burned over 46 square miles (120 square kilometers).

In South Dakota, a wildfire threatened homes in Pennington County this week forcing residents in more than 400 houses to evacuate. The Sheriff's Office said Thursday most evacuations have been lifted in the Nemo area.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial reopened Thursday after it was closed because of the spreading wildfire.

Midwest Economy: March state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for March:

Arkansas: The overall index for Arkansas decreased to 75 from 79.8 in February. Components from the March survey of supply managers were: new orders at 73.2, production or sales at 74.4, delivery lead time at 82.6, inventories at 79.2, and employment at 65.8. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Arkansas manufacturing employment is down 3,500 jobs, or 2.2%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 3.5% higher," Goss said.

Iowa: The state's overall index for March declined to 66.5 from 71.1 in February. Components of the index were: new orders at 74.5, production, or sales, at 75.6, delivery lead time at 73.8, employment at 60.2,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 28 of 95

and inventories at 56.2. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Iowa manufacturing employment is down 3,600 jobs, or 1.6%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 1.8% lower," Goss said.

Kansas: The overall index for Kansas climbed to 67.3 from 61.6 in February. Components of the index were: new orders at 76.9, production or sales at 66.8, delivery lead time at 83.6, employment at 58.8, and inventories at 50.4. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Kansas manufacturing employment is down 13,900 jobs, or 8.2%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 1.3% lower," Goss said.

Minnesota: The March index for Minnesota fell to 59.8 from 68.8 in February. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 65.7, production or sales at 63.8, delivery lead time at 60.3, inventories at 58.1, and employment at 51.7. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Minnesota manufacturing employment is down 16,500 jobs, or 5.1%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 2.4% higher," Goss said.

Missouri: The state's overall index rose in March to 70.5 from 64.2 in February. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 69.8, production or sales at 68.6, delivery lead time at 79.3, inventories at 70.7, and employment at 63.7. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Missouri manufacturing employment is down 10,300 jobs, or 3.7%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 2.9% higher," Goss said.

Nebraska: The state's overall index rose to 72 in March from 70.8 in February. Components of the index were: new orders at 71.9, production or sales at 69.1, delivery lead time at 80.6, inventories at 74, and employment at 64.5. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nebraska manufacturing employment is flat (no job loss), while average hourly manufacturing wages are 1.6% higher," Goss said.

North Dakota: The March index for North Dakota decreased to 69.3 from 76 in February. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 69.3, production or sales at 68.2, delivery lead time at 82.3, employment at 62.3, and inventories at 64.6. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, North Dakota manufacturing employment is down 1,000 jobs, or 3.8%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 3.8% higher," Goss said.

Oklahoma: The state's overall index remained strong in March even though it declined to 63 from February's 67.1. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 68.1, production or sales at 66.7, delivery lead time at 71.4, inventories at 50.1, and employment at 58.8. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oklahoma manufacturing employment is down 9,900 jobs, or 7.1%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 6.3% higher," Goss said.

South Dakota: The March index for South Dakota climbed to 69.4 from February's 64. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 69.1, production or sales at 77.9, delivery lead time at 76.1, inventories at 62.2, and employment at 61.7. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, South Dakota manufacturing employment is down 1,200 jobs, or 2.7%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 2.1% higher," Goss said.

Survey: strong economic growth continues in the region

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Strong economic growth is expected to continue in nine Midwest and Plains states over the next few months as businesses continue to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new monthly survey of business leaders released Thursday.

The overall index for the region remained at a strong level of 68.9 in March even though it was slightly lower than February's 69.6 reading. Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests recession.

Businesses in the area have recovered roughly half of the 120,000 jobs lost last year when states imposed restrictions related to the coronavirus. Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey, said growth in the area might be even stronger if it weren't for delays in receiving raw materials

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 29 of 95

and supplies.

"The region is adding jobs and economic activity at a healthy pace, and that growth will remain healthy well into the second half of 2021," Goss said.

Business leaders said they are seeing significant inflation particularly in the cost of metal products and lumber at the wholesale level.

But the business leaders are optimistic about the economy. The survey's confidence index increased to 58 in March from February's neutral score of 50.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Decorated WWII veteran honored with museum exhibit

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A decorated World War II veteran from South Dakota celebrated his 101st birthday with a special honor at the Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City.

A new exhibit about Maurice "Morry" Crow's extraordinary military service was unveiled at the South Dakota Air and Space Museum on base Wednesday, Crow's birthday.

Crow said he was driven by patriotism when he enlisted in the Army Air Force following the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He was a B-17 flight engineer and top gunner, completing 30 missions in the European Theater in 1943 and 1944, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Despite being wounded in combat and facing tall odds against the Nazi-German Luftwaffe, Crow not only survived, but was credited with an aerial victory against an attacking fighter.

Crow was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Presidential Unit Citation, a Purple Heart and received three Oak Leaf Clusters for his service. He returned to Rapid City, married his girlfriend Lucy Lang and never left the Black Hills. Lang died in 2005.

The Distinguished Flying Cross Society presented Crow as the Society's latest lifetime inductee and gave him a medal for extraordinary valor in aerial flight. The award is one of the highest decorations for military service in the United States.

"Morry represents the essence of the DFC recipient and the selflessness of his generation, willing to give up his life for others. Our nation is built upon the service of strong individuals like Morry," said Woody Gilliland, of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

03-16-26-29-32

(three, sixteen, twenty-six, twenty-nine, thirty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$100,000

Lotto America

17-18-21-35-42, Star Ball: 8, ASB: 2

(seventeen, eighteen, twenty-one, thirty-five, forty-two; Star Ball: eight; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$4.38 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$168 million

Powerball

03-10-44-55-68, Powerball: 24, Power Play: 2

(three, ten, forty-four, fifty-five, sixty-eight; Powerball: twenty-four; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 30 of 95

Italy may be in Easter lockdown, but the party's on at sea

By MARIA GRAZIA MURRU Associated Press

ABOARD THE MSC GRANDIOSA (AP) — Italy may be in a strict coronavirus lockdown this Easter with travel restricted between regions and new quarantines imposed. But a few miles offshore, guests aboard the MSC Grandiosa cruise ship are shimmying to Latin music on deck and sipping cocktails by the pool.

In one of the anomalies of lockdowns that have shuttered hotels and resorts around the world, the Grandiosa has been plying the Mediterranean Sea this winter with seven-night cruises, a lonely flag-bearer of the global cruise industry.

After cruise ships were early sources of highly publicized coronavirus outbreaks, the Grandiosa has tried to chart a course through the pandemic with strict anti-virus protocols approved by Italian authorities that seek to create a "health bubble" on board.

Passengers and crew are tested before and during cruises. Mask mandates, temperature checks, contact-tracing wristbands and frequent cleaning of the ship are all designed to prevent outbreaks. Passengers from outside Italy must arrive with negative COVID-19 tests taken within 48 hours of their departures and only residents of Europe's Schengen countries plus Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria are permitted to book under COVID-19 insurance policies.

On Wednesday, the Grandiosa left the Italian port of Civitavecchia for its weeklong Easter cruise, with 2,000 of its 6,000-passenger capacity and stops planned in Naples and Valletta, Malta, before returning to its home port in Genoa.

Passengers welcomed the semblance of normalcy brought on by the freedom to eat in a restaurant or sit poolside without a mask, even if the virus is still a present concern.

"After a year of restrictive measures, we thought we could take a break for a week and relax," said Stefania Battistoni, a 39-year-old teacher and single mother who overnight from Bolzano, in northern Italy, with her two sons and mother to board the cruise.

The pandemic has plunged global cruise ship passenger numbers from a record 30 million in 2019 to more than 350,000 since July 2020, according to Cruise Lines International, the world's largest cruise industry association representing 95% of ocean-going cruise capacity. Currently, fewer than 20 ships are operating globally, a small fraction of CLIA's members' fleets of 270 ships.

The United States could be among the last cruise ship markets to reopen, possibly not until fall, and not until 2022 in Alaska. Two Royal Caribbean cruise lines that normally sail out of Miami opted instead to launch sailings in June from the Caribbean, where governments are eager to revive their tourism-based economies despite activist concerns about the health and environmental impact.

On the MSC, extra cabins are set aside to isolate suspected virus cases. Because of the contact tracing wristbands, if a passenger tests positive, medical personnel can identify anyone with whom they were in contact. Once the situation is clear, anyone who is positive is transferred to the shore.

According to an independent consulting firm, Bermello Ajamii & Partners, just 23 COVID-19 cases have been confirmed on ships since the industry began its tentative relaunch last summer, for a passenger infection rate of 0.006%.

But cruise industry critics say the risk isn't worth it and add that cruise companies should have taken the pandemic timeout to address the industry's long-standing environmental and labor problems.

"All large cruise ships burn huge volumes of the dirtiest, cheapest fuel available," said Jim Ace of environmental group Stand Earth, a member of the Global Cruise Activist Network. "Cruise ship companies could have used the COVID shutdown to address their impacts on public health and the environment. Instead, they scrapped a few of their oldest ships and raised cash to stay alive."

On board, though, passengers are relishing the chance to enjoy activities that have been mostly closed in Italy and much of Europe for a year: a theater, restaurant dining, duty-free shopping and live music in bars.

The rest of Italy is heading back into full lockdown over the Easter weekend, with shops closed and restaurants and bars open for takeout only to try to minimize holiday outbreaks. In addition, Italy's government imposed a five-day quarantine on people entering from other EU countries in a bid to deter Easter

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 31 of 95

getaways.

"Let's say that after such a long time of restrictions and closures, this was a choice done for our mental health," said Federico Marzocchi, who joined the cruise with his wife and 10-year-old son Matteo.

The European cruise industry is looking to expand the reopening this spring.

Cruises are circulating on Spain's Canary islands in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Africa, including the company AIDA catering to German tourists. Costa Cruises, which with MSC is one of Europe's largest cruise companies, will resume cruises on May 1, with seven-night Italy-only cruises. Costa plans to begin sailing in the western Mediterranean from mid-June.

Britain is opening to cruise ships in May, with MSC and Viking launching cruises of the British Isles, among several companies offering at-sea "staycation" cruises aimed at capturing one of the most important cruise markets. The cruise industry is hoping Greece will open in mid-May, but the country hasn't yet announced when it will reopen tourism.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a "framework" for resuming cruises in the U.S., but the industry says the health agency hasn't spelled out the details that companies need to operate their ships. Once the CDC provides technical requirements, industry officials say it takes about 90 days to prepare a ship for sailing.

The cruise companies complain that last fall's CDC framework is outdated and should be scrapped. They say it was issued before vaccines were available and before the restart of cruises in Europe, which they say have safely carried thousands of passengers under new COVID-19 protocols. And they complain that cruising is the only part of the U.S. economy that remains shuttered by the pandemic.

The Cruise Lines International Association trade group is lobbying for an early July start to U.S. cruising, noting that loyal cruise customers will just go to elsewhere.

"Cruisers love to cruise, and they will go where the ships are sailing," said Laziza Lambert, a spokeswoman for the trade group.

Still, environmentalists pushing back against an earlier restart say the timeout imposed by COVID-19 provides a window to address the industry's issues.

"Large cruise ships pollute our air, our water, and contribute to climate change. They are toxic to port communities. And they spread COVID. They exploit workers and put passengers at risk," said Jim Ace, a Washington state-based campaigner who is part of the Global Cruise Activist Network. "Why should large cruise ships be allowed to return before they have addressed these concerns?"

UK bans travel from 4 more nations over virus; 39 in all

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government is gearing up to ban international arrivals from four more countries — Bangladesh, Kenya, Pakistan and the Philippines — amid concerns over new virus variants but opted against including France and other European nations that are facing a resurgence of the virus.

The Department for Transport said Friday that the number of countries on its "red list" will reach 39 when the latest restrictions take effect in England beginning April 9. The other nations of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — have similar lists to those that apply in England.

Under the terms of the travel bans, international visitors who have departed from or traveled through countries on the list in the preceding 10 days are refused entry into England. Countries on the list include Brazil and South Africa, where two of the most concerning virus variants have been identified.

British and Irish citizens and people who have residence rights in the U.K. can enter, as commercial flights are not banned. However, they must quarantine in a government-approved hotel for 10 days at their own expense and must take a COVID-19 test on days two and eight of their self-isolation.

No European nations are on the British red list, even though much of Europe is witnessing a strong resurgence of the virus that has prompted many countries to reimpose lockdown restrictions. Health experts say the surge is being driven by virus variants, including the one first found in Britain, that are sweeping the continent. The World Health Organization on Thursday bemoaned the slow pace of vaccinations in

European nations other than Britain, saying they were losing the race to protect their people.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government has faced questions in recent days as to why France, which is suffering one of the worst outbreaks in Europe, is not on the list. Yet putting France on the red list could have serious implications for trade flows in and out of the U.K., given its reliance on traffic from cross-Channel ports.

The U.K. transport department said the majority of cases of the South African variant detected in England so far were linked to international travel and that very few are thought to have come from Europe.

The measures are aimed at reducing the risk posed by new virus variants into the U.K., which has seen new coronavirus infections and deaths fall sharply since the winter amid a strict 3-month lockdown and Britain's rapid rollout of coronavirus vaccines. The U.K. has now given a first vaccine shot to over 31 million people, 46% of its population.

Despite the improved coronavirus backdrop, the U.K. has recorded Europe's highest COVID-related death toll, with over 126,500 deaths.

US employers add 916,000 jobs in March as hiring accelerates

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's employers unleashed a burst of hiring in March, adding 916,000 jobs in a sign that a sustained recovery from the pandemic recession is taking hold as vaccinations accelerate, stimulus checks flow through the economy and businesses increasingly reopen.

The March increase — the most since August — was nearly double February's gain of 468,000, the Labor Department said Friday. The unemployment rate declined from 6.2% to 6%.

Even with last month's robust increase, the economy remains more than 8 million jobs short of the number it had before the pandemic erupted a little over a year ago. But with the recovery widely expected to strengthen, many forecasters predict enough hiring in the coming months to recover nearly all those lost jobs by year's end.

The increasingly bright outlook for the labor market follows a year of epic job losses, waves of coronavirus infections and small business closures. Numerous signs suggest that the economy is improving. Consumer confidence in March reached its highest level since the pandemic intensified.

Last month, hiring strengthened across the economy. Restaurants, hotels and bars — the sector that was most damaged by the virus — added 216,000 jobs. Construction companies, aided by better weather after severe storms in February, gained 110,000.

Manufacturers added 53,000. And professional and business services, which include such well-paying fields as engineering and architecture, gained 66,000.

In another encouraging sign, about 500,000 women returned to the workforce last month and found jobs, in part a reflection of school re-openings around the country. Women disproportionately quit jobs or stopped looking for work during the pandemic, in many cases because they had to care for children attending school online from home. A reversal of that trend will be important as employers seek to rapidly rehire.

A survey found that manufacturing grew in March at its fastest pace since 1983. And vaccinations are increasingly being administered, although new confirmed infections have risen from lower levels in recent weeks.

The \$1,400 checks in President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion economic relief plan have sharply increased consumer spending, according to Bank of America's tracking of its debit and credit cards. Spending jumped 23% in the third week of March compared with pre-pandemic levels, the bank said.

Spending had begun to rise in March even before the stimulus checks arrived as viral case counts have tumbled from their heights in January. Americans are increasingly willing to venture out from home to travel and eat out, though not yet at their pre-pandemic pace. Roughly 1.5 million people traveled through airports on March 28, according to the Transportation Services Administration. That was roughly eight times the figure of a year ago, although it was still down sharply from 2.5 million on the same day in 2019.

The transportation analytics firm Inrix has calculated that daily car trips returned to pre-pandemic levels

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 33 of 95

late last month. Many of those trips have likely been to restaurants, where the volume of seated diners was just 25% below pre-pandemic levels, on average, in the last week of March, according to OpenTable, a restaurant software provider. That's up from 50% below pre-pandemic traffic just six weeks earlier.

The burgeoning economic activity is showing signs of translating into more jobs.

Karen Fichuk, CEO of Randstad North America, a recruiting firm, said the company is seeking to fill 38% more permanent jobs than it was at the end of last year. Demand for workers is particularly strong in manufacturing, information technology, logistics, and health care.

Job listings on the website Indeed.com jumped in the last week of March, with available jobs now 13.5% above pre-pandemic levels. Jed Kolko, Indeed's chief economist, said that job postings in higher-paid sectors, such as financial services and technology, have accelerated in the past couple of months.

The surge of hiring last month raises an important question: Can it continue at the same pace?

Besides the 8.4 million fewer jobs that now exist in the U.S. economy than just before the virus struck, an additional 2 million or so jobs would have been added in the past year under normal circumstances. That means the U.S. economy still needs roughly 11.5 million more jobs to regain something close to full health.

Louise Sheiner, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and formerly an economist at the Federal Reserve, has estimated that hiring could average between 700,000 and 1 million a month for the rest of the year, if the economy expands at the 6.5% pace that the Fed and many economists expect. That would leave total job growth for 2021 at somewhere between 7 million and 10 million.

In part, her forecast is based on the fact that the pandemic recession has deeply hurt labor-intensive parts of the economy, from hotels and restaurants to health care and the entertainment industry. A recovery in those sectors, even a partial one, would require significantly more hiring. In addition, Sheiner said, higher consumer spending, fueled by stimulus checks and pent-up savings, should drive job growth in other industries.

Ronaldo's armband auctioned for \$75,000 to help Serbian baby

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — The captain's armband that Cristiano Ronaldo angrily threw to the ground during Portugal's World Cup qualifier in Belgrade last week has been sold to an unidentified bidder for 64,000 euros (\$75,000) at a charity auction, Serbian state TV reported on Friday.

A Serbian humanitarian group put the blue armband up for online bidding to raise money for medical treatment for a 6-month-old boy suffering with spinal muscular atrophy.

The three-day auction didn't pass without controversy as some participants tried to disrupt the process by putting up unrealistically huge sums. The fake bidding triggered public outrage with authorities pledging to find and punish the culprits.

Moments before last Saturday's match with Serbia ended in a 2-2 draw, Ronaldo walked off the field after his injury-time goal was disallowed. The Portugal great dinked the ball over the Serbia goalkeeper and it looked as if it crossed the line before being cleared by a defender.

While heading to the dressing room before the final whistle, Ronaldo angrily threw down his armband near the touchline. After the match, it was picked up by a firefighter on duty and given to the charity group.

Ronaldo was criticized for his actions and some believe his angry display could lead to FIFA sanctions.

Myanmar cuts wireless internet service amid coup protests

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's wireless broadband internet services were shut down on Friday by order of the military, local providers said, as protesters continued to defy the threat of lethal violence to oppose the junta's takeover.

A directive from the Ministry of Transport and Communications on Thursday instructed that "all wireless broadband data services be temporarily suspended until further notice," according to a statement posted online by local provider Ooredoo.

After weeks of overnight cutoffs of internet access, the military on Friday shut all links apart from those using fiberoptic cable, which was working at drastically reduced speeds. Access to mobile networks and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 34 of 95

all wireless — the less costly options used by most people in the developing country — was blocked.

The Norwegian telecoms company Telenor, one of the biggest carriers in Myanmar, confirmed it could no longer offer wireless services. It was offering fiberoptic service of up to 40 megabits per second in its packages as of Friday, well below high-speed access, which is a minimum of 100 Mbps.

The government has shut down all but a handful of fully military-controlled media outlets. Some of those banned or whose operations have been suspended have continued to publish via social media or whatever methods they can find.

Facebook announced it was providing a safety feature to enable users in Myanmar to beef up security settings locking their profiles to prevent access by non-friends. That includes preventing non-friends from enlarging, sharing or downloading full-size profile and cover photos and seeing any posts on a person's timeline.

Facebook and other major social media platforms have banned members of the Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw, and are blocking ads from most military-linked commercial entities.

Also Friday, a South Korean bank said it temporarily closed its branch in Yangon and was considering bringing its South Korean employees back home after security forces fatally shot one of its Myanmar employees.

Noh Ji-young, a spokesperson for Shinhan Bank, said the woman was shot in the head while commuting home from work on Wednesday and was pronounced dead on Friday.

The bank did not disclose further personal details about her. South Korea's Foreign Ministry said the woman was shot while Myanmar security forces inspected the company car she was using.

The ministry said it has issued a warning to South Korean nationals in Myanmar to act with caution when they are inspected by security forces.

Meanwhile, German-based Giesecke+Devrient (G+D), which supplies raw materials, supplies and system components for making Myanmar's kyat banknotes, said it was suspending all deliveries to the state-owned security printer, Security Print Works.

"This is a reaction to the ongoing violent clashes between the military and the civilian population," the company said in a statement. It said it had previously restricted business.

With its economy contracting under pressure from mass disruptions in reaction to the coup and from the pandemic, Myanmar's military leaders are expected to order an increase in the money supply by the central bank. It was unclear how much of an impact the German company's move would have.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch issued a report Friday saying that Myanmar's military has forcibly disappeared hundreds of people, including politicians, election officials, journalists, activists and protesters and refused to confirm their location or allow access to lawyers or family members in violation of international law.

"The military junta's widespread use of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances appears designed to strike fear in the hearts of anti-coup protesters," said Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch's Asia director. "Concerned governments should demand the release of everyone disappeared and impose targeted economic sanctions against junta leaders to finally hold this abusive military to account."

The crisis in the Southeast Asian nation has escalated in the past week, both in the number of protesters killed and with military airstrikes against the guerrilla forces of the Karen ethnic minority in their homeland along the border with Thailand.

In areas controlled by the Karen, more than a dozen civilians have been killed since Saturday and more than 20,000 have been displaced, according to the Free Burma Rangers, a relief agency operating in the area.

About 3,000 Karen fled to Thailand, but many returned under unclear circumstances. Thai authorities said they went back voluntarily, but aid groups say they are not safe and many are hiding in the jungle and in caves on the Myanmar side of the border.

The U.N. Human Rights Office for Southeast Asia called on countries in the region "to protect all people fleeing violence and persecution in the country" and "ensure that refugees and undocumented migrants are not forcibly returned," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York.

The U.N. Security Council late Thursday strongly condemned the use of violence against peaceful

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 35 of 95

protesters. The press statement was unanimous but weaker than a draft that would have expressed its "readiness to consider further steps," which could include sanctions. China and Russia, both permanent Council members and both arms suppliers to Myanmar's military, have generally opposed sanctions.

The statement came after the U.N. special envoy for Myanmar warned the country faces the possibility of civil war and urged significant action be taken or risk it spiraling into a failed state.

Earlier this week, an opposition group consisting of elected lawmakers who were not allowed to be sworn into office Feb. 1 put forth an interim charter to replace Myanmar's 2008 constitution. By proposing greater autonomy for ethnic minorities, it aims to ally the armed ethnic militias active in border areas with the mass protest movement based in cities and towns.

More than a dozen ethnic minority groups have sought greater autonomy from the central government for decades, sometimes through armed struggle. Even in times of peace, relations have been strained and cease-fires fragile. Several of the major groups — including the Kachin, the Karen and the Rakhine Arakan Army — have denounced the coup and said they will defend protesters in their territories.

The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for five decades languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip, culminating in Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to leadership in 2015 elections, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investment into the country.

Notre Dame's rector: "15 or 20 years" needed for restoration

PARIS (AP) — The rector of Notre Dame said Friday that the burned-out Paris cathedral and its esplanade could remain a building site for another "15 or 20 years."

Rector Patrick Chauvet spoke to The Associated Press following Good Friday ceremonies, including venerating the "Crown of Thorns" at Notre Dame's temporary liturgical base, the nearby church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois.

He added that: "I can guarantee that there's work to do!"

In the days following the April 15, 2019, blaze that engulfed Paris' Gothic gem, French President Emmanuel Macron set a five-year restoration deadline for 2024, when Paris is to host the Summer Olympics. But French officials quickly backpedaled Macron's statement, conceding that it was unrealistic to complete the enormous project by that time.

The blaze also distributed vast amounts of toxic lead from the cathedral's burned-out roof onto the site and nearby, complicating the clean-up work that came before restoration efforts could even begin.

Works planned include remodeling the cathedral's esplanade, which before the blaze was visited every year by 20 million tourists.

Iran, world powers ready to welcome back US to nuclear deal

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Iran and the major world powers participating in the agreement to keep Tehran from developing nuclear weapons said Friday they were ready to welcome the return of the United States to the deal.

The group — the European Union, China, France, Germany, Russia, Britain and Iran — "recognized the prospect of a full return of the U.S. to the JCPOA, and underlined their readiness to positively address this in a joint effort," the chair of a meeting of high-level officials said, referring to the acronym for the nuclear accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The participants said they "emphasized their commitment to preserve the JCPOA and discussed modalities to ensure the return to its full and effective implementation," according to a statement after their virtual meeting,

The group said they would resume further talks Tuesday in Vienna on the 2015 agreement, "in order to clearly identify sanctions lifting and nuclear implementation measures."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 36 of 95

U.S. officials had no immediate public comment, but Washington on Thursday welcomed the news that the Europeans would be meeting with the Iranians to try to get talks going again. State Department spokesman Ned Price called that development "a positive step."

President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, and President Joe Biden has said rejoining the agreement is a priority for his administration. The Biden administration and Iran have differed on any conditions for that to happen, including the timing of the lifting of U.S. sanctions against Iran.

Friday's statement from the EU-chaired meeting said the group's coordinator "will also intensify separate contacts in Vienna" with all participants of the nuclear agreement and the United States.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif immediately stressed that no meeting was planned between officials from Iran and the U.S.

In a tweet, Zarif said the aim of the Vienna session would be "rapidly finalize sanction-lifting & nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, followed by Iran ceasing remedial measures."

He added for good measure: "No Iran-US meeting. Unnecessary."

Iranian state television quoted Abbas Araghchi, Iran's nuclear negotiator at the virtual meeting, as saying during Friday's discussions meeting that any "return by the U.S. to the nuclear deal does not require any negotiation and the path is quite clear."

"The U.S. can return to the deal and stop breaching the law in the same way it withdrew from the deal and imposed illegal sanctions on Iran," Araghchi was quoted as saying.

Russia's ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, said that "the impression is that we are on the right track, but the way ahead will not be easy and will require intensive efforts. The stakeholders seem to be ready for that."

Any return of the United States would involve complications.

Iran has been steadily violating the restrictions of the deal, like the amount of enriched uranium it can stockpile and the purity to which it can enrich it. Tehran's moves have been calculated to put pressure on the other nations in the deal — Russia, China, France, Germany and Britain — to do more to offset crippling sanctions reimposed under Trump.

Iran has said that before it resumes compliance with the deal, the U.S. needs to return to its own obligations under the deal by dropping the sanctions.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has said that over the past two years, Iran has accumulated a lot of nuclear material and new capacities, and used the time for "honing their skills in these areas."

The ultimate goal of the deal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb, something it insists it doesn't want to do. Iran now has enough enriched uranium to make a bomb, but nowhere near the amount it had before the nuclear deal was signed.

As part of its ongoing violations of the JCPOA, Iran last month began restricting IAEA inspections of its nuclear facilities. Under a last-minute deal worked out during a trip to Tehran, however, some access was preserved.

Under that temporary agreement, Iran will no longer share surveillance footage of its nuclear facilities with the IAEA, but it has promised to preserve the tapes for three months. It will then hand them over to the Vienna-based U.N. atomic watchdog if it is granted sanctions relief. Otherwise, Iran has vowed to erase the tapes, narrowing the window for a diplomatic breakthrough.

Truck knocks train off tracks in Taiwan, killing at least 48

By RALPH JENNINGS and JOHNSON LAI Associated Press

HUALIEN COUNTY, Taiwan (AP) — A train collided with an unmanned vehicle that had rolled down a hill Friday in eastern Taiwan, leaving at least 48 people dead and dozens injured in the island's deadliest rail disaster. Passengers climbed out of windows and walked along the roof to reach safety.

The train derailed near the Taroko Gorge scenic area on the first day of a long holiday weekend when many people were using Taiwan's extensive rail system. The train had been carrying more than 400 people.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 37 of 95

Images from the scene showed train cars wedged against the walls of the tunnel; part of the wall of one car had smashed into a seat.

"Many people were crushed under train seats in the collision. And there were other people on top of the seats. So those at the bottom were pressed and crushed and lost consciousness," a passenger with gauze taped to her elbow told Taiwanese broadcaster EBC, which did not show her face or give her name. "At the beginning, they still responded when we called them. But I guess they lost consciousness afterward."

The National Fire Service confirmed the death toll, which included the train's young, newly married driver, and said all aboard had now been accounted for. More than 100 people were injured, it said. Railways news officer Weng Hui-ping called the crash Taiwan's deadliest rail disaster.

Weng said a construction truck operated by the railway administration slid onto the track from a work site on the hillside above. No one was in the truck at the time. He said the speed of the train was not known.

The train had only partially emerged from a tunnel, and with much of it still inside, many escaping passengers were forced to scramble out of doors and windows and scale the sides of the train to walk along the roof to safety.

The stretch of track where the orange-striped train came to a halt hugs the coastline. Yellow and red police tape marked the area of the crash, where tents had been set up and dozens of rescuers and officials had converged.

Taiwan is a mountainous island, and most of its 24 million people live in the flatlands along the northern and western coasts that are home to most of the island's farmland, biggest cities and high-tech industries. The lightly populated east is popular with tourists, many of whom travel there by train to avoid mountain roads.

An investigation has been launched into the crash, and there was no immediate word about any arrests.

In a tweet, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said emergency services "have been fully mobilized to rescue & assist the passengers & railway staff affected. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure their safety in the wake of this heartbreaking incident."

The crash came on the first day of the four-day Tomb Sweeping Festival, an annual religious holiday when people travel to their hometowns for family gatherings and to pay their respects at the graves of their ancestors.

Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang said the Railways Administration would be required to immediately conduct checks along other track lines to "prevent this from happening again."

About 50 volunteers from the Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation stationed at an aid tent near the crash site said children were among the dozens who escaped the train cars. They were treating minor wounds and offering lunches.

"We see people coming off the train and they look shaken and nervous," said Chen Tzu-chong, a Tzu Chi team leader on site.

Taiwan's last major rail crash was in October 2018, when an express train derailed while rounding a tight corner on the northeast coast, killing at least 18 people and injuring nearly 200.

In 1991, a collision in western Taiwan killed 30 people and another crash a decade earlier also killed 30. Those were said to be the worst previous crashes on the rail system that dates from the late 19th century.

Taiwan's extensive rail system has undergone substantial upgrades in recent years, particularly with the addition of a high-speed line connecting the capital Taipei with west coast cities to the south.

The train involved in Friday's derailment, the Taroko No. 408, is one of Taiwan's newer models.

AP-NORC poll: Majority in US back easier voter registration

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats' proposals to overhaul voting in the U.S. won solid -- although not overwhelming -- support from Americans in a new survey measuring the popularity of major pieces of the sweeping legislation in Congress.

The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll found about half of Americans support

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 38 of 95

expanding access to early and mail voting, while about 3 in 10 opposed the ideas and the rest had no opinion. Automatic voter registration was the most popular Democratic proposal in the survey, endorsed by 60% of Americans.

Generally, the partisan divide was stark, as many Republicans opposed measures that make it easier to register and vote and most Democrats embraced them. About three-quarters of Democrats supported no-excuse voting by mail, for example, but about 6 in 10 Republicans were opposed.

There was one striking exception: Nearly three-quarters of all Americans — including majorities of both parties — said they support laws requiring voters to present photo identification, even as the Democratic proposal would ease those laws.

The sizable number of Americans who expressed no opinion on many of the measures suggests both parties have some room to try to sway public opinion as they ramp up efforts to pressure the Senate to act on the bill.

"When you ask questions that are focused specifically on voting, you can't help but step into what is a super-charged debate that is still resonating coming off the 2020 election," said U.S. Rep. John Sarbanes, one of the lead sponsors of the Democrats' bill. "There continues to be a lot of misinformation around what it means to have accurate and fair elections and voting in this country."

The 2020 presidential election was dominated by coronavirus pandemic-related voting changes and a flood of misinformation and false claims of voter fraud. There was no widespread election fraud, and those claims were rejected by Republican and Democratic election officials in state after state, by U.S. cybersecurity officials and by courts up to the U.S. Supreme Court. And then-Attorney General William Barr said there was no evidence of fraud that could change the election outcome.

Still, now there is a collective sense of urgency to change how elections are run. But each side is taking a dramatically different path, with state Republicans looking to tighten rules and Democrats in Congress seeking national voting standards.

The two approaches reflect a partisan disagreement over the problem that needs solving. The AP-NORC poll shows a significant split over whether voter suppression or voter fraud is the more pressing concern. While 62% of Democrats say people who are eligible not being allowed to vote is a major problem, just 30% of Republicans do. Sixty-three percent of Republicans but just 19% of Democrats say people voting who are not eligible is a major problem.

Phil DiMenna, a 67-year-old retiree from Ashland, Ohio, who participated in the poll, said he did not think voter suppression or voter fraud were major problems, and he wished politicians of both parties would stop making voting so political.

"Put aside the party lines and do what's best for the people of the United States," said DiMenna, who voted for Joe Biden in November. "There is always common ground somewhere."

The poll found bipartisan agreement on requiring all voters to provide photo identification at their polling place -- something that more than a dozen mostly Republican-led states have implemented. Not all these states have strict rules, though, and many allow voters to sign an affidavit if they don't have their photo ID with them.

Overall, 72% are in favor of requiring voters to provide photo identification to vote, while just 13% are opposed. Ninety-one percent of Republicans and 56% of Democrats are in favor. The bill in Congress would require all states with an ID requirement to allow voters to sign a sworn statement under penalty of perjury and have their ballot counted.

The measure is one of several in Democrats' legislation, which also includes various changes to campaign finance and ethics laws. The House approved its bill in early March, and a companion measure has had its first hearing in the Senate.

Final passage, however, depends on whether Democrats, who have a tie-breaking vote in the Senate, are willing to toss out legislative rules that currently require 60 votes for most bills to advance. Republican lawmakers are universally opposed to the voting overhaul, calling it a Democratic power grab and federal intrusion into states' rights to administer elections.

Democrats are hoping to use the federal effort to thwart state proposals that would restrict access to the polls. The Brennan Center for Justice counts 360 voting restriction bills introduced this year. Five have already been enacted, and 29 others have passed at least one legislative chamber, the group says.

The AP-NORC poll suggests a strong base of support that voting advocates can build on, according to Wendy Weiser, who leads the democracy program at the Brennan Center.

"The two things that increase support are people learning more about the reforms and how they work and people experiencing those reforms in practice in their own communities," Weiser said.

This has been the case with Ann Cobb, a 56-year-old former customer service representative who lives in Calhoun, Georgia, where state lawmakers years earlier did away with requiring an excuse to vote absentee. She supports keeping it that way so long as voters show proof of identification.

"I think there are more opportunities for fraud with the mail-in voting, but I think if they can make you send in your driver's license and identification then it should be OK," said Cobb, who voted for President Donald Trump in November but changed her party registration to independent after a pro-Trump mob's deadly Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Georgia lawmakers have done just that, recently passing a bill that now requires absentee voters to include driver's license information when requesting and returning mail ballots. And Republican lawmakers in Congress say that is how voting changes should be done -- at the state level.

"Each state has different election laws because each state is different," said U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, a Republican from Wisconsin, at a recent congressional hearing. "At a time of real record voting turnout, I don't think it's time to be mandating a one-size-fits-all to our voting system."

Other elements of the Democratic bill would restore voting rights to felons and require same-day voter registration. The poll found 51% of Americans in favor of allowing a citizen who has completed a prison sentence for a felony to vote upon release, while 20% are opposed. Fifty-three percent of Americans say they support allowing citizens to register and vote on the same day at polling places, while 27% are opposed.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to be in favor of both proposals.

Christians mark Good Friday amid lingering virus woes

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Christians in the Holy Land are marking Good Friday this year amid signs the coronavirus crisis is winding down, with religious sites open to limited numbers of faithful but none of the mass pilgrimages usually seen in the Holy Week leading up to Easter.

The virus is still raging in the Philippines, France, Brazil and other predominantly Christian countries, where worshippers are marking a second annual Holy Week under various movement restrictions amid outbreaks fanned by more contagious strains.

Last year, Jerusalem was under a strict lockdown, with sacred rites observed by small groups of priests, often behind closed doors. It was a stark departure from past years, when tens of thousands of pilgrims would descend on the city's holy sites.

This year, Franciscan friars in brown robes led hundreds of worshippers down the Via Dolorosa, retracing what tradition holds were Jesus' final steps, while reciting prayers through loudspeakers at the Stations of the Cross. Another group carried a large wooden cross along the route through the Old City, singing hymns and pausing to offer prayers.

"We have to pray for those who can't be here," said Alejandro Gonzalez, a Mexican living in Israel. "Those of us who can be here have a responsibility to keep them in mind and to go in this Way of the Cross that they are going through as well."

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where Christians believe Jesus was crucified, died and rose from the dead, is open to visitors with masks and social distancing.

"Things are open, but cautiously and gradually," said Wadie Abunassar, an adviser to church leaders in the Holy Land. "In regular years we urge people to come out. Last year we told people to stay at home..."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 40 of 95

This year we are somehow silent.”

Israel has launched one of the world’s most successful vaccination campaigns, allowing it to reopen restaurants, hotels and religious sites. But air travel is still limited by quarantine and other restrictions, keeping away the foreign pilgrims who usually throng Jerusalem during Holy Week.

The main holy sites are in the Old City in east Jerusalem, which Israel captured along with the West Bank in the 1967 war. Israel annexed east Jerusalem and considers the entire city its unified capital, while the Palestinians want both territories for their future state.

Israel included Palestinian residents of Jerusalem in its vaccination campaign, but has only provided a small number of vaccines to those in the occupied West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority has imported tens of thousands of doses for a population of more than 2.5 million.

Israeli authorities said up to 5,000 Christian Palestinians from the West Bank would be permitted to enter for Easter celebrations. Abunassar said he was not aware of any large tour groups from the West Bank planning to enter, as in years past, likely reflecting concerns about the virus.

In neighboring Lebanon, Christians observed Good Friday under a coronavirus lockdown and amid a severe economic crisis exacerbated by the massive explosion that demolished parts of the capital last year. Even traditional Easter sweets are a luxury few can afford.

“People are not even talking about the feast,” says Majida Al Asaily, owner of a sweets shop in Beirut. “We haven’t witnessed anything like this year, despite the war and other difficulties that we had faced before.”

Pope Francis began Good Friday with a visit to the Vatican’s COVID-19 vaccination center, where volunteers have spent the past week administering some 1,200 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to poor and disadvantaged people in Rome.

The Vatican City State bought its own doses to vaccinate Holy See employees and their families, and has been giving away surplus supplies to homeless people. A masked Francis posed for photos with some of the volunteers and recipients in the Vatican audience hall.

Later Friday, Francis was to preside over the Way of the Cross procession in a nearly empty St. Peter’s Square, instead of the popular torchlit ritual he usually celebrates at the Colosseum.

In France, a nationwide 7 p.m. curfew is forcing parishes to move Good Friday ceremonies forward in the day, as the traditional Catholic night processions are being drastically scaled back or cancelled. Nineteen departments in France are on localized lockdowns, where parishioners can attend daytime Mass if they sign the government’s “travel certificate.”

Although a third lockdown “light” is being imposed Saturday, French President Emmanuel Macron has wavered on a travel ban for Easter weekend, allowing the French to drive between regions to meet up with family on Friday.

Fire-ravaged Notre Dame will not hold a Good Friday mass this year, but the cathedral’s “Crown of Thorns” will be venerated by the cathedral’s clergy at its new temporary liturgical hub in the nearby church of Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois.

In Spain, there will be no traditional processions for a second year in a row, and churches will limit the number of worshippers. Many parishes are going online with Mass and prayers via video streaming services.

In the Philippines, streets were eerily quiet and religious gatherings were prohibited in the capital, Manila, and four outlying provinces. The government placed the bustling region of more than 25 million people back under lockdown this week as it scrambled to contain an alarming surge in COVID-19 cases.

The Philippines had started to reopen in hopes of stemming a severe economic crisis, but infections surged last month, apparently because of more contagious strains, increased public mobility and complacency.

Russian entrepreneurs adapt to virus lockdown challenges

By DARIA LITVINOVA and DANIEL KOZIN Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Valentina Konstantinova remembers well when Russia locked down for the coronavirus a year ago. Her 18-room boutique hotel, called Skazka, or “Fairytale,” was full, and within a couple of days, it had only one guest left.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 41 of 95

"I still don't understand how people could have vanished in one day, and where," she recalled. The lockdown lasted six weeks, but with borders closed, her business prospects were grim.

One year later, Skazka is still open — thanks to some creative thinking by its owners — but with fewer guests than before.

Russia was never fully locked down again after last spring, and as a result, its economy and some of its businesses didn't suffer as much as those in some countries during the pandemic. But it also has seen its mortality rates rise.

When infections surged again in the fall, the government resisted imposing restrictions that would have shut many businesses.

Had there been another lockdown, "we'd be closed already," Konstantinova said.

A six-week lockdown still damaged the weakening economy and compounded Russians' frustrations over declining incomes and worsening living conditions. President Vladimir Putin's approval rating fell from 69% in February 2020 to a historic low of 59% two months later before rebounding, according to the Levada Center, Russia's top independent pollster.

For the rest of 2020, industries and enterprises mostly stayed open. During a virus resurgence in the fall, some regions imposed restrictions that limited the hours or capacity of bars, restaurants and other businesses, but rarely were they closed altogether.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Russia's gross domestic product fell by just 3.6% — a little more than the global average of 3.4%. By comparison, GDP in the U.K. shrank by 9.9%. France by 8.2%, Germany by 5.3%, and Canada by 5.4%.

Still, it was Russia's biggest plunge since 2009. In recent years, its GDP grew by about 1-2% per year.

At the same time, Russia saw a significant increase in mortality, said Sergei Guriev, economics professor at Sciences Po institute of political studies in Paris. The number of overall deaths in 2020 grew by nearly 324,000, compared with the previous year, according to the statistical agency Rosstat.

The country recorded over 97,000 deaths from COVID-19, according to Johns Hopkins University, although experts say the actual number is probably higher and even Rosstat said over 200,000 people with the virus died between April 2020 and January 2021.

"These losses, which could have obviously been avoided, are the price of the Russian economy not shutting down and of the Russian GDP only shrinking by 3%," Guriev said.

Online sales had a good year. Ozon, a major Russian e-commerce platform similar to Amazon, saw sales jump almost 2.5 times last year, the company's communications director Maria Zaikina said.

But even without a second lockdown, some small- and medium-sized businesses needed creative ways to stay afloat, with government support mostly limited to tax deferrals, cheap but hard-to-get loans, and relatively small direct subsidies. Many aren't earning what they did before the pandemic.

A survey of 5,000 such enterprises found that about a third are still seeing a decline in revenue at the start of 2021. The survey, conducted by Russia's business ombudsman Boris Titov and cited by the news outlet RBC last month, said about 27% reported revenue at the same level as last year and nearly one in 10 was looking to close. Only about 19% said they are slowly starting to recover.

Nearly 60% of the companies asked pointed to a still-depressed demand for products and services as one of the biggest difficulties they face.

Russians' incomes fell by 3.5% last year, Guriev said, noting that Moscow spent much less supporting businesses and consumers than other countries, where governments took "unprecedentedly generous measures."

That could be because the government, with its sovereign wealth fund worth \$165 billion in April 2020, was reluctant to open state coffers last spring, when oil prices had plunged.

During the first lockdown, Konstantinova still wanted to make use of her hotel, which is located in a museum and entertainment complex built in a style that mimics 17th-century Russian architecture. Working with NGOs and aid groups, she offered free rooms to victims of domestic violence, refugees, doctors and foreigners who got stuck in Russia.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 42 of 95

With tourists unlikely to return anytime soon, Konstantinova was looking for ways to transform her hotel. Some of her nonpaying guests were originally from India, and she decided to tap their expertise to add a restaurant serving authentic Indian cuisine. The project took off, and her business is now breaking even.

"Profit is out of the question at this point, of course, as is early repayment of loans," she said. "But the fact that we're working at a break-even level is important. It means that when the market recovers, the business is likely to earn a profit."

Artyom Borovoy, co-founder of a company that builds stands for exhibitions, was in a similar situation.

When convention business ground to a halt, Borovoy's company Stend-Do started making folding desks for those working from home — an idea he said came from Zoom discussions with his friends "out of desperation."

Simple, inexpensive plywood desks that fold like an easel and can be used either sitting or standing proved popular for those working remotely from tiny apartments. Borovoy sold about 2,100 last year, but admits the new project is making only enough to cover costs.

"In terms of profit, there isn't any yet," he said.

Both Borovoy and Konstantinova say they didn't get any significant government support, aside from tax deferrals.

Amid the restrictions, some businesses turned to acts of defiance to preserve their income.

In St. Petersburg, where tough restrictions were imposed because of a virus surge during the New Year's holidays in December and January, there was a backlash from restaurant and bar owners who were ordered to shut between Dec. 31 and Jan. 3, and required to close at 7 p.m. for a week after that.

Dozens of owners joined what was called the "Map of Resistance" — a short-lived website listing bars and restaurants that refused to obey the restrictions.

"How else were we supposed to survive?" said Mikhail Kavin, manager of the Commode bar — just off the city's famed Nevsky Prospekt — that features rooms named for different cultural figures such as "Gershwin," "Brando," "Rockefeller" and "Lebowski."

"People needed to be able to eat and work. The authorities were unwilling to enter into a dialogue. They did not provide any support, neither to employees nor business owners," he said, noting that joining the Map of Resistance "was our only way to be heard."

Police raided Commode in early December for serving customers behind closed doors past 11 p.m. Security video showed a dozen officers in balaclavas breaking through the door and later walking amid patrons who apparently were made to lie on the floor, and beating some with batons.

Authorities eventually eased the restrictions: Cafes, restaurants and bars were still banned from operating between Dec. 31 and Jan. 3 unless they had "winter terraces" serving customers outside, but they could open between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. the week after that.

Commode operated during the holidays despite the restrictions, but even with flouting the rules, it hasn't bounced back to its pre-pandemic level of sales, Kavin said.

"Maybe some months or weeks were an exception to the rule, but it's a long, long way to go to a full recovery," he added.

EXPLAINER: Who are the rebels in northern Mozambique?

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — With more than a week of fierce fighting including beheaded bodies in the streets, the battle for the northern Mozambique town of Palma has highlighted the southern Africa country's insurgency and threats to its multibillion-dollar investments.

Here's a look at what is known about the rebel group and the challenges facing Mozambique.

WHO ARE THE REBELS?

They're mostly unemployed young Muslim men from Cabo Delgado, the northernmost province on the country's long Indian Ocean coastline.

For centuries, most people there have been Muslims who traded with Swahili dhow sailors and coexisted

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 43 of 95

with Catholicism brought by Portuguese colonial rulers.

Despite rich natural resources, the province has been one of Mozambique's least developed, with low levels of education, health services, and nutrition.

In recent years some unemployed youths have studied abroad on scholarships from Muslim organizations and locals say many returned preaching a more radical form of Islam. In 2017, violence erupted against government targets by a few small bands, often using machetes to kill police and officials.

The rebels have grown to several hundred, they use motorcycles and are now well-armed with automatic weapons and mortars. Military experts say many weapons come from abroad.

WHAT ARE THEY CALLED?

They are known locally as al-Shabab — Arabic for "youth" — but it seems to be just a handy nickname as they don't have any known affiliation with Somalia's jihadi rebels of the same name.

For a few years, the insurgents didn't appear to be linked to any group, but in 2019, the Islamic State group began claiming responsibility for their attacks, calling them the Islamic State Central African Province.

IS also posts photos and videos of the militants, often standing by the group's black flag. A video posted this week showed them dressed in a mix of camouflage and black shirts and red scarves, and speaking Swahili and some Arabic.

ARE THEY GAINING GROUND?

The number of attacks since 2017 has risen to more than 838, and more than 500 of those have been in the past year, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project.

More than 2,600 people have been killed. The humanitarian crisis has also dramatically increased, from 90,000 displaced at the start of 2020 to more than 670,000 now, according to U.N. organizations. More than 900,000 people in the area need food aid, according to the World Food Program.

After years of hit-and-run attacks, the rebels captured the port town of Mocimboa da Praia in August and have held it since then. They've attacked smaller towns in the surrounding area.

In one massacre, they beheaded 50 people on a soccer pitch, according to a report confirmed by the Catholic bishop of Pemba, the provincial capital, where hundreds of thousands have fled. The rebels target government offices, kill local officials and rob banks.

HOW IS THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDING?

President Filipe Nyusi's government in Maputo, in the southernmost part of Mozambique, has launched a counterterrorism offensive by the national police and the military.

It also has used a private military organization based in South Africa, the Dyck Advisory Group, which has sent helicopter gunships and other aircraft to find and attack the rebels.

Because the rebels often mingle with civilians, military action is difficult. Atrocities have been committed by all sides — the rebels, the government forces and the mercenaries — according to a March 2 report by Amnesty International. The government and the Dyck group deny the charges, saying they are investigating them.

IS MOZAMBIQUE GETTING HELP?

The United States last month declared Mozambique's rebels to be a terror organization and sent special operations forces officers to carry out a two-month training of Mozambique's marines.

Portugal said it's sending 60 officers to provide training and said the European Union is considering military support.

Mozambique is a member of the 16-nation Southern African Development Community, which has been closely watching the instability. The group has had a few meetings on the rebels but Mozambique hasn't yet requested direct military help from neighboring countries, including South Africa and Zimbabwe.

WHAT IS THE ECONOMIC IMPACT?

Rebel violence had caused a suspension of work by the French oil and gas firm Total in January.

On March 24, Total said security had improved enough to allow it to resume, but within a few hours, the rebels attacked Palma, and Total once again evacuated workers from the fortified construction site.

Experts say it will be a long time before stability is sufficiently restored for Total to get back to work. The huge deposits of natural gas are reported to be among the world's largest, and the government was

hoping the projects would bring much-needed economic growth.

Exxon also was planning an investment, but that appears to be on hold.

"The whole gas gamble was bet on a promise of security, and Nyusi -- and Mozambique -- lost the bet," wrote academic Joseph Hanlon in the newsletter Mozambique News Reports and Clippings.

WHAT IS THE OUTLOOK FOR MOZAMBIQUE AND AFRICA?

The rebels have grown in size and organization. Once viewed as a ragtag bunch of dissatisfied youths, their attacks are more strategic and they are spreading their reach over a large part of northern Cabo Delgado.

Military experts say restoring stability will be a long, violent and challenging process. A more long-range solution would be to improve local governments and provide better services and living conditions, according to analysts and military experts.

But that will be difficult, with the rebels already entrenched. Africa's arc of extremism — from the Sahel region in West Africa, to Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency in central Africa and al-Shabab's entrenched conflict in Somalia in East Africa — has a new foothold in southern Africa in Mozambique that will be hard to dislodge.

Israel's dilemma: Can the unvaccinated return to workplaces?

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — After spending much of the past year in lockdown, Tel Aviv makeup artist Artyom Kavnatsky was ready to get back to work. But when he showed up for a recent photo shoot, his employer turned him away. The reason? He had not been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

"He didn't take me because I didn't get vaccinated," Kavnatsky said. "It's discrimination, and it's not all right."

The breakneck pace of Israel's vaccination drive has made it one of the few countries able to return to much of its pre-pandemic routine. Bars and businesses, hotels and health clubs have all sprung back to life in Israel, where some 80% of the adult population is fully vaccinated and new infections and COVID-19 deaths have plummeted.

While Israel provides a glimpse of what may be possible with high immunization rates, it also offers insight into the problems that lie ahead: Workplaces and schools are now grappling with what to do with those who refuse to get vaccinated as the next phase in the pandemic again pits public health concerns against individual rights and possibly new questions of equity. One case has already ended up in court, and others are expected to.

Airlines are already considering if vaccination, or a recent negative test, might be required for travel, as is the European Union. Some officials in Britain and the United States are exploring if proof of immunization could help large-scale gatherings to return, though there remains significant resistance to such measures in the U.S. Whether a shot is necessary to go back to work or class is an even thornier question.

In many countries, the decisions may raise the prospect of further dividing populations along the lines of wealth and vaccine access. While the vast majority of the 100,000 Palestinians who live in the West Bank and have Israeli work permits have been vaccinated, immunization drives in the West Bank and Gaza have lagged far behind. Many parts of the world have received few, if any, vaccines.

So far, Israel has relied primarily on a series of incentives meant to encourage people to get a vaccine. It has established a "green pass" for the fully vaccinated whose holders can attend concerts, dine out, go to the gym or travel to popular vacation spots in places like Egypt, Cyprus and Greece. Those who do not have the pass are out of luck.

The system has worked well in areas of leisure and entertainment. But now, it is moving into other realms. Health officials have recommended barring unvaccinated workers who have not recently tested negative for COVID-19 from schools, elder care facilities and other high-risk workplaces.

Israel's health care system has also mandated that all employees — doctors, nurses, administrators, and support staff alike — receive the coronavirus vaccine. If they refuse, they will be transferred to jobs that

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 45 of 95

do not involve contact with high-risk patients.

Rights groups have expressed concern that such regulations could jeopardize workers' income.

Similar concerns exist in education. Tel Aviv University, Israel's largest, has found an uneasy balance for now.

As the university resumes in-person classes, Eyal Zisser, its deputy rector, said that only students who are vaccinated can be physically present. Those who are not can continue to learn remotely.

"In the initial stages, we are bringing back some of the students according to the green pass and making lessons accessible to the rest of the students," said Zisser.

Even with Israel's success, hundreds of thousands of people remain unvaccinated — some who are opposed to vaccines in general but many who are hesitant to take a shot that was developed so quickly. U.N., U.S. and European health experts have said the vaccines authorized by Israel are safe and effective.

Kavnatsky, the makeup artist, objects to vaccines and modern medicine more broadly, saying he doesn't want to put "any needles in my body." He is not alone. He is one of over 15,000 members of a Hebrew-language anti-vaccine Facebook group who are critical of what they see as forced immunization by the state.

Rappeh, a political party headed by outspoken anti-vaccine advocate Aryeh Avni, garnered over 17,000 votes in last week's recent parliamentary elections. That was not enough to get into parliament but illustrates the challenge for policymakers.

Israel's Health Ministry acknowledges its powers are limited.

"We cannot force people to vaccinate," said Einav Shimron, the ministry's deputy director for international relations.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, a nongovernmental organization that deals with labor issues, said that the long-term application of the green pass raises a potential civil rights issue, and has called on the government to pass legislation on the matter.

"If there is going to be a policy that infringes on the right to employment and on the right for a person to choose what to do with his or her body in order to be employed, then it needs to go through the legislative process," said spokeswoman Maya Fried. "There needs to be a public discussion."

In the meantime, the debate is already playing out in the courts.

In the first major decision on the topic, a Tel Aviv labor court in March allowed a day care center to bar a teaching assistant who who refused to get vaccinated or undergo coronavirus testing. The decision is expected to be appealed.

Dr. Nadav Davidovitch, the head of Israel's association of public health physicians, said he believes people have an obligation to get vaccinated, particularly given the evidence that the vaccine not only prevents the worst outcomes from COVID-19 but also may reduce the spread of the virus. Israel, with 9.3 million people, has recorded at least 6,188 deaths since the pandemic began.

"We see vaccination as a solidarity act, not just an individual choice," he said.

Still, he said he opposes forced vaccinations or firing people for refusing. Instead, he favors alternative approaches, from education to persuasion. Those who continue to refuse can perhaps be given different jobs, work remotely or undergo frequent testing.

Davidovitch, a former military epidemiologist, has experience with the issue. He said that well over 90% of Israeli recruits who did not want to be vaccinated when they enlisted ended up agreeing once they were educated by medical experts.

"I think it's a bad idea to move quickly to compulsion," he said. "Most people are hesitant. They are not against vaccination in general."

Pakistan, India peace move silences deadly Kashmir frontier

By AIJAZ HUSSAIN and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — The machine guns peeking over parapets of small, sandbagged concrete bunkers and the heavy artillery cannons dug deep into Himalayan Kashmir's rugged terrain have fallen silent. At least for now.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 46 of 95

The Line of Control, a highly militarized de facto border that divides the disputed region between the two nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan, and a site of hundreds of deaths, is unusually quiet after the two South Asian neighbors last month agreed to reaffirm their 2003 cease-fire accord.

The somewhat surprising decision prompted a thaw in the otherwise turbulent relations between the countries but also raised questions about the longevity of the fragile peace, in part due to earlier failures. The crackdown by Indian forces and attacks by rebels have continued inside Indian-held Kashmir.

The cease-fire, experts say, could stabilize the lingering conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. Kashmiris say the rare move should lead to resolution of the dispute.

It was unclear what prompted the two militaries to adhere to the accord they had largely ignored for years. But experts point to a climbdown by both from their earlier stance following a decision by India to strip Kashmir of its semi-autonomy and take direct control over the region in 2019, and its monthslong bitter border standoff with China.

Paul Staniland, associate professor of political science at the University of Chicago, said the ongoing costs of clashes along the Line of Control, the economic effects of the pandemic, and other foreign policy challenges facing both countries might have combined to create incentives to pursue a cease-fire.

Since 2003, the cease-fire has largely held despite regular skirmishes. Both India and Pakistan claim the region in its entirety and have fought two wars over it, and in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir, militants have fought against Indian rule since 1989.

Each country has accused the other of heightening tensions by significantly ratcheting up border attacks in the last four years, leading to the deaths of soldiers and villagers.

The cease-fire announcement came shortly after China and India agreed to a military disengagement from a portion of their disputed border after a monthslong deadly military standoff. It had led to fears of a two-front war between India and China, with the latter assisted by its closest ally, Pakistan.

"Some sort of pressure, possibly from Washington and Beijing for different reasons, is pushing India and Pakistan for wider peace moves in the region," said Siddiq Wahid, historian and former vice chancellor of the Islamic University of Science and Technology.

Beijing wants Pakistan to focus on securing its investments as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, a massive, cross-continental infrastructure development project aimed at expanding China's commercial connections globally. Islamabad is a key partner and some Chinese-built highways snake through Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. The U.S., on the other hand, is courting India to focus its energies on countering China.

"If Pakistan is indeed looking to move toward a new regional role, embracing geopolitics, reducing tensions with India is a must, and if India is going to pivot to deal with a rising China, it has reasons to want to calm relations with Pakistan," said Staniland, a South Asia expert. "The real question is whether these reasons remain powerful enough over time."

The thaw in relations became apparent when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an avowed Hindu nationalist, ceased playing up rhetoric against Pakistan and referencing Kashmir in campaigning for elections in four key states.

In Pakistan, too, political leadership and the powerful military have shifted from their earlier position of not engaging with India until it reversed its decision to annul Kashmir's semi-autonomy.

Last week, Pakistan's army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa said it was time for the two countries to "bury the past" and resolve the dispute over Kashmir peacefully. His remarks followed Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's repeated calls for good relations with India with a caveat that the Kashmir dispute remains at the center of any future talks. Since the announcement of the cease-fire, Khan, too, has abandoned his past rhetoric against Modi.

Modi appeared to reciprocate, sending last week a letter to Khan seeking cordial relations. Khan replied Tuesday but reiterated that lasting peace was mainly contingent on resolving the future of Kashmir.

The rapprochement has sparked skepticism among Kashmiris who fear the dispute could be pushed to the backburner given the fast administrative and political changes in the region by India that they have likened to settler colonialism.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 47 of 95

"We are not against talks and want an end to violence. But there has to be an end to repression too," said Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, an influential Kashmiri separatist leader who has been under house arrest since August 2019. "The whole idea behind the negotiations has to be a resolution of the Kashmir issue as per the wishes of its people."

In the past, Pakistan and India made multiple attempts to broker a deal over Kashmir. They also initiated confidence-building measures like exclusive barter trade between two parts of Kashmir, sporting games and bus services for divided families.

"The cease-fire can lead to relative peace but one should not expect lasting peace," said Vinod Bhatia, who was India's director-general for military operations from 2012 to 2014.

Meanwhile, villagers living along the frontier are paying the price.

The lives of Nader Hussain and Munshi Muhammad Arshad are divided by a barbed concertina wire. Hussain lives in Indian-controlled Kashmir and Arshad in the part controlled by Pakistan.

In late November, Hussain saw an artillery shell fired by Pakistani soldiers fly towards him in his mountainous village. The 50-year-old couldn't outrun the projectile and lost both legs in the blast. Two other men were killed on the spot.

"The two countries do politics on our bodies, but this must end," he said.

On the other side, the 45-year-old Arshad, who lost his father to an artillery shell fired by Indian soldiers, hoped for peace.

"But a durable peace," he said, "will only come when the Kashmir issue is resolved."

Biden's 'Jobs Cabinet' to sell infrastructure as GOP resists

By JOSH BOAK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is setting about convincing America it needs his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan, deputizing a five-member "jobs Cabinet" to help in the effort. But the enormity of his task is clear after Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's vowed to oppose the plan "every step of the way."

Speaking in Kentucky on Thursday, McConnell said he personally likes Biden and they've been friends a long time. But the president will get no cooperation from the GOP, which objects to the corporate tax increases in the plan and says they would hurt America's ability to compete in a global economy.

"We have some big philosophical differences, and that's going to make it more and more difficult for us to reach bipartisan agreements," the Republican leader said.

White House chief of staff Ron Klain said the key to any outreach is that the proposal's ideas are already popular. Americans want smooth roads, safe bridges, reliable public transit, electric vehicles, drinkable water, new schools and investments in manufacturing, among the plan's many components, he said.

"We kind of think it's just right," Klain said in a televised interview with the news organization Politico. "But we're happy to have a conversation with people, less about the price tag, more about what are the elements that should be in the plan that people think are missing."

Those conversations could be limited to Democrats as McConnell declared: "I'm going to fight them every step of the way."

Biden told his Cabinet at its first meeting that he is enlisting several of them to help with the push: Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge, Labor Secretary Marty Walsh and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

"Working with my team here at the White House, each Cabinet member will represent me in dealings with Congress, engage the public in selling the plan and help organize the details as we refine it and move forward," Biden said.

The task will involve lots of salesmanship for a legacy-making piece of legislation that Biden announced in a Wednesday speech.

His administration must sway Congress. It needs to rally voters. It's also looking to outside economists to back the plan.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 48 of 95

It's monitoring Wall Street for any celebrations or jitters. It's forming alliances with advocates, while dealing with critics of the plan's corporate tax hikes and project details. And Biden's administration also intends, per the plan, to cajole other nations to stop slashing their own tax rates in what has been a race-to-the-bottom to attract and retain multinational businesses.

Biden's vehicle for financing his infrastructure plans is a key dividing line. Republicans object to raising the corporate tax rate to 28% from 21%, one of the many changes so that business taxes would fund infrastructure. Republicans had cut the corporate rate from 35% in 2017, a hallmark policy achievement of Donald Trump's presidency.

Within Washington and corporate board rooms, the administration is attracting its share of accolades and rebukes on his proposal.

In Biden's own party, liberal Democrats in Congress want him to go bigger. And Democrats representing high-tax states want to remove a 2017 tax code change that limited deductions of state and local taxes for individuals.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi expressed no qualms about the proposal's scope.

"It was in the tradition of America -- to think big," Pelosi said at a press conference Thursday. "And now, in this century, President Biden is undertaking something in the tradition of thinking big, being transformational and creating jobs for America."

While many leading business groups oppose the higher taxes, some major companies see reason for optimism because of the innovations that would be encouraged by the plan.

Automakers Ford, General Motors and Toyota endorsed the general concepts of Biden's plan, which calls for the construction of 500,000 electric vehicle charging stations by 2030 in what would be a shift away from gasoline-powered cars.

But some environmentalists said the plan's shift away from fossil fuels that cause climate change was not substantial enough.

"Biden has pledged to cut carbon emissions 50% and decarbonize our electricity sector, but this proposal won't even come close," said Brett Hartl, government affairs director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The White House was quick to address the climate change concerns. Climate adviser Gina McCarthy said the administration expects the infrastructure package to include Biden's pledge to set a national standard requiring utilities to produce 100% carbon-free electricity by 2035.

The proposed electricity standard "is going to be fairly robust, and it's going to be inclusive," McCarthy said. "I think we can get to the results that we're looking for in a number of different ways. If a clean energy standard can be done, we think it should be done."

For every criticism of the plan's details, there were also plaudits for its broader approach.

Harvard University economist Larry Summers, a former treasury secretary, endorsed Biden's plan, after previously criticizing the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan because of its size and debt-based financing.

He downplayed any risks from corporate tax hikes, since low interest rates mean the costs of obtaining capital are already low for many companies.

"I am excited," Summers said on Twitter. "The economy's capacity will go up."

The plan also carries a political dimension as organized labor is mobilizing to get the package passed, an important push given the steady, recent Republican gains among working class voters. Biden's plan, with its focus on construction and manufacturing jobs, has the potential to reverse some of that slide — and the unions that backed him in 2020 are promising to help deliver votes on infrastructure.

"Our members are an army a half-million strong, that will make calls, visit members of Congress and rally for good jobs building our nation's infrastructure," said Terry O'Sullivan, general president of Laborers International Union of North America, one of the largest construction trades unions. "We did it with boots on the ground to get President Biden elected."

Immigrants with temporary status have grown deep roots in US

By AMY TAXIN, JEFF ROBERSON and MARCOS ALEMAN Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 49 of 95

SPRINGDALE, Ark. (AP) — Irma Chavez is a married mother of four who leads a business networking initiative in this small Arkansas city she calls home. It's a long way from her life as a live-in housekeeper in California years ago, and further still from a childhood working in El Salvador's coffee fields.

What has indelibly marked the path of the 44-year-old marketing specialist is a government program that allows people from countries ravaged by disaster and war to live and work legally in the United States. While the Trump administration tried to cancel the program for many immigrants, President Joe Biden is backing legislation that would give Chavez and hundreds of thousands of people like her a shot at becoming American citizens.

It's a monumental shift from just six months ago, when a court gave the Trump administration the right to halt Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, for four countries, stoking fear among many of the program's 411,000 recipients that they could be sent back to their homelands. Many, like Chavez, haven't lived there in decades.

Now, these immigrants are pinning their hopes on the Senate after the House passed a sweeping bill to let them call the United States their permanent home. The legislation, which faces uncertain prospects, would offer an eight-year pathway to citizenship to an estimated 11 million people in the U.S. illegally and put immigrants brought to the country as children and TPS recipients on an even faster track to becoming Americans.

For Chavez, who lives in Springdale, Arkansas, and has been renewing her temporary status for two decades, the legislation could put an end to fears that she might be deported without her children. It also would allow her to travel more easily to see her mother and sister in their humble Salvadoran hometown lined with dusty streets.

"We really hope everything is going to change in our favor now," Chavez said. "We are good people. We work. We do our taxes. We pay our taxes."

The U.S. Homeland Security secretary can designate a country for TPS as it recovers from natural disasters, war or other circumstances preventing people from returning home safely. Last fall, there were 10 countries in the program. The Biden administration, which has eased some of Trump's hardline immigration policies and is facing an uptick in migration, has recently added two more — Myanmar and Venezuela.

While temporary, the program can be renewed by U.S. officials and has been repeatedly. If supporters and critics agree on anything, it's that a temporary program should not last decades.

More than half of those with the status are from El Salvador, which was designated for the program after a 2001 earthquake. Many Salvadorans who initially qualified for TPS had fled their country after a civil war and have set down roots in communities from California to Arkansas. Most have no plan of returning to a country that still sees thousands leave each year in search of economic stability and safety from gangs.

Giving these immigrants the ability to stay could drive many of them to buy homes and invest in businesses in U.S. communities still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic, said Manuel Orozco, director of the Center for Migration and Economic Stabilization at the development organization Creative Associates International.

"It's almost like the logical thing to do because they are de facto Americans," Orozco said. "It definitely will create better conditions for them not only to integrate but also strengthen their economic roots, improving the economy."

On the outskirts of El Salvador's second-largest city, Santa Ana, Iris Franco runs a bakery at home and delivers the bread on a bike. It's how she makes ends meet for herself and her four children, the oldest of whom is studying to be a doctor — the first in her family to attend college.

Already that's a change from how she grew up. Neither she nor her older sister, Chavez, finished high school. They both worked as kids while their mother, who lived in a house made from adobe, sold tamales to scrape by.

In 1994, the family reluctantly agreed Chavez would travel north with smugglers to stay with relatives in Los Angeles and work for three years. She would save up money and come back.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 50 of 95

It didn't happen quite as they planned. Chavez got married and had children. But the money she vowed to send always arrived — first, in small bits, then more once she started getting better-paying restaurant and retail jobs under TPS.

Franco, 41, said the family lives humbly but is in a better place thanks to her sister's help. Her mother's home is modest, but more stable, and when Franco's home was destroyed in a flood, Chavez's contributions helped her rebuild.

Chavez sends money to help cover their mother's diabetes medication and food, which is out of reach for their mother, who earns \$6 a day in the family bread business.

"It changed our life, because we knew that we had my sister in that place, and so in whatever she could, she has helped us," Franco said. "She has always paid attention to us."

The Central American country of 6.5 million people has long relied on migrants sending money home to help power its economy, totaling nearly \$6 billion last year. Since people with the temporary status often hold higher-paying jobs than those without legal papers, they're sometimes able to contribute more to their families, said Jesse Acevedo, a University of Denver political science professor who researches international migration.

Not that migration hasn't come at a price. Franco remembers her sister crying when their mother was ill and she couldn't be there and on the many Mother's Days she missed.

But now the technology is better, so the sisters can swap text messages daily and speak several times a week. They finally saw each other four years ago when Chavez filed paperwork with the U.S. government to travel to El Salvador. She surprised her mother, Elsa Victorina Franco, at the airport, met her nephews and nieces and agreed to send what she could to help the oldest train to become a doctor.

Chavez was afraid that she wouldn't be allowed back in the United States when she flew back after her trip. Such cases are up to U.S. border officials; but they let her in.

"When we went to drop her off, she told me, 'Mom, pray that they don't detain me,'" her mother said. "God answered us."

In Arkansas, Chavez gets her two youngest sons ready each morning for school, then heads home to hop on Zoom calls for work. She leads a business networking initiative she hopes will lead to Springdale's first Latino chamber of commerce.

Her husband, a Brazilian-born chef at a well-known restaurant, helps the younger kids with homework, but she's the main cook at home, giving him a break from the kitchen. Her oldest son will get married later this year, and the next in line works as a delivery driver. Both are from a previous marriage.

Chavez's bustling life in a brick-sided house looks little like her early start in the United States. She arrived as a teenager and stayed with relatives in Los Angeles until she got a job as a live-in housekeeper, picking up English from the children she cared for. Once she married and had kids of her own, she worked the night shift at a gas station.

She had no driver's license, bank account or Social Security number. That meant limited health benefits and fears she could be deported.

Once Chavez got temporary status, things changed. She got jobs in stores and restaurants, moved to Oklahoma and later Arkansas, and eventually landed work in a chiropractor's office where she brought in Latino clients and helped with Spanish translation.

After her trip to El Salvador, Chavez decided she wanted to do more to give back. She and her sister started a nonprofit to help children in their Salvadoran neighborhood, giving them backpacks and school supplies and a gift and party at Christmas.

For Chavez, who has renewed her status every 18 months, it was eye-opening when the Trump administration announced it would cancel the program for various countries, including El Salvador.

"I learned a lot from that, that we're not safe in this country unless we are citizens," she said.

Salvadorans joined TPS recipients from Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan in litigation aimed at protecting the program and lobbied lawmakers for a more permanent fix. In December, the government granted an extension of TPS as the issue winds through the courts.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 51 of 95

The White House transition has brought relief to Chavez and many others with the status, but it still doesn't guarantee her life in the United States. She will still need to repeatedly renew her federal paperwork and with it, her driver's license. She can't travel freely to El Salvador or apply to bring her aging mother, who is too poor to qualify for a travel visa, to be with her.

"She doesn't know her grandchildren," she said.

TPS also doesn't solve her own immigration problems. Chavez's U.S. citizen husband has sponsored her for a green card, but she would need to get an old immigration court order cleared to be able to apply. She fears doing so could put her at risk for deportation.

The bill in Congress could change that, giving her the assurance she's long dreamed of that she will never be separated from her children.

"If there were an amnesty or residency for all those on Temporary Protected Status, I'd automatically be in," she said. "I'd always be protected from deportation. It would have a big impact."

A ghostly set of images, and a glimpse of border danger

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A border wall. Smugglers. Small children being dropped into America in the darkness.

A grainy video released Wednesday by authorities — its figures visible only in ghostly white outline, its stark storyline dramatic and obvious — captures, in mere seconds, the dangers for migrant children at the southern U.S. border.

A man straddling a 14-foot barrier near Santa Teresa, New Mexico, lowers a toddler while holding onto one arm. With the child dangling, he lets go. She lands on her feet, then falls forward face first into the dirt. The smuggler does the same thing with a slightly larger child, who falls on her feet and then her bottom. Then the smuggler and another man run off into the desert, deeper into Mexico.

The simple scene caught by a remote camera is an extreme case. But it embodies so much of the saga playing out on the border amid a spike in migrant arrivals, particularly children.

There is implied desperation — a family willing to subject their children to such risks in hopes of changing their future. There is the callousness of the smugglers handling kids like rag dolls.

And there is that barrier over which so many have fought — a symbol of American strength for some, a decidedly un-American thing altogether for others. A fence that, despite its height, is relatively easily overcome.

For immigrant advocates, scenes like this underscore why immigration laws need to be overhauled with a focus on unifying families and making legal immigration easier. For many opponents of such reform, scenes like this are confirmation that the nation's rule of law isn't being respected, that a reform of immigration policies could never even be contemplated while such things are happening. And Americans of all political stripes may debate what circumstances, if any, justify parents taking such actions.

While such debates happen, thousands of migrants from Mexico, Central America, and countries further south are arriving every day to the Mexico-U.S. border. Many are fleeing violence or other hardships in their home countries. Others are simply looking for better economic opportunities. They arrive by boat or wade through the Rio Grande River in Texas, or come on land into California, Arizona and New Mexico.

Many are children traveling alone. Border authorities encountered more than 9,000 children without a parent in February, the highest single month since May 2019, when more than 11,000 unaccompanied minors came to the border.

Unlike their parents in many situations, all unaccompanied minors are allowed to stay in the U.S. That dynamic has prompted many parents to either send kids on the journey to America alone, or get to the border and let them go the rest of the way. Most end up at least temporarily in shelters that are currently way beyond capacity.

Border authorities said the children caught on video were sisters, ages 3 and 5, and from Ecuador. They were found alert, taken to a hospital and cleared of any physical injuries. As of Thursday, they remained at a Border Patrol temporary holding facility pending placement by the U.S. Health and Human Services Department.

The girls' mother is in the United States and authorities are in contact with her, Roger Maier, a spokesman for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, told The Associated Press on Thursday. Maier couldn't provide more details.

Many children arriving alone have relatives in the United States. If they are too young to remember names or phone numbers, as these girls likely were, they may come with contact information written down on paper or directly on their bodies. After being processed by the Border Patrol, they are transferred to Health and Human Services. Eventually they will be released to a sponsor, usually a parent or close relative.

The hope of those who send the children is that they will eventually be reunited with family in the U.S. But the risks to get to that point are enormous.

They can come from traveling without parents. They can come from the actual crossing, whether by river, crammed into a vehicle or on foot through the desert and traversing a wall; last year, a woman died after falling from a barrier in the Santa Teresa area where the girls were found. Finally, the risks can come from unscrupulous smugglers.

"People considering using the services of smugglers need to know that smugglers don't have the kids' best interest at heart. It's entirely too dangerous," said Maier, who added this about the girls being dropped: "Had it not been an area that was monitored, these children would have been fending for themselves."

Duty sergeant: Officers could have ended Floyd restraint

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, AMY FORLITI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A Minneapolis police supervisory sergeant who was on duty the night George Floyd died testified that he believes the officers who restrained Floyd could have ended it after he stopped resisting.

David Ploeger testified Thursday at the trial of since-fired officer Derek Chauvin, who is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death. He noted that officers are trained to roll people on their side to help with their breathing after they have been restrained in the prone position.

"When Mr. Floyd was no longer offering up any resistance to the officers, they could have ended the restraint," Ploeger said.

"And that was after he was handcuffed and on the ground and no longer resistant?" prosecutor Steve Schleicher asked.

"Correct," replied Ploeger, now retired.

Chauvin, 45 and white, is accused of killing Floyd by pinning his knee on the 46-year-old Black man's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, as he lay face-down in handcuffs. Floyd had been accused of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill at a neighborhood market.

His death triggered large protests around the U.S., scattered violence and widespread soul-searching over racism and police brutality. The most serious charge against Chauvin carries up to 40 years in prison.

Thursday's testimony began with Floyd's girlfriend tearfully telling the jury how they met in 2017 — at a Salvation Army shelter where he was a security guard with "this great, deep Southern voice, raspy" — and how they both struggled with an addiction to painkillers.

"Our story, it's a classic story of how many people get addicted to opioids. We both suffered from chronic pain. Mine was in my neck and his was in his back," 45-year-old Courteney Ross said.

She said they "tried really hard to break that addiction many times."

Prosecutors put Ross on the stand in an effort to humanize Floyd in front of the jury and portray him as more than a crime statistic, and also explain his drug use.

The defense has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do when he encountered Floyd last May and that Floyd's death was caused by drugs, his underlying health conditions and his own adrenaline. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Ross said she and Floyd struggled with addiction throughout their relationship — testimony that could help prosecutors blunt the argument that drugs killed Floyd. Medical experts have said that while the level of fentanyl in his system could be fatal, people who use the drug regularly can develop a tolerance.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 53 of 95

Ross said they both had prescriptions, and when those ran out, they took the prescriptions of others and used illegal drugs.

"Addiction, in my opinion, is a lifelong struggle. ... It's not something that just kind of comes and goes. It's something I'll deal with forever," she said.

In March 2020, Ross drove Floyd to the emergency room because he was in extreme stomach pain, and she learned he had overdosed. In the months that followed, Ross said, she and Floyd spent a lot of time together during the coronavirus quarantine, and Floyd was clean.

But she suspected he began using again about two weeks before his death because his behavior changed: She said there would be times when he would be up and bouncing around, and other times when he would be unintelligible.

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson drove hard at Floyd's drug use in cross-examining Ross, asking questions aimed at showing the danger of overdose and death.

Under questioning from Nelson, Ross also disclosed that Floyd's pet name for her in his phone was "Mama" — testimony that called into question the widely reported account that Floyd was crying out for his mother as he lay pinned to the pavement.

Also Thursday, a paramedic who arrived on the scene that day testified that the first call was a Code 2, for someone with a mouth injury, but it was upgraded a minute and a half later to Code 3 — a life-threatening incident that led them to turn on the lights and siren.

Seth Bravinder said he saw no signs that Floyd was breathing or moving, and it appeared he was in cardiac arrest. A second paramedic, Derek Smith, testified that he checked for a pulse and couldn't detect one: "In layman's terms? I thought he was dead."

Bravinder said they loaded Floyd into the ambulance so he could get care "in an optimum environment," but also because bystanders "appeared very upset on the sidewalk," and there was some yelling. "In my mind at least, we wanted to get away from that," he said.

Chauvin's lawyer has argued that the police on the scene were distracted by what they perceived as a growing and increasingly hostile crowd. Video showed around 15 onlookers near where Floyd lay.

Bravinder said after he drove the ambulance three blocks and jumped in back to help his partner, a monitor showed Floyd's heart was not beating. He said they were never able to restore a pulse.

On cross-examination, Chauvin's lawyer questioned why the ambulance did not go straight to the hospital, and he pressed Smith on Floyd's condition as he lay on the pavement. The paramedic expressed himself in blunt terms, saying Floyd was "dead" or "deceased."

Ross began her testimony by telling how she and Floyd met at a shelter where Floyd was a security guard. "May I tell the story?" she asked. "It's one of my favorite stories to tell."

She said she had gone to the shelter because her sons' father was staying there. But she got upset that day because the father was not coming to the lobby to discuss their son's birthday. Floyd came over to check on her.

"Floyd has this great, deep Southern voice, raspy," Ross recalled. "And he's like, 'Sis, you OK, sis?' And I wasn't OK. I was like, 'No, I'm just waiting for my sons' father.' He said, 'Can I pray with you?'"

"This kind person, just to come up to me and say, 'Can I pray with you?' when I felt alone in this lobby, it was so sweet," she said.

Minnesota is a rarity in explicitly permitting such "spark of life" testimony about a crime victim at trial. Defense attorneys often contend such testimony allows prosecutors to play on jurors' emotions.

Police: California office attack that killed 4 wasn't random

By STEFANIE DAZIO and AMY TAXIN Associated Press

ORANGE, Calif. (AP) — A gunman who killed four people, including a 9-year-old boy, in a rampage at a Southern California office building knew all the victims and his motive may have involved personal or business relationships, police said.

"This was not a random act of violence," Lt. Jennifer Amat said Thursday of the attack at a building that

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 54 of 95

housed small businesses in Orange, southeast of Los Angeles.

Aminadab Gaxiola Gonzalez, 44, was identified as the suspected shooter. He was in critical but stable condition. It wasn't clear whether he was wounded by police or shot himself, Amat said.

Gonzalez, from nearby Fullerton, was staying at a motel in neighboring Anaheim and used a rented car to arrive at the two-story office building on Lincoln Avenue, Amat said.

He chained the front and rear gates to the complex with bicycle cable locks and was spotted on security video wearing a bandana over his face, brandishing a semiautomatic handgun and hauling a backpack that contained pepper spray, handcuffs and ammunition, police said.

He targeted Unified Homes, a mobile home brokerage business, authorities said.

Reports of shots fired sent officers to the scene within two minutes, and they exchanged gunfire with the shooter through a gate before the locks were cut, Amat said.

The dead included a 9-year-old boy who was found cradled in the arms of a wounded woman, who was in critical but stable condition.

"It appears that a little boy died in his mother's arms as she was trying to save him during this horrific massacre," Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said.

A man was found dead inside an office, a woman in another office and a second woman was found on an outdoor landing upstairs.

"The preliminary motive is believed to be related to a business and personal relationship which existed between the suspect and all of the victims," Amat said. However, she said the precise relationships were still being determined.

A family member identified one victim as Luis Tovar, 50, who owned Unified Homes.

"Our world is shattered," 28-year-old Vania Tovar, one of Tovar's five children, told the Orange County Register.

The violence in the city of Orange was the nation's third major mass shooting in just over two weeks. Last week a gunman opened fire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado, and killed 10. A week before that, six Asian women were among eight people killed at three Atlanta-area spas.

Scott Clark, who is owner of Calco Financial that is two doors down from Unified Homes, described Luis Tovar as hard-working.

"He's there day and night," Clark said.

Clark left his office on Wednesday, around 4:45 p.m., earlier than usual.

"I must have had an angel from God watching out for me to make me leave an hour before I usually do," he said.

Clark said he has worked out of the building for about 21 years, and Unified Homes has been in that location for seven or eight years. He said they expanded to a second suite about a year ago, and both offices were on the second level.

Clark said he has seen about 10 people working inside Unified Homes but doesn't know them well. He said he has chatted with Tovar, sometimes inviting him inside his own office to take a break.

Gonzalez was charged in 2015 in Orange County with cruelty to a child and other counts. It's not clear if the child that died was his. He pleaded guilty to misdemeanor battery and served one day in jail. All other counts were dismissed, and the conviction was expunged in 2017, said Lauren Gold, spokeswoman for the city of Anaheim.

Floyd's girlfriend recalls their struggles with addiction

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, AMY FORLITI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — George Floyd's girlfriend tearfully told a jury Thursday the story of how they met — at a Salvation Army shelter where he was a security guard with "this great, deep Southern voice, raspy" — and how they both struggled mightily with an addiction to opioids.

"Our story, it's a classic story of how many people get addicted to opioids. We both suffered from chronic pain. Mine was in my neck and his was in his back," 45-year-old Courteney Ross said on Day Four of the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 55 of 95

murder trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin for digging his knee into Floyd's neck.

She said they "tried really hard to break that addiction many times."

Prosecutors put Ross on the stand as part of an effort to humanize Floyd in front of the jury and portray him as more than a crime statistic, and also explain his drug use.

The defense has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do when he encountered Floyd last May and that Floyd's death was caused by drugs, his underlying health conditions and his own adrenaline. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

In other testimony, David Pleoger, a now-retired Minneapolis police sergeant who was on duty the night Floyd died, said that based on his review of the body camera video, officers should have ended their restraint after Floyd stopped resisting.

He also said officers are trained to roll people on their side to help with their breathing after they have been restrained in the prone position.

"When Mr. Floyd was no longer offering up any resistance to the officers, they could have ended the restraint," Pleoger said.

"And that was after he was handcuffed and on the ground and no longer resistant?" prosecutor Steve Schleicher asked.

Yes, Pleoger replied.

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter, accused of killing Floyd by kneeling on the 46-year-old Black man's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, as he lay face-down in handcuffs, accused of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill at a neighborhood market.

The case triggered large protests around the U.S., scattered violence and widespread soul-searching over racism and police brutality. The most serious charge against the now-fired white officer carries up to 40 years in prison.

Earlier, Ross said she and Floyd first met in 2017 and struggled with addiction to painkillers throughout their relationship — testimony that could help prosecutors blunt the argument that drugs killed Floyd. Medical experts have said that while the level of fentanyl in his system could be fatal to some, people who use the drug regularly can develop a tolerance to it.

Ross said they both had prescriptions, and when those ran out, they took the prescriptions of others and also used illegal drugs.

"Addiction, in my opinion, is a lifelong struggle. ... It's not something that just kind of comes and goes. It's something I'll deal with forever," she said.

In March 2020, Ross drove Floyd to the emergency room because he was in extreme stomach pain, and she learned he had overdosed. In the months that followed, Ross said, she and Floyd spent a lot of time together during the coronavirus quarantine, and Floyd was clean.

But she suspected he began using again about two weeks before his death because his behavior changed: She said there would be times when he would be up and bouncing around, and other times when he would be unintelligible.

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson drove hard at Floyd's drug use in cross-examining Ross, asking questions aimed at showing the danger of overdose and death.

Under questioning from Nelson, Ross also disclosed that Floyd's pet name for her in his phone was "Mama" — testimony that called into question the widely reported account that Floyd was crying out for his mother as he lay pinned to the pavement.

Also Thursday, a paramedic who arrived on the scene that day testified that the first call was a Code 2, for someone with a mouth injury, but it was upgraded a minute and a half later to Code 3 — a life-threatening incident that led them to turn on the lights and siren.

Seth Bravinder said he saw no signs that Floyd was breathing or moving, and it appeared he was in cardiac arrest. A second paramedic, Derek Smith, testified that he checked for a pulse and couldn't detect one: "In layman's terms? I thought he was dead."

Bravinder said they loaded Floyd into the ambulance so he could get care "in an optimum environment,"

but also because bystanders “appeared very upset on the sidewalk,” and there was some yelling. “In my mind at least, we wanted to get away from that,” he said.

Smith likewise said there were “multiple people” with “multiple cellphones out,” and “it didn’t feel like a welcoming environment.”

Chauvin’s lawyer has argued that the police on the scene were distracted by what they perceived as a growing and increasingly hostile crowd. Video showed somewhere around 15 onlookers not far from where Floyd lay on the pavement.

Bravinder said after he drove the ambulance three blocks and jumped in back to help his partner, a monitor showed that Floyd had flatlined — his heart had stopped. He said they were never able to restore a pulse.

On cross-examination, Chauvin’s lawyer questioned why the ambulance did not go straight to the hospital, and he pressed Smith on Floyd’s condition as he lay on the pavement, in an apparent attempt to plant doubt as to whether Chauvin was directly responsible for his death. The paramedic expressed himself in blunt terms that Floyd was “dead” or “deceased.”

Ross began her testimony by telling how she and Floyd met at a shelter where Floyd was a security guard.

“May I tell the story?” she asked. “It’s one of my favorite stories to tell.”

She said she had gone to the shelter because her sons’ father was staying there. But she got upset that day because the father was not coming to the lobby to discuss their son’s birthday. Floyd came over to check on her.

“Floyd has this great, deep Southern voice, raspy,” Ross recalled. “And he’s like, ‘Sis, you OK, sis?’ And I wasn’t OK. I was like, ‘No, I’m just waiting for my sons’ father.’ He said, ‘Can I pray with you?’”

“This kind person, just to come up to me and say, ‘Can I pray with you?’ when I felt alone in this lobby, it was so sweet,” she continued. “At the time, I had lost a lot of faith in God.”

Minnesota is a rarity in explicitly permitting such “spark of life” testimony about a crime victim at trial. Defense attorneys often contend such testimony allows prosecutors to play on jurors’ emotions.

EXPLAINER: How Floyd’s ‘spark of life’ played out at trial

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

Prosecutors trying a white former Minneapolis police officer in George Floyd’s death put Floyd’s girlfriend on the witness stand Thursday in an effort to humanize him for the jury, but her testimony also gave the defense an opportunity to delve into Floyd’s drug use.

Prosecutors used a legal doctrine called “spark of life” to call Courteney Ross to testify about Floyd’s life, and are expected to call a Floyd family member to the witness stand later. They are trying to portray Floyd’s complicated life, from his childhood in Houston’s Third Ward, where he came to be seen as a mentor, to his struggle with drug addiction in Minneapolis.

But the “spark of life” doctrine, which is rare outside Minnesota, is controversial among defense attorneys and could complicate the trial. Here’s how legal experts see that playing out:

WHAT IS THE “SPARK OF LIFE” DOCTRINE?

The doctrine emerged in 1985 when a defendant accused of killing a police officer argued to the Minnesota Supreme Court that the prosecutor prejudiced the jury with a speech about the officer’s childhood, his parents and his marriage. The prosecutor became so emotional the trial court had to take a recess.

The court ruled that prosecutors can present evidence that a murder victim was “not just bones and sinews covered with flesh, but was imbued with the spark of life. The prosecution has some leeway to show that spark and present the victim as a human being as long as it is not an attempt to invoke any undue sympathy or inflame the jury’s passions.”

WHAT DID THE JURY LEARN?

Ross told jurors that she and Floyd were both drug addicts stemming from their struggles with chronic pain. She said they “tried really hard to break that addiction many times.”

“We’re learning that Floyd is not a perfect person, as none of us are,” said David Schultz, a law professor

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 57 of 95

at the University of Minnesota.

After watching the first days of testimony, Schultz said it was clear prosecutors were “pulling at the emotional strings of the jury” to make a case for convicting Derek Chauvin of the most severe charges.

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter. Prosecutors say he knelt on Floyd’s neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, pinning the handcuffed man to the ground. The most serious charge — second-degree murder — against the former officer carries up to 40 years in prison.

“What the spark of life is bringing in, is painting a picture of perhaps Chauvin was indifferent to the problems to the health and the life and safety of George Floyd,” Schultz said.

DID IT BACKFIRE?

When Chauvin’s defense attorney Eric Nelson cross-examined Ross, he questioned her on Floyd’s drug use, driving hard for her to talk about how Floyd was hospitalized in March 2020 and how she had speculated that it was because he had used heroin. Ross drove Floyd to the emergency room because he was suffering from extreme stomach pain, and she later learned he had overdosed.

“It was the defense’s best day in terms of testimony,” said F. Clayton Tyler, a prominent local defense attorney. “The fact that he overdosed, I thought that was huge.”

Legal experts expect Floyd’s cause of death to be key at trial. The defense has argued Floyd’s death was caused by his drug use, underlying health conditions and the adrenaline flowing through his body. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Attorneys for both sides will bring expert witnesses to provide competing testimony about what killed Floyd. Jurors will have to decide.

“It’s an excellent tactic for the state to try to get jurors to feel sorry for a person because he’s an addict, but in this case, being an addict means he’s violating the law,” said Joe Friedberg, a defense attorney.

Some legal experts have said if prosecutors go too far to invoke undue sympathy, Chauvin’s defense could have grounds for an appeal. But Friedberg doubted that would happen, saying Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill would halt testimony if it goes too far.

Tyler also reasoned that the defense was bound to highlight Floyd’s drug addiction at some point anyway, so by using “spark of life” prosecutors can address it head-on while showing “who he was as an individual.”

With King Kong, a little swagger returns to the box office

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Once again, mayhem and mass destruction is back at the box office. It’s almost like old times.

“Godzilla vs. Kong,” one of the few tentpoles to dare release during COVID times, is poised this weekend to set a new high in ticket sales during the pandemic. It won’t be the kind of blockbuster business such a big-budget release would typically manage, but experts forecast a launch of at least \$25 million.

Opening-day ticket sales on Wednesday for “Godzilla vs. Kong” totaled \$9.6 million, Warner Bros. said Thursday — a single-day pandemic record and more than most 2020-2021 opening weekend hauls. Last weekend, the monster mash pulled in an impressive \$123.1 million internationally. In China, where moviegoing is close to pre-pandemic levels, the movie made about \$70 million, double the debut of 2014’s “Godzilla.”

For the first time in a long time, there’s the faint hint of a hit at the box office.

“It’s a good omen that the tastes of the consumer have not shifted so much that there’s no possibility of restarting the movie business,” says Joshua Grode, chief executive of Legendary Entertainment, which produced “Godzilla vs. Kong.” “This tells everybody: the moviegoing business is here, and, yes, it may be different post-pandemic. But there is a viable industry there.”

Huge challenges remain to the revival of moviegoing. With so many cinemas shuttered for nearly an entire year, many moviegoers are out of the habit. Some are unlikely to return to sitting indoors with strangers until they’re vaccinated or the pandemic has ebbed. And even those who have been convinced of the safety of moviegoing by theaters’ health protocols, they now have only more in-home options. “Godzilla

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 58 of 95

vs. Kong" is streaming simultaneously on HBO Max in North America.

But few scream big screen as much as King Kong and Godzilla. To help kickstart moviegoing and bring back a little chest-thumping swagger to theaters, the industry is counting on two of the movies' most iconic, long-running leviathans. Laying another metropolis to waste might help movie theaters build themselves back up.

"The issue is less convincing consumers to go to the movies than it is convincing studios to open their movies," says Rich Gelfond, IMAX'S chief executive. "There's been a hesitancy on the part of Hollywood studios to release movies because they haven't been convinced the demand is there. What I really hope this weekend shows is that there is a lot of demand there and it convinces them to open a lot of movies that have been sitting on the shelf."

Since the launch of "Tenet" fizzled last August, and virus cases soared, most studios have been postponing or rerouting their biggest releases to streaming services. But as vaccinations have ramped up and restrictions have eased, more theaters have opened. About 60% of theaters will be open this weekend, according to data firm Comscore. On Monday, Los Angeles County will expand cinema capacity from 25% to 50%. For the first time since last winter, wide release will mean playing in more than 3,000 theaters. That's still about 1,200 shy of typical for a title like "Godzilla vs. Kong."

Recently, ticket sales, while still far below their usual levels, are ticking upward. The best debut of 2021 was "Tom & Jerry," with \$13.7 million in late February. The pandemic-high belongs to "Wonder Woman 1984," which launched with \$16.7 million in December. Each were Warner Bros. releases that landed simultaneously on HBO Max — a once controversial release plan that has helped theaters stay afloat and proved an interesting test case for how viewers prefer to see, and pay for, a movie.

Nevertheless, the Walt Disney Co. recently delayed the planned summer-kickoff of "Black Widow" to July, while pushing a number of titles to its streaming platform, Disney+. Part of what's holding blockbusters back is the need for a global release to make back their sizable production budgets and marketing spend. ("Godzilla vs. Kong" cost about \$160 million to make.) While moviegoing in much of Asia is rejuvenated, rising cases in Europe and in countries like Brazil have, for now, made a full worldwide rollout impossible.

Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore, believes "Godzilla vs. Kong" will be "another building block in our education in where the industry is heading."

"The theatrical experience will prove to be viable and resilient as it always has," says Dergarabedian. "But it's going to be a different world, no question. I think it's going to be a leaner, meaner business going forward."

Some of the old standard practices that have governed blockbusters aren't coming back. Studios like Warner Bros. and Universal Pictures have made deals to shorten exclusive theatrical windows. Warner Bros. next year will hold movies in theaters for a minimum of 45 days, or half of the traditional window, before moving releases to at-home platforms. Such new models mean a recalibrating of what movies get greenlit and how much they're worth.

"The value of those streaming/pay-TV rights are more valuable now because you're getting access to them much, much earlier than you did before," says Grode. "So you kind of have to rerun your model of how the movie is going to perform over its lifetime."

It's also meant some tense negotiations over profit participation. When Warner Bros. surprised with its hybrid release plans for 2021, Legendary — whose highly anticipated "Dune" is to be released in the fall by Warner Bros. — considered legal action before arriving at an agreement.

"We obviously didn't like the way they announced what they were doing in 2021, and I think they would admit they didn't handle it perfectly," says Grode. "But when you look at the state of the world, the facts as we all knew them at the time, their decision made a lot of sense."

"You get over that pretty quickly and you get back to business," he added.

Helping theaters get back to business, Gelfond believes, are large-format screens "that differentiate the couch as much as they can." IMAX accounted for 14% of the Chinese box office for "Godzilla vs. Kong." This weekend, the film will be playing on 1,170 IMAX screens worldwide. Showings in New York and Los

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 59 of 95

Angeles, Gelfond said, are already sold out, albeit at lower capacity.

The box office might not quite roar again this weekend, but "Godzilla vs. Kong" may show it has a little bite left. Says Grode: "In years from now, when people write about coming back to the movies, I'm very proud that 'Godzilla vs. Kong' will be in that history."

US draws close to 100M vaccinations as baseball resumes

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

The U.S. moved closer Thursday toward vaccinating 100 million Americans in a race against an uptick in COVID-19 cases that is fueling fears of another nationwide surge just as the major league baseball season starts and thousands of fans return to stadiums.

More than 99 million people have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and more than 56 million people — 17% of the nation's population — have been fully vaccinated, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A total of 154 million vaccines had been administered as of Thursday. President Joe Biden's new goal is to give 200 million vaccine doses during his first 100 days in office.

But coronavirus infections are inching up again. The country is averaging 64,000 cases per day this week, up from a daily average of 55,000 infections two weeks ago. Deaths have steadily been averaging about 900 a day.

Officials have warned that they could ban fans from ballparks if the numbers continue to rise. Even before the baseball season got underway Thursday, an opening game was postponed after a player tested positive for the coronavirus.

The Washington Nationals were scheduled to host the New York Mets on Thursday night, but after a Nationals player tested positive for COVID-19, the team canceled the game. It was not immediately re-scheduled.

At American Family Field in Milwaukee, Tonia Smith said she didn't have any safety concerns about returning to the stadium where the Brewers were facing off against the Minnesota Twins. The stadium limited attendance to about 16,000 fans — a quarter of its capacity.

"It was hard to judge how quickly to get here. It's a different opening day experience. But just having those smells hit you, walking in and having that experience back, it's invigorating," said Smith, 45, of Sussex, Wisconsin.

In Chicago, officials warned that they will stop letting baseball fans into Wrigley Field and across town at Guaranteed Rate Field, as well as bars and restaurants, if COVID-19 cases keeps climbing.

The warning was included in a news release issued by the city's Office of Emergency Management and Communications on Wednesday, a day before opening day for the Chicago Cubs. Both ballparks will be limited to 25% of their capacity when they open up to fans for the first time since 2019.

For Wrigley Field, that means little more than 10,000 fans in the stands. Many more are expected to watch the game from nearby bars and restaurants. Guaranteed Rate Field is home to the White Sox.

Meanwhile, states are doubling their efforts to vaccinate as many people as possible by expanding eligibility and touting the vaccines as essential to getting the country back to normal.

As of Thursday, anyone 50 or older is eligible for a vaccine in California, the country's most populous state with 40 million people.

In Michigan, which has the country's highest new case rate over the past week, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer doubled the state's daily COVID-19 vaccination goal to 100,000 shots as the state faces a third surge in cases.

Michigan's direct allotment of doses will total about 620,000 next week, a record. That is 12%, or roughly 66,000, more than this week and includes a substantial boost in the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

The state added 6,000 cases Thursday for the second day in a row. Its seven-day average, 5,061, has grown six-fold over nearly six weeks.

Michigan also reported its first confirmed case of a coronavirus variant that was initially identified in

Brazil. The infection arose in a resident of Bay County, where local health officials were investigating the person's exposure history.

The state previously reported finding variants that were first identified in Britain and South Africa.

"It is now even more important that Michiganders continue to do what works to slow the spread of the virus," the governor said in a statement, citing wearing masks, keeping social distance, avoiding crowds, washing hands and getting a vaccine.

While some states are struggling to meet vaccine demand, others report that a significant portion of their populations are hesitant to get the vaccine.

In Iowa, about a third of the state's adult population, roughly 800,000 people, will not commit to getting a vaccine, which prompted Gov. Kim Reynolds to plead with them to consider it for everyone's sake.

Iowa's virus activity has increased in recent weeks specifically among spring break travelers ages 18 to 29.

The state is expected to get nearly 161,000 vaccine doses next week, the largest weekly supply so far, Reynolds said. That will enable the state to open vaccination appointments broadly to all adults beginning Monday although a few counties already have expanded their vaccination eligibility.

Daughter: Bystander disrupted attack on Asian American woman

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The daughter of an Asian American woman attacked in New York City said Thursday that a person not seen on surveillance video helped the woman by screaming to distract her assailant while others watched and did nothing to intervene.

Elizabeth Kari, writing on a fundraising webpage she set up for her mother's care, said the bystander was across the street when a man accosted her 65-year-old mother Vilma Kari, kicked her in the stomach, knocked her to the ground and repeatedly stomped on her face late Monday morning near Times Square.

The person, who has remained anonymous, "yelled and screamed to get the assailant's attention," Elizabeth Kari wrote. Fundraising service GoFundMe verified the authenticity of the webpage. The Associated Press has been unable to reach the Karis for comment; a message seeking an interview was left with Elizabeth Kari.

"I want to THANK YOU for stepping in and doing the right thing," she wrote. "This gesture of action is what we need in our world right now. I hope one day, my mom and I can thank you personally."

Brandon Elliot, a 38-year-old parolee convicted of killing his mother nearly two decades ago, was charged Wednesday with assault and attempted assault as hate crimes. His lawyers urged the public to "reserve judgment until all the facts are presented in court."

The attack, among the latest in a national spike in anti-Asian hate crimes, drew widespread condemnation and raised alarms about what appeared to be the failure of bystanders to help. Police said no one called 911 and that patrol officers driving by came upon Kari after she was assaulted.

Vilma Kari, who emigrated from the Philippines several decades ago, suffered serious injuries including a fractured pelvis. She was discharged from the hospital Tuesday and is "safe and in good spirits," her daughter said.

"Although the healing process will not be easy, she has always been a resilient role model for me," Elizabeth Kari wrote. "We are hopeful that in time she will make a full recovery."

Vilma Kari was attacked outside a luxury apartment building while walking to church. Her Facebook profile features a photo showing St Peter's Square in Vatican City.

Two workers in the building's lobby were seen on surveillance video watching the violence but doing nothing to help Kari. The video shows one of the workers closing the building's door as she lay on the ground about 10 seconds after the attacker started to walk away. The building's management company said the workers were suspended pending an investigation.

A widely seen snippet of the video ended as the attacker was walking away from Kari. Her daughter wrote Thursday that the man was crossing the street and heading toward the bystander who screamed at him. That person has remained anonymous, she said.

The workers' union, SEIU 32BJ, said Wednesday that the workers waited until the attacker walked away to check on Kari and flag down a nearby patrol car because they thought he had a knife.

A longer version of the surveillance video showed the workers, identified by their union as doormen, waiting in the lobby for more than a minute before going outside and approaching Kari. About a minute after that, the video shows a police car pulling up. The workers and officers are seen with her on the sidewalk for several more minutes before the video cuts off.

Elizabeth Kari wrote that aside from her care, her mother wants to donate some of the fundraiser's proceeds to support other victims and help organizations that raise awareness and work to prevent anti-Asian American hate crimes. Nearly \$100,000 was raised in less than a day — far exceeding the goal of \$20,000.

The Latest: NHL postpones 3 more Vancouver Canucks games

By The Associated Press undefined

The Latest on the effects of the novel coronavirus on sports around the world:

The NHL postponed three more Vancouver Canucks games on Thursday due to COVID-19 issues.

Forward Adam Gaudette, defenseman Travis Hamonic, and a member of the Canucks coaching staff are in NHL COVID-19 protocol.

Canucks games at Edmonton on Saturday, and at Winnipeg on Sunday and Tuesday, have been postponed. That's in addition to the home game against the Calgary Flames that was postponed Wednesday. Rescheduled dates have not been announced.

Pending test results in the coming days, it's expected the Canucks will be able to resume their game schedule next Thursday, but the team can't practice before Tuesday.

Washington Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo says the team has three players who have tested positive for the coronavirus and a fourth considered a "likely positive."

The Nationals' season-opening game against the visiting New York Mets that was scheduled for Thursday night was postponed.

Rizzo said it was not known when that game will be made up — other than that it would not be played Friday.

He did not identify any of the players involved.

Rizzo announced an initial positive test Wednesday, saying it resulted from testing done Monday while the Nationals were still in Florida.

At the time, he said four other players were considered to have been in close contact and were quarantining. Now, two of those players resulted positive after being tested Wednesday and another had an inconclusive sample that is being treated as a likely positive.

Carson-Newman has opted out of the rest of the spring football season because of the health and safety of the Division II program.

Coach Mike Clowney announced the decision Thursday.

The Eagles in Jefferson City, Tennessee, had played only one game this season. They won in four overtimes last month over UVA Wise. But COVID issues with their opponent canceled a game March 20, and Carson-Newman's own injuries and COVID issues canceled a game last weekend.

Clowney says they all worked hard over the past nine months trying to make this unprecedented spring season work. But he says now it's time to turn their attention to the next season this fall.

Coastal Carolina's baseball team has paused activities for the next seven days due to COVID-19 concerns within the program.

The school said Thursday that its three-game series with Appalachian State and games with UNC Wilm-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 62 of 95

ington on Tuesday and College of Charleston on Wednesday have been postponed.

The New York Mets season opener at Washington has been postponed because of coronavirus concerns. The Nationals issued a statement saying "ongoing contact tracing involving members of the Nationals organization" was the reason for scrapping Thursday night's game at Nationals Park. The game has not yet been rescheduled.

Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo said Wednesday that one of the team's players had tested positive for COVID-19 on Monday, before the team left spring training camp.

Rizzo said four other players and one staff member were following quarantine protocols after contact tracing determined they were in close contact with the person who tested positive.

Rizzo did not identify any of those involved.

The Atlanta Braves will expand capacity at Truist Park to 50% for their second homestand beginning April 23 against the Arizona Diamondbacks.

The Braves are permitting 33% capacity at their initial homestand to allow for ample social distancing, limiting the crowd to about 13,500. Those standards will be in place for the first seven home games, beginning with the April 9 opener against the Phillies.

The capacity will increase to 50%, or roughly 20,500, for at least the ensuing seven home games. The Braves have said they will review their seating policies before each homestand.

The Braves' capacity will be among the highest in the big leagues. They will join Houston at 50%, which is only surpassed by the Texas Rangers' plans to allow full capacity at the start of the season.

President Joe Biden has called the Rangers' plan a mistake, joining health officials in warning of a possible fourth surge in COVID-19 cases while urging states to keep restrictions in place until more of the population is vaccinated.

That request has been largely rejected by governors in GOP-led states, including Georgia. The Braves announcement came one day after Gov. Brian Kemp signed an executive order rolling back the state's coronavirus restrictions beginning April 8, including the ban on large gatherings.

Biden's 'Jobs Cabinet' to sell infrastructure as GOP resists

By JOSH BOAK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden set about convincing America it needs his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan on Thursday, deputizing a five-member "jobs Cabinet" to help in the effort. But the enormity of his task was clear as Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's vowed to oppose the plan "every step of the way."

Speaking in Kentucky, McConnell said he personally likes Biden and they've been friends a long time. But the president will get no cooperation from the GOP, which objects to the corporate tax increases in the plan and says they would hurt America's ability to compete in a global economy.

"We have some big philosophical differences, and that's going to make it more and more difficult for us to reach bipartisan agreements," the Republican leader said.

White House chief of staff Ron Klain said the key to any outreach is that the proposal's ideas are already popular. Americans want smooth roads, safe bridges, reliable public transit, electric vehicles, drinkable water, new schools and investments in manufacturing, among the plan's many components, he said.

"We kind of think it's just right," Klain said in a televised interview with the news organization Politico. "But we're happy to have a conversation with people, less about the price tag, more about what are the elements that should be in the plan that people think are missing."

Those conversations could be limited to Democrats as McConnell declared: "I'm going to fight them every step of the way."

Biden told his Cabinet at its first meeting that he is enlisting several of them to help with the push: Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Housing and Urban Devel-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 63 of 95

opment Secretary Marcia Fudge, Labor Secretary Marty Walsh and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. "Working with my team here at the White House, each Cabinet member will represent me in dealings with Congress, engage the public in selling the plan and help organize the details as we refine it and move forward," Biden said.

The task will involve lots of salesmanship for a legacy-making piece of legislation that Biden announced in a Wednesday speech.

His administration must sway Congress. It needs to rally voters. It's also looking to outside economists to back the plan.

It's monitoring Wall Street for any celebrations or jitters. It's forming alliances with advocates, while dealing with critics of the plan's corporate tax hikes and project details. And Biden's administration also intends, per the plan, to cajole other nations to stop slashing their own tax rates in what has been a race-to-the-bottom to attract and retain multinational businesses.

Biden's vehicle for financing his infrastructure plans is a key dividing line. Republicans object to raising the corporate tax rate to 28% from 21%, one of the many changes so that business taxes would fund infrastructure. Republicans had cut the corporate rate from 35% in 2017, a hallmark policy achievement of Donald Trump's presidency.

Within Washington and corporate board rooms, the administration is attracting its share of accolades and rebukes on his proposal.

In Biden's own party, liberal Democrats in Congress want him to go bigger. And Democrats representing high-tax states want to remove a 2017 tax code change that limited deductions of state and local taxes for individuals.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi expressed no qualms about the proposal's scope.

"It was in the tradition of America -- to think big," Pelosi said at a press conference Thursday. "And now, in this century, President Biden is undertaking something in the tradition of thinking big, being transformational and creating jobs for America."

While many leading business groups oppose the higher taxes, some major companies see reason for optimism because of the innovations that would be encouraged by the plan.

Automakers Ford, General Motors and Toyota endorsed the general concepts of Biden's plan, which calls for the construction of 500,000 electric vehicle charging stations by 2030 in what would be a shift away from gasoline-powered cars.

But some environmentalists said the plan's shift away from fossil fuels that cause climate change was not substantial enough.

"Biden has pledged to cut carbon emissions 50% and decarbonize our electricity sector, but this proposal won't even come close," said Brett Hartl, government affairs director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The White House was quick to address the climate change concerns. Climate adviser Gina McCarthy said the administration expects the infrastructure package to include Biden's pledge to set a national standard requiring utilities to produce 100% carbon-free electricity by 2035.

The proposed electricity standard "is going to be fairly robust, and it's going to be inclusive," McCarthy said. "I think we can get to the results that we're looking for in a number of different ways. If a clean energy standard can be done, we think it should be done."

For every criticism of the plan's details, there were also plaudits for its broader approach.

Harvard University economist Larry Summers, a former treasury secretary, endorsed Biden's plan, after previously criticizing the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan because of its size and debt-based financing.

He downplayed any risks from corporate tax hikes, since low interest rates mean the costs of obtaining capital are already low for many companies.

"I am excited," Summers said on Twitter. "The economy's capacity will go up."

The plan also carries a political dimension as organized labor is mobilizing to get the package passed, an important push given the steady recent Republican gains among working class voters. Biden's plan, with its focus on construction and manufacturing jobs, has the potential to reverse some of that slide — and the unions that backed him in 2020 are promising to help deliver votes on infrastructure.

"Our members are an army a half-million strong, that will make calls, visit members of Congress and

rally for good jobs building our nation's infrastructure," said Terry O'Sullivan, general president of Laborers International Union of North America, one of the largest construction trades unions. "We did it with boots on the ground to get President Biden elected."

Brutal NYC attack renews Asian American volunteers' efforts

By TERRY TANG and DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Fed up with the incessant attacks on Asian Americans, Stan Lee recently started voluntarily patrolling San Francisco's Chinatown. So when the 53-year-old fire lieutenant saw a video of a New York City woman getting brutally beaten, he didn't have to guess how his fellow volunteers — other Asian American firefighters — were taking it.

"I'm pretty sure they're all steamed, like I am," said Lee, who is Chinese American. "It's personal. It could have been our aunt or our mom or our grandma."

The vicious assault of a 65-year-old woman while walking to church this week near New York City's Times Square has heightened already palpable levels of outrage over anti-Asian attacks that escalated with the pandemic.

New York police say the assailant yelled racial slurs at the Filipina American woman and told her, "You don't belong here!" The video quickly drew millions of views along with widespread condemnation, not just for its heinous nature but the seemingly indifferent bystanders. The assailant was arrested and charged Wednesday with hate crimes.

Asian American groups from coast to coast, already doing more than digital activism — patrolling, escorting, chaperoning — are trying not to let this latest hate crime discourage those efforts.

"I think that gives us more motive to take care of our own," Lee said. "We see everyone in our community as our own. It doesn't have to be just Asians."

In New York City, Teresa Ting, a 29-year-old Chinese American, started what has become the Main Street Patrol following an attack on another older Asian American woman in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens in February.

"It literally could have been my mother had it been the wrong place, wrong time," Ting said of that attack.

She wanted to do something more than posting messages on social media and was happily surprised when people showed up to volunteer. The group has since organized volunteers to go out in parts of Flushing, a heavily Asian neighborhood, on weekend afternoons.

Volunteers travel in groups of three, and have an app to communicate with each other. Ting, who wants to expand to offer a chaperone service, said she wanted people to know how to get involved and tactics they could use.

"I think it's very necessary, especially in the Asian community right now, just because a lot of the elders have a language barrier. They can't speak or understand English," she said. "That's why I feel a lot of hate crimes have been unreported."

Bystander training has also been on the rise and the need was only reinforced by the video of this week's attack. Emily May, co-founder of Hollaback!, which offers training on how to respond when witnessing harassment, said it was disturbing that the video showed several witnesses who didn't seem to render aid to the woman, who has been identified as Vilma Kari.

In a post on a fundraising page Thursday, Kari's daughter, Elizabeth, said a bystander not seen on the video yelled at the attacker and drew him away from her mother. "THANK YOU for stepping in and doing the right thing," she wrote.

Two onlookers have been identified as lobby workers in a building in front of where the attack took place. Neither intervened or called 911, the police said. One of them was even seen closing the door during the assault.

May said there were things they could have done, even if they were worried about harm coming to themselves, like shouting or otherwise creating a distraction.

"There are ways that they could have intervened without compromising their own safety," she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 65 of 95

Marita Etcubanez, senior director of strategic initiatives for Asian Americans Advancing Justice AAJC, said the organization partnered with Hollaback! last year to offer free online bystander training that focused on Asian Americans.

"It's clear that the training was responding to a need and a lot of concerns within the community because we had over 1,000 people register for the first two trainings," she said.

Interest has cycled up and down since, but demand has increased as anti-Asian attacks have gotten more coverage.

The New York assault came just two weeks after a white gunman opened fire inside three Asian-owned massage businesses in metro Atlanta. Eight people, including six women of Asian descent, died. The shooter has not been charged with any hate crimes, and authorities received intense backlash when they cited the suspect blaming a "sex addiction." Critics say the victims' race is inextricably tied to the motive.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland on Tuesday ordered a review of how the Justice Department can best deploy its resources to combat hate crimes during a surge in incidents targeting Asian Americans.

Garland issued a department-wide memo announcing the 30-day review, citing the "recent rise in hate crimes and hate incidents, particularly the disturbing trend in reports of violence against members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community since the start of the pandemic."

Asian American activists say former President Donald Trump is partly to blame because of his rhetoric around COVID-19, which he frequently referred to as the "Chinese virus." They say he gave license for people to show racism that was already rooted in decades of anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S.

According to a report from Stop AAPI Hate, more than 3,800 anti-Asian incidents were reported to the organization between March 2020 through February. The group, which tracks incidents of discrimination, hate and xenophobia against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the U.S., said that number is "only a fraction of the number of hate incidents that actually occur."

According to the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, hate crimes targeting Asians ballooned by 150% last year, while hate crimes overall during the pandemic went down 7%.

Cynthia Choi, co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate, lauded the volunteer efforts that have sprung up in San Francisco and elsewhere, but emphasized the need for training.

"I really appreciate the interest in protecting our elders," Choi said. "My concern is without proper training ... we'll have a situation where there are interventions that aren't helpful, that might escalate the situation."

Lee, the San Francisco firefighter, said he was willing to keep volunteering for however long it feels necessary, adding that he often bumps into volunteers from other citizen patrols, a sign of how much attention the issue is getting. Asian American seniors he's met still want to maintain their routines.

"If they are scared they're not showing it, because they still have to go about their daily lives," he said.

EXPLAINER: Witnesses relive trauma, guilt over Floyd's death

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

The first days of testimony at the trial of a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death were dominated by witnesses to his arrest and countless videos that forced them to relive the trauma of it all over again.

One man who shouted "You can't win!" at Floyd as the Black man struggled with police, bowed his head and sobbed on the stand. The teenager who shot widely seen bystander video cried as she talked about her guilt over not being able to help Floyd. A firefighter trained as an EMT broke down as she described her frustration because police prevented her from acting to save Floyd's life. The young cashier who reported that Floyd used a \$20 counterfeit bill to buy cigarettes — prompting a call to police — recalled his guilt as he watched Floyd struggling to breathe.

Attorneys on both sides at the trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin face a delicate balance in questioning witnesses who have experienced such pain while trying to advance their cases. The testimony raises questions about how witnesses who have suffered trauma are treated when they participate in the criminal

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 66 of 95

justice system.

New York Law School criminal law professor Kirk Burkhalter, a former detective who leads a program on police reform, said the bystander testimony has been a powerful reminder of how police misconduct is a betrayal to the entire community.

"These people have been walking around with this pain for a year, unbeknownst to us," he said. "They were victims of a crime. We just cannot forget that. They were trying to do their civic duty and they were prevented from interceding in something that was just completely horrible."

Chauvin's defense has even tried to paint some of the witnesses as part of a dangerous crowd, adding more pain, he said.

ARE THESE WITNESSES CONSIDERED CRIME VICTIMS?

Probably not. The law generally does not recognize the emotional toll on witnesses as a harm, Burkhalter said.

In Minnesota law, a victim is anyone who incurs "loss or harm as a result of a crime, including a good faith effort to prevent a crime." Some of the witnesses testified that they sought to stop Chauvin from using force against Floyd, and even called the police to report his actions. They also described the emotional harm they have endured.

The legal distinction between a witness and a victim is important. Victims have rights in criminal cases, including the right to be notified and object to any proposed plea agreements, and to give victim impact statements at sentencing hearings.

DO WITNESSES QUALIFY FOR GOVERNMENT AID TO DEAL WITH THEIR TRAUMA?

Potentially. Witnesses to crimes may apply for mental health counseling and other benefits from the Minnesota Crime Victims Reparations Board.

Eligibility depends on individual circumstances and is decided on a case-by-case basis, said Doug Neville, a spokesman for the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. If approved, they could be eligible for up to \$7,500 in counseling and healing services.

WHAT LEGAL PROTECTIONS DO WITNESSES HAVE?

Most of the laws and professional guidelines governing the treatment of witnesses are designed to protect their physical safety against retaliation and limit the inconvenience of having to testify.

National District Attorneys Association guidelines note that one of the greatest needs for witnesses is the assurance of safety against threats, harassment or intimidation. In Minnesota, a prosecutor can take steps to protect witnesses from having to reveal their home or employment addresses, telephone numbers and dates of birth.

Generally, witnesses are also compensated for their time and the expense of testifying, including \$20 per day in Minnesota plus mileage and meals. They are to be notified when to show up, with any delays minimized. And employers in Minnesota cannot retaliate against witnesses who have to take time off to testify.

WHAT ABOUT THEIR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING?

Prosecutors have a duty to present the truth in court proceedings, and that can include gut-wrenching testimony from people who witnessed disturbing and distressing events.

At Chauvin's trial, prosecuting attorneys frequently paused when witnesses were overcome, inviting them to take as much time as they needed. Chauvin's attorney often skipped cross-examining witnesses, including a 9-year-old girl.

How much trauma witnesses have to relive on the stand largely depends on the attorneys' strategies and what evidence the judge allows, said University of Iowa law professor Emily Hughes, a criminal law expert. Some may be unavoidable.

"In order for the prosecution to meet their burden and put in the evidence they need, they sometimes do have to put in really hard, traumatic facts," Hughes said. "At the same time, sometimes the two sides are able to stipulate to certain information to protect witnesses or jurors or people from having to relive an experience like that again. When and how that happens is very much a case-by-case, witness-by-witness or fact-by-fact situation."

Prosecutors have played bystander video of Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck as he lay face-down in handcuffs. They have argued that he persisted even after several onlookers tried to intervene and yelled at him to stop. Chauvin's defense has argued that the videos show an angry crowd that made it harder to subdue Floyd.

DO WITNESSES WHO ARE MINORS HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL PROTECTIONS?

Yes. A judge this week sided with prosecutors in blocking live television coverage of the testimony of four witnesses who were minors when they witnessed Floyd's arrest. He allowed audio of their testimony.

The judge ruled that it would be up to the news media to determine whether to identify those witnesses by their names or to keep them confidential. One child witness appeared with an adult support person as allowed under Minnesota law.

Company producing J&J vaccine had history of violations

By RICHARD LARDNER, JASON DEAREN and LINDA A. JOHNSON Associated Press

The company at the center of quality problems that led Johnson & Johnson to discard 15 million doses of its coronavirus vaccine has a string of citations from U.S. health officials for quality control problems.

Emergent BioSolutions, a little-known company vital to the vaccine supply chain, was a key to Johnson & Johnson's plan to deliver 100 million doses of its single-shot vaccine to the United States by the end of May. But the Food and Drug Administration repeatedly has cited Emergent for problems such as poorly trained employees, cracked vials and problems managing mold and other contamination around one of its facilities, according to records obtained by The Associated Press through the Freedom of Information Act. The records cover inspections at Emergent facilities since 2017.

Johnson & Johnson said Wednesday that a batch of vaccine made by Emergent at its Baltimore factory, known as Bayview, cannot be used because it did not meet quality standards. It was unclear how the problem would affect future deliveries of J&J's vaccine. The company said in a statement it was still planning to deliver 100 million doses by the end of June and was "aiming to deliver those doses by the end of May."

"Human errors do happen," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, said Thursday in an interview on CBS' "This Morning." "You have checks and balances. ... That's the reason why the good news is that it did get picked up. As I mentioned, that's the reason nothing from that plant has gone into anyone that we've administered to."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Thursday that none of the J&J vaccine doses on the market are affected and the company was on track to deliver 24 million doses in April and 100 million doses by the end of May.

"These are doses that the U.S. government has purchased, but we also have plenty of doses from Pfizer and Moderna, regardless, Psaki said."

J&J locked arms with Emergent in April 2020, enlisting the lesser-known company to manufacture the vaccine J&J was developing with federal money. At the time, Emergent's Bayview facility wasn't scaled for making millions of doses of a potential COVID-19 vaccine, according to the FDA records, which describe the plant as a contract testing laboratory that "did not manufacture products for distribution." Upgrades in technology and personnel were required before Bayview could begin making what is known as "drug substance" material for the vaccine, a two-month process during which the required biological cells are grown.

The FDA inspected Emergent's Bayview plant in April 2020, just as the agreement with J&J was being announced. The federal agency criticized Emergent for problems with its testing of a potential treatment for anthrax, according to the records obtained by the AP. The FDA's lead investigator cited the company for failing to train employees "in the particular operations they perform as part of their function and current good manufacturing practices."

On the same day, Johnson & Johnson, in a separate news release, heralded its partnership with Emergent as a step toward the pharmaceutical giant's goal of supplying more than 1 billion doses of the vaccine globally by the end of 2021.

But the FDA's inspection of Emergent's Bayview plant had faulted the company for a series of quality

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 68 of 95

control shortcomings, according to the records. Although the inspection was not triggered by work on a COVID-19 vaccine, the issues listed by agency inspectors stand out due to the large role Emergent would soon have to combat the pandemic.

The FDA criticized the Bayview plant for failing to ensure that electronic data generated through testing of drug ingredients "was protected from deletion or manipulation." A closer review found 202 deletions and 543 reprocessed files, yet the company had not investigated how those alterations had occurred or their possible impact, according to the records. The FDA's lead investigator, Marcellinus Dordunoo, wrote that Emergent had not investigated what he described as "data integrity concerns."

Emergent also did not follow proper testing and lab procedures at Bayview, the FDA said, noting that "deviations from test methods are not investigated, and are manually corrected days after performance, with no supporting data or documented justification."

The FDA also criticized Emergent for carelessness in the handling of rejected materials in the Bayview plant. An inspector observed items in a "reject cage" that did not have reject labels, and wrote that "separate or defined areas to prevent contamination or mix-ups are deficient."

The inspection was the most recent in a series of critical reports from the FDA about Emergent, including one following a December 2017 inspection at a plant in Canton, Massachusetts, in which the FDA said the company had not corrected "continued low level mold and yeast isolates" found in the facility.

In September 2018, agency investigators questioned why Emergent had "an unwritten policy of not conducting routine compliance audits" at a separate plant in Baltimore, known as Camden, where an anthrax vaccine, BioThrax, is filled into vials.

A few months earlier, FDA inspectors noted that the company's processes there were flawed. "Your firm received 3 complaints for residue on the outside of the vials for 3 different lots," the FDA's inspection report said. Tests on that residue confirmed it was vaccine, according to the June 2018 report.

The agency, in another finding from that inspection, noted Emergent's ongoing problems managing contamination at the Camden facility: "Procedures designed to prevent microbiological contamination of drug products purporting to be sterile are not adequately established and followed." FDA's inspectors also noted that Emergent staff filling vials of vaccine held "their hands directly above open vials" in a way that violated sterility safeguards.

The FDA declined repeated requests to discuss the inspections at Emergent's facilities. A spokesman said the agency "cannot comment on any particular company or any potential or ongoing compliance matters."

In an emailed statement, Emergent spokesman Matt Hartwig said the company's "rigorous quality checks" identified a batch of drug substance that did not meet its standards.

"Discarding a batch of bulk drug substance, while disappointing, does occasionally happen during vaccine manufacturing, which is a complex and multi-step biological process," he said.

Emergent's revenues skyrocketed during the Trump administration, from about \$523 million in 2015 to more than \$1.5 billion in 2020. Emergent has invested heavily in lobbying the federal government, according to disclosure records that show the company spent \$3.6 million on lobbying in 2020 alone.

Emergent is one of about eight companies that Johnson & Johnson is using to speed up manufacturing of its recently approved coronavirus vaccine, the company said. The Bayview factory where the tainted vaccine ingredient was found had not yet been approved by the FDA, so no vaccine in circulation is affected.

President Joe Biden has pledged to have enough vaccines for all U.S. adults by the end of May. The U.S. government has ordered enough two-dose shots from Pfizer and Moderna to vaccinate 200 million people to be delivered by late May, plus the 100 million single-dose shots from J&J.

A federal official said Wednesday evening that the administration's goal can be met without additional J&J doses.

A J&J spokesman said earlier Wednesday that the company met the end-of-March goal. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's online vaccine tracker showed J&J had provided about 6.8 million doses to the U.S. vaccine effort. J&J has been shipping finished vaccines from its factory in the Netherlands to the U.S.

J&J said it was putting more of its manufacturing and quality experts inside Emergent's factory to su-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 69 of 95

pervise production of the COVID-19 vaccine, a move meant to enable delivery of an additional 24 million vaccine doses through April.

J&J said it still expects to deliver more than 1 billion vaccine doses globally by the end of the year.

The J&J vaccine has been viewed as crucial for vaccination campaigns around the world because only one shot is required and it can be shipped and stored at standard refrigeration temperatures, unlike some other vials that must be kept frozen. The company also has pledged to sell the vaccine without a profit, but only during the pandemic emergency.

The problem with the vaccine batch was first reported by The New York Times. The FDA said it was aware of the situation but declined further comment.

Amid glow open day, cloud looms over MLB All-Star Game

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Amid the glow of baseball's opening day, there is a cloud looming over the All-Star Game still more than three months away.

Georgia's new voting law — which critics say unfairly limits access to the ballot box, especially for people of color — has prompted calls from as high as the White House to consider moving the midsummer classic out of Atlanta.

The game is set for July 13 at Truist Park, the Braves' 41,000-seat stadium in suburban Cobb County. It would be the third time Atlanta serves as host, having previously held the event in 1972 and 2000.

One of baseball's biggest stars, Braves first baseman and reigning National League MVP Freddie Freeman, weighed in on the divisive issue Thursday, just a few hours before Atlanta opened the season in Philadelphia.

Freeman suggested that the game should remain at Truist Park, but be used as a platform to promote voting rights.

"Why not?" he said. "What's happened in the last couple of months has already gone through" the state Legislature and been signed into law last week by Gov. Brian Kemp.

"Why not use what we already have here as a platform in the city and the state it's been passed through," Freeman added. "I think it would be better to keep it (in Atlanta) and use it as a platform."

Others have taken a different tack.

Everyone from President Biden to Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred to the head of baseball's powerful players union, Tony Clark, saying that moving the game to another city should be on the table.

Biden told ESPN he would "strongly support" pulling the game out of Atlanta because of a law he described as "Jim Crow on steroids."

Two of Atlanta's sports team owners also seemed to express their opposition to the law in statements that bemoaned restrictions on voting access, though neither specifically cited the new statute.

"Every voice and every vote matters and should be heard through our democratic process in Georgia," said Arthur Blank, owner of the NFL's Atlanta Falcons and Major League Soccer's Atlanta United. "We should be working to make voting easier, not harder for every eligible citizen."

Tony Ressler, owner of the NBA's Atlanta Hawks, noted that his team was the first in country to open its arena as an early voting site for last year's elections. He said the team remains "committed to endorsing steps that promote equality and encourage participation by all who seek to cast a ballot."

In the face of repeated assertions by former President Trump that Georgia's election was fraudulent, the Republican-controlled legislature approved a sweeping new law that would, among other things, place new ID requirements on absentee voting by mail and prohibit handing out food and water to voters standing in line.

Supporters of the law have said it merely ensures election integrity and stamps out potential fraud. Others have said the motives are more sinister after an election that registered nearly 5 million votes with no credible evidence of serious wrongdoing.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 70 of 95

Sports has long been a conduit for promoting social change, a movement that only grown over the past year with America's renewed reckoning over racial injustice.

Often, it involves major events with hefty economic clout.

In the early 1990s, the Super Bowl was moved out of Arizona after the state failed to make Martin Luther King Jr. Day an official holiday. Once the state reversed course, the game was held in Arizona in 1996 and will return again for the fourth time in 2023.

For years, the NCAA barred holding its championships in states where the Confederate battle flag was officially recognized. The last of those states, Mississippi, adopted a new flag in January that removed a banner many consider a vestige of slavery.

The 2017 NBA All-Star Game was stripped from Charlotte because of objections to a North Carolina law that limited anti-discrimination protections for lesbian, gay and transgender people. After the so-called "bathroom bill" was repealed, the NBA brought its showcase event to Charlotte in 2019.

While numerous GOP-governed states around the country have pushed for new restrictions on voting in the wake of Biden's victory over Trump, Georgia has become a lightning rod for the issue because of its pivotal role in the November election.

With the hefty turnout buoyed by early and absentee voting, Biden won a narrow victory over Trump in the Peach State — the first time Georgia has been won by a Democratic presidential candidate since 1992.

Also, the state's two Republican incumbent senators were defeated by Democrats Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, giving their party effective control of the U.S. Senate.

While much of the attention in the sports world has focused on the All-Star Game, a civil rights organization called on the PGA Tour to move the Masters golf tournament — the sport's first major championship of the year — out of Georgia.

Augusta National, an exclusive club that has previously faced protests over its one-time exclusion of Blacks and women from the membership rolls, ignored the request and carried on with a women's amateur event that leads into next week's Masters.

Another prominent women's tournament is set to be held in suburban Atlanta this summer.

The Women's PGA Championship — one of five majors on the LPGA Tour — is scheduled for Atlanta Athletic Club in Johns Creek, Georgia from June 24-27.

The LPGA has not responded to a request for comments on whether a new venue is under consideration in the wake of the Georgia law.

Pope celebrates surprise Holy Thursday with ousted cardinal

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis celebrated a surprise Holy Thursday Mass with the cardinal he fired last year, extending an extraordinary gesture to Cardinal Angelo Becciu by celebrating the liturgy that commemorates Jesus' Last Supper with his apostles before his crucifixion.

News of the celebration in Becciu's private chapel was confirmed by Becciu's private secretary. In addition, a longtime friend who was in contact with Becciu after the papal visit said the cardinal was "very happy" with the meeting. A Vatican official said he couldn't confirm Francis' private initiative but added that "such a gesture of paternity doesn't seem strange on a day like today, Holy Thursday."

The visit carried enormous symbolic weight and could suggest Francis may have come to realize he had erred in his handling of the Becciu dossier. Francis has long prized the Holy Thursday service as a ritual of repentance and service.

Francis forced Becciu's resignation on Sept. 24 apparently acting on allegations, contained in a yet-to-be-published article in the Italian newsmagazine *l'Espresso*, that Becciu had sent 100,000 euros in Holy See funds to a diocesan charity controlled by his brother.

Becciu admitted he sent the funds to the charity — not his brother — and told reporters he had done nothing wrong. The money never left the diocese's bank account.

Becciu at the time was the No. 2 in the Vatican secretariat of state, and enjoyed full authority to manage

the department's substantial asset portfolio, including using it for charitable donations.

Becciu has filed a 10 million-euro defamation lawsuit against L'Espresso, claiming its report, and months of other damaging articles citing unnamed Vatican prosecutors, ruined his reputation and eliminated his chances of becoming pope.

Francis was able to celebrate the service with Becciu after he cancelled his participation in the Vatican's official Holy Thursday Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, delegating it instead to the dean of the College of Cardinals.

The Vatican never explained why Francis was skipping the official service. Francis has traditionally traveled to a prison or refugee center for the Holy Thursday service, which usually involves a foot-washing ritual to symbolize Jesus' willingness to serve others.

Since Becciu's ouster, the conduct of the Vatican's criminal prosecutors investigating a host of allegedly corrupt financial deals have come under increasing criticism. They have suffered a string of defeats in foreign courts ruling that their searches were illegitimate, their arrest warrants unenforceable and their requests for asset seizures "appalling" full of misrepresentations and omissions.

OPEC and allies agree to gradually boost crude oil output

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — The OPEC oil cartel and allied countries said Thursday that they have decided to gradually add back some 2 million barrels per barrel per day of oil production from May to July, moving cautiously in pace with the recovery of the global economy from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The group is restoring production that was slashed last year to support prices as demand sagged during the worst of the pandemic recession, which sapped demand for fuel. The group will add back 350,000 barrels per day in May, 350,000 in June, and 400,000 in July.

Meanwhile Saudi Arabia will over the same period restore an additional 1 million barrels per day in cuts that it made on its own.

OPEC members, led by Saudi Arabia, and nonmembers, led by Russia, have been meeting monthly to determine production levels as they face a recovery in demand whose pace has been uncertain. They face conflicting pressures. Raising production before the demand is there risks sending prices lower. But lower production levels deprive national budgets of money at a difficult time.

Oil prices were trading higher despite the decision to increase production, suggesting markets see more than adequate demand for the added oil. Crude oil traded 3.6% higher at \$61.28 per barrel in trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange while Brent crude rose 3.1% per barrel to \$64.66.

Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman, who has urged careful approach with the recovery still uncertain, said that "the cautiousness is still there" in the group's approach. Ahead of the meeting, he had warned that "until the evidence of recovery is undeniable, we should retain this cautious stance ... the waves are still tall and the seas remain rough." One reason is the new wave of infections in Europe, which is holding back the economy amid a slow vaccine rollout.

He noted that the reductions would only take effect from May, meaning that the Saudi voluntary cut still had a month to run. He also said that under the agreement, the group could "tweak, or adjust" production as needed in coming months.

Higher crude oil prices are eventually reflected in the price of gasoline for U.S. motorists since the cost of oil makes up half the price at the pump. Another factor that could soon push prices higher is demand for gasoline, which is approaching pre-pandemic levels. The national average of \$2.86 reported this week by motoring club federation AAA is 15 cents higher than a month ago and 84 cents higher on the year.

Putin critic Navalny loses weight, blames harsh prison

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has lost a substantial amount of weight in custody, his organization said Thursday, a day after the well-known government critic called a

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 72 of 95

hunger strike to protest what he called poor medical care.

A post Thursday on Navalny's channel in the Telegram messaging app said he weighed 93 kilograms (204 pounds) when he arrived at the prison last month and now is at 85 kilograms (187 pounds).

The statement said he blames the weight loss primarily on a harsh prison regime in which he is awakened eight times every night.

Navalny also is complaining of severe back pains that have spread to one leg and says his other leg is numb. Prison authorities have not provided proper medicine or allowed his doctor to visit him, he said Wednesday when announcing he was going on a hunger strike.

The 44-year-old Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's most outspoken domestic opponent, was arrested in January upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusation.

Last month, Navalny was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating the terms of his probation during his convalescence in Germany. The sentence stems from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that Navalny has rejected as fabricated — and which the European Court of Human Rights has ruled to be unlawful.

Navalny was moved this month from a Moscow jail to a penal colony in the Vladimir region, 85 kilometers (50 miles) east of the Russian capital. The facility called IK-2 stands out among Russian penitentiaries for its particularly strict rules for inmates, which include standing at attention for hours.

Navalny's nerve-agent poisoning and conviction have further strained Russia's ties with the United States and the European Union, which sank to post-Cold War lows after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, its meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, hacking attacks and other actions.

Although Navalny's doctor has not been able to see him, his organization said the prison on Thursday gave access to a team from the Kremlin-funded satellite TV channel RT led by Maria Butina, who was convicted of acting as an unregistered foreign agent in the United States and served 18 months in prison.

It said Butina declared the prison to be one of Russia's best and most comfortable, after which Navalny denounced her as a "parasite" in front of other inmates.

RT did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

EXPLAINER: Starving for more chips in a tech-hungry world

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and TOM KRISHER AP Business Writers

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — As the U.S. economy rebounds from its pandemic slump, a vital cog is in short supply: the computer chips that power a wide range of products that connect, transport and entertain us in a world increasingly dependent on technology.

The shortage has already been rippling through various markets since last summer. It has made it difficult for schools to buy enough laptops for students forced to learn from home, delayed the release of popular products such as the iPhone 12 and created mad scrambles to find the latest video game consoles such as the PlayStation 5.

But things have been getting even worse in recent weeks, particularly in the auto industry, where factories are shutting down because there aren't enough chips to finish building vehicles that are starting to look like computers on wheels. The problem was recently compounded by a grounded container ship that blocked the Suez Canal for nearly a week, choking off chips headed from Asia to Europe.

These snags are likely to frustrate consumers who can't find the vehicle they want and sometimes find themselves settling for a lower-end models without as many fancy electronic features. And it threatens to leave a big dent in the auto industry, which by some estimates stands to lose \$60 billion in sales during the first half of his year.

"We have been hit by the perfect storm, and it's not going away any time soon," said Baird technology analyst Ted Mortonson, who said he has never seen such a serious shortage in nearly 30 years tracking the chip industry.

IS THE PANDEMIC TO BLAME?

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 73 of 95

Sort of. The pandemic prompted chip factories to start shutting down early last year, particularly overseas, where the majority of the processors are made. By the time they started to reopen, they had a backlog of orders to fill.

That wouldn't have been as daunting if chipmakers weren't then swamped by unforeseen demand. For instance, no one entered 2020 expecting to see a spike in personal computer sales after nearly a decade of steady decline. But that's what happened after government lockdowns forced millions of office workers to do their jobs from homes while students mostly attended their classes remotely.

ARE OTHER FACTORS AT WORK?

Yes. Both Sony and Microsoft were preparing to release highly anticipated next-generation video game consoles for their PlayStation and Xbox brands, respectively, that required more sophisticated chips than ever. To add to the demand, wireless network providers are clamoring for chips to power ultrafast "5G" services being built around the world.

President Donald Trump's trade war with China probably didn't help either. Some analysts believe the Trump administration's blacklisting of Huawei Technologies prompted that major maker of smartphones to build a huge stockpile of chips as it braced for the crackdown.

WHY IS THE AUTO INDUSTRY BEING HIT SO HARD?

Stay-at-home orders drove a surge in consumer electronics sales, squeezing auto parts suppliers who use chips for computers that control gas pedals, transmissions and touch screens. Chip makers compounded the pressure by rejiggering factory lines to better serve the consumer-electronics market, which generates far more revenue for them than autos.

After eight weeks of pandemic-induced shutdown in the spring, automakers started reopening factories earlier than they had envisioned. But then they were hit with unexpected news: chip makers weren't able to flip a switch quickly and make the types of processors needed for cars.

HOW ARE AUTOMAKERS DEALING WITH THE SHORTAGE?

They've canceled shifts and temporarily closed factories. Ford, General Motors, Fiat Chrysler (now Stellantis), Volkswagen and Honda seem to have been hit the hardest. Others, most notably Toyota, aren't being affected as dramatically. That is probably because Toyota was better prepared after learning how sudden, unexpected shocks can disrupt supply chains from the massive earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, said Bank of America Securities analyst Vivek Arya.

The harder hit automakers have diverted chips from slower-selling models to those in high demand, such as pickup trucks and large SUVs. Ford, GM and Stellantis have started building vehicles without some computers, putting them in storage with plans to retrofit them later.

GM expects the chip shortage to cost it up to \$2 billion in pretax profits this year from lost production and sales. Ford is bracing for a similar blow. Chip makers probably won't fully catch up with auto-industry demand until July at the earliest.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BUY A NEW CAR?

Expect to pay more. Supplies of many models were tight even before the chip shortage because automakers were having trouble making up for production lost to the pandemic.

IHS Markit estimates that from January through March, the chip shortage reduced North American auto production by about 100,000 vehicles. In January of last year, before the pandemic, the U.S. auto industry had enough vehicles to supply 77 days of demand. By February of 2021 it was down almost 30% to 55 days.

WILL OTHER POPULAR PRODUCTS BE AFFECTED THIS YEAR?

Samsung Electronics, one of the world's biggest chipmakers, recently warned that its vast line-up of consumer electronics could be affected by the shortage. Without specifying which products might be affected, Samsung co-CEO Koh Dong-jin told shareholders that a "serious imbalance" between the supply

and demand for chips could hurt sales from April through June.

WHAT'S GOING TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING AGAIN?

There are no quick fixes, but chipmakers appear to be gearing up to meet future challenges.

Intel, which for decades has dominated the market for PC chips, recently made waves by announcing plans to invest \$20 billion in two new factories in Arizona. Even more significant, Intel revealed said it is starting a new division that will enter into contracts to make chips tailored for other firms in addition to its own processors. That's a major departure for Intel, aligning it more closely with a model popularized by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., or TSMC, which already had been building a plant in Arizona, too.

Compelled by the current shortage, TSMC also has committed to spending \$100 billion during the next three years to expand its worldwide chip manufacturing capacity. About \$28 billion of that investment will come this year to boost production at factories that have been unable to keep up with the surge in demand since the pandemic began, according to TSMC Chief Executive Officer C.C. Wei.

And President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion plan to improve U.S. infrastructure includes an estimated \$50 billion to help make the the country less reliant on chips made overseas. The U.S. share of the worldwide chip manufacturing market has declined from 37% in 1990 to 12% today, according to Semiconductor Industry Association, a trade group.

But chips won't start coming out of any new factories built as part of the spending splurge for two to three years. And even as existing factories ramp up and expand to meet current demand, some analysts wonder if there might be a glut of processors a year from now.

Biden launches community corps to boost COVID vaccinations

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Seeking to overcome vaccine hesitancy, the Biden administration on Thursday stepped up its outreach efforts to skeptical Americans, launching a coalition of community, religious and celebrity partners to promote COVID-19 shots in hard-hit communities.

The administration's "We Can Do This" campaign features television and social media ads, but it also relies on a community corps of public health, athletic, faith and other groups to spread the word about the safety and efficacy of the three approved vaccines. The campaign comes amid worries that reluctance to get vaccinated will delay the nation's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic — and is kicking off as the U.S. is anticipating a boost in vaccine supply that will make all adult Americans eligible for vaccines by the beginning of May.

President Joe Biden encouraged more than 1,000 faith leaders on Thursday to continue their efforts to promote vaccinations in their communities. "They're going to listen to your words more than they are to me as president of the United States," Biden said.

Vice President Kamala Harris and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy held a virtual meeting with the more than 275 inaugural members of the community corps on Thursday to kick off the effort. The Department of Health and Human Services was also encouraging other groups, as well as everyday Americans, to join the effort.

"You are the people that folks on the ground know and rely on and have a history with," Harris said. "And when people are then making the decision to get vaccinated, they're going to look to you."

A White House official said Harris plans to take on a larger role in promoting the uptake of vaccines, in addition to her efforts selling the president's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill and working to address the root causes of migration driving an increase in unaccompanied minors entering the U.S. along the southern border.

The focus on trusted validators stems from both internal and public surveys showing those skeptical of the vaccines are most likely to be swayed by local, community and medical encouragement to get vaccinated, rather than messages from politicians.

Courtney Rowe, the White House's COVID-19 director of strategic communications and engagement,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 75 of 95

briefed governors on the new initiative Tuesday, telling them that people “want to hear from those they know and trust.” She added that the initiative would be “empowering the leaders people want to hear from.”

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research conducted late last month finds that three-quarters of American adults now say they have or will get a vaccine, compared with 13% who say they probably will not, while 12% say they definitely will not. The share saying they probably or definitely will not has ticked down since January, when a combined 32% said that.

The coalition includes health groups like the American Medical Association and the National Council of Urban Indian Health, sports leagues like the NFL, NASCAR and MLB, rural groups, unions and Latino, Black, Asian American Pacific Islander and Native American organizations, as well as coalitions of faith, business and veterans leaders.

The community corps will receive fact sheets and social media messages to share with members of their communities, as well as regular updates from the Biden administration with the latest vaccine confidence resources.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced last week that it will devote \$3 billion to support outreach by community leaders and groups to boost vaccine confidence.

HHS was also launching its first national ad campaign promoting vaccinations, aimed at senior, Latino and Black Americans, with the roughly \$250 million initial ad campaign. And in partnership with Facebook, it was deploying social media profile frames so that ordinary Americans could share their intent to get vaccinations and their experience with the shots to their peers.

The White House is also deploying Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious-disease expert, and Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, who chairs Biden’s COVID-19 equity task force, to speak directly to the public about the benefits of the vaccines. On Wednesday, the pair conducted an interview with rapper and actor LL Cool J and DJ Jazzy Jeff.

By the end of May, the U.S. will have enough supply of COVID-19 vaccine to cover all adults in the country. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious-disease expert, has estimated that 70% to 85% of the population needs to be immune to the virus to reach herd immunity.

7 Hong Kong democracy leaders convicted as China clamps down

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Seven of Hong Kong’s leading pro-democracy advocates, including a media tycoon and an 82-year-old veteran of the movement, were convicted Thursday for organizing and participating in a march during massive anti-government protests in 2019 that triggered a crackdown on dissent.

The verdict was the latest blow to the flagging democracy movement as the governments in Hong Kong and Beijing tighten the screws in their efforts to exert greater control over the semi-autonomous Chinese territory. Hong Kong had enjoyed a vibrant political culture and freedoms not seen elsewhere in China during the decades it was a British colony. Beijing had pledged to allow the city to retain those freedoms for 50 years when it took the territory back in 1997, but recently it has ushered in a series of measures that many fear are a step closer to making Hong Kong no different from cities on the mainland.

Jimmy Lai, the owner of the outspoken Apple Daily tabloid; Martin Lee, the octogenarian founder of the city’s Democratic Party; and five former pro-democracy lawmakers were found guilty in a ruling handed down by a district judge. They face up to five years in prison. Two other former lawmakers charged in the same case had pleaded guilty earlier.

According to the ruling, six of the seven defendants convicted on Thursday, including Lee and Lai, carried a banner that criticized police and called for reforms as they left Victoria Park on Aug. 18, 2019, and led a procession through the center of the city. The other defendant, Margaret Yee, joined them on the way and helped carry the banner.

Police had given permission for a rally at Victoria Park but had rejected an application from the organizer, the Civil Human Rights Front, for the march.

Organizers estimated that 1.7 million people marched that day in opposition to a bill that would have

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 76 of 95

allowed suspects to be extradited to mainland China for trial — a measure that infuriated Hong Kongers who cherish their distinct justice system and sparked months of demonstrations that sometimes led to violent clashes between protesters and police.

The legislation was eventually withdrawn, but the fuse was lit, and the protesters' demands expanded to include calls for full democracy. Instead, Beijing has responded by cracking down even harder on dissent, including a new national security law and changes last month that will significantly reduce the number of directly elected seats in Hong Kong's legislature. As a result of the clampdown, most of Hong Kong's outspoken activists are now in jail or in self-exile abroad.

"Their conviction is yet another example of Beijing eroding Hong Kong's freedoms and failing to live up to its international obligations," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. The U.N. chief's spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, said U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "has repeatedly said there should be no prisoners of conscience in the 21st century, and he's always underscored the right to peaceful assembly."

Former lawmaker Lee Cheuk-yan, who was among those convicted Thursday, expressed disappointment in the verdict, saying he and his fellow residents have the constitutional right to march. Lee is known for helping to organize annual candlelight vigils in Hong Kong on the anniversary of the bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

"We are firm that we have the right to assemble," he said. "It is our badge of honor to be in jail for walking together with the people of Hong Kong."

Six of the nine defendants in the case have been released on bail on the condition they do not leave Hong Kong and they hand in all their travel documents. They are due back in court on April 16, where mitigation pleas will be heard before sentencing.

Lai is among those who remains jailed on other charges, including collusion with foreign forces to intervene in the city's affairs, a new crime under the national security law imposed on the city in 2020 by the central government in Beijing.

The law has put a chill on dissent, all but quashing public protest, which was already diminished because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Authorities have used the sweeping legislation to arrest prominent pro-democracy advocates. They have also detained activists on other charges, such as participating in illegal assemblies.

Lee, a former lawmaker, has been an advocate for human rights and democracy in the city since the former British colony was returned to China in 1997, though he disagreed with the violent tactics adopted by some of the protesters in 2019.

Ahead of Thursday's court session, some of the defendants and their supporters gathered outside the court, shouting "Oppose political persecution" and "Five demands, not one less," in reference to demands by democracy supporters that include amnesty for those arrested in the protests as well as universal suffrage in the territory.

WHO: Europe's vaccination program is 'unacceptably slow'

LONDON (AP) — European nations' immunization campaigns against COVID-19 are "unacceptably slow" and risk prolonging the pandemic, a senior World Health Organization official said Thursday.

Dr. Hans Kluge, WHO's regional director for Europe, said vaccines "present our best way out of this pandemic," but noted that to date, only 10% of Europe's population has received one dose and that only 4% have been fully protected with two doses.

"As long as coverage remains low, we need to apply the same public health and social measures as we have in the past, to compensate for delayed schedules," Kluge said.

Even those numbers hide the true scope of the problems facing the European Union's 27 nations, where only about 5.6% of its people have had a first vaccine shot, according to the bloc. In Britain, that figure is 46% of its population.

Kluge warned European governments against having "a false sense of security" for having started their immunization campaigns. He noted that Europe remains the second-most affected region in the world in terms of new coronavirus infections and deaths.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 77 of 95

WHO said new COVID-19 infections are increasing in every age group except those over 80, in a sign that vaccination efforts are having an impact in slowing outbreaks. But the U.N. health agency said "early action" to stop the virus' spread must be taken in the absence of high immunization rates.

Faced with rising hospitalizations that were overwhelming hospitals in Paris and elsewhere, French President Emmanuel Macron imposed new measures to combat a resurgence of the virus, including a three-week school closure and a domestic travel ban.

WHO says there were 1.6 million new cases and nearly 24,000 deaths in its European region last week. The 27-nation European Union has counted over 612,000 virus-related deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University, and if other European nations like Britain, Russia, Switzerland and others are counted, Europe has seen over 928,000 virus deaths during the pandemic.

"The region's situation is more worrying than we have seen in several months," said Dr. Dorit Nitzan, WHO Europe's emergency manager, who warned people not to travel or gather in large groups over the coming religious holidays.

"Many countries are introducing new measures that are necessary and everyone should follow as much as they can," Nitzan said.

Kluge said his message to European countries was that "now is not the time to relax measures."

In Italy spy story, Navy captain struggled with mortgage

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Italy's spy thriller took a decidedly mundane turn Thursday with indications that the Italian Navy captain accused of passing classified documents to Russia was desperate for extra money to pay his mortgage and support his four children.

Walter Biot, an Italian Navy frigate captain most recently assigned to a policy position at the Defense Ministry, was being held at Rome's Regina Coeli prison. During a preliminary interrogation Thursday, he exercised his right to not answer prosecutors' questions or make a statement, Italian news reports said.

Biot was arrested on espionage charges Tuesday after he was allegedly caught passing a pen drive of classified documents, including some on NATO operations, to a Russian Embassy official in exchange for 5,000 euros (\$5,900). He had been trailed for months by Italian intelligence officials.

A Rome judge on Thursday confirmed his arrest and denied his request for house detention, the ANSA and LaPresse news agencies reported. His lawyer, Roberto De Vita, didn't immediately respond to calls or an email seeking comment.

The Foreign Ministry immediately ordered the Russian caught with Biot, as well as another Russian Embassy diplomat, expelled in what Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said was a "hostile act of extreme gravity."

Biot's wife, Claudia Carbonara, insisted that Biot would never betray Italy's security. But she said he was desperate for money since his 3,000-euro salary at the Defense Ministry simply didn't cover the needs of a family of six with four dogs and a mortgage.

In an interview with Corriere della Sera newspaper, Carbonara said Biot wouldn't dream of cutting back on his children's sports activities but couldn't make ends meet. Carbonara, a psychotherapist, said if he had told her what he was planning, she would have dissuaded him.

"Even if he did what he did, I'm sure he would have thought it through and wouldn't prejudice the national interest. He's not stupid," she was quoted as saying.

Biot's adult son, meanwhile, told reporters that his father was only trying to support his family. In an audio recording posted on the website of La Repubblica newspaper, the 24-year-old son said he returned to the family's Pomezia home Tuesday evening to find Carabinieri officers there, and that he only learned his father had been arrested on espionage charges from news reports.

The son, whose name was not given, said neither he nor his adult sister had full-time jobs, working only as a gardener or cleaning pools, leaving Biot to support them all. He voiced concern that if his father receives a dishonorable discharge from the Navy, the family would face even more devastating financial problems.

"If he did something like this, maybe there's a solution, that he is suffering from mental instability," he said.

Ancient coins may solve mystery of murderous 1600s pirate

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

WARWICK, R.I. (AP) — A handful of coins unearthed from a pick-your-own-fruit orchard in rural Rhode Island and other random corners of New England may help solve one of the planet's oldest cold cases.

The villain in this tale: a murderous English pirate who became the world's most-wanted criminal after plundering a ship carrying Muslim pilgrims home to India from Mecca, then eluded capture by posing as a slave trader.

"It's a new history of a nearly perfect crime," said Jim Bailey, an amateur historian and metal detectorist who found the first intact 17th-century Arabian coin in a meadow in Middletown.

That ancient pocket change — among the oldest ever found in North America — could explain how pirate Capt. Henry Every vanished into the wind.

On Sept. 7, 1695, the pirate ship *Fancy*, commanded by Every, ambushed and captured the *Ganj-i-Sawai*, a royal vessel owned by Indian emperor Aurangzeb, then one of the world's most powerful men. Aboard were not only the worshipers returning from their pilgrimage, but tens of millions of dollars' worth of gold and silver.

What followed was one of the most lucrative and heinous robberies of all time.

Historical accounts say his band tortured and killed the men aboard the Indian ship and raped the women before escaping to the Bahamas, a haven for pirates. But word quickly spread of their crimes, and English King William III — under enormous pressure from a scandalized India and the East India Company trading giant — put a large bounty on their heads.

"If you Google 'first worldwide manhunt,' it comes up as Every," Bailey said. "Everybody was looking for these guys."

Until now, historians only knew that Every eventually sailed to Ireland in 1696, where the trail went cold. But Bailey says the coins he and others have found are evidence the notorious pirate first made his way to the American colonies, where he and his crew used the plunder for day-to-day expenses while on the run.

The first complete coin surfaced in 2014 at Sweet Berry Farm in Middletown, a spot that had piqued Bailey's curiosity two years earlier after he found old colonial coins, an 18th-century shoe buckle and some musket balls.

Waving a metal detector over the soil, he got a signal, dug down and hit literal paydirt: a darkened, dime-sized silver coin he initially assumed was either Spanish or money minted by the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Peering closer, the Arabic text on the coin got his pulse racing. "I thought, 'Oh my God,'" he said.

Research confirmed the exotic coin was minted in 1693 in Yemen. That immediately raised questions, Bailey said, since there's no evidence that American colonists struggling to eke out a living in the New World traveled to anywhere in the Middle East to trade until decades later.

Since then, other detectorists have unearthed 15 additional Arabian coins from the same era — 10 in Massachusetts, three in Rhode Island and two in Connecticut. Another was found in North Carolina, where records show some of Every's men first came ashore.

"It seems like some of his crew were able to settle in New England and integrate," said Sarah Sportman, state archaeologist for Connecticut, where one of the coins was found in 2018 at the ongoing excavation of a 17th-century farm site.

"It was almost like a money laundering scheme," she said.

Although it sounds unthinkable now, Every was able to hide in plain sight by posing as a slave trader — an emerging profession in 1690s New England. On his way to the Bahamas, he even stopped at the French island of Reunion to get some Black captives so he'd look the part, Bailey said.

Obscure records show a ship called the *Sea Flower*, used by the pirates after they ditched the *Fancy*, sailed along the Eastern seaboard. It arrived with nearly four dozen slaves in 1696 in Newport, Rhode Island, which became a major hub of the North American slave trade in the 18th century.

"There's extensive primary source documentation to show the American colonies were bases of opera-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 79 of 95

tion for pirates," said Bailey, 53, who holds a degree in anthropology from the University of Rhode Island and worked as an archaeological assistant on explorations of the Wydah Gally pirate ship wreck off Cape Cod in the late 1980s.

Bailey, whose day job is analyzing security at the state's prison complex, has published his findings in a research journal of the American Numismatic Society, an organization devoted to the study of coins and medals.

Archaeologists and historians familiar with but not involved in Bailey's work say they're intrigued, and believe it's shedding new light on one of the world's most enduring criminal mysteries.

"Jim's research is impeccable," said Kevin McBride, a professor of archaeology at the University of Connecticut. "It's cool stuff. It's really a pretty interesting story."

Mark Hanna, an associate professor of history at the University of California-San Diego and an expert in piracy in early America, said that when he first saw photos of Bailey's coin, "I lost my mind."

"Finding those coins, for me, was a huge thing," said Hanna, author of the 2015 book, "Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire." "The story of Capt. Every is one of global significance. This material object — this little thing — can help me explain that."

Every's exploits have inspired a 2020 book by Steven Johnson, "Enemy of All Mankind;" PlayStation's popular "Uncharted" series of video games; and a Sony Pictures movie version of "Uncharted" starring Tom Holland, Mark Wahlberg and Antonio Banderas that's slated for release early in 2022.

Bailey, who keeps his most valuable finds not at his home but in a safe deposit box, says he'll keep digging. "For me, it's always been about the thrill of the hunt, not about the money," he said. "The only thing better than finding these objects is the long-lost stories behind them."

Study: US pesticide use falls but harms pollinators more

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

American farmers are using smaller amounts of better targeted pesticides, but these are harming pollinators, aquatic insects and some plants far more than decades ago, a new study finds.

Toxicity levels have more than doubled since 2005 for important species, including honeybees, mayflies and buttercup flowers, as the country switched to a new generation of pesticides. But dangerous chemical levels in birds and mammals have plummeted at the same time, according to a paper in Thursday's journal Science.

"The bottom line is that these pesticides, once believed to be relatively benign and so short-lived that they would not damage ecosystems, are anything but," said Dr. Lynn Goldman, a former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assistant administrator for toxic substances who wasn't part of the study and is now dean of George Washington University's school of public health.

German scientists examined 381 pesticides used in the United States between 1992 and 2016, combining EPA data that calculates toxic dosage effects for eight types of animals and plants with U.S. Geological Survey data on how much of the chemicals were used year by year for dozens of agricultural crops. The scientists calculated a new measurement they call total applied toxicity for the eight groupings of species and trends over time.

"Very often politicians, media, scientists just talk about amounts. They always argue 'OK, the amount pesticides we use is reduced so things are getting better' and this is not necessarily true," said lead author Ralf Schulz, a professor of environmental sciences at the University of Kolenz-Landau. "It's sometimes true, but not always,"

Industry keeps developing new pesticides and "very often these new compounds are more toxic," Schulz said. They include neonicotinoids, which have been connected to one of the many causes of dwindling honeybee numbers.

The newer pesticides are aimed more toward animals without backbones to spare birds and mammals, but this means insects such as pollinators get poisoned, Schulz said.

The same goes for some land plants and for aquatic invertebrates including dragonflies and mayflies,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 80 of 95

which birds and mammals eat, he said, adding that future studies should look at the harm higher up the food chain.

Chris Novak, president of the pesticide industry group CropLife America, said in an email that "it is critical to note that the study found great reductions in acute toxicity have been achieved for humans and mammals over the past few decades."

Novak noted pesticides go through extensive studies and "only one in 10,000 discoveries make the 11-year journey from the lab to the market."

It's not surprising that newer generations of pesticides generally are more harmful to insects, which are undergoing a massive decline for many reasons, said University of Connecticut entomologist David Wagner, who wasn't part of the study. But Wagner said this newest research doesn't provide data needed to show "that pesticides are the major driver of insect declines."

Former California cop leads GOP dream of Newsom recall

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

FOLSOM, Calif. (AP) — Orrin Heatlie was recovering from a back procedure and browsing social media in 2019 when he found a video of California Gov. Gavin Newsom instructing immigrants in the country illegally not to open their doors to law enforcement unless officers had a warrant.

The 52-year-old retired county sheriff's sergeant was incensed, believing Newsom's message was an insult to his profession. It was an unsurprising reaction for a Republican who built a 25-year career in law enforcement.

What Heatlie did next would eventually slingshot the political neophyte to the center of California's political world: He started researching a recall campaign. Twenty-one months later, 2.1 million signatures have been gathered and it's now a near certainty that Californians will choose later this year whether to remove Newsom from office.

Heatlie said his police background gave him the organizational skills to pull off what would be only the second recall election for a governor in state history.

"It wasn't launched on a wing and a prayer," Heatlie said during a recent interview with The Associated Press from his home in the Northern California city of Folsom.

He started by joining an existing effort to recall Newsom. He described it as a "training mission" that allowed him to make contacts with people who ultimately would turn into his political operation when he formed his own recall effort.

For months he's been working 12-plus hour days in a silver Airstream camper in his driveway, coordinating volunteers and taking calls. He jokes his family banished him from the house because they were sick of hearing about the recall.

Heatlie lives with his wife and two children — an 18-year-old daughter he describes as a "lovely little socialist" and a 17-year-old son who is more centrist. The children's politics lead to lively family discussions but Heatlie thinks they respect his activism.

"I'm participating in something that is monumental and historic, and it's something that, you know, this country was founded on," he said. "We're bringing government back to represent the people."

For an amateur political organizer to get a recall on the ballot is remarkable. While recall efforts are common, the only one to get on the ballot was in 2003 when voters replaced Democrat Gray Davis with Arnold Schwarzenegger, the state's last Republican governor. In recent months, Heatlie's effort has drawn donations and support from national Republicans including Mike Huckabee and Newt Gingrich.

California is more Democratic and diverse now and booting Newsom from office remains an uphill climb. A Public Policy Institute of California poll released Tuesday found only 40% support removing the first-term Democrat.

Stephanie Suela, the Sacramento County coordinator for the recall, said Heatlie's effort succeeded where others failed because he had an eye for talent and created a supportive environment for his volunteers. He had a strong command of the operation and was able to "process 15 things at once," she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 81 of 95

"Orrin is really good-hearted when people are in need," she said, recalling how he organized a GoFundMe account to help a volunteer repair her truck and bought a new computer monitor for another.

Both worked on the recall effort led by Erin Cruz, an unsuccessful candidate for U.S. House and Senate. Heatlie joined Cruz's group after seeing Newsom's immigration video and was made moderator of a Facebook group, using it to make contacts and assess the operation's flaws.

"I started to use her campaign as a live-fire training drill or a live-fire lesson, the term we use in law enforcement. Just basically a training mission to learn everything I could about the recall process," he said.

Cruz's campaign fizzled with fewer than 300,000 valid signatures, and Heatlie filed his recall paperwork soon after in February 2020 and formed the California Patriot Coalition.

As a police sergeant, he was adept at managing people and supervising operations. And as a member of the Yolo County Sheriff Department's crisis negotiating team, he had experience in convincing people to do things.

He reached out to veterans of the 2003 recall and eventually recruited 58 county coordinators, 27 regional leaders and more than 150 social media managers.

Republicans had many grievances against Newsom, including his moratorium on the death penalty and power shutoffs related to wildfires. But it took the pandemic and an infamous decision by Newsom to dine out with lobbyists — maskless — at a fancy restaurant while telling Californians to stay home to generate the necessary recall signatures.

Organizers submitted 55,000 signatures to the Secretary of State's office between June and November. By December, after Newsom's dinner came to light, that jumped to nearly 500,000. More kept pouring in.

Newsom ignored the effort until early March, and then came out swinging. He highlighted a Facebook post Heatlie wrote in 2019 that said "Microchip all illegal immigrants. It works! Just ask Animal control!" It was posted the same day as Newsom's social media video that sparked Heatlie's anger, according to a screenshot of the post from Capital Public Radio.

Heatlie said it was hyperbole meant to generate discussion and that he does not support forced micro-chipping of anyone. Facebook disabled Heatlie's account; he said he doesn't know why.

Beyond Heatlie, Newsom paints the effort as led by Trump-loving extremists and white supremacists, language that could boost his support with Democrats but further anger recall supporters. The group saw a jump in people downloading the petition after California Democratic Party Chairman Rusty Hicks in January called the effort a "coup" and likened it to the U.S. Capitol insurrection, Heatlie said.

Heatlie said he does not support the Proud Boys, a far-right, anti-immigrant men's group that has engaged in violent clashes at political rallies, or the QAnon conspiracy theory that believes former President Donald Trump was fighting a "deep state" and child sex trafficking ring affiliated with prominent Democrats. But he does not turn away participants based on their personal affiliations.

He said he looked into QAnon so he could understand what people were talking about and determined it was a "ridiculous premise" whose followers have been "duped."

"We don't ask people their affiliations, we don't vet their background or anything like that. They have a First Amendment right to petition the government," he said.

He's skeptical that President Joe Biden rightfully won the election, citing a debunked theory about rigged voting machines. But he's glad Trump hasn't spoken about the recall, saying it would be a distraction.

Now that the signature gathering is over, Heatlie isn't sure what's next for his group. He doesn't envision the group endorsing a candidate to replace Newsom, but he hopes they'll continue bringing grassroots energy to other races and initiatives.

"We will continue to have an influence over California," he said.

Hospital workers despair as France's virus strategy flails

By ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

AMIENS, France (AP) — As France battles a new virus surge that many believe was avoidable, intensive care aide Stephanie Sannier manages her stress and sorrow by climbing into her car after a 12-hour shift,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 82 of 95

blasting music and singing as loud as she can.

"It allows me to breathe," she says, "and to cry."

People with COVID-19 occupy all the beds in her ICU ward in President Emmanuel Macron's hometown hospital in the medieval northern city of Amiens. Three have died in the past three days. The vast medical complex is turning away critically ill patients from smaller towns nearby for lack of space.

With France now Europe's latest virus danger zone, Macron on Wednesday ordered temporary school closures nationwide and new travel restrictions. But he resisted calls for a strict lockdown, instead sticking to his "third way" strategy that seeks a route between freedom and confinement to keep both infections and a restless populace under control until mass vaccinations take over.

The French government refuses to acknowledge failure, and blames delayed vaccine deliveries and a disobedient public for soaring infections and saturated hospitals. Macron's critics, in turn, blame arrogance at the highest levels. They say France's leaders ignored warning signs and favored political and economic calculations over public health — and lives.

"We feel this wave coming very strongly," said Romain Beal, a blood oxygen specialist at the Amiens-Picardie Hospital. "We had families where we had the mother and her son die at the same time in two different ICU rooms here. It's unbearable."

The hospital's doctors watched as the variant ravaging Britain over the winter jumped the Channel and forged south across France. Just as in Britain, the variant is now driving ever-younger, ever-healthier patients into French emergency rooms and critical care wards. Amiens medics did their best to prepare, bringing in reinforcements and setting up a temporary ICU in a pediatric wing.

After Britain's death toll shot higher in January, after new variants slammed European countries from the Czech Republic to Portugal, France continued vaunting its "third way."

French scientists' projections — including from the government's own virus advisory body — predicted trouble ahead. Charts from national research institute Inserm in January and again in February forecast climbing virus hospitalization rates in March or April. Worried doctors urged preventative measures beyond those that were already in place — a 6 p.m. nationwide curfew and the closure of all restaurants and many businesses.

Week after week, the government refused to impose a new lockdown, citing France's stable infection and hospitalization rates, and hoping that they would stay that way. Ministers stressed the importance of keeping the economy afloat and protecting the mental health of a populace worn down by a year of uncertainty. A relieved public granted Macron a boost in the polls.

But the virus wasn't finished. The nationwide infection rate has now doubled over the past three weeks, and Paris hospitals are bracing for what could be their worst battle yet, with ICU overcrowding forecast to surpass what happened when the pandemic first crashed over Europe.

Acknowledging the challenges, Macron on Wednesday announced a three-week nationwide school closure, a month-long domestic travel ban and the creation of thousands of temporary ICU beds. Parliament approved the measures Thursday.

While other European countries imposed their third lockdowns in recent months, Macron said that by refusing to do so in France, "we gained precious days of liberty and weeks of schooling for our children, and we allowed hundreds of thousands of workers to keep their heads above water."

At the same time, France has lost another 30,000 lives to the virus this year. It has also reported more virus infections overall than any country in Europe, and it has one of the world's highest death tolls — 95,640 lives lost.

Macron's refusal to order a lockdown frustrates people like Sarah Amhah, visiting her 67-year-old mother in the Amiens ICU.

"They've managed this badly all along," she said, recalling government missteps a year ago around masks and tests and decrying logistical challenges around getting a vaccine for elderly relatives. While she's still proud of France's world-renowned health care system, she's not proud of her government. "How can we trust them?"

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 83 of 95

Pollsters note growing public frustration in recent days with the government's hesitancy to crack down, and the potential impact of Macron's current decisions on next year's presidential campaign landscape.

Government officials argue that softer restrictions are more likely to be respected. Instead of lockdowns, Macron told his ministers he's focusing on the "speed race" to get the French population vaccinated.

Yet officials from the World Health Organization on Thursday bemoaned the slow pace of vaccinations in European countries like France, saying they have been "unacceptably slow" and risk prolonging the pandemic.

Macron last week defended his decision not to confine the country on Jan. 29, a moment epidemiologists say could have been a turning point in France's battle to prevent surge No. 3. "There won't be a mea culpa from me. I don't have remorse and won't acknowledge failure," he said.

Instead of emulating European neighbors whose strategies appear to be bringing infections down, French government officials dodge questions about the growing death toll by comparing their country to places where the situation is even worse.

At the Amiens ICU, things are already bad enough.

"We have the impression that the population is doing the opposite of what they should be doing," said Sannier, the nurse's aide, before heading off on her rounds. "And we have the feeling we are working for nothing."

Intern Oussama Nanai acknowledged that the drumbeat of grim virus numbers has left many people feeling numb, and he urged everyone to visit an ICU to put a human face to the figures.

"There are ups and downs every day ... Yesterday afternoon I couldn't do it anymore. The patient in (room) 52 died, and the patient in (room) 54," he said.

But sometimes their work pays off. "Two people who were in the most serious condition for 60 days left on their own two feet, and they sent us photos," he said. "That boosts our morale and makes us realize that what we are doing is useful."

Biden plan would spend \$16B to clean up old mines, oil wells

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's \$2.3 trillion plan to transform America's infrastructure includes \$16 billion to plug old oil and gas wells and clean up abandoned mines, a longtime priority for Western and rural lawmakers from both parties.

Hundreds of thousands of "orphaned" oil and gas wells and abandoned coal and hardrock mines pose serious safety hazards, while causing ongoing environmental damage. The administration sees the long-standing problem as an opportunity to create jobs and remediate pollution, including greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

Biden said last week he wants to put pipefitters and miners to work capping the wells "at the same price that they would charge to dig those wells."

Many of the old wells and mines are located in rural communities that have been hard-hit by the pandemic. Biden's plan would not only create jobs, but help reduce methane and brine leaks that pollute the air and groundwater. Methane is a powerful contributor to global warming.

The Interior Department has long led efforts to cap orphaned wells — so named because no owner can be found — but does not assess user fees to cover reclamation costs. Bond requirements for well operators, when known, are often inadequate to cover full clean-up costs.

Biden's plan, which needs approval by Congress, would jump-start the well-capping effort and expand it dramatically.

Similarly, the White House plan would exponentially boost an Abandoned Mine Land program run by Interior that uses fees paid by coal mining companies to reclaim coal mines abandoned before 1977. About \$8 billion has been disbursed to states for mine-reclamation projects in the past four decades, but Biden's plan would ramp up spending sharply.

Sen. Joe Manchin, the West Virginia Democrat who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 84 of 95

Committee, has long pushed to expand the mine-lands program, which he calls crucial to his state.

"It cannot be forgotten that West Virginia coal miners powered our country to greatness," Manchin said. While many mine lands in coal communities have been reclaimed, "there is still much more work to be done to clean up damage to the land and water in those communities," he said.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the top Republican on the Senate energy panel, ridiculed Biden's overall plan as "an out-of-control socialist spending spree."

The proposal "starts with the punishing policies of the Green New Deal and builds back worse from there," Barrasso said in statement. The plan would hike taxes and "spend trillions of dollars on the left's radical agenda," he added.

A spokeswoman said Barrasso has "has been very active in trying to re-evaluate and improve" the Abandoned Mine Land program. Barrasso is working with Manchin and other committee members to "responsibly reauthorize AML fee collection and facilitate reclamation (of mine sites) across the country," spokeswoman Sarah Durdaller said.

Environmental groups hailed the announcement, saying unplugged wells and abandoned mines pose a significant environmental threat. Some former drilling or mining sites have sat unattended for decades.

"From launching a visionary Civilian Climate Corps and reclaiming abandoned mines and orphaned wells to restoring America's lands, waters, wetlands, grasslands and coasts, the president's plan proposes strategic investments that will make communities more resilient and healthier," said Collin O'Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.

An oil industry group said it shares the administration's goals of safety and environmental stewardship.

"Our industry is fully committed to complying with existing state and federal requirements for abandoned wells" and "will continue to support efforts to plug these wells and further reduce methane emissions," said Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of the American Petroleum Institute.

The National Mining Association said it supports the renewed focus on abandoned mine lands, but wanted to see more details. "We're eager to work with Congress on legislation around the president's initiative, while bringing reform to the coal AML program and standing up durable, bipartisan solutions on hard-rock" mining sites, spokesman Conor Bernstein said.

Environmental groups and Democrats have called for stronger bonding requirements for oil and gas companies that drill on public lands, as well as changes to bankruptcy law that make it harder for companies to evade responsibility for cleaning up old sites.

"Investing in orphan well clean-up would create good-paying jobs while helping reduce pollution, restore habitat and protect our climate," said Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., who has introduced legislation to clean up federal sites and strengthen bond requirements for drilling on public lands.

Black adviser quits UK government in wake of racism report

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The most senior Black adviser to U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has resigned, the government said Thursday, the day after a report on racial disparities concluded that Britain does not have a systemic problem with racism.

The government denied any link between the departure of Samuel Kasumu and the much-criticized report, which activists and academics have accused of ignoring the experiences of ethnic-minority Britons.

The prime minister's office said Kasumu would leave his job as a special adviser for civil society and communities in May, as had "been his plan for several months."

It denied the resignation was related to Wednesday's publication of a report by the government-appointed Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, which concluded that Britain is not an institutionally racist country.

But Simon Woolley, a former government equalities adviser and a member of the U.K. House of Lords, said Kasumu's exit was connected to the "grubby" and "divisive" report.

"(There is a) crisis at No. 10 when it comes to acknowledging and dealing with persistent race inequal-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 85 of 95

ity," Woolley said.

Kasumu had considered quitting in February. He wrote a resignation letter, obtained by the BBC, that accused Johnson's Conservative Party of pursuing "a politics steeped in division." He was persuaded to remain temporarily to work on a campaign encouraging people from ethnic minorities to get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The Conservative government launched the inquiry into racial disparities in the wake of anti-racism protests last year. The panel of experts concluded that while "outright racism" exists in Britain, the country is not "institutionally racist" or "rigged" against ethnic minorities.

Citing strides to close gaps between ethnic groups in educational and economic achievement, the report said race was becoming "less important" as a factor in creating disparities that also are fueled by class and family backgrounds.

Many anti-racism activists were skeptical of the findings, saying the commission ignored real barriers to equality.

"Institutionally, we are still racist, and for a government-appointed commission ... to deny its existence is deeply, deeply worrying," said Halima Begum, chief executive of the Runnymede Trust, a racial equality think tank.

Doreen Lawrence, who became a leading anti-racism campaigner after her 18-year-old son Stephen was killed in a racist 1993 attack in London, said the report's authors were "not in touch with reality."

"Those people who marched for Black Lives Matter? It's denying all of that. The George Floyd stuff? It's denied all of that," she said.

The report was also widely disparaged by academics and scientists, who said it ignored the interplay of factors such as poverty, class and race in creating inequality.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted racial fault lines, with Britons from Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds dying from COVID-19 at more than twice the rate as their white compatriots. Jobs, underlying health conditions and deprivation are all factors in the divide.

Writing in the British Medical Journal, public health experts Mohammad S. Razai, Azeem Majeed and Aneez Esmail said "structural racism is an important factor in ethnic disparities in health" and accused the report of using "cherry-picked data" to support a political agenda.

"Its attempts to undermine the well-established and evidence-based role of ethnicity on health outcomes will lead to a worsening of systemic inequalities, putting more ethnic minority lives at risk," the authors said.

Black people in Britain are also three times as likely as white people to be arrested and twice as likely to die in police custody.

Like other countries, Britain has faced an uncomfortable reckoning with race since the death of George Floyd, a Black American, at the knee of a U.S. policeman in May 2020 sparked anti-racism protests around the world.

Large crowds at Black Lives Matter protests across the U.K. last summer called on the government and institutions to face up to the legacy of the British Empire and the country's extensive profits from the slave trade.

The toppling of a statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston in the city of Bristol in June prompted a pointed debate about how to deal with Britain's past. Many felt such statues extol racism and are an affront to Black Britons. Others, including the prime minister, argued that removing them was erasing a piece of history.

Johnson insisted Thursday that his government was not downplaying racism. He pointed out that the commission made 24 recommendations, including setting up an office for health disparities, sending low-level drug offenders into the public health system rather than the criminal justice system, and ensuring police forces better represent the communities they serve.

"There are very serious issues that our society faces to do with racism that we need to address," he said. "We've got to do more to fix it, we need to understand the severity of the problem, and we're going to be looking at all the ideas that (the commission) have put forward, and we'll be making our response."

Japan puts Osaka, 2 other areas under virus semi-emergency

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan designated Osaka and two other areas for new virus control steps on Thursday as infections there rise less than four months before the Tokyo Olympics.

Osaka, neighboring Hyogo and Miyagi in the north have had sharp increases in daily cases since early March, soon after Japan scaled down a partial and non-binding state of emergency that began in January. Japan lifted the state of emergency in the Tokyo area on March 21, fully ending the measures aimed at slowing the coronavirus and relieving pressure on medical systems treating COVID-19 patients.

Experts have raised concerns about Osaka's rapid spike — with many cases linked to new variants of the virus from Britain — and the burden on health care.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, at a government task force meeting Thursday, designated the three prefectures for pre-emergency status under a new prevention law beginning next Monday. The measure lasts until May 5 when Japan's "Golden Week" of spring holidays ends.

"The measure is intended to prevent the infections from spreading further so that we don't have to issue another state of emergency," Suga said.

An international figure skating championship is scheduled on April 15-18 in Osaka city, where skaters from five countries are to participate. The Olympic torch relay is scheduled to pass through Osaka city in two weeks.

"Personally, I think the Olympic torch relay in Osaka City should be canceled," Osaka Gov. Hirofumi Yoshimura said, noting that virus prevention steps such as social distancing and avoiding non-essential outings should be ensured rather than hosting the event. Torch relays elsewhere in Osaka prefecture will be held as planned.

Torch relay organizers have already asked people to keep social distance, wear masks and refrain from cheering when runners pass. They have said they will reroute or cancel legs of the relay if needed.

Suga said it is the first time the government is applying the law enacted in February. It is designed to target specific municipalities as a pre-emergency measure and allows prefectural leaders to request or order business owners to close at 8 p.m. and take other steps. It allows compensation for those who comply and fines for violators.

The measures, like the previous state of emergency, largely focus on restaurants and bars, while stores, schools, theaters and museums will stay open.

This time, restaurants and bars will have to comply with government-set safety standards, including installation of partitions, and health officials will patrol to ensure the rules are followed, said economy revitalization minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, also in charge of virus measures.

Six cities — Osaka in Osaka prefecture, Kobe and three other cities in Hyogo, and Sendai in Miyagi prefecture — are covered.

Japan has so far managed the pandemic much better than the United States and Europe without imposing a binding lockdown. But Suga's government has been struggling to control the spread of the virus while minimizing damage to the economy.

Japan was also weak on testing despite repeated calls from experts and opposition lawmakers. Suga on Thursday vowed to step up testing capacity while strengthening monitoring and preventive measures for new variants, while promising to do utmost to protect the medical system by securing enough beds and hospital rooms.

"We will do everything we can to keep the infections from becoming a big wave," Suga said, and urged people to take basic preventive measures until they're vaccinated.

Dr. Shigeru Omi, who heads the government taskforce, said the pace of infections is quickening, possibly because of new variants. He said the government was too slow in acting on an earlier resurgence in the winter, which prolonged the state of emergency.

"Delayed judgment will delay measures," Omi said. "It is important to take measures adequately and quickly."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 87 of 95

Japan had 474,773 cases and 9,162 deaths as of Wednesday, according to the health ministry. Osaka reported 599 daily new cases Wednesday, surpassing Tokyo's 414.

Cases in Tokyo has also been on the rise. The capital city on Thursday reported 475 new cases. Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike warned that a situation similar to Osaka "can happen here at any time."

Government advisers say cases are increasing in parts of the country, including western and northern Japan, and variants that are believed to be more contagious are rising rapidly in the Osaka region.

Hyogo Gov. Toshizo Ido told reporters his prefecture has faced a sharp upsurge since early March, especially in Kobe and a few other cities where the majority of new cases were from variants.

He also noted that younger people, including children, are being infected.

Oklahoma town eases pandemic, one restaurant meal at a time

By EMILY LESHNER and LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In Miami, Oklahoma, restaurants and their customers are doing their part to ease pandemic heartache, one meal at a time.

Cafes in and around the close-knit town in the state's northeastern corner have put up "receipt walls," allowing diners to pre-pay for meals and the needy to grab what they like, have a seat and refuel — judgment-free, no questions asked.

The idea of providing free, pre-paid meals spread from restaurant to restaurant a few months ago. Many recipients are homeless or have otherwise hit hard times since the pandemic rolled into Miami (pronounced my-AM-uh), population about 13,000. Two February blizzards brought even more trouble.

Jennifer White, a Miami native who owns the gourmet hot dog spot The Dawg House, transitioned from food truck to brick and mortar last September, a bold move in the middle of a pandemic. She was the first to put up a giving wall. Within eight hours, she had a wall full of meal receipts.

So far, customers at The Dawg House have provided more than 600 meals.

"And we have only eight tables in our restaurant, so that says a lot about how amazing our community is," White said.

Some who have peeled off a taped-up receipt have paid it forward, returning to add receipts of their own. She's had regulars purchase 10 to 50 giveaway meals at a time.

Lasay Castellano, a nursing student who recently left her job as manager of Zack's Cafe, said the diner serves about 600 people a day. She's been taping up receipts for nearly two months.

"We have a lot of homeless people here. A lot. Within a day we had almost \$600 in meals on the wall," she said. "We're having a hard time keeping tickets on the wall."

Among White's donors is 32-year-old Derrick Hayworth, who owns a food delivery company that services The Dawg House and other restaurants and retailers.

"It's the whole community behind it," he said. "It wasn't forced. It was just meant to happen."

When the blizzards hit, everybody pitched in to help those without places to stay. Mayor Bless Parker helped ease homeless into hotels and supply them food from the restaurant walls, some delivered by Hawthorne.

Life in Miami, in an area where lead and zinc mines ruled more than 100 years ago, inches closer to something that looks like the old normal every day. The area's plentiful casinos have reopened, and restaurants like The Dawg House have welcomed back in-person dining, with fewer tables to provide for social distancing.

White said a couple and their four young daughters stand out among the beneficiaries of the free meals.

"They were just so sweet, and their parents were beyond grateful and thankful," she said. "They seemed like they had a lot going on and got to sit for an hour and a half or so to just have a meal, have fun and laugh, and not worry about how much they were having to spend."

Where every kid needs lunch, school fights to feed them all

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 88 of 95

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press/Report for America

FAYETTE, Miss. (AP) — Most mornings, children are waiting beside the road with arms outstretched by the time driver Brian Hall pulls up in the decades-old yellow school bus.

As he pulls away, the bus creaking along toward his next stop on winding dirt roads, they already are breaking the plastic open to begin eating the day's offerings: barbecue chicken, fish sticks or turkey tacos with cartons of milk and cans of juice.

"You can tell they need the food by the way they react to the deliveries," Hall said. "We don't know what they're getting at home."

More than half of all children in Jefferson County, Mississippi live in food insecurity, making it the hungriest county in the U.S. according to an October 2020 report by Feeding America, a non-profit and national network of food banks. All 1,100 students enrolled in Jefferson County School District qualified for free breakfast and lunch at school before the pandemic because of the high poverty rate.

By the state of Mississippi's accounts, Jefferson County is a "failing" school district, based on pre-pandemic test scores. Like other under-resourced districts, it doesn't have the money to build new schools or hire more teachers.

Educators have been working to improve the district's rating: implementing a new curriculum, creating a program for parent engagement, working one-on-one with students.

And for more than a year now, they have been succeeding in the most crucial and fundamental way: Driving long miles on dusty roads to ensure every child gets something to eat each day.

"There's not a chance if you're a child, you're going to be able to really engage in school if you're not eating," Superintendent Adrian Hammitte said. "We know families desperately need the help. We're trying to substitute for what a lot of kids are not getting at home."

Jefferson County, a community of around 7,000, has one of the highest unemployment rates of any in America: 17% in January 2021 compared to the national rate of around 6.3%.

Named for U.S. President Thomas Jefferson, it was originally developed as cotton plantations before the Civil War. Agriculture was always the largest industry in the rural region but with the rise of industrialization, jobs were lost and the county's tax base has crumbled. The county has the highest African American population of any in the U.S., and many families have lived in poverty for generations.

Because of a lack of jobs in the area, people travel distances for work — oftentimes out of state. Many of the district's children care for younger siblings, while others are watched by grandparents.

More than 50% of people in Jefferson County have received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine, with 30% of people fully vaccinated, according to the state Department of Health. That makes Jefferson by far the most vaccinated per-capita out of all of the state's 82 counties, largely because of the work of the Jefferson Comprehensive Health Center, a clinic that provides care based on patients' ability to pay.

Yet like many predominantly Black school districts, Jefferson County School District, which is 98% Black, has been cautious about returning to in-person instruction. Families are worried after seeing how the virus has impacted Black communities across the nation.

Around 10% of people in Jefferson County have at one point tested positive for coronavirus, according to the state department of health. There was an outbreak in the school district when schools tried going back in-person in the fall.

The district was mostly virtual up until February, when it slowly began offering opportunities for limited in-person instruction. Now, all students spend three days a week learning from home and two days on campus.

Each morning, the cafeteria staff arrives in the dark to begin prepping the day's meals. Cafeteria Manager Sondra Smith said her employees — some of whom go to food banks to get their own meals because family members have lost jobs — volunteer to come in early and prep, before their work shift starts. Other days, they forgo their breaks to get meals done.

"It's a very serious job," Smith said. "We're feeding the babies that need it."

Inmates from the Jefferson-Franklin County Correctional facility down the road come to the district to

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 89 of 95

package food and load the aging buses and vans. Schools were able to purchase some new equipment with federal coronavirus funds, like coolers to keep milk cold in transit.

On a recent morning, high school senior Shaneque Merritt walked to the end of her driveway to collect a handful of bags for her family.

Her grandmother, Victoria Green, 61, is raising five other kids between the ages of 7 and 12.

Green said before the pandemic, she worked as a private nurse caring for some of the county's older citizens. Now, she said she's had to stay home to help the kids with their schoolwork. The staggered hybrid schedule means at least one child is home every day.

She said the family relies on food stamps and her husband's monthly Social Security check. It isn't enough to get by.

"It's hard, I ain't gonna lie about it," she said. "There's a lot of things we need, but we can't get it right now."

Annie Turner, 31, is the mother of six young children. Four are school-age. She said receiving food from the school helps supplement what she is able to provide. It's tough being the family's breadwinner during a pandemic, she said.

"It's really put a strain on me - big time," she said.

Like many parents, she has to travel outside the county to work. She drives more than two hours every weekend to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to a 36-hour-a-week job working nights making \$15 an hour at a hospital as a Post-Anesthesia Care Unit aide.

"You got a lot of parents who are actually out there working to try to take care of home, and when it comes to food, you want to make sure that your family is eating well," she said. "Nobody wants to just be eating ramen noodles and hot dogs all day."

The pandemic has required school districts across the country to find creative ways to get food to students.

In Mississippi's capital of Jackson, a majority-Black city where all students qualify for free meals, the public school district made pick-up points for kids to get food while learning from home.

But when Jefferson County started doing the same at the beginning of the pandemic, only around 75% of kids were being fed, because some families don't have vehicles or aren't able to drive. Delivering door to door, around 98% of kids are getting food.

DeAmber Reynolds takes care of her 6-year-old daughter and her nephew at home during remote learning days. She has seizures and can't drive.

"If I had to go to pick it up, we wouldn't be getting the meals," said Reynolds, 26, who is in graduate school studying technology management while caring for kids at home. "Having them delivered, it helps a lot. People who need them, get them."

Most days, the district's buses leave the schools filled with bags and come back empty.

Still, there are homes where the bus stops, and no one comes to collect the food. There are others where kids have only taken food a few times. On a recent day, the bus stopped outside a home. The driver honked. Two children peered out at the bus from a window, but didn't leave the house.

"We figure they're getting food somewhere else, we hope so," cook Raquel Mims-Cole said, as she looked out at the house. "But you can't know. All we can do is keep being here every day. We'll keep on coming, as long as they need us."

US hunger crisis persists, especially for kids, older adults

By ANITA SNOW, REBECCA SANTANA and CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — America is starting to claw its way out of the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, but food insecurity persists, especially for children and older adults.

Food banks around the U.S. continue giving away far more canned, packaged and fresh provisions than they did before the virus outbreak tossed millions of people out of work, forcing many to seek something to eat for the first time. For those who are now back at work, many are still struggling, paying back rent or trying to rebuild savings.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 90 of 95

"We have all been through an unimaginable year," said Brian Greene, CEO of the Houston Food Bank, the network's largest. It was distributing as much as 1 million pounds of groceries daily at various points during the pandemic last year.

Data from Feeding America, a national network of most food banks in the U.S., shows that its members dispensed far more in the last three months of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.

The food banks that agreed to let Feeding America publicly share their data, 180 out of 200 total, collectively distributed far more food — about 42% — during the last quarter of 2020 than in the same period of 2019. The amount of food allotted in the last quarter slipped just slightly from the previous three months, down around just 1%.

Katie Fitzgerald, Feeding America's chief operating officer, said the network's members are still seeing demand above pre-pandemic levels, although final numbers for this year's first quarter aren't yet available. Fitzgerald said she expects the food banks will collectively distribute the equivalent of 6 billion meals this year, about the same amount they gave away last year and far above the 4.2 billion meals given out in 2019.

"A lot of families who were living paycheck to paycheck before the pandemic were already experiencing food insecurity," she said. "Now, the level of insecurity for some has grown more extreme, when you see real hunger — mom skipping meals to feed the family."

America's yearlong food insecurity crisis has been felt especially sharply by children who lost easy access to free school meals, and older adults who struggled to get groceries or meals at senior centers because they worried about contracting the virus.

"It got really ugly," said Silvia Baca Garcia, 33, a Phoenix resident from Honduras who scrambled to feed her three children and granddaughter during months of unemployment caused by the viral outbreak. "It had been a lot easier when my two boys were in school and getting their hot breakfasts and lunches everyday."

HUNGRY CHILDREN

When COVID fears shuttered schools around the U.S. last spring, school districts nationwide suddenly had to get food to students who rely on free lunches even in the best times.

The number of free meals districts served to children whose families meet income criteria fell sharply: Nationwide approximately 1.65 billion fewer breakfasts and lunches were served by child food service programs between March and November of 2020 than were served March through November of 2019 -- a decrease of 30 percent.

"There are definitely a certain amount of students that are falling through the cracks," said Reggie Ross, president of the School Nutrition Association, which represents school food service employees and food suppliers.

From rural to urban areas, districts have had to get creative to deliver the food to kids.

In Phoenix on a recent, hazy afternoon, grownups and kids lined up by a yellow school bus for bags of free food.

The tiniest kids balanced multiple bags as they trudged home to apartments nearby, an occasional apple or juice box tumbling onto the asphalt. A young woman stuffed bags of food under her toddler's stroller seat.

"This has been important because most refugees don't have a ride," said Sinthia Rehmet, originally from Pakistan. She was among those picking up bags containing small milk cartons, peanut butter, hamburgers and pre-cooked meals to be re-heated.

The Alhambra School District in Phoenix went from serving 6,000 free breakfasts and 9,600 free lunches every day before the pandemic down to about 2,500 meals overall daily, said Brienne Berg, the district's child nutrition coordinator. Berg said about 5,000 of the district's estimated 10,000 students returned to campuses in March while a similar number were signed up to continue remote learning.

For Baca Garcia, the struggling Phoenix mother, without a car, it was often difficult to pick up the packages of food the kids' school was offering while the campus was closed. Fortunately a neighborhood church ensured the family always had something to eat. She's now relieved to be working as a hotel housekeeper

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 91 of 95

and her sons Hugo, 14, and Adrian, 6, have returned to classes and two hot meals a day at the district's Valencia Newcomer School.

In Mississippi's impoverished Jefferson County, the school district for months has used aging school buses to deliver meals to the homes of remote learners. All 1,100 students in the district qualify for free school meals.

As districts reopen, including some with hybrid models where kids don't attend in person every day, schools are trying to ensure their access to food is consistent. As New York City works to get kids back in school, the school district has made students' meals available at pickup sites in the mornings. In the afternoons, families can also get free packaged meals and snacks available to the whole community.

Jennel Jerome, a New York school district supervisor, worries about students' nutrition when they aren't in class where staff can make sure they eat lunch and encourage them to grab an extra milk or fruit if they are still hungry.

"Now that we're not seeing them, there is that concern: what are they really getting to eat?" she asked.

The USDA has announced that during summer recess it will extend flexible food programs providing free meals to all children across the U.S. regardless of income.

OLDER ADULTS

Since the pandemic began, many older adults in the U.S. have turned to food banks, Meals on Wheels home deliveries and other charities to get enough to eat.

Daily meals at the local senior center are no longer an option during shutdowns and going to the grocery store may be dangerous. Many older people are cut off from family and friends trying to keep them safe.

Meals on Wheels programs that deliver food to homes were flooded with calls, while other programs also popped up to feed older adults nationwide. Meals on Wheels America said at the end of 2020 its branches nationwide were still serving on average 60% more seniors than before COVID-19.

Over \$1.675 billion in emergency funding has gone to nutrition programs under the Older Americans Act to pay for food, gas and drivers to deliver meals, along with masks, gloves and sanitizer to protect staff.

Jackie Robinson, a 66-year-old retired cook who once worked at a French Quarter restaurant in New Orleans, struggled to get by on his Social Security benefits before the pandemic, occasionally visiting a food pantry. But over the summer he signed up for a city-run delivery program and now gets two meals a day, seven days a week.

"Things were getting kind of tough, a little rough and ... I needed a little extra assistance," he said.

The New Orleans program pays local restaurants to make food that is delivered to people who qualify. It feeds 11,200 people including about 4,000 seniors and is a partnership between the city and FEMA designed to get food to people at a time when they were being encouraged to stay home. It isn't restricted to older adults, but officials had them in mind when they launched it last summer.

It's been renewed monthly since its inception in July. The city is planning a survey to get a sense of who will need help once the program ends so they can help them with things like applying for SNAP benefits or finding other food services.

"We've had quite a few people tell us that they would not have meals, they literally would not have food if not for the program," said Darnell Head, of Revolution Foods, which operates the program in New Orleans.

New Orleans resident Helen Smith Green, 76, uses a walker to get around and depended on her 96-year-old mother to cook for both of them before the older woman fell and went to an assisted living facility. Green now gets meals through the New Orleans program. Separately, she also gets a monthly food box delivered.

"I'm very thankful for these meals. It makes a big difference in your life, you know," she said.

With vaccinations hopefully hastening an end to the pandemic, advocates working with older adults who are food insecure worry the increase in clients won't abate when the outbreak does.

Economic recovery for people over 60 could be slower and more difficult. It's often harder for unemployed older adults to find work and they have fewer years to pull themselves out of poverty exacerbated by the pandemic.

Erin Kee who tracks nutrition issues for the National Council on Aging, said even before the pandemic only about half of the older adults eligible sign up for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which lets people buy groceries at a store. While some don't know about the program, others are ashamed to use it or struggle with the paperwork, she said.

Robert Blancato, executive director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs, said in a January survey that 90% of its members were still serving more people than before the pandemic, and most worried funds would run out.

"Once the pandemic ends, people go back to their normal business, and again, seniors won't be on the radar," said Al Robichaux who heads the Jefferson Parish Council on Aging based in the New Orleans suburbs.

Terry and Barbara Jackson, who live in the town of Marrero, count on the home meals they started receiving from the council's delivery program. He is blind and has diabetes and congestive heart failure while his wife suffers from Alzheimer's and dementia.

"We get Social Security and disability, both of us," Terry Jackson said. "It barely gets us by."

Holy Thursday service held at fire-ravaged Notre Dame

PARIS (AP) — A Holy Thursday service in Paris was held at Notre Dame cathedral, which is still under construction after it was ravaged by flames just days before Easter in 2019, its spire crumbling in a shocking blaze.

The ceremony involved a foot-washing ritual that symbolizes Jesus' willingness to serve. Six worshipers were chosen for the foot washing, a diverse group including medical staff, the needy and some people who are set to be baptized this Easter.

Paris Bishop Michel Aupetit led the rite, accompanied by Notre-Dame's rector Patrick Chauvet.

Attendance at the service was sharply restricted due to the cathedral's reconstruction and the pandemic.

Migrants freed without court notice — sometimes no paperwork

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

MISSION, Texas (AP) — Overwhelmed and underprepared, U.S. authorities are releasing migrant families on the Mexican border without notices to appear in immigration court or sometimes without any paperwork at all — time-saving moves that have left some migrants confused.

The rapid releases ease pressure on the Border Patrol and its badly overcrowded holding facilities but shifts work to Immigration and Customs and Enforcement, the agency that enforces immigration laws within the United States. Families are released with booking records; only parents are photographed and fingerprinted.

The Border Patrol began the unusual practice last week in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, which has seen the biggest increase in the number of migrant families and unaccompanied minors crossing the border. Last week, the agency added instructions to report to an ICE office within 60 days to adults' booking documents.

But some got no documents at all, including dozens at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in the Texas border city of Mission, where about 100 migrants released by U.S. authorities had been arriving each night to sleep on mats in classrooms in a shuttered elementary school.

Carlos Enrique Linga, 27, waited at the shelter for a week without documents along with his 5-year-old daughter, hoping to join a friend in Tennessee. His wife is still in Guatemala with their 2-year-old twin daughters and a 3-month-old.

Linga was unwilling to leave the shelter until he got documents and was asking Catholic Charities of Rio Grande Valley for help.

"We hope they can help with our papers so that we can move on, work and send (money) to my family," said Linga, whose home in Guatemala was destroyed by storms in November. "The church has told us that there are mistakes sometimes. Because there are so many people, they forget."

Customs and Border Protection, which oversees the Border Patrol, said it stopped issuing court notices

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 93 of 95

in some cases because preparing even one of the documents often takes hours. Migrants undergo background checks and are tested for COVID-19.

The agency didn't answer questions about how many migrants have been released without court notices or without documents at all.

Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of Rio Grande Valley, knows of 10 to 15 families released without any paperwork since last week, an issue that has cropped up before when there are large increases in new arrivals.

"It's a problem, it's a situation we need to resolve, to make sure we follow up," she said.

Migrants will be issued notices to appear in court at their 60-day check-ins with ICE, according to a U.S. official with direct knowledge of the plans who spoke on condition of anonymity because the plans have not been made public. It is unclear how widespread the practice has been, but it is very common in Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings.

Preparing a court appearance notice can take an hour to 90 minutes, said Chris Cabrera, spokesman for the National Border Patrol Council, a union that represents agents. He welcomed the change.

"Honestly, from my end, I think it's good because it's less paperwork for our guys," said Cabrera, who works in the Rio Grande Valley.

An uptick in the number of people crossing the border, especially children traveling alone and families, has filled up federal holding facilities. The U.S. has been releasing families with children 6 and under and expelling families with older children under pandemic-related powers that deny an opportunity to seek asylum.

Immigration attorneys had mixed reactions to people being released without court notices or paperwork, particularly the requirement to check in with ICE. They advise migrants to apply for a different route to asylum — one that's only for people already in the country. In that option, they meet a Citizenship and Immigration Services asylum officer in a less adversarial environment and if denied, can appeal to an immigration judge, advocates say.

"It's a whole different tone," said Charlene D'Cruz, director of Lawyers for Good Government's Project Corazon legal aid program. And if they fail, they get "a second bite at the apple" before a judge.

Initially, U.S. authorities didn't even require the ICE check-in when it began releasing families without court notices over the past two weeks. But they shifted course. D'Cruz said ICE could potentially issue a notice to appear in court, expel people from the country or do nothing.

"There are so many different options, and I don't know what's going to happen," D'Cruz said.

The immigration courts, with a backlog of 1.3 million cases, is ill-prepared for a large increase in new asylum claims.

At the shelter in Mission, a city of about 85,000 people bordering Mexico with a large park known for birdlife, migrants who have booking records closely guarded them. Along with their proof of a COVID-19 test, the documents are kept in large yellow envelopes that say, "Please help me. I do not speak English."

Information on the booking form is sparse: name, nationality, gender, date of birth. Some forms say they are eligible for "prosecutorial discretion," a designation that signals they are not a priority for deportation.

Jose Sansario waited at the shelter for a week after coming from Guatemala with his wife, Kimberly, and their 3-year-old daughter, Genesee. They had difficulty finding flights to Richmond, Virginia, their final destination.

They left their homeland in early March because a gang threatened to kill him if he didn't hand over money from his auto repair business. He said he heard the Biden administration was friendly to immigrants, despite repeated statements from the president and top aides that the border is not open.

"We didn't know what was true, but we had faith — faith that God would help us and that faith would allow us in," Sansario said.

Alba Urquia of El Salvador waited for a week at the shelter because she was released without any documents after crossing the Rio Grande with a large group of migrants, including her 4-year-old daughter. She plans to help her father with his car repair shop in Los Angeles.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 94 of 95

"I can't leave," she said, sitting on a bench in the shuttered school's playground. The shelter has since closed. "Our fear is that they return us to Mexico or to our country."

"That would be a nightmare," said Alexi Sarmiento of Honduras, who came to the U.S. with her 6- and 9-year-old daughters and was released without documents.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, April 2, the 92nd day of 2021. There are 273 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 2, 1792, Congress passed the Coinage Act, which authorized establishment of the U.S. Mint.

On this date:

In 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis and most of his Cabinet fled the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, because of advancing Union forces.

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war against Germany, saying, "The world must be made safe for democracy." (Congress declared war four days later.)

In 1932, aviator Charles A. Lindbergh and John F. Condon went to a cemetery in The Bronx, New York, where Condon turned over \$50,000 to a man in exchange for Lindbergh's kidnapped son. (The child, who was not returned, was found dead the following month.)

In 1968, "2001: A Space Odyssey," the groundbreaking science-fiction film epic produced and directed by Stanley Kubrick and starring Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood, had its world premiere in Washington, D.C.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed into law a windfall profits tax on the oil industry. (The tax was repealed in 1988.)

In 1982, several thousand troops from Argentina seized the disputed Falkland Islands, located in the south Atlantic, from Britain. (Britain seized the islands back the following June.)

In 1986, four American passengers, including an 8-month-old girl, her mother and grandmother, were killed when a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a TWA jetliner en route from Rome to Athens, Greece.

In 2002, Israel seized control of Bethlehem; Palestinian gunmen forced their way into the Church of the Nativity, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, where they began a 39-day standoff.

In 2003, during the Iraq War, American forces fought their way to within sight of the Baghdad skyline.

In 2005, Pope John Paul II died in his Vatican apartment at age 84.

In 2007, in its first case on climate change, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*, ruled 5-4 that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases were air pollutants under the Clean Air Act.

In 2019, former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot won the runoff election for Chicago mayor, becoming the first Black woman and the first openly gay person to lead the nation's third-largest city. Police near Los Angeles arrested a man they said had fatally shot rapper Nipsey Hussle and evaded authorities for two days; police said the two men knew each other and had some sort of personal dispute in the hours before the rapper was killed.

Ten years ago: Highly radioactive water leaked into the sea from a crack at Japan's stricken nuclear power plant; meanwhile, earthquake-tsunami survivors complained that the government was not paying enough attention to victims.

Five years ago: Mormon leaders meeting in Salt Lake City called on church members to practice tolerance despite political differences, providing guidance at a conference amid a presidential campaign between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton that was marked by harsh rhetoric and bickering.

One year ago: The number of confirmed coronavirus cases worldwide passed the 1 million mark, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. The captain of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier facing a coronavirus outbreak was fired after widely distributing a memo pleading for help; Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 2, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 270 ~ 95 of 95

Capt. Brett Crozier had demonstrated "poor judgment" in a crisis. (Modly himself would resign days later after facing a backlash over his harsh criticism of Crozier in remarks to the ship's crew.) The government said more than 6.6 million Americans had applied for unemployment benefits in the preceding week, doubling a record high set just a week earlier.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Sharon Acker is 86. Actor Dame Penelope Keith is 81. Actor Linda Hunt is 76. Singer Emmylou Harris is 74. Actor Sam Anderson is 74. Social critic and author Camille Paglia is 74. Actor Pamela Reed is 72. Rock musician Dave Robinson (The Cars) is 72. Country singer Buddy Jewell is 60. Actor Christopher Meloni is 60. Singer Keren Woodward (Bananarama) is 60. Country singer Billy Dean is 59. Actor Clark Gregg is 59. Actor Jana Marie Hupp is 57. Rock musician Greg Camp is 54. Actor Roselyn Sanchez is 48. Country singer Jill King is 46. Actor Pedro Pascal is 46. Actor Adam Rodriguez is 46. Actor Michael Fassbender is 44. Actor Jaime Ray Newman is 43. Rock musician Jesse Carmichael (Maroon 5) is 42. Actor Bethany Joy Lenz is 40. Singer Lee Dewyze (TV: "American Idol") is 35. Country singer Chris Janson is 35. Actor Drew Van Acker is 35. Actor Briga Heelan (TV: "Great News") is 34. Actor Jesse Plemons is 33. Singer Aaron Kelly (TV: "American Idol") is 28.