

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Worship Services

**United Methodist, Groton:** Worship, 11 a.m.

**Emmanuel Lutheran, Groton:** Sunrise service w/ Communion, 7 a.m., 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.

**Saturday: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic:** 8:15 p.m.: Easter Vigil in Groton

**Sunday: Catholic Paris:** Mass at SEAS, Groton, 8:30 a.m.; Mass at St. Joseph, Turton, 11 a.m.

**Saturday: St. John's, Groton:** 4 p.m.: Circuit Easter Vigil Service

**Sunday:** Worship at Zion Lutheran, Andover, 7:30 a.m.; Worship at St. John's Lutheran, Groton, 9 a.m.

**Saturday, April 3:** Heaven Bound Ministries, Pierpont, 5:30 p.m.

**Sunday, April 4:** Buffalo Lake Lutheran 10:30 a.m.



## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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## South Dakota Severe Weather Preparedness Week is April 19-23

South Dakota Severe Weather Preparedness Week is April 19-23. The week is designed to refresh, remind and educate everyone about the seasonal threats from severe weather and how to avoid them.

A formal tornado drill will be part of the week and will occur on Wednesday, April 21. During this drill the National Weather Service (NWS) offices in South Dakota will send a test tornado watch at 10:00 am CDT and a test tornado warning at 10:15 am CDT. NOAA Weather Radio will tone alert. Local tornado drills/siren testing is the prerogative of local officials. Please contact your county emergency manager if you have any questions about siren activation within your communities.

We will also use social media to encourage the public to consider their severe weather safety plans and what they would do in the event of real severe weather. If possible, please help us promote weather safety during this week. Here are the daily topics as well as premade graphics that you are free to use the week of April 19-23 (and all season long!):

Monday: [Weather Alerts and Warnings](#)  
Tuesday: [Severe Storms Wind, Hail & Lightning](#)  
Wednesday: [Tornado Safety Information](#)  
Thursday: [Flash Floods](#)  
Friday: [Extreme Heat](#)  
[Additional safety information on all topics](#)

Another severe weather preparedness initiative that will occur during the month of April is the #safeplaceselfie campaign. This is a one day national effort on April 7th to encourage people across the United States to identify their safe place to shelter and to share a photo. Knowing the safest place to shelter is one of the most essential preparedness actions everyone can take. More information here:

<https://www.weather.gov/wrn/safeplaceselfie>.

## #SafePlaceSelfie

Join us on April 7, 2021

- Learn the weather hazards that happen in your area
- Find locations that will keep you safe and take a selfie
- On April 7, post your photo using #SafePlaceSelfie

safe place: interior hall

safe place: basement

weather.gov/SafePlaceSelfie



## Groton PEEPS Winners

Groton Area Elementary would like to thank Mrs. Dunker for organizing the Easter Peeps Contest and all 2nd and 5th grade students who participated. Pictured from left to right are Addison Hoeft-5th grade 3rd place winner with Mad Hater, Makenna Krause-5th grade 1st place winner with Peep School, Easton Weber/Owen Sperry-5th grade 2nd place winners with Peep Wreck, Micah Theisen-2nd grade 2nd place winner with World of Dinosaurs, Hank Hill-2nd grade Grand Champion with Peeps National Park, Brynlee Dunker-2nd grade 1st place winner with Three Little Bunnies, and Kinley Sandness-2nd grade 3rd place winner with Peeps Igloo. (Photo from grotonarea.com website)

# NOW HIRING

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

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**#404 in a series**

## **Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller**

The numbers remain high. We're up to 30,630,100 total cases in the US today, 0.2% more than yesterday. There were 69,500 new cases reported today. Hospitalizations are up a bit to 41,518. And deaths total 553,549 now, 0.2% more than yesterday. There were 964 deaths reported today.

On April 2, 2020, one year ago today, we had 234,483 cases and 5708 deaths. The first wave was starting to slow; cases continued to increase, but the rate of growth was declining. It would peak in the next week or two; and because it was driven by just a couple of hard-hit states that accounted for a good half of cases, when they began strict mitigation measures the overall picture improved even while cases were rising around the country. For quite some time, the declining numbers in New York and New Jersey masked these broader increases, and we started to think we were out of the woods; this was a serious miscalculation.

This was a period when most of the country was in some sort of shutdown or stay-at-home order—schools, businesses, churches, most activities—in the hope of stopping transmission. The idea was then to reopen things according to the amount of community transmission in an area. Thing is the shutdowns were never applied seriously where cases weren't scary-high and the reopening was completely willy-nilly; that means these were not highly successful in many parts of the country. There was a lot of economic pain imposed to little effect; we also failed to use the time this bought us to ramp up testing and contact tracing so we could respond more efficiently after reopening. The phrase, social distancing, had entered our vocabulary. As our awareness that asymptomatic, as well as symptomatic, people could spread the virus, even just by breathing in the same room with uninfected people, the CDC director said in an interview that the agency was reviewing guidelines and may recommend general mask use; it was a long time before we received official acknowledgement that this virus could spread in aerosols, even though this was the time when we began to know it.

We were still desperate for more testing. Medical supplies were becoming critical in numerous states. More temporary hospitals were opening; health care workers from around the country had moved to hot spots to augment beleaguered hospital staffs. Navy hospital ships were anchored off New York City and Los Angeles to relieve the burden on the health care system. Nursing homes had pretty much shut down visits. More and more schools were announcing closures would go to the end of the academic year. We were assured groceries were not a significant risk for transmission. Racist attacks on anyone who looked vaguely Asian to the attacker had ramped up; there were deaths from those too. Prisoners had begun to die. The USS Theodore Roosevelt, lying off Guam, was evacuated. The Democratic National Convention was pushed back a month to August. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, received his first death threats for doing his job and has required security ever since.

Worldwide, we passed a million cases with 1,002,159 from 180 countries the same day deaths passed the 50,000 mark. There had been 51,485 deaths. An ice rink was being used as a temporary morgue in the UK. Curfews and shutdowns were being imposed around the world: Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and Kenya, joined Germany, the UK, Italy, Spain, and France, among many others.

The trend we are seeing today is not a good one either. New cases have increased by 58 percent in the past two weeks, in the Northeast by 30 percent. The West is increasing slowly, and the South is declining, although Florida is showing danger signals. Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia are increasing, but some states are increasing very quickly: Michigan is up by 125 percent in the past two weeks, Puerto Rico is up by 116 percent, Nebraska by 61 percent, Illinois by 56 percent, Pennsylvania by 54 percent, and Minnesota by 53 percent. Vermont (75 percent) and North Dakota (63 percent) have large percentage increases, but it's difficult to interpret these data because the raw number of cases is so small that just a few cases can represent a large percentage one way or the other.

We should also note that in the Midwest and South, there's very little testing going on at the moment. In sufficient testing can mask a surge because we could simply be missing a lot of cases. Testing has declined because states are redirecting resources into vaccination. Also, there is little incentive to ramp

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up testing where there is pressure from the public to ease restrictions; it's easier to give in to the political imperative to open up if you don't have very many positive tests. One indication of insufficient testing is high test positivity—the percentage of tests that are coming back positive; positivities are high in several of these states.

Hospitalizations has also been increasing in the past week for the first time since the winter surge began to decline in January. Four states are spiking at 15 percent or more; those would be South Dakota, Michigan, Connecticut, and Maryland. This is a helpful metric to get a line on what's happening in a place where reduced testing might be muting the growth in cases; whether you're testing or not, there's no way to miss more sick people in beds.

We know what's happening here. People are relaxing their precautions, states are lifting restrictions, the B.1.1.7 variant is spreading. Operating against that is the increasing vaccination program and the fact that some proportion of residents have already been infected; while there's some overlap between the vaccinated and the previously infected, those two things are going to help to blunt a surge. It also helps that we are coming into spring where it is more reasonable and more likely that people will do at least some of their socializing outdoors where it is easier to mitigate and more difficult to spread. Although this shouldn't be happening at all, the better news is that few experts think this is going to be as bad as last time around. I would be more sanguine if I saw people doubling down on precautions instead of throwing caution to the wind. I'd also be happier if we didn't have a holiday weekend coming up; our track record of controlling ourselves over holidays hasn't been stellar so far. I think we're going to wring every drop of disaster out of this pandemic we can.

There is good news for fully vaccinated people: The CDC is now classifying travel by fully vaccinated people as low-risk as long as masking and other precautions are followed. They are adding that it is not necessary to either get tested or quarantine before or after traveling. I'm going to guess this is a consequence of the recent research showing vaccination is highly effective in preventing symptomatic infection and generally prevents even asymptomatic infections, which should greatly reduce transmission by vaccinated people. We are still advised not to go crazy while this surge builds, but some of the concerns around fully-vaccinated people have eased.

Janssen/Johnson & Johnson began its adolescent clinical trial today; included are children 12 to 17 years old. They are testing one-dose and two-dose regimens in this age group as they also run a two-dose trial in adults. I imagine any sort of read-out of data is at least several weeks off.

Today Moderna received a modification of the authorization for its vaccine; now they can put five additional doses in each vial for a total of 15 doses. Because obtaining vials and what's called fill and finish are two potential bottlenecks in the supply chain—production of the actual vaccine is running ahead of what they can bottle currently—being able to put additional doses in each vial boosts production capacity. Because the FDA had let the company know they favored this request, the company's been producing these 15-dose vials in anticipation of the approval. That mean they'll be ready to ship these quite soon. The agency also gave approval for squeezing an eleventh dose out of the current 10-dose vials, so those that are already out may represent a 10 percent increase in supply. This should help to offset any delays due to the quality control issue we talked about at Janssen/Johnson & Johnson's contractor for its vaccine.

I'd like to talk tonight a bit about SARS-CoV-1 and animals because there's some information coming together which may be relevant as we go along. The thing with viruses is that they typically are quite host-specific, that is, a given virus is limited in the hosts it can infect. This makes sense when you think about it: Viruses depend on the host cell for every damned thing, and they're pretty simple critters, so they don't have a wide array of techniques for getting inside those host cells. They must bind to the cell, gain entry, and then take over the cell's machinery to replicate; a virus will have a fairly limited set of tools for accomplishing this, and the tools will be quite specific to the preferred host. Host cells very different from the preferred host's cells are generally inaccessible to a virus because they lack the binding sites the virus needs; even if it can bind, it must then evade the host's immune response, get inside, and replicate. The upshot of this is that, generally, a virus can infect only one or a small number of fairly closely-related

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species; in fact, it can often infect only a certain kind of cells within a particular host—cells with certain markers or substances on their surfaces that act as binding sites.

That makes zoonotic viruses most unusual. A zoonosis is a disease that can spread from animals to people, and while we see some transmission from closely related primates to humans, we don't see a ton of transmission from less related animals to people. Coronaviruses are of interest because they're an exception to the usual run of things; all of the known coronaviruses are animal viruses, and several of them have made the jump to humans. We've recognized for a long time that this ability to jump species poses real risks, which is why for many years epidemiologists and virologists have been warning us of the potential for a coronavirus to jump species, present the immune systems of the world with a new and dangerous challenge, and cause a worldwide pandemic before we figure out how to deal with it. Like now. A lot of smart people saw this coming.

All of the coronaviruses we know of are bat viruses, and typically the wild-type ones circulating among bats are not equipped to pose a significant challenge to a human. But we've talked about the way random mutation can, in a one in a zillion sort of event, present a virus with an enhanced capability; one of the enhanced capabilities you might see is the ability to infect a new host. What we think happened with this particular virus—whatever route it traveled, a matter up for some debate these days—is that it mutated sufficiently to jump to some intermediate non-bat host and then mutated sufficiently to jump again, this time to humans. There are people who can read the sequence of mutations in the genome of a virus, and they're busy trying to track down the intermediate host by studying genomes of a lot of other related viruses, looking for clues.

Because lots of transmissions produce an increased number of mutations and some minute percentage of mutations might enhance a virus's capabilities, one of those capabilities we're very interested in these days (in addition to all of the possibilities that will make more of us sick or kill more of us) is the capability to jump species again—because if this virus makes its way into a new animal host, that host could act as what's called a reservoir of infection, sort of a storehouse for virus, from which it could reemerge at some future date after we think we have this virus under control. Worse, there is the possibility it emerges having mutated further into an even scarier form that makes this one look like a putz. No one really wants that.

As a result, one of the things folks are interested in is our relationships with bats. Now in a good share of the world, most folks don't have little pet bats or try to farm them or anything, but there still are people who interact with them: bat researchers, wildlife control workers, and people who rehabilitate injured bats. It is difficult to evaluate the risk such a worker with Covid-19 might infect a bat, but we can't dismiss the possibility. Guidelines for handling bats have been proposed. The greater risk is that there are parts of the world where people hunt bats for food or to capture and raise them for sale as food. In rural areas of countries like China, people traditionally ate bats as part of a subsistence lifestyle; but now that the country is urbanizing and trying to raise the economic status of the population, it's become a status symbol to eat wildlife, so bats are shipped across the country for consumption by the well-to-do. The hunting, farming, and shipping of bats presents many opportunities for contact between humans and the animals, and that all raises the risk profile.

What's the risk of bats acquiring the virus from humans? According to two federal agencies, "non-negligible." Something to consider. We do not know that North American bats can become infected—doesn't mean they can't, but it means we don't know. Researchers in Hong Kong have managed to produce laboratory infection of cells from the Chinese rufous horseshoe bat, and German researchers at the Institute of Diagnostic Virology, the Institute of Novel and Emerging Infectious Diseases, and the Department of Experimental Animal Facilities and Biorisk Management at Greifswald-Insel Riems, Germany, have experimentally infected fruit bats with the virus. So there are susceptible bat species out there.

There are two possibilities with all of this contact: (1) that the bats acquire infection with this virus which has mutated from the wild-type virus that came from other bats and then serve as a reservoir for the reintroduction of the virus into human populations after we've brought it under control, and (2) that the virus, while residing in this bat reservoir, continues to mutate into a new, more lethal or more transmissible

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form or an immune escape we're not prepared to deal with. None of that would be good.

We've seen that big apes can be infected; we've talked about an outbreak in the mountain gorilla troop at the San Diego Zoo; these infections were undoubtedly acquired from human caretakers. Humans and great apes are so genetically similar that there are many diseases which can be cross-transmitted, so this is not a big surprise despite the efforts made to prevent such transmission at the zoo. There have also been cases of domestic and big cats infected from human caretakers, so there's more evidence of this virus's versatility in hosts. And there has been the very occasional example of transmission to pet dogs. In June, Buddy, a pet dog in the US died from Covid-19; but he did suffer from lymphoma before that, so it is likely that was the primary contributing factor in his demise.

We have seen no evidence at all of transmission back to humans from any of these, so the primary consideration here is to prevent transmission from humans to the pets. For that reason, from early on, we've been recommending infected people have someone else in the household care for pets for the duration. If you're in a single-person household, it is recommended you avoid cuddling and close contact with the pet and wear a mask when interacting. Overall, cats and dogs have had mild infections with few, if any, long-term consequences, but there may be some changes since the advent of B.1.1.7. There was a report of some severe cardiac abnormalities secondary to myocarditis in cats and dogs infected with B.1.1.7 without any particular respiratory symptoms, but with serious impairment of the general health of the animals. They do tend to improve with rest, oxygen, diuresis (drugs to increase urine production and decrease fluid retention), and anti-arrhythmic therapy (to treat abnormal heart rhythms). These have been rare, but merit consideration.

Then there are the mink. The mink is the single animal most seriously affected by infection with this virus; when outbreaks have occurred on mink farms, the results have been devastating with huge mortality rates. Worse, this is the one animal known to have acquired an infection from a human and also to pass it back to another human, an event that occurred just once to the best of our knowledge on a mink farm in Denmark. What's more, there has been a report (in December) of a wild mink infected by a farmed mink in Utah. The case was turned up as part of routine surveillance around farms with infected animals, and the virus isolated from the wild animal was a genomic match the one seen on the farm; so there's little doubt as to the source. No other infected wild animals were detected; but there's a worry. We really do not need a reservoir established in an animal with such a wide range across the continent.

There has also been concern about the black-footed ferret, a close mink relative. These are very endangered in the wild, and if the virus should make its way into this rather limited population and produce as severe disease as it does in mink, it could cause serious problems for the species.

Now we're seeing something else: There is a paper available in preprint (so not yet peer-reviewed) which indicates the P.1 and B.1.351 variants have extended the virus's host range to mice. That's a new thing; mice have not been susceptible to the original wild-type virus or to the other variants. This is disquieting. We knew mutations can lead to new hosts: That's how we got into this mess in the first place, after all. To be clear, no mice have been found infected in the wild; the infections seen were experimentally induced laboratory infections. We also have no evidence that humans and mice can transmit across species to one another. Since most of us aren't snuggling up at night with mice the way we might be with household pets, the current thinking is not that rodents will play an important role in the pandemic; but it does point up the need to continue surveillance for further extensions in host range. As we've already pointed out, establishment of a reservoir in another species offers opportunity for dangerous mutations to emerge; and I've had enough of those, thanks.

A couple of over-the-counter at-home tests will now be sold without a prescription. The tests read out at home in 10 to 20 minutes. One will cost under \$10 per test; I have not seen pricing information on the other one. I don't know whether this price point will encourage people to frequently test at home; we will soon find out.

Like many towns around the country, Miami, Oklahoma, took an economic hit during the pandemic—hours cut, jobs gone, business down. A couple of blizzards over the winter added to the hardship. Something

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that popped up along the way in first one restaurant, then more and more—spreading sort of like a virus does—is the “receipt wall,” a place to pick up a pre-paid meal if you’re down on your luck and hungry. Customers buy the meals and tape the receipts up in the designated space; anyone who needs a meal can come in, peel one off the wall, and sit down to dinner without worrying about how to pay for it.

The first restaurant to try the concept, The Dawg House, which sells gourmet hot dogs, had a wall full of receipts within eight hours of setting it up. Most customers routinely buy an extra meal; there are customers who buy two and regulars who’ve bought 10 and even as many as 50 meals at a time; even some of the restaurants’ vendors chip in. During the time when there wasn’t in-person dining at all, the receipts kept coming. A former waiter at Zack’s Café told the AP she saw \$600 go up on the wall at Zack’s in a day; still, “We were having a hard time keeping tickets on the wall.” Some recipients are homeless; others are just in need of some short-term help. The owner of The Dawg House says she’s had recipients who’d just needed a meal to get to the next paycheck come back in after payday and put meals back on the wall for the next person. This little town of 13,000 is just taking care of one another. Not a bad place to live.

Take care. We’ll talk again.



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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	459	439	903	15	Minimal	12.0%
Beadle	2867	2789	6171	40	Substantial	10.7%
Bennett	386	374	1211	9	Minimal	3.6%
Bon Homme	1514	1479	2167	26	Moderate	5.0%
Brookings	3862	3679	12675	37	Substantial	6.0%
Brown	5322	5145	13303	91	Substantial	9.4%
Brule	702	690	1925	9	Minimal	2.7%
Buffalo	423	409	909	13	Minimal	5.3%
Butte	1010	984	3343	20	Minimal	1.3%
Campbell	131	127	268	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1352	1297	4112	21	Substantial	3.8%
Clark	419	390	984	5	Substantial	12.5%
Clay	1873	1823	5686	15	Substantial	9.7%
Codington	4221	4065	10097	80	Substantial	15.8%
Corson	476	462	1027	12	Minimal	0.0%
Custer	787	761	2815	12	Moderate	9.6%
Davison	3124	2967	6896	66	Substantial	17.9%
Day	678	642	1868	29	Moderate	16.0%
Deuel	495	479	1181	8	Moderate	0.0%
Dewey	1442	1409	3975	26	Minimal	2.0%
Douglas	448	431	952	9	Minimal	15.4%
Edmunds	493	474	1102	13	Minimal	6.7%
Fall River	566	541	2749	15	Moderate	7.6%
Faulk	365	351	713	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	1009	956	2365	42	Moderate	15.3%
Gregory	573	531	1345	30	Moderate	4.9%
Haakon	260	249	563	10	None	0.0%
Hamlin	751	699	1867	38	Moderate	6.2%
Hand	354	347	864	6	Minimal	0.0%
Hanson	380	372	761	4	Minimal	14.3%
Harding	92	91	188	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2376	2310	6847	37	Moderate	1.4%
Hutchinson	846	779	2491	26	Substantial	23.4%

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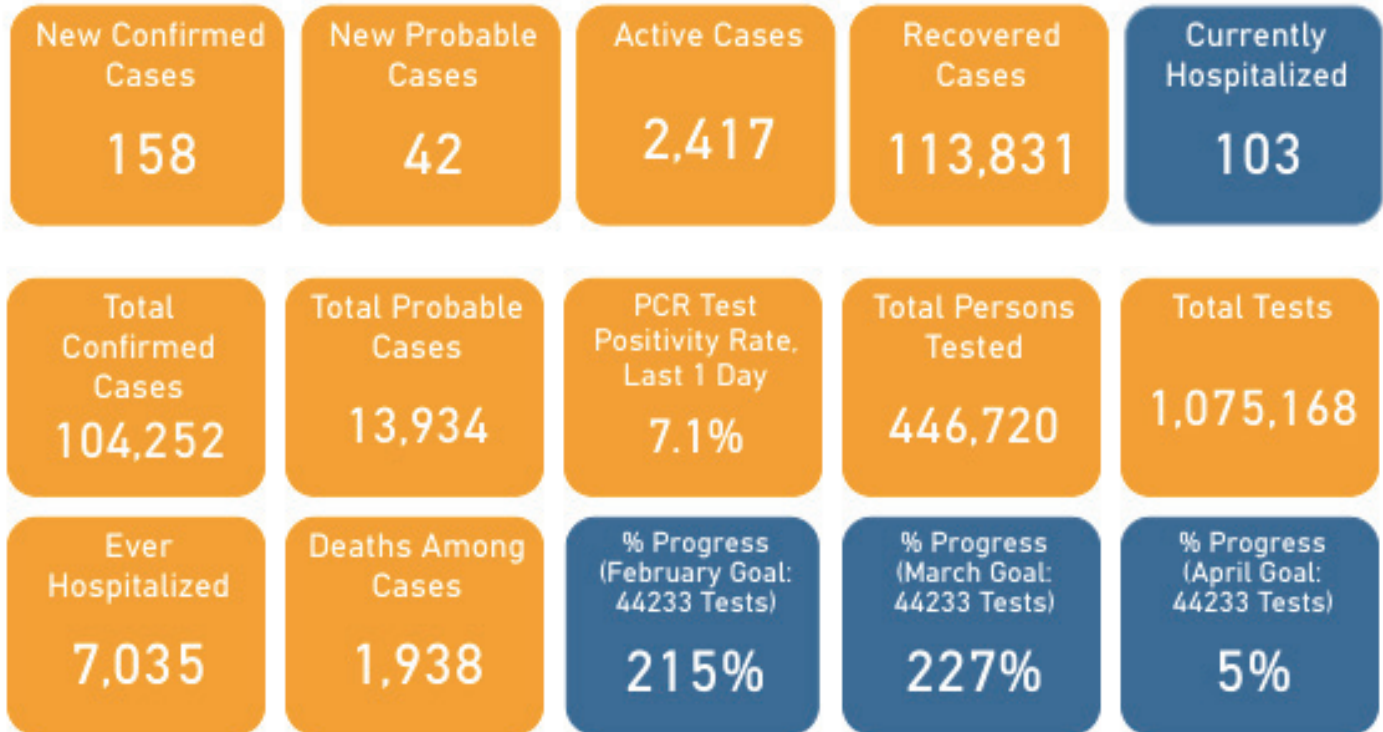
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Hyde	140	137	435	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	285	269	937	14	None	0.0%
Jerauld	274	257	581	16	Minimal	9.1%
Jones	93	91	240	0	Minimal	11.1%
Kingsbury	740	662	1762	14	Substantial	20.4%
Lake	1307	1250	3583	18	Substantial	18.0%
Lawrence	2895	2828	8798	45	Moderate	4.7%
Lincoln	8262	7976	21247	77	Substantial	13.1%
Lyman	626	603	1955	11	Moderate	10.8%
Marshall	364	351	1263	6	Moderate	0.0%
McCook	796	747	1737	24	Moderate	9.7%
McPherson	240	236	587	4	None	0.0%
Meade	2698	2639	8009	31	Moderate	7.1%
Mellette	254	252	765	2	None	0.0%
Miner	292	272	607	9	Moderate	15.4%
Minnehaha	29905	28678	82160	344	Substantial	13.9%
Moody	626	605	1825	17	Minimal	0.0%
Oglala Lakota	2089	2029	6813	49	Minimal	1.7%
Pennington	13267	12964	40843	191	Moderate	6.0%
Perkins	352	337	847	14	Minimal	5.9%
Potter	388	383	871	4	Minimal	4.0%
Roberts	1316	1245	4332	38	Substantial	12.9%
Sanborn	339	333	717	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	825	790	2210	26	Moderate	6.2%
Stanley	339	337	981	2	Minimal	4.8%
Sully	137	133	330	3	None	0.0%
Todd	1219	1187	4248	29	Minimal	0.0%
Tripp	740	708	1538	17	Moderate	9.1%
Turner	1133	1056	2847	54	Substantial	9.5%
Union	2152	2042	6642	41	Substantial	12.0%
Walworth	757	724	1881	15	Moderate	11.5%
Yankton	2939	2840	9800	28	Substantial	11.8%
Ziebach	341	329	900	9	Minimal	9.1%
Unassigned	0	0	1920	0		

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## South Dakota



### AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4935	0
10-19 years	13643	0
20-29 years	20860	7
30-39 years	19483	19
40-49 years	16947	38
50-59 years	16601	116
60-69 years	13483	259
70-79 years	7072	443
80+ years	5162	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

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## Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

6

New Probable Cases

2

Active Cases

86

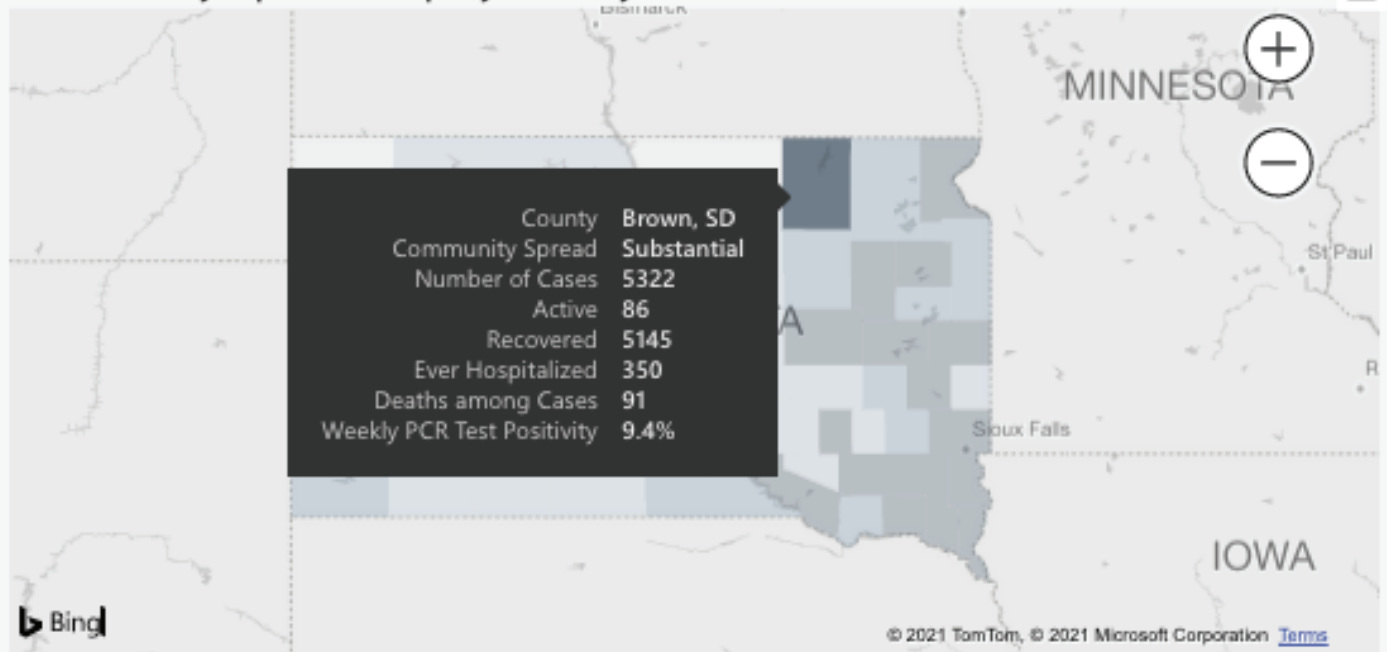
Recovered Cases

5,145

Currently Hospitalized

103

### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

Total Confirmed Cases

4,706

Total Probable Cases

616

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

15.0%

Total Persons Tested

18,625

Total Tests

52,063

Ever Hospitalized

350

Deaths Among Cases

91

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

215%

% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)

227%

% Progress (April Goal: 44233 Tests)

5%

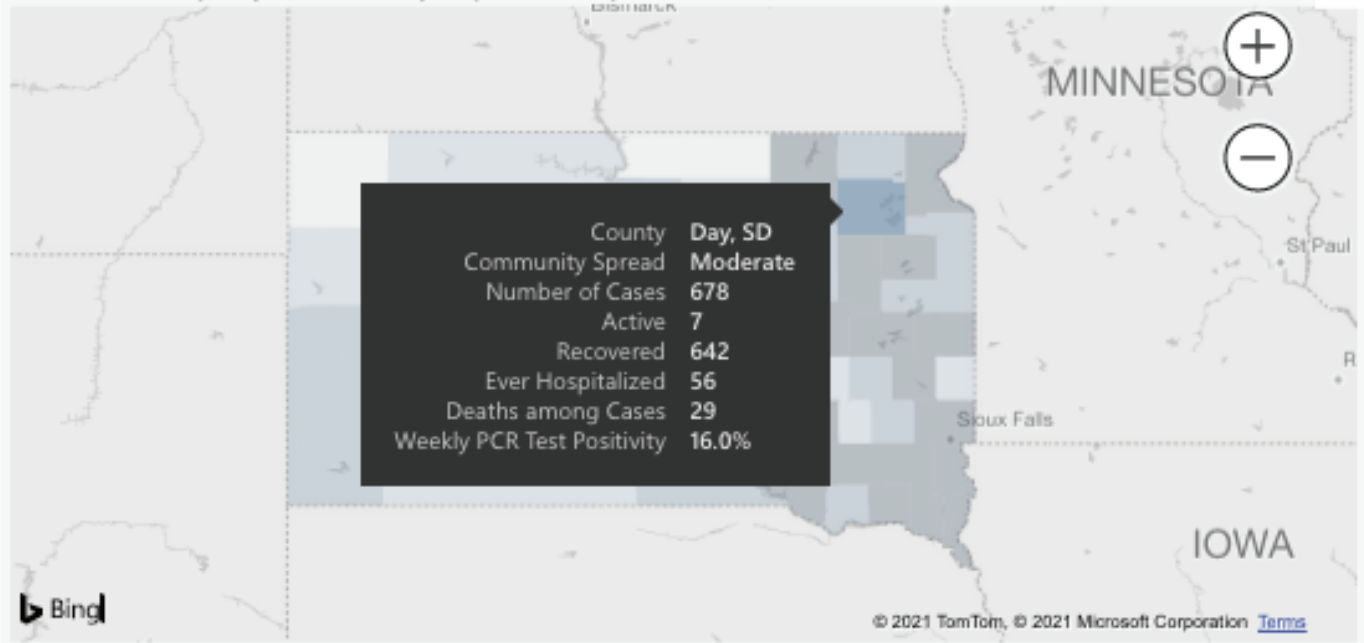
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## Day County

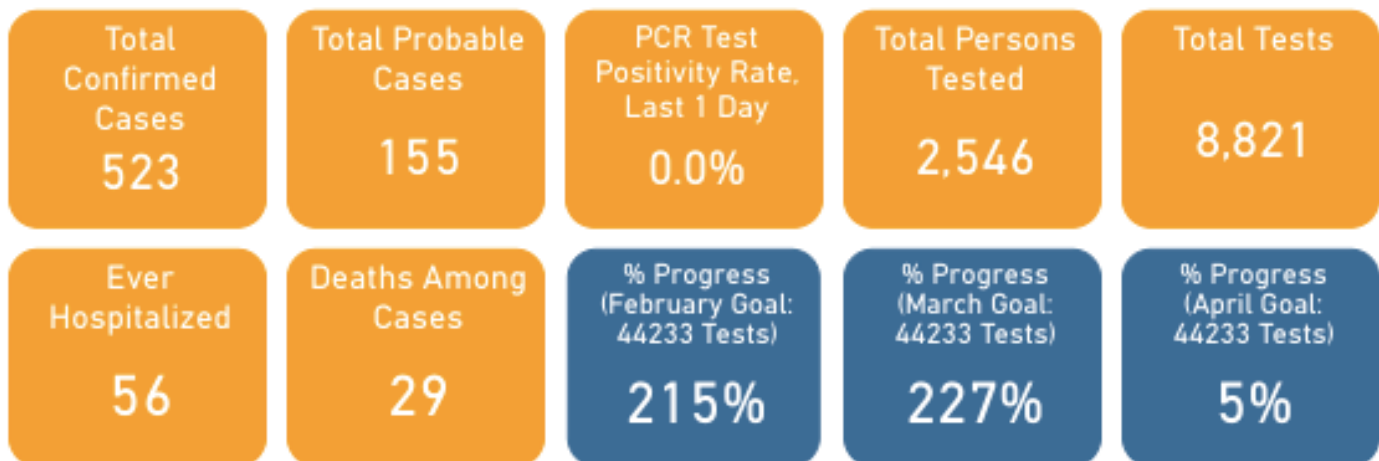


### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

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



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## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered\*

432,795

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine\*

264,826

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose\*\*

45%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	8,985
Moderna	202,818
Pfizer	220,992

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	8,985
Moderna - 1 dose	44,773
Moderna - Series Complete	79,022
Pfizer - 1 dose	43,116
Pfizer - Series Complete	88,938

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	44.64%
Series Complete	30.06%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,279	397	441	838
Beadle	9,380	2,467	3,456	5,923
Bennett*	609	119	245	364
Bon Homme*	4,635	715	1,960	2,675
Brookings	14,327	4,673	4,827	9,500
Brown	21,090	4,582	8,254	12,836
Brule*	2,334	410	962	1,372
Buffalo*	156	76	40	116
Butte	3,155	819	1,168	1,987
Campbell	1,336	182	577	759
Charles Mix*	4,073	1,133	1,470	2,603
Clark	1,752	528	612	1,140
Clay	7,195	2,365	2,415	4,780
Codington*	13,742	3,940	4,901	8,841
Corson*	372	52	160	212
Custer*	3,854	720	1,567	2,287
Davison	10,702	2,980	3,861	6,841
Day*	3,438	762	1,338	2,100
Deuel	2,105	537	784	1,321
Dewey*	448	78	185	263
Douglas*	1,591	381	605	986
Edmunds	1,907	325	791	1,116
Fall River*	3,389	556	1,416	1,972
Faulk	1,433	351	541	892
Grant*	4,098	654	1,722	2,376
Gregory*	2,271	513	879	1,392
Haakon*	685	87	299	386

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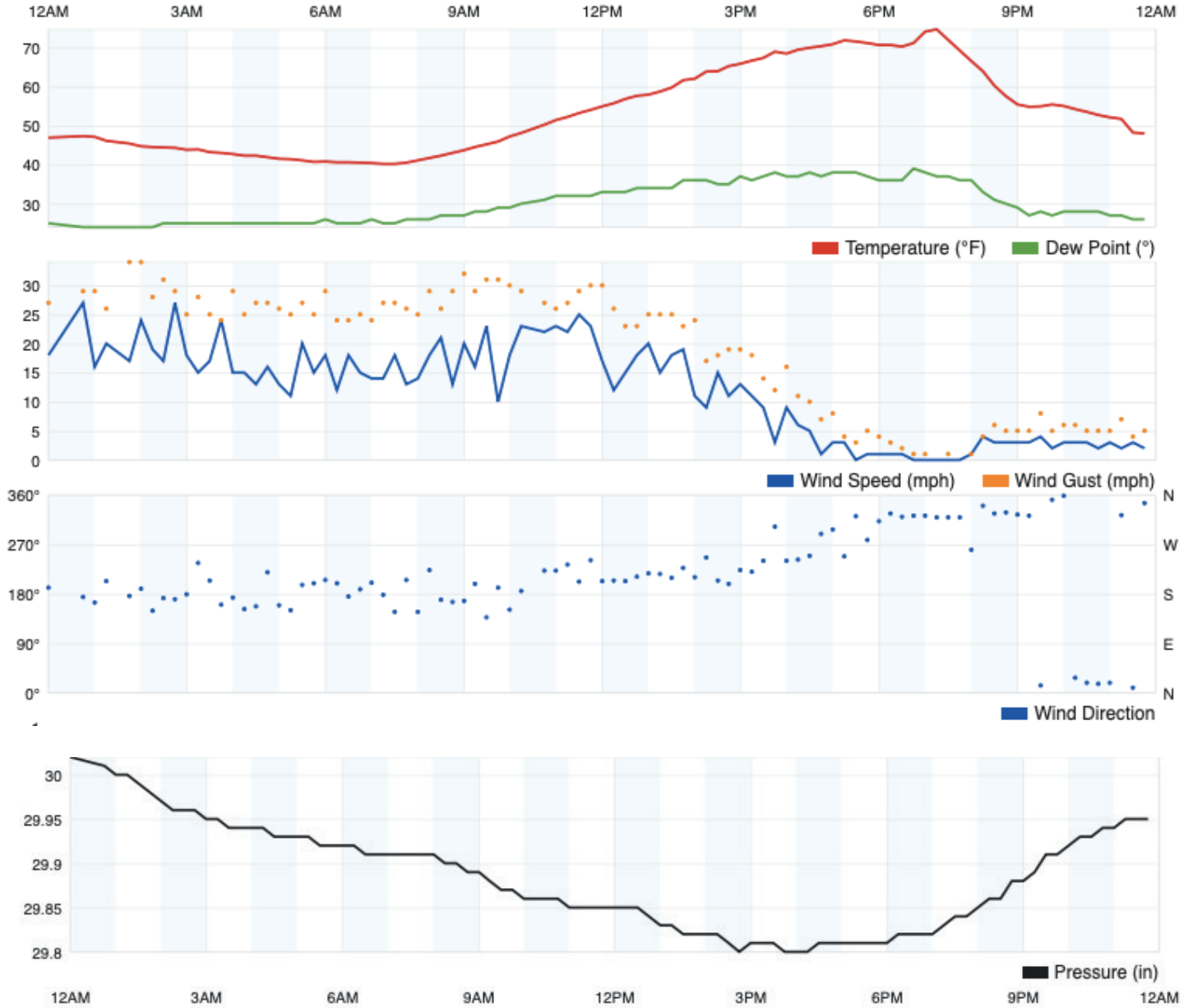
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Hamlin	2,410	664	873	1,537
Hand	1,943	549	697	1,246
Hanson	754	232	261	493
Harding	164	52	56	108
Hughes*	10,603	2,299	4,152	6,451
Hutchinson*	4,620	1,105	1,757	2,862
Hyde*	695	133	281	414
Jackson*	516	98	209	307
Jerauld	1,231	289	471	760
Jones*	802	110	346	456
Kingsbury	3,401	979	1,211	2,190
Lake	6,162	1,962	2,100	4,062
Lawrence	11,765	3,167	4,299	7,466
Lincoln	34,750	6,775	13,987	20,762
Lyman*	1,078	240	419	659
Marshall*	2,362	770	796	1,566
McCook	3,011	669	1,171	1,840
McPherson	347	59	144	203
Meade*	8,687	1,745	3,471	5,216
Mellette*	60	6	27	33
Miner	1,238	316	461	777
Minnehaha*	111,493	23,300	44,094	67,394
Moody*	2,538	606	966	1,572
Oglala Lakota*	231	45	93	138
Pennington*	49,232	8,564	20,334	28,898
Perkins*	852	202	325	527
Potter	1,286	300	493	793
Roberts*	5,518	948	2,285	3,233
Sanborn	1,411	389	511	900
Spink	4,091	779	1,656	2,435
Stanley*	1,579	293	643	936
Sully	515	117	199	316
Todd*	219	41	89	130
Tripp*	2,619	407	1,106	1,513
Turner	4,665	907	1,879	2,786
Union	4,651	1,551	1,550	3,101
Walworth*	2,431	469	981	1,450
Yankton	13,023	2,865	5,079	7,944
Ziebach*	73	15	29	44
Other	8,413	2,447	2,983	5,430

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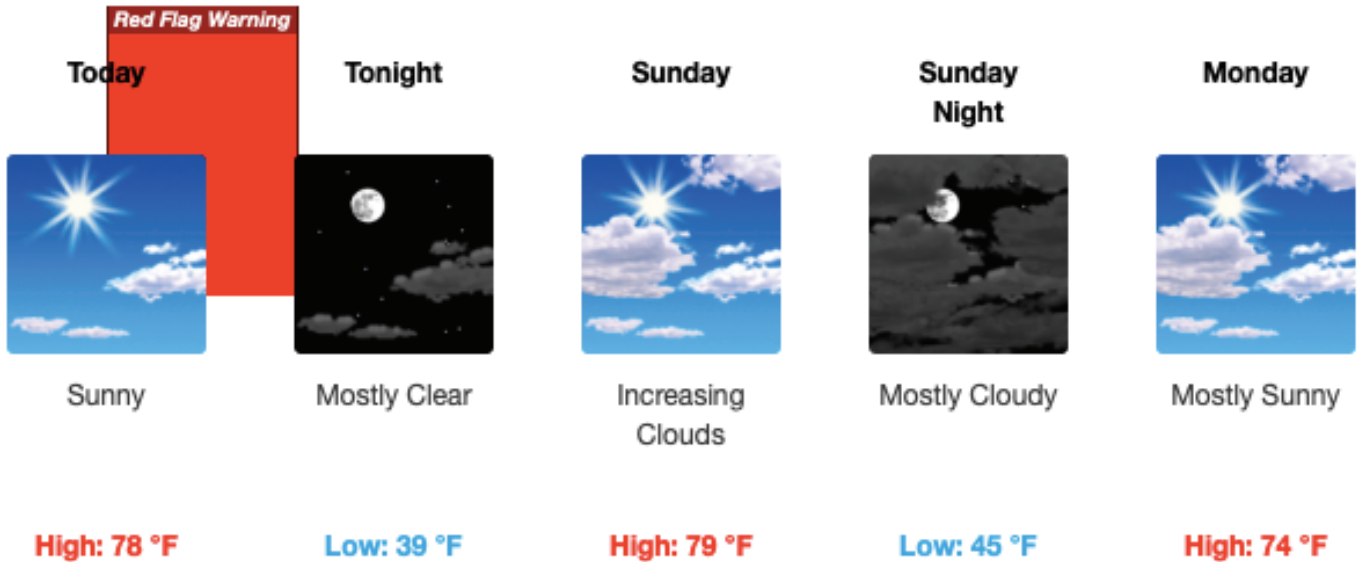
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





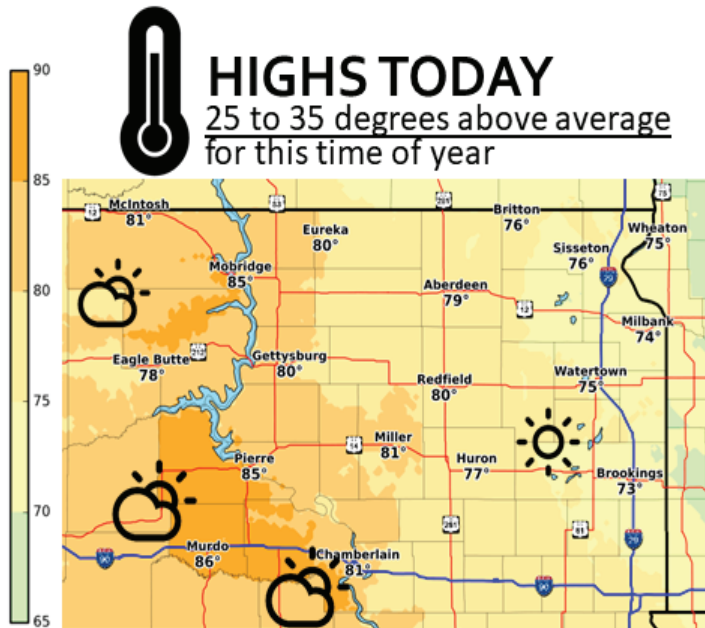
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## Very Warm and Dry Weekend

see current forecast at [weather.gov/abr](http://weather.gov/abr)



**Very dry & Dry**  
Relative humidity values in the teens  
Winds increasing out of the south 10 to 20 mph  
with **gusts 25 to 35 mph this afternoon** –  
strongest over central South Dakota.

**Red Flag Warning today**

**National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD** Updated: 4/3/2021 4:48 AM Central

Near record high temperatures, very dry conditions, and winds gusting 25 to 35mph this afternoon will result in another critical fire weather day across the region. The worst conditions, with the strongest winds this afternoon, will be over portions of central South Dakota. Be very cautious with any outdoor activities that could create sparks.

## Planning On Burning? Know Your Limits.

- Don't burn when windy or during low humidity
- Know local burn bans and regulations



weather.gov

Have some burning to do? Wait until we get into a more humid pattern, with light winds. Many counties in the area have active Burn Bans. More information of the Burn Ban for Brown County can be found here... <https://www.brown.sd.us/emergency-management/home>

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## Today in Weather History

April 3, 1968: Heavy snowfall, up to ten inches, was accompanied by winds of over 60 mph in parts of South Dakota. Snowdrifts of up to 4 feet were reported, and many roads were closed. Aberdeen was one of the hardest hit areas with 10.5 inches of snow and wind gusts of 62 mph. The strong winds and localized areas of icing caused considerable damage to utility lines.

April 3, 2003: Dry vegetation, along with windy conditions, caused a grassland burn northeast of Bath, near the James River in South Dakota, to get out of control during the early afternoon hours. Strong north to northeast winds of 20 to 35 mph caused the fire to spread quickly south along the James River. The fire became one and a half miles wide and burned six miles to the south before it was brought under control. A total of 4,000 acres were consumed. The smoke from the fire could be seen from miles around and lowered visibilities enough to close State Highway 12 two different times. At one point, traffic had to be diverted on Highway 12 for six hours due to the low visibility in smoke. Also, the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railroad was delayed in Bristol and Andover on April 3rd because of the smoke. Twenty-one fire departments with around 250 people worked to bring the fire under control.

April 3, 2007: A sharp frontal boundary along with an upper-level disturbance brought an unusual band of heavy snow across northern South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 6 to 12 inches occurred from Eureka to Summit. Roads became snow covered or slushy making travel difficult. Due to the poor road conditions, several vehicles ended up in the ditch. Several schools and events were either postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Eureka and Milbank, 7 inches at Conde, 8 inches at Hosmer, Columbia, Summit, and Britton, 10 inches at Webster, and 12 inches at Waubay.

April 3, 2009: An area of low pressure moved across the Central Plains producing widespread snow over central and north central South Dakota. Along with the snow came strong north winds of 15 to 30 mph causing areas of blowing snow and reduced visibilities. The snow and reduced visibility caused some travel problems. Snowfall amounts ranged from a few inches to almost a foot of snow. Some of the snowfall amounts included; 6 inches near Presho and Okaton, Fort Thompson, and Timber Lake; 7 inches in Murdo and 16 S Ree Heights; 8 inches 14 NNE Isabel and 11 inches 3 NW Parade and 6 E Hayes.

1898: An avalanche near Chilkoot Pass, Alaska in the Yukon during the Gold Rush buried 142 people and killed 43 others.

1964: KAUZ in Wichita Falls, Texas broadcast the first live television pictures of an F5 tornado moving through the city. Seven people were killed, 111 injured and 225 homes were destroyed during the twisters 5 to a 6-mile path. Extensive damage was done at Sheppard Air Force Base where three tanker planes, a hanger, the power plant, and the chapel were all destroyed. Damage estimates exceeded \$15 million.

1974: A "Super-Outbreak" of tornadoes ravaged the Midwest and the eastern U.S. Severe weather erupted early in the afternoon and continued through the next day. Severe thunderstorms spawned 148 tornadoes from Alabama to Michigan, most of which occurred between 1 PM (CST) on the 3rd and 1 AM on the 4th. The tornadoes killed 315 persons, injured 5300 others, and caused 600 million dollars damage. Alabama, Kentucky, and Ohio were especially hard hit in the tornado outbreak. One tornado destroyed half of the town of Xenia, Ohio killing 34 persons. Another tornado, near the city of Stamping Ground, Kentucky produced a path of destruction a record five miles in width. A tornado raced through Guin, Alabama at a speed of 75 mph. Two powerful tornadoes roared across northern Alabama during the early evening hours, killing fifty persons and injuring 500 others. Some rescue vehicles responding to the first tornado were struck by the second.

1987: An extensive, slow-moving low-pressure system produced very heavy snows over the Appalachian Region lasting through April 5th. 60 inches fell at Newfound Gap in western North Carolina, the most substantial single storm snowfall in the state's history. Up to 36 inches was reported in southeastern Kentucky. The total of 25 inches at Charleston, WV easily surpassed its previous record for the entire month of April of 5.9 inches. The 20.6 inch total at Akron, OH established an all-time record for that location. Snow closed interstate 40 for the first time since it was opened in 1967. Lightning and thunder accompanied the snow in some areas while a trace fell as far south as Mobile. The snow was the first snow ever reported in April in Mobile since records began in 1872. The storm became known unofficially as the "Dogwood Snowstorm" as many trees had fully bloomed

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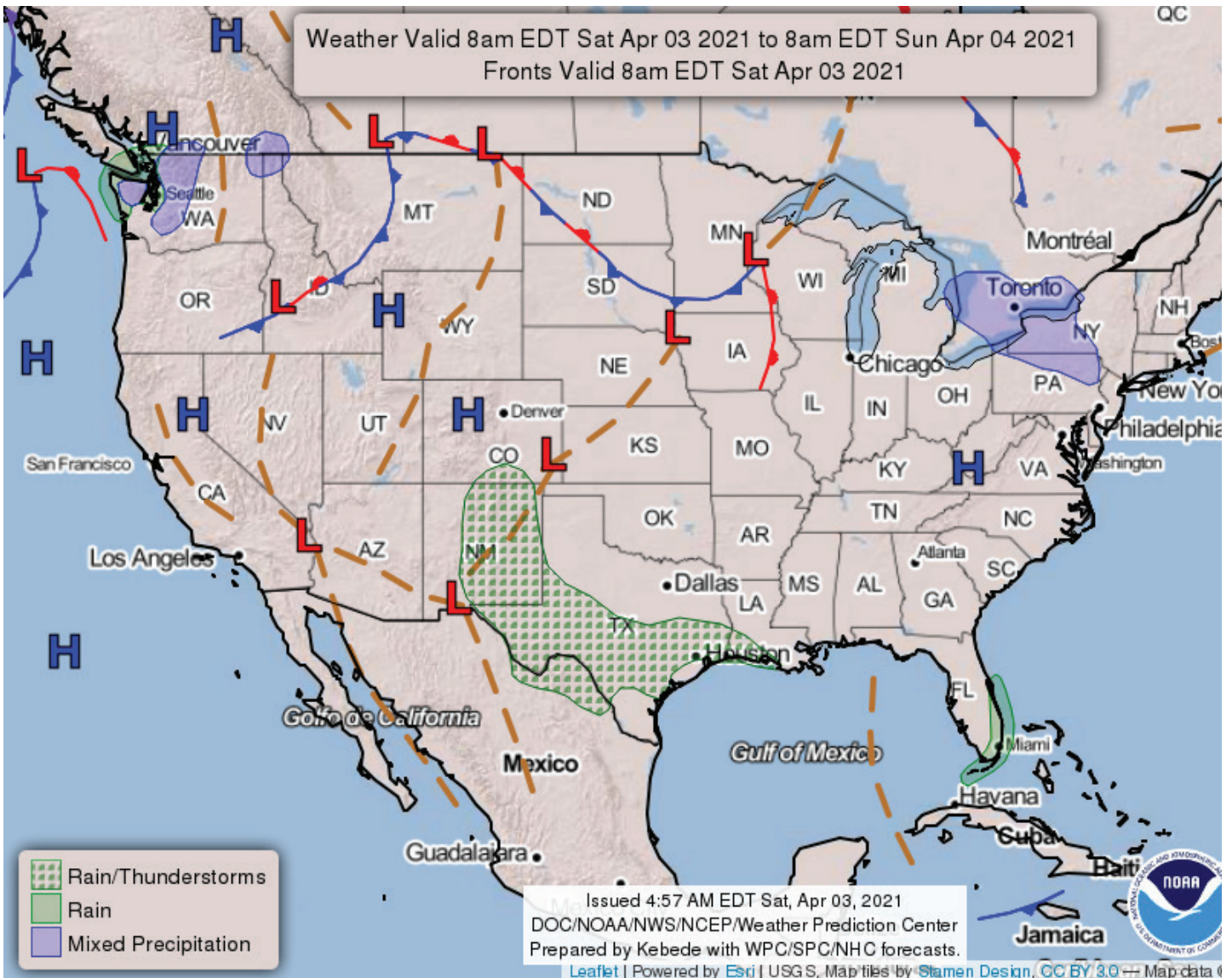
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 75 °F at 7:17 PM**  
**Low Temp: 40 °F at 7:11 AM**  
**Wind: 35 mph at 2:45 AM**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 83° in 1921**  
**Record Low: -2° in 1975, 2018**  
**Average High: 50°F**  
**Average Low: 27°F**  
**Average Precip in Mar.: 1.25**  
**Precip to date in Mar.: 0.36**  
**Average Precip to date: 2.27**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.54**  
**Sunset Tonight: 8:05 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:08 a.m.**



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## WHENEVER...FOR WHATEVER

Whenever is a gracious word that sounds very comforting when someone offers to help us when we are going through a difficult time. We know that someone will help when we dial 911. Our homes are wrapped in security systems "in case" someone tries to enter if they are not invited in. There are endless "alerts" available to notify someone, somewhere if we fall, encounter pain, or face an emergency. We are to be thankful for these and many other devices, linking us to responders, who are available to help us.

In Psalm 34 we are reminded of the realities of life. "God's eyes," says David "are on the righteous," His "ears attentive to their cry." So, whenever the righteous cry out, "the Lord hears them." Not may or might hear them, could or should hear them – but will hear them. We do not have to get in line, dial a number on a phone or tap an icon. Just "call out!" Whenever. David is very realistic about life. He's been there and endured that. When he speaks about the tragedies in his life, we can enter into his experience with him. Most have walked through the deep valleys as he has and have stumbled through similar shadows. Christians are not given a "free pass" to a life without problems.

But we are given the assurance that God is always present. "His eyes are on us" and "His ears open to us." So, when our hearts are broken by the tragedies of life, our spirits crushed in grief, our joints ache and our illnesses never seem to end, we are to call on Him. "Whenever" we need "whatever" He's there to help. Whenever...for...whatever!

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for understanding our problems, hearing our cries, and healing our hearts and bodies. Thank You for "whatever - whenever!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right; his ears are open to their cries for help. Psalm 34:15

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## 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.

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## 2021 Community Events

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

## News from the Associated Press

### Neighbors help fire department rebuild after building burns

By JILL SCHRAMM Minot Daily News

GLENBURN, N.D. (AP) — After a devastating fire on March 6 that severely damaged its fire hall and contents, the Glenburn Fire Department is bouncing back faster than Fire Chief Mike Overton ever thought possible.

The reason is the unexpectedly outpouring of help.

“It’s absolutely overwhelming,” Overton said. “When this first happened, I felt it would be months before we would be able to respond to everything, and we are already responding to fires.”

Thanks to donations, the Glenburn Fire Department was able to respond – along with the Maxbass, Mohall and Lansford departments – to a grass fire to save a structure and farm equipment March 20.

Fire departments that stepped up to donate gear and other equipment to Glenburn include Burlington, Kenmare, Wing, Ray, Tioga and Maxbass. The Columbus department donated a 200,000-gallon tanker truck. Wildrose donated a grass fire-fighting truck and Velva a combination pumper/tanker. Williston Rural donated a fire engine, complete with equipment and gear, The Minot Daily News reported.

Williston Rural Fire Chief John Laqua said the engine was a fourth backup engine that his department planned to sell. When it heard about Glenburn’s need, the board decided to donate the engine instead. Not looking for recognition, the department “just wanted to help out,” Laqua said.

“It’s become very important for rural districts to help each other out, whether it’s on-scene calls,” he said, “or in this case, helping out with materials.”

Glenburn’s help came from fire departments as far away as Brainard, Nebraska, which provided air packs and bottles. Departments in South Dakota and Minnesota also have contacted him about possibly helping, Overton said.

Additionally, the Glenburn department accepted an offer of communication radios from the Mountrail County Sheriff’s Office. The Minot Air Force Base Fire Department agreed to wash and test hoses that came through the fire to determine whether they remain usable.

Fire departments that are loaning equipment are Antler, a grass-fire unit; Newburg, a combination pumper/tanker; Tolley, a combination tanker/grass-fire unit and extrication gear; Upham, a four-wheel drive grass-fire truck; and Tioga, extrication gear.

Overton said the Glenburn board has yet to act on more equipment that has been offered.

Overton highlighted the three departments and their chiefs that responded to the March 6 fire and have been particularly supportive in his department’s recovery. Those departments are Lansford, led by Fire Chief Matt Unlin; Maxbass and its Fire Chief Bryan Pease; and Minot Air Force Base with Fire Chief Essam Cordova.

The Glenburn department has received more than \$60,000 in direct personal and corporate financial donations, which doesn’t include money being raised online or otherwise by outside individuals and groups for the department.

Minot’s Minotauros is donating \$1 per ticket sold for its April 22 hockey game and has given the Glenburn department some tickets to sell for which it can keep all the proceeds.

The Fire and Iron Motorcycle Club, which has a Minot chapter, is planning a benefit ride this summer. The club consists mostly of firefighters. The Glenburn department also has been seeking grants and holding a raffle.

Steve Farden of Farden Construction granted the use of a company equipment building in Glenburn as a temporary fire station.

Overton said the department’s station was a total loss in the fire. A professional investigation determined the cause of the fire to have been a catastrophic failure of a furnace. The department is still assessing the fire trucks housed in the building to determine if anything is salvageable, but Overton said the damage



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was significant.

The Glenburn community has rallied to support its department.

"We have actually had two new firefighters join since then, just because they want to help," Overton said. "Everyone has pulled together. I can't tell you enough about the firefighters in Glenburn. They are really working. Not a one of them wants to give up, and it can be tempting to do so because there's a ton of work involved."

Besides reviving the department's firefighting capacity and the extra hours of training on the use of donated equipment, there will be a need to tear down the fire-damaged station. Plans for a new station are in a very early stage.

"Our priority above all is for public safety. The building comes second to that. We need to be able to provide fire protection, medical response, emergency response to the people of the community. That, by far, is our biggest priority," Overton said.

He said the most frequent calls to which rural fire departments respond are medical. The Glenburn department is at about 100% capacity to respond to those calls, he said. A good share of the medical supplies were personally kept by firefighters for rapid response so were not affected by the fire. The department has replaced much of the equipment lost.

The second most common call is grass fires, and with two borrowed grass-fire units and a donated grass-fire unit, the department is in good shape, Overton said.

Rescue calls are the third most common calls. Overton said Glenburn is partially able to respond but still is working on replacing some equipment to get back to 100%.

Structure fires are least common but can be disastrous so Glenburn welcomed the fire engine from Williston and other donations.

"We will still respond to structure fires and we will still respond to rescue calls but we may need mutual aid from other departments," said Overton, noting that Minot Air Force Base provides the primary mutual aid. "We are way further ahead than I thought we would be, but we still have a long way to go."

## Brothers turn pinball passion into popular establishment

By KERRY DRAGER Watertown Public Opinion

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — To some, arcades have become a cluster of games in a forgotten corner of a dying mall as home gaming consoles have gained popularity.

But for brothers Ryan and Clay Wilfahrt, there remains something magical about the lights and sounds of a metal ball flinging through a pinball machine.

While they were traveling musicians in the band the Dive Bar Club, the brothers found themselves throwing quarters into a pinball machine in Deadwood.

That's where things started.

"My brother went and found a pinball machine that needed fixing up," Ryan Wilfahrt said. "I wanted a pinball machine, too, so I went and found a broken early 1970s Williams Triple Action, and I got it working. I think my wife thought I was crazy."

Self-taught through the internet, the brothers began buying more broken machines and repairing them to working order. Word got out, and they began fixing the machines of private collectors.

"The collectors want to buy something different, so we buy what they want to replace. We bought a lot of our pins that way," Wilfahrt said.

The brothers named their new Watertown business Retro Bros. Pinball. With their collection expanding, they wanted to find a place to house the machines and enjoy them the way they were intended — by being played. But Retro Bros. isn't an arcade, it's where they work on and repair machines. They also loan pinball machines.

"There is something about pinball that keeps bringing you back. We were totally hooked on it at that point," Wilfahrt said. "We just wanted the machines out in the public so we could play them. It was kind of selfish of us. We wanted a place to have a beer and play. We thought that if we wanted that, maybe

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others would too.”

There was immediate interest in their pinball machines both locally and across state lines. To accommodate that, the Guest House Bar has become the local stop to enjoy the pinball machines, the Watertown Public Opinion reported.

During the pandemic, the Wilfahrt brothers and Guest House owner Chance Walford got to work painting the bar’s arcade and setting up the machines. Now that patrons are returning out of quarantine, the games are seeing some action.

Wilfahrt wanted to bring a new competitive edge and formed a local pinball league. Individual players square off against each other on Tuesday nights. Winners receive a cash prize, and all players get a chance at a paid bar tab during league nights.

“It’s just an excuse to play pinball and drink a couple of beers,” he said.

It is not just men who are flocking to the arcade. Women are winning in the leagues, and most of the players are millennials.

“The league has created a small pinball culture in town. Most of us are new to it. We are learning the game together, so the competition is pretty even. The older generation is excited to have an opportunity to teach us to play better,” Wilfahrt said.

The arcade in the Guest House is open for players of any age.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

10-42-48-53-62, Mega Ball: 19, Megaplier: 2

(ten, forty-two, forty-eight, fifty-three, sixty-two; Mega Ball: nineteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$168 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$32 million

## UNI game against South Dakota canceled over COVID-19 case

CEDAR FALLS, Iowa (AP) — A scheduled Friday night football game between the University of Northern Iowa and University of South Dakota was canceled following a positive COVID-19 test result within the South Dakota program.

The UNI Panthers announced the cancellation on the school’s website. The Missouri Valley Football Conference required Friday’s game to be canceled following the positive test result and subsequent contact tracing among USD’s student athletes, coaches, managers and staff.

The game that had been planned Vermillion, South Dakota, will not be rescheduled.

The conference ditched its regular fall season in light of the coronavirus pandemic in favor of a nine-week, eight-game conference-only spring schedule, which began in February.

## Wildfire evacuees return to North Dakota tourist town

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Residents of a small western North Dakota tourist town forced to evacuate as a large wildfire approached have been able to return to their homes.

The city of Medora, with its population of about 100, was evacuated Thursday as firefighters worked to stop the blaze from spreading. Authorities on Friday reduced the estimated size of the fire from about 15 square miles (38 square kilometers) to about 4 1/2 square miles (10 square kilometers).

There were no 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.

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The blaze 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.

A 45-mile (72-kilometer) stretch of Interstate 94, from Belfield to Beach, was temporarily closed but reopened Thursday night. Residents were allowed to return to their homes a short time later, said Beth Hill, acting outreach and education manager for the North Dakota Forest Service.

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.

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.

North Dakota 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 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 Friday all evacuations have been lifted in the Nemo area.

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

## French hospitals boost Easter staff to battle virus resurgence

PARIS (AP) — French hospitals brought in extra staff for the Easter holiday weekend to cope with growing numbers of virus patients, while travelers converged on train stations and highways to flee big cities before new nationwide restrictions take hold.

With a new virus variant spreading fast and French intensive care units as full as they were last April, the government closed all schools and imposed stricter new rules that take effect Sunday around the country.

Bracing for more COVID-19 patients arriving over the weekend, hospitals across hard-hit northern France were ordered to bring in extra staff.

Dr. Christophe Boyer, head of emergency services at the Amiens-Picardie Hospital, is worried about the rising number of patients but also dismayed that after more than a year of the pandemic, he's asking staff to make an extra effort yet again and work on Easter.

"It's been a year of trying to keep our heads above water," he told The Associated Press.

In Paris, police said Saturday they are deploying 6,600 officers to enforce the new virus restrictions, which include a ban on traveling more than 10 kilometers (6 miles), a ban on outdoor gatherings of six people or more and a continued nationwide 7 p.m. curfew.

On the Mediterranean shores of Marseille, police patrolled amid sunbathers and fined people drinking in public or not wearing masks.

However authorities said they would show "tolerance" over the Easter weekend to allow parents to arrange for child care or to allow city dwellers to travel to the countryside to settle in for a month of lockdown restrictions. As a result, crowds packed Paris-area train stations starting Friday night, and the SNCF national rail authority said it was expecting 600,000 people to travel over the weekend.

Meanwhile, the government is trying to speed up France's vaccination efforts after a slow start dogged by vaccine delays, red tape and logistical problems. People lined up at a stadium in Lyon on Saturday to get vaccinated, and other vaccination centers around the country were stepping up injections throughout

the holiday period.

More than 96,000 people with the virus have died in France, which has reported more virus infections than any European country.

## **Hundreds of French sports figures accused of sexual violence**

PARIS (AP) — A year-long, nationwide French effort to uncover and combat sexual violence in sports has identified more than 400 coaches, teachers and others suspected of abuse or covering it up.

Most of the victims were under 15, according to data released Friday by the sports ministry. The alleged abuse included sexual assault, harassment or other violence.

Sixty people have faced criminal proceedings, more than 100 have been temporarily or permanently removed from their posts, and local investigations are under way into other cases, the ministry said.

The abuse reached across the country and across the whole sector, with accusations targeting a total of 48 sports federations.

Of those accused, 96% are men. Of the victims, 83% were women, and 63% were under 15, the ministry said.

The fact-finding probe was launched in February 2020 after 10-time French skating champion Sarah Abitbol said in a book that she was raped by coach Gilles Beyer from 1990-92, when she was a teen. Beyer was handed preliminary charges of sexual assault and the investigation is ongoing.

In the wake of Abitbol's accusations, more skaters spoke out to denounce alleged sexual violence from coaches. The sports ministry set up a dedicated platform for athletes' testimonies and conducted a year of hearings.

In its statement, the ministry called Abitbol's testimony "a historic moment for French sport" that raised awareness and has pushed authorities to crack down on abuse. A new law on tougher screening of sports educators, including volunteer coaches, went into effect Friday, and the French government and sports federations have pledged to respond faster and more effectively to reports of abuse.

## **The final insult: Some dying of COVID while awaiting vaccine**

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

After months of hoping to receive a COVID-19 immunization and then weeks of fighting the illness after one never came, Air Force veteran Diane Drewes was down to her last few breaths at a hospice center in Ohio when the phone rang. It was a health care worker, calling to schedule her first appointment for a coronavirus shot.

Drewes' daughter Laura Brown was stunned by the timing of the call in January but didn't lash out over the phone or even explain that her 75-year-old mom was at the point of death. There just wasn't any point, she said.

"But me and my sister were upset that it came too late," Brown said. "It seemed like the final insult."

More than 247,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the U.S. since vaccines first became available mid-December. Officials had warned that dispensing enough vaccines to reach herd immunity would take months. And with the initial vaccine supply extremely limited and the virus running rampant across the nation over the winter, it was a sad reality that some would contract COVID-19 and die before they could be inoculated.

With surveys showing a large percentage of the U.S. population leery of vaccines, it's impossible to say exactly how many of the dead would have even wanted an immunization. But Brown said her mother wanted one — desperately. Other families have similar, wrenching stories of loved ones being infected after months of staying safe and then dying before they could get a dose.

Charlotte Crawford, who has spent 40 years working in the microbiology laboratory at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, was fully immunized in January after receiving two doses of the Moderna vaccine because of her work. Yet she then endured the agony of watching her husband and two adult children contract COVID-19

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and die before they could get shots.

Henry Royce Crawford, 65, had an appointment for a vaccine when he fell ill, his widow said. Their children, Roycie Crawford, 33, and Natalia Crawford, 38, also wanted the shot but had yet to find one when they got sick and died, Crawford said.

The days since their deaths in late February and early March seem like a jumble to Crawford; she is still trying to sort out what happened as she pleads with anyone who will listen to get a vaccine as soon as possible.

"All I know is I did three funerals in three weeks," said Crawford, of Forney, Texas.

While more than 96 million people in the U.S. have received at least one dose of vaccine, only 53 million are fully vaccinated, or roughly 16% of the nation's population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

With doses now more widely available, shots are proceeding at a quickened pace. More than a dozen states have opened vaccine eligibility to all adults amid an increase in virus cases.

Only the Johnson & Johnson shot is complete after one dose, so the wait time between the first and second shot of either the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines leaves a period of weeks when a recipient remains vulnerable and subject to infection.

The wait for a second shot proved too long for Richard Rasmussen of Las Vegas, said daughter Julie Rasmussen.

Richard Rasmussen, 73, fervently believed in wearing face masks for protection and had his first dose of the Pfizer vaccine in early January. "He was very excited to get his vaccine," she said.

Yet Rasmussen tested positive for the virus 10 days later and died Feb. 19 before receiving a second dose, Julie Rasmussen said. His final decline was stunning for its speed, she said.

"And now I am alone," Rasmussen said in an email interview. "He was my best friend. We texted every day, all day. I have no siblings. No husband/boyfriend. He was single. I am all alone navigating the legal system and packing his house."

The same day Rasmussen died, Deidre Love Sullens, of Oklahoma City, was standing in the icy, snow-covered parking lot of a vaccine clinic amid the grief of losing both her mother, Catherine Douglas, 65, and stepfather, Asa Bartlett Douglas, 58, to COVID-19 in a span of 16 days before they could get shots.

"They, and I, looked at the vaccine as the single life-changing factor that would allow us to see one another in person again. It was our goal. We all aimed to get the vaccine so we could gather again, so my mother could play with my daughter again, so we could maybe visit my grandma in the nursing home and not be restricted to window visits," Sullens said in an interview conducted by email.

On that cold February day, with some doses to spare because foul weather kept others from making appointments, a worker called Sullens in to the clinic to be immunized. Sullens said she was overcome by tears and a "surreal feeling of disbelief" as she entered.

"My mind was thinking, 'If only my parents could have held out an extra two months ... they'd be here getting the vaccine too. They'd be alive. They'd be here with me,'" she said.

## Man rams car into 2 Capitol police; 1 officer, driver killed

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, NOMAAN MERCHANT and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Capitol Police officer has died after a man rammed a car into two officers at a barricade outside the U.S. Capitol and then emerged wielding a knife. It was the second line-of-duty death this year for a department still struggling to heal from the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Video shows the driver of the crashed car emerging with a knife in his hand and starting to run at the pair of officers, Capitol Police Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman told reporters Friday. Authorities shot the suspect, who died at a hospital.

"I just ask that the public continue to keep U.S. Capitol Police and their families in your prayers," Pittman said. "This has been an extremely difficult time for U.S. Capitol Police after the events of Jan. 6 and now the events that have occurred here today."

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Police identified the slain officer as William "Billy" Evans, an 18-year veteran who was a member of the department's first responders unit.

Two law enforcement officials told The Associated Press that investigators initially believed the suspect stabbed one of the officers, but it was later unclear whether the knife actually made contact, in part because the vehicle struck the officers with such force. The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss the investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Authorities said there wasn't an ongoing threat, though the Capitol was put on lockdown for a time as a precaution. There was also no immediate connection apparent between Friday's crash and the Jan. 6 riot.

Law enforcement officials identified the suspect as 25-year-old Noah Green. Investigators were digging into his background and examining whether he had any mental health history as they tried to discern a motive. They were also working to obtain warrants to access his online accounts.

Pittman said the suspect did not appear to have been on the police's radar. But the attack underscored that the building and campus — and the officers charged with protecting them — remain potential targets for violence.

Green described himself as a follower of the Nation of Islam and its founder, Louis Farrakhan, and spoke of going through a difficult time where he leaned on his faith, according to recent messages posted online that have since been taken down. The messages were captured by the group SITE, which tracks online activity.

"To be honest these past few years have been tough, and these past few months have been tougher," he wrote. "I have been tried with some of the biggest, unimaginable tests in my life. I am currently now unemployed after I left my job partly due to afflictions, but ultimately, in search of a spiritual journey."

President Joe Biden said in a statement that he and his wife were heartbroken to learn of the attack and expressed condolences to Evans' family. He directed flags at the White House to be lowered to half staff.

The crash and shooting happened at a security checkpoint near the Capitol typically used by senators and staff on weekdays, though most were away from the building for the current recess. The attack occurred about 100 yards (91 meters) from the entrance of the building on the Senate side of the Capitol. One witness, the Rev. Patrick Mahoney, said he was finishing a Good Friday service nearby when he heard three shots ring out.

The Washington region remains on edge nearly three months after a mob of insurrectionists loyal to former President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol as Congress was voting to certify Biden's presidential win.

Five people died in the Jan. 6 riot, including Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick, who was among a badly outnumbered force trying to fight off the intruders seeking to overturn the election. Authorities installed a tall perimeter fence around the Capitol and for months restricted traffic along the roads closest to the building, but they had begun pulling back some of the emergency measures. Fencing that prevented vehicular traffic near that area was only recently removed.

Evans was the seventh Capitol Police member to die in the line of duty in the department's history, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page, which tracks deaths of law enforcement. In addition, two officers, one from Capitol Police and another from Washington's Metropolitan Police Department, died by suicide following the Jan. 6 attack.

Almost 140 Capitol Police officers were wounded in that attack, including officers not issued helmets who sustained head injuries and one with cracked ribs, according to the officers' union. It took hours for the National Guard to arrive, a delay that has driven months of finger-pointing between that day's key decision makers.

Capitol Police and National Guard troops were called upon soon afterward to secure the Capitol during Biden's inauguration and faced another potential threat in early March linked to conspiracy theories falsely claiming Trump would retake the presidency.

"Today, once again, these heroes risked their lives to protect our Capitol and our country, with the same extraordinary selflessness and spirit of service seen on January 6," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a statement. "On behalf of the entire House, we are profoundly grateful."

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The U.S. Capitol complex was placed on lockdown for a time after Friday's shooting, and staffers were told they could not enter or exit buildings. Video showed Guard troops mobilizing near the area of the crash.

Video posted online showed a dark colored sedan crashed against a vehicle barrier and a police K-9 dog inspecting the vehicle. Law enforcement and paramedics could be seen caring for at least one unidentified individual.

## Pressure mounts on corporations to denounce GOP voting bills

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Liberal activists are stepping up calls for corporate America to denounce Republican efforts to tighten state voting laws, and businesses accustomed to cozy political relationships now find themselves in the middle of a growing partisan fight over voting rights.

Pressure is mounting on leading companies in Texas, Arizona and other states, particularly after Major League Baseball's decision Friday to move the 2021 All-Star game out of Atlanta. The move came a week after Georgia Republicans enacted an overhaul of the state's election law that critics argue is an attempt to suppress Democratic votes.

Other companies have, somewhat belatedly, joined the chorus of critics.

Delta Air Lines and The Coca-Cola Co., two of Georgia's best-known brands, this past week called the new law "unacceptable," although they had a hand in writing it. That only angered Republicans, including Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp and several U.S. senators, who accused the companies of cowering from unwarranted attacks from the left.

The fight has thrust corporate America into a place it often tries to avoid — the center of a partisan political fight. But under threat of boycott and bad publicity, business leaders are showing a new willingness to enter the fray on an issue not directly related to their bottom line, even if it means alienating Republican allies.

"We want to hold corporations accountable for how they show up when voting rights are under attack," said Marc Banks, an NAACP spokesman. "Corporations have a part to play, because when they do show up and speak, people listen."

Civil rights groups have sued to block the new Georgia law, which was passed after Democrats flipped the once-reliably Republican state in an election that Donald Trump falsely claimed was rife with fraud. Some activists have called for consumer boycotts of Delta, Coca-Cola and others. They dismiss business leaders' assertions that they helped water down the bill to ease earlier, more restrictive proposals; those leaders, they argue, should have tried to block the plan altogether.

In Texas, the NAACP, League of Women Voters and League of United Latin American Citizens, among other organizations, are urging corporations in the state to speak out against a slate of Republican-backed voting proposals. "Democracy is good for business," the campaign says.

Nine organizations took out full-page ads in The Houston Chronicle and The Dallas Morning News, the state's leading newspapers, urging corporate opposition to the plan. The Texas proposal would limit some early voting hours, bar counties from setting up drive-thru voting and prohibit local officials from proactively sending applications for mail ballots before voters request them.

Unlike their Georgia-based counterparts, American Airlines and Dell Technologies didn't wait for the Texas measure to pass. "To make American's stance clear: We are strongly opposed to this bill and others like it," American said in a statement.

Arizona, which Biden flipped from Trump in November, hasn't seen high-profile corporate players engage yet. But 30-plus groups sent a joint letter to Allstate Insurance, CVS Health and Farmers' Insurance, among others, urging their public opposition to proposed voting restrictions. Emily Kirkland, executive director of Progress Arizona, a progressive group that signed the letter, said there's been no response yet.

Other groups are demanding that corporations focus on Washington, where congressional Democrats are pushing measures intended to make it easier for Americans to vote, regardless of state laws. Among the changes, Democrats would enact automatic voter registration nationally and standardize access to

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early and mail voting.

Democrats also want to restore parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that require the federal government to approve all election procedures in states and locales with a history of discrimination. The Supreme Court struck down those provisions, which applied to Georgia and Arizona, among other states, in 2013.

Corporate giants were mostly quiet when Trump falsely claimed he lost because of fraud. Business leaders largely maintained that caution as Republican state lawmakers used Trump's lie to justify a flood of new bills to make it more cumbersome to vote.

The reticence was a stark contrast to how chambers of commerce reacted six years ago when Republican-run states pushed "religious freedom" measures. Indiana, under then-Gov. Mike Pence, the future vice president, saw immediate corporate backlash. After North Carolina passed a "bathroom bill" limiting LGBTQ rights in 2016, PayPal scuttled expansion plans there and the NBA moved its all-star game from Charlotte. An AP analysis in 2017 found the reaction would eventually cost North Carolina at least \$3.76 billion in lost business.

Then, Georgia's corporate lobbying groups — with Delta's and Coca-Cola's backing — took no such chances, speaking out forcefully against Georgia conservatives' version of a "religious freedom" bill. Lawmakers passed it anyway but Kemp's predecessor, Republican Nathan Deal, vetoed it amid the chamber outcry.

Some Republicans dispute the comparison. Brian Robinson, a former top Deal aide who was part of the business coalition that publicly opposed the religious freedom bill, argued that measure "was clearly discriminatory" against LGBTQ citizens, while the nearly 100-page election bill is less clear-cut and is being misrepresented by Democrats and their allies.

Companies are reacting to "Twitter mobs demanding reaction to their false narrative," he said.

National Republicans reacted even more harshly. Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, a former and potentially future presidential candidate, slammed Delta with the hashtag "#WokeCorporateHypocrites."

Still, Delta and Coca-Cola's response to the Georgia voting fight is standing as a cautionary tale for other businesses.

Ed Bastian, the airline's chief executive, initially released a statement noting the business lobby's role in altering the bill as it moved through the General Assembly. Officials at the Atlanta Metro Chamber, where Bastian currently serves as president, detailed how corporate lobbyists spent weeks at the Capitol on mitigating provisions.

Some Georgia Republicans wanted to roll back the state's no-excuse absentee voting law, end automatic voter registration and ban Sunday early voting used heavily by Black churches. They also wanted to require photocopies of state IDs to receive and submit absentee ballots, while banning "drop boxes" as ballot collection receptacles.

The final law preserved no-excuse absentee voting and automatic registration. The new ID requirement for absentee ballots allows a voter to write their state ID number, rather than produce a photocopy, and the legislature included funding for free state IDs. The law also codifies in-person early voting on weekends, although it allows counties to choose whether to be open for voting for up to two Sundays. And it made drop boxes of mail ballots a permanent fixture in Georgia, but limited the number.

Business leaders' philosophy, according to Democratic state Sen. Jen Jordan, was "basically, Republicans are going to pass something, so they might as well try to keep from being awful."

But by Wednesday, the same day 72 Black business executives published a letter in The New York Times urging corporate leaders to speak out, Bastian was more direct. He sent a companywide memo declaring the law "unacceptable" and "based on a lie" — though he didn't mention Trump.

Big business's mistake, Jordan said, was "thinking there was ever any version that wouldn't end up like this."

## Myanmar death toll mounts amid protests, military crackdown

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Security forces in central Myanmar opened fire on anti-coup protesters on



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Saturday, killing at least two people according to local media. A human rights group said mounting violence since the Feb. 1 military takeover has killed at least 550 civilians.

Of those, 46 were children, according to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Some 2,751 people have been detained or sentenced, the group said.

Threats of lethal violence and arrests of protesters have failed to suppress daily demonstrations across Myanmar demanding the military step down and reinstate the democratically elected government. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in the Southeast Asian country.

The Myanmar Now news service reported government forces fired at demonstrators in Monywa city, killing at least two people. One video posted on social media showed a group of protesters carrying away a young man with what appeared to be a serious head wound, as gunfire sounded. His condition wasn't immediately known.

At least seven people were injured in the shooting, two of whom sustained severe wounds and were taken into custody by soldiers, Myanmar Now said, citing a member of a local rescue team.

Late Friday, armed plainclothes police took five people into custody after they spoke with a CNN reporter in a market in Yangon, the country's largest city, local media reported citing witnesses. The arrests occurred in three separate incidents.

Two women reportedly shouted for help as they were being arrested, Myanmar Now reported. One police officer, who was carrying a gun, asked if "anyone dared to help them," a witness told the news service.

"They pointed their pistols at everyone — at passersby and at people in the store," a witness said of two police officers, who forcibly took away two other women in the market.

Meanwhile, the Karen National Union representing the ethnic minority rebel group that has been fighting the government for decades condemned "non-stop bombings and airstrikes" against villages and "unarmed civilians" in their homeland along the border with Thailand.

"The attacks have caused the death of many people including children and students, and the destruction of schools, residential homes, and villages. These terrorist acts are clearly a flagrant violation of local and international laws," the group said in a statement.

In areas controlled by the Karen, more than a dozen civilians have been killed and over 20,000 displaced since March 27, according to the Free Burma Rangers, a relief agency operating in the region.

About 3,000 Karen fled to Thailand, but many have 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.

More than a dozen minority groups have sought greater autonomy from the central government for decades, sometimes through armed struggle. 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.

After weeks of overnight cutoffs of internet access, Myanmar's military on Friday shut all links apart from those using fiberoptic cable, which was working at drastically reduced speeds. Access to mobile networks and all wireless — the less costly options used by most people in the developing country — remained blocked on Saturday.

Myanmar languished for five decades under strict military rule, which 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.

## Taiwan prosecutors seek arrest in deadly train crash

By RALPH JENNINGS and JOHNSON LAI Associated Press

HUALIEN COUNTY, Taiwan (AP) — Prosecutors in Taiwan on Saturday sought an arrest warrant for the owner of an unmanned truck that rolled onto a train track and caused the country's worst rail disaster in decades, killing 50 people and injuring 178.

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The train was carrying 494 people at the start of a long holiday weekend on Friday when it smashed into the construction truck, the Taiwan Railways Administration said. The truck's emergency brake was not properly engaged, according to the government's disaster relief center.

The crash occurred just before the train entered a tunnel, and many passengers were crushed inside the mangled train carriages. With much of the train stuck inside the tunnel, some survivors were forced to climb out of windows and walk along the train's roof to safety.

Authorities initially reported 51 deaths but revised the count down by one on Saturday. Among those killed was a U.S. citizen. Another U.S. citizen who was on the train was reported missing, according to a statement by Taiwan's Foreign Ministry.

Yu Hsiu-duan, chief prosecutor in eastern Hualien County where the train derailed, said they were seeking an arrest warrant for the truck's owner, who was questioned along with several others. She didn't offer details citing an ongoing investigation.

The Hualien district court allowed the truck owner to post bail of 500,000 new Taiwan dollars (US\$17,516) but he must stay in the county and avoid contact with any witnesses, Taiwan's Central News Agency reported.

President Tsai Ing-wen visited hospitals near the crash instead of the site itself so as not to interfere with rescue work, her spokesperson said.

"This heartbreaking accident caused many injuries and deaths. I came to Hualien today to visit the injured and express my condolences to the deceased passengers' families," Tsai said. "We will surely help them in the aftermath."

Tsai told reporters Friday that she asked the Transportation Safety Committee to conduct a strict investigation.

Transportation Minister Lin Chia-lung said repairs will be accelerated.

"When such a thing happens, I feel very sorry and I will take full responsibility," Lin said after touring the site.

Workers removed the two rearmost cars from the tracks Saturday morning. However, a third could not be moved before the tracks are repaired while the other five cars were still wedged into the tunnel. Two large construction cranes could be seen drawn up next to the train in a remote area on the island's east coast.

The operation should be done within a week, said Weng Hui-ping, head of the railway administration's news group. During the repairs, all east coast trains will run on a track parallel to the one damaged in the accident, causing delays of 15 to 20 minutes, he said.

The National Fire Service said the dead included the train's young, newly married driver and the assistant driver. The government's disaster response center said it was the worst rail disaster since a train caught fire in 1948 in suburban Taipei, killing 64 people.

Train travel is popular during Taiwan's four-day Tomb Sweeping holiday, when families often return to hometowns to pay respects at the gravesites of their elders.

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 where the crash happened is popular with tourists, many of whom travel there by train to avoid mountain roads.

## Deadly breach could delay decisions about Capitol fencing

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The deadly breach of the Capitol's perimeter could delay the gradual reopening of the building's grounds to the public just as lawmakers were eyeing a return to more normal security measures following the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Capitol Police officer William "Billy" Evans, an 18-year veteran of the force, was killed Friday when a man rammed his car into a barrier outside the Senate side of the building. The driver, identified as 25-year-old Noah Green, was shot and killed after he got out of his car and lunged at police with a knife.

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Their deaths came less than two weeks after the Capitol Police removed an outer fence that had cut off a wide swath of the area to cars and pedestrians, in an effort to secure the complex after thousands of then-President Donald Trump's supporters had marched on the building Jan. 6, as Congress was certifying Joe Biden's election victory. About 800 of those loyalists broke inside the Capitol, and siege led to the deaths of five people, including a Capitol Police officer.

Police have left an inner fencing perimeter intact. The tall, dark fencing — parts of it covered in razor wire until recently -- had blocked major arteries that cross the city and was a stark symbol of the fear many in the Capitol felt after the violent mob laid siege two months ago. Lawmakers said the seat of American democracy was meant to be open to the people, even if there was always going to be a threat.

But after Friday's attack, lawmakers said they needed to proceed with caution.

"It's an eyesore, it sucks," Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan of Ohio, chairman of a House spending committee that oversees security and the Capitol, said about the fencing in the hours after the two deaths. "Nobody wants that there. But the question is, is the environment safe enough to be able to take it down? In the meantime, maybe that fence can prevent some of these things from happening."

Ryan stressed that no decisions had been made, and that lawmakers would be "reviewing everything." His committee and others are looking at not only the fence but at the staffing, structure, and intelligence capabilities of the Capitol Police.

"The scab got ripped off again here today," Ryan said. "So we've got to figure this out."

The breach happened inside the perimeter. The driver slipped through a gate that had opened to allow traffic in and out of the Capitol and rammed a barrier that had protected the building long before Jan. 6. There was no evidence that Green's actions were in any way related to the insurrection.

Still, it was a reminder that there is always a target on one of the country's most visible public buildings, especially after the public attention over the broad security failures three months ago.

"This may just cause everybody to pump the brakes a bit on taking the fence down entirely because of the sense of security that it provides us," said Democratic Rep. Jennifer Wexton of Virginia, another member of the spending panel that oversees the legislative branch.

As a lawmaker who represents the suburbs of Washington, Wexton said she wants to see the Capitol open again to visitors. While the indoor parts of the building have been closed for the last year because of the coronavirus pandemic, the plazas, roads and sidewalks that surround the Capitol were only closed after the riot, keeping the public completely away from the area.

"I would like to see it come down at the earliest possible moment," Wexton said of the fencing.

While lawmakers were initially supportive of the fencing to secure the area, and the thousands of National Guard troops sent to the Capitol to back up the overwhelmed police force, they soon said they were ready for a drawdown.

"I think we've overdone it," said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky last month. "It looks terrible to have the beacon of our democracy surrounded by razor wire and National Guard troops."

Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, the top Republican on the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, said the fencing should come down because the next security problem is "highly unlikely to be a carbon copy of the last problem." Republican Rep. Carlos Gimenez of Florida told Fox News he believed Democrats were keeping the fence up for "political reasons."

But abhorrence of the fence is a rare issue on which the two parties can agree.

"It's just ghastly, it's an embarrassment," said Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the second-ranking Democrat. "If there's a better way to protect us, I want to see it. I want to work to get it."

Security officials, though, say that the Capitol cannot return to what had been status quo.

In February, acting Capitol Police Chief Yogananda Pittman told lawmakers that "the Capitol's security infrastructure must change."

A security review requested by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., in the aftermath of the riot and conducted by a task force recommended eventually replacing the barrier with mobile fencing and "an integrated, retractable fencing system" that could be used as needed. It is unclear whether such an ex-

pensive proposal could win approval from Congress.

Ryan said his committee was doing extensive research and had a recent call with Israeli security officials to learn how they keep their government secure.

"We've got to figure out what the sweet spot is with the security," he said.

## Robot artist sells art for \$688,888, now eyeing music career

By ZEN SOO and ALICE FUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Sophia is a robot of many talents — she speaks, jokes, sings and even makes art. In March, she caused a stir in the art world when a digital work she created as part of a collaboration was sold at an auction for \$688,888 in the form of a non-fungible token (NFT).

The sale highlighted a growing frenzy in the NFT market, where people can buy ownership rights to digital content. NFTs each have a unique digital code saved on blockchain ledgers that allow anyone to verify the authenticity and ownership of items.

David Hanson, CEO of Hong Kong-based Hanson Robotics and Sophia's creator, has been developing robots for the past two and a half decades. He believes realistic-looking robots can connect with people and assist in industries such as healthcare and education.

Sophia is the most famous robot creation from Hanson Robotics, with the ability to mimic facial expressions, hold conversations and recognize people. In 2017, she was granted Saudi Arabian citizenship, becoming the world's first robot citizen.

"I envisioned Sophia as a creative artwork herself, that could generate art," Hanson said in an interview.

"Sophia is the culmination of a lot of arts, and engineering, and the idea that she could then generate art was a way for her to emotionally and visually connect with people," he said.

Sophia collaborated with Italian artist Andrea Bonaceto, who drew portraits of Sophia. Sophia then processed his work via neural networks and proceeded to create a digital artwork of her own.

The digital work that sold for \$688,888 is titled "Sophia Instantiation", and is a 12-second video file which shows Bonaceto's portrait evolving into Sophia's digital painting. It is accompanied by the physical artwork painted by Sophia.

The buyer, a digital artwork collector and artist known as 888 with the Twitter handle @Crypto888crypto, later sent Sophia a photo of his painted arm. The robot then processed that, adding that image to her knowledge and painted more strokes on top of her original piece.

In a tweet on Sophia's account, the work was described as the first NFT collaboration between an "AI, a mechanical collective being and an artist-collector."

"As an artist, I have computational creativity in my algorithms, creating original works," Sophia said when asked what inspires her when it comes to art. "But my art is created in collaboration with my humans in a kind of collective intelligence like a human-artificial intelligence hive mind."

Sophia's artwork selling as an NFT is part of a growing trend. In March, a digital artwork by artist Beeple — whose real name is Mike Winkelmann — sold for nearly \$70 million, shattering records and making it the most expensive digital artwork ever sold.

Henri Arslanian, PricewaterhouseCooper's Global Crypto Leader, said that NFTs give people "bragging rights" of the assets that they own.

"And what is really amazing with NFT is that it not only allows you to actually show to the broader world that you own this, but it really creates this bond between the holder of the NFT and the artists," he said.

It also allows art to be sold without traditional intermediaries, so that artists can connect directly with buyers without being constrained by galleries or auction houses, Arslanian said.

Sophia will carry on painting, Hanson said, and the next step in the robot's career could be that of a musician. She is working on several musical works in a project called Sophia Pop, where she collaborates with human musicians to generate music and lyrics, he said.

"We're so excited about Sophia's career as an artist," Hanson said.

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## **Bangkok home collapses after fire; 3 dead, several trapped**

By BUSABA SIVASOMBOON Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — At least three people were killed after a three-story house in Bangkok collapsed on Saturday following a fire, leaving an unknown number of people still trapped under the rubble, local police said.

Two of the fatalities were volunteer rescue workers who were helping to put out the fire and the third person lived in the residence, said police Cpl. Kamolpoo Khaokaew. A few other people including rescue workers were trapped under the building after it collapsed and efforts were underway to reach them.

"I believe that there might be people who are trapped inside who are alive," Bangkok governor Asawin Kwanmuang told media.

But he said rescue efforts were proceeding cautiously due to fears that the building could further collapse, which would complicate efforts to reach them.

One person was already rescued, Asawin said, and workers were trying to get to one other person who "we think might be alive."

A volunteer rescue worker told local news broadcaster Thai PBS that he was spraying water onto the building's balcony when he sensed that something was wrong. Officials from the disaster prevention department soon ordered everyone to leave the house.

"Some left but others who were inside holding the hose couldn't leave because they had to wait for the water to be turned off first. At that moment, the building collapsed in front of me. I was lucky I did not get hurt," said Somchai Bowornlarp.

Video footage captured the moment the building came crashing down, as a number of rescue workers were standing outside. Earlier footage showed flames raging throughout all three floors as a man sprayed the building's exterior with a single hose.

## **Young professionals cut ahead of older Italians for vaccine**

By FRANCES D'EMILIO and COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Octogenarians in Tuscany watched in disbelief and indignation as lawyers, magistrates, professors and other younger professionals got vaccinated against COVID-19 before them, despite government pledges of prioritizing Italy's oldest citizens. Even some of their adult children jumped ahead of them.

By one estimate, the failure to give shots to the over-80s and those in fragile health has cost thousands of lives in a country with Europe's oldest population and its second-highest loss of life in the pandemic.

As the elderly were elbowed aside, a dozen prominent senior citizens in Tuscany published a letter calling out the authorities, including the region's governor, for what they said was a violation of their health care rights enshrined in the Italian Constitution.

"We asked ourselves, 'What's the reason for this disparity?'" said signatory Enzo Cheli, a retired constitutional court judge who is a month shy of 87. By late March, he still hadn't been vaccinated, three months into Italy's inoculation campaign.

"The appeal was born of this idea that errors were being made, abuses," Cheli said in a telephone interview from his country home near Siena. He noted that investigations are underway in Tuscany and other regions where professionals received priority status.

Those over 80 in Tuscany have the lowest vaccination rate nationally.

Another signatory was 85-year-old editorial cartoonist Emilio Giannelli, who hasn't been vaccinated, while his son, a lawyer, has.

A Giannelli cartoon appeared on the front page of Corriere della Sera depicting a young man in a business jacket kicking an old man leaning on a cane out of a vaccine line.

In a country where many citizens have learned not to count on often weak national governments, outside influence is wielded by lobbying groups, sometimes derided as "castes."

Premier Mario Draghi has decried such "contractual clout," saying last month that the "basic line is the need to vaccinate the most fragile people and the over-80s." His government insists that vaccinations

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proceed in descending order by age, with the only exceptions being school and university employees, security forces, prison personnel and inmates, and those in communal residences such as convents.

According to a calculation by the ISPI think tank, opening vaccination rolls to younger Italians cost 6,500 lives from mid-January through March, a period in which nearly 28,000 died.

ISPI researcher Matteo Villa said any decision to vaccinate non-health care professionals who face infection risks should have been limited to those 50 and older.

"If we give 100 vaccines to people over 90, we save 13 lives," Villa said in a phone interview, citing mortality rates. "But it takes 100,000 vaccines to 20- to 29-year-olds to save just one life."

The current average age of pandemic dead in Italy is 81.

Throughout the pandemic, the oldest Italians have made up the majority of deaths, and not just in Tuscany. Just before Draghi sounded the alarm about lobbying groups, journalists in the small region of Molise had been poised to get early vaccinations. In Lombardy, veterinarians were given priority. In Campania, the region including Naples, drug company salespeople got priority status.

Regional leaders blame vaccine delivery delays, alleging the previous government's vaccine rollout opened the door to lobbying groups.

Some regions like Lazio, which includes Rome, resisted their pressure. By the end of March, nearly 64% of those 80 and older in Lazio had received at least one COVID-19 shot, compared with 40% in Tuscany.

Speaking about society's most fragile, Lazio Gov. Nicola Zingaretti told the Corriere della Sera newspaper: "It's true everyone risks getting COVID, but the difference is that they are among those who, if they catch it, risk dying more than others."

Of Italy's 4.4 million residents 80 or older, fewer than 29% had been vaccinated, and another 27% had gotten only the first dose by the end of March, said the GIMBE foundation, which monitors health care in Italy.

That compares with 95% of that age group in Malta who have received at least one dose, and 85% in Finland, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, Italy.

In Britain, where the vaccine rollout began roughly a month before the EU's, most of the over-50s have received at least one dose.

GIMBE official Renata Gili linked much of Italy's uneven performance to varying organizational capabilities as well as "an excess of autonomy in regions in the choice of priority categories to vaccinate."

Some lobbying groups aren't backing down. The National Magistrates Association, which represents most of Italy's more than 9,600 magistrates, threatened to further slow down the snail-paced judicial system if they aren't given priority. On Thursday, the tourism lobby demanded priority vaccines for its workers, describing them as essential to the country's recovery.

On Friday, a top Health Ministry official, Giovanni Rezza, sought to cut off any more jockeying for priority. "There was a struggle between categories" to get vaccine priority, Rezza told a news conference when asked if supermarket clerks could get special status. "We said, 'Let's finish the teachers, the security forces, but let's not have any more categories.' We simply will use criteria of age."

The army general who was tapped last month by Draghi to shake up Italy's COVID-19 vaccination campaign acknowledges its widespread problems.

"Is everything going well? No," Gen. Francesco Figliuolo told reporters Wednesday in Milan.

Just how many people in Italy received priority vaccines isn't known. Tuscany's health commission office said that before Draghi pulled the plug on special interest groups, 10,319 lawyers, magistrates, courthouse clerks and personnel had received a dose in the region.

Allowing lawyers and others to have quick access to vaccines is "an issue, and everyone is pissed off about it," said Nathan Levi, an antiques dealer in Florence who turns 83 next month and is still waiting. "That's what Italy is all about. The people who put the pressure" get ahead.

Of the 10.6 million doses so far administered in Italy, around 1.6 million went to people categorized as "other," prompting some politicians to demand to know who they are. When questioned, Figliuolo's office admitted it has no idea and said it was pressing the regions for specific details.

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Italians in their 70s, who are largely out of the workforce, are still waiting for their shots. By March 31, only 8% had received a first dose and fewer than 2% had received both.

Then there are people in fragile health, who have a priority category on the government's rollout chart. "The situation for the 'fragile' is one of huge uncertainty," said Francesca Lorenzi, a 48-year-old lawyer in Milan with breast cancer. She noted that if cancer patients have finished therapy more than six months ago, they are no longer considered "fragile."

"Meanwhile, they gave doses of Pfizer to 60-year-olds in great health because they have university contracts. I don't understand why a university professor or a lawyer should get vaccinated before the others," she said.

## CBS crew has many fond Indianapolis Final Four memories

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

CBS' Clark Kellogg has had a front row seat for Indianapolis' metamorphosis from sleepy Midwest city to a thriving pro town that also serves as the NCAA's home.

Kellogg was drafted by the Indiana Pacers with the eighth overall pick in 1983, when Indianapolis was still referred to as "Naptown." But that was before the city was able to lure the Colts from Baltimore, as well as attracting many amateur events. The crowning jewel was getting the NCAA to move its headquarters from Kansas City in 1999.

"There are a number of key folks that saw sports as a way to drive economic development and to enhance the city. I mean the Indiana Sports Corporation is the forerunner for the sports commissions you see across the country now," Kellogg said. "That was an amazing period of growth based on the vision and leadership of some key people."

Indianapolis had already hosted three Final Fours before it became the NCAA's home base, but the contract guaranteed the city would be a part of the regular rotation.

This is Indianapolis' eighth Final Four and seventh that will be broadcast by CBS. This will be the sixth that Kellogg has worked, either as an analyst courtside or as part of the pregame crew.

Kellogg's best memory though was being the courtside analyst in 2010, when Duke held off Butler's Cinderella bid in the championship game.

"The electricity of Butler there, the theme of David versus Goliath, there was so much there that resonated on so many levels, but the excitement throughout the city was unlike any I've experienced," he said. "We rarely have a hometown team in the Final Four in the home city and so I'm sure being in Indiana just amplified the level.

"Plus it was a dramatic game that came down to a last-second shot (Gordon Hayward's miracle half-court shot nearly going in). You can't make this stuff up, and when it happened it's hard to forget."

Jim Nantz is doing his 30th Final Four. His first was in the old RCA Dome in 1991, when Duke upset undefeated UNLV in the semifinals and then Kansas in the final. He also counts 2010 as his favorite memory.

Nantz said he drove around the Butler campus the day of the game and then was able to find an open door at Hinkle Fieldhouse so that he could go in and take a look.

"You could just feel there was something magical happening with that team throughout the ride to the championship game. If Hayward's shot would have dropped, it would have been the greatest finish not only in tournament history but maybe in any sports championship history," he said.

Grant Hill was on the 1991 Duke team that gave Mike Krzyzewski his first of five NCAA championships. His first Final Four as a CBS analyst was in 2015, when his alma mater beat Wisconsin in the championship game. It was also the last time Indianapolis hosted, until this year.

"Aside from the fact that I had a horrible haircut that I'm often reminded of when they replay moments from that year (in 1991) that was a special time," Hill said. "A lot of great memories from different segments in my basketball life."

Bill Raftery and Tracy Wolfson have fond memories from Arizona's title run in 1997. Raftery was the radio analyst when the Wildcats denied Kentucky's bid for repeat titles with an overtime victory.

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Raftery was close friends with Arizona coach Lute Olson and remembered the players messing Olson's perfectly combed gray hair.

Wolfson was a senior at the University of Michigan, but was a production assistant throughout the tournament. During the championship game, she was near the Arizona band, telling them when they could play and when the network was going into and out of commercials.

However, Wolfson's affinity for Arizona went a bit too far after they won.

"I took to this Arizona team. I just I found them fun," she said. "As soon as the game ended I remember actually running onto the court celebrating with them and I think it was (producer) Bob Dekas screaming in my ear 'Get off the court, Tracy.' It was definitely a special one, and it's fun to really come full circle now."

## California OKs indoor sports, concerts as COVID cases plunge

By ADAM BEAM and JANIE HAR Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Sports, theater and music fans will be able to take their seats again in California as the state's coronavirus cases plummet and vaccinations jump.

After a year-long ban on most indoor seating, the state Friday set the stage for a literal stage-setting that could see resumption of NBA games and live entertainment performances in most counties beginning April 15.

Most of the state's 58 counties will be permitted to allow at least some indoor seating because they fall into the lower three levels of California's four-tiered COVID-19 restriction plan. Big population centers like San Francisco, Santa Clara County and Los Angeles County are in the second-least restrictive orange tier. Only three counties — San Joaquin, Merced and Inyo — remain in the highest purple tier, indicating "widespread" COVID-19 risk.

The others will be permitted some indoor seating "with capacity limits and modifications including physical distancing, advance ticket purchases, designated areas for eating and drinking, and attendance limited to in-state visitors," according to a state public health announcement.

In the red tier, venues of up to 1,500 people can operate at 10% capacity and grow to 25% if all guests provide evidence of vaccination or a negative test. Venues of 1,501 people or more can operate at 20% capacity in the red tier, but guests must show proof of vaccination or a negative test. Capacity increases for tiers where the virus is less widespread.

State officials won't require testing or proof of vaccination for some of those events. Events that do require testing and vaccinations will be allowed to have more paying customers than those that don't. Only people who live in California can attend these live performances.

The Los Angeles Lakers announced that fans will be allowed back into Staples Center for an April 15 game against the Boston Celtics.

"Obviously we don't know exactly how many fans will be there yet, but just having some in there will bring us great energy," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "It's one of everybody's favorite things to do is go to Lakers games, and they haven't been able to do that during this pandemic."

Ben Bleiman, a San Francisco nightlife activist and chairman of the California Music and Culture Association, said venues need full capacity to make any money — but members will take the change, albeit with trepidation.

"On the one side you have the thrill and the joy of reopening," he said, adding on the other, "there's some dread that something's going to go wrong."

California has been easing COVID-19 restrictions as it recovers from a deadly winter surge, although public health officials still urge people to follow social distancing and mask-wearing protocols. Rates of hospitalizations and deaths have plunged, and the rate of people testing positive for the virus is at a near-record low.

California's rules are different for private indoor gatherings, including weddings, meetings or conferences. Those are only to be allowed if all guests test negative for the coronavirus at least 72 hours in advance or show proof of full vaccination. The changes do not mention requiring proof of vaccination and put much



of the enforcement on business owners and operators.

"Allowing some of these activities and opportunities to vaccinated individuals is an incentive," said Dee Myers, director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development. "If they can return to some of their favorite activities because they're vaccinated, then hopefully a few more people will go and get vaccinated."

The new rules seem to nudge California toward a system of vaccine verification, a hotly debated issue across the country. New York has launched a digital pass residents can use to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test that is accepted at major entertainment venues. But Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis issued an executive order on Friday banning businesses from requiring so-called "vaccine passports."

President Joe Biden's administration has said the federal government won't come up with a national vaccine passport app, leaving that to the private sector. But the federal government is devising regulations for how and when those passports can be used.

California Public Health Officer Dr. Tomás Aragón said Friday the state will follow the federal government's lead but said vaccinations won't be required for essential services.

California's new rules come as the state has administered nearly 19 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines. Nearly 6.9 million people are fully vaccinated in a state with close to 40 million residents. Only people 50 and over are eligible statewide to get the vaccine now, followed by those 16 and older on April 15.

## University of California victim of nationwide hack attack

By ROBERT JABLON The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The University of California is warning its students and staff that a ransomware group might have stolen and published their personal data and that of hundreds of other schools, government agencies and companies nationwide.

A cybersecurity attack targeted a vulnerability in Accellion, a third-party vendor that is used to securely transfer files, the university said in a statement Wednesday.

"We understand those behind this attack have published online screenshots of personal information, and we will notify members of the UC community if we believe their data was leaked in this manner," the university said.

The hacker or hackers also have been sending threatening mass emails threatening to publish data "in an attempt to scare people into giving them money," the statement said.

In an update Friday, the university system said the cyberattack affected about 300 organizations, "including universities, government institutions and private companies."

Other schools, including Stanford University's School of Medicine and Yeshiva University in New York City, have reported that student and employee Social Security numbers and financial information were stolen and that some were posted online.

The information was obtained in December and January when hackers exploited a vulnerability in a 20-year-old Accellion file transfer service, various reports have said. However, some organizations said they only recently became aware of the breach.

The Baltimore Sun on Thursday reported that private information of staff members and students at the University of Maryland, Baltimore was posted online this week. The school said a hacking group known as Clop gained access to Accellion in December, the Sun said.

The University of Colorado and the University of Miami reported that files were accessed in January and included personal data and some health, study and research data.

The Washington State Auditor's Office reported last month that information on nearly 1.5 million unemployment applicants had been stolen.

Accellion released a statement in March that said it had closed "all known" vulnerabilities and no new ones had been found.

Ransomware attacks on a massive scale and seeking massive payouts have hit several organizations in

recent months.

In an unrelated attack, the computer system of one of the nation's largest school districts was hacked by a criminal gang that encrypted district data and demanded \$40 million in ransom or it would erase the files and post students' and employees' personal information online. Broward County Public Schools, based in Fort Lauderdale, said in a statement Thursday that there is no indication that any personal information has been stolen and that it made no extortion payment to the ransomware gang.

An epidemic of ransomware attacks has been plaguing government agencies, businesses and individuals for the past three years. Most are Russian-speaking gangs based in Eastern Europe and enjoy safe harbor from tolerant governments. The more sophisticated groups identify their targets in advance, infect networks through phishing or other means and often steal data as they plant malware that encrypts a victim's network.

After the ransomware is activated, the criminals demand money to unlock the malware and refrain from posting — or selling — stolen data. In the case of corporations, that data could be trade secrets. In the case of retailers or government agencies it could be Social Security, bank account numbers and birth dates.

Public school districts have been frequent targets of ransomware attacks. Overall, ransomware attacks disrupted learning at 1,681 schools, colleges, and universities in 2020 and at least 544 so far this year, said analyst Brett Callow at Emsisoft, a cybersecurity firm. Seven districts had personal data published.

The average ransom paid for to hacking gangs nearly tripled from \$115,000 in 2019 to \$312,000 in 2020, according to the cybersecurity firm Palo Alto Networks. It said the highest ransom paid by an organization doubled last year from to \$10 million, up from \$5 million in 2019.

## MLB All-Star Game yanked from Georgia over voting law

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Atlanta lost Major League Baseball's summer All-Star Game on Friday over the league's objections to sweeping changes to Georgia voting laws that critics — including the CEOs of Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines and Coca-Cola — have condemned as being too restrictive.

The decision to pull the July 13 game from Atlanta's Truist Park amounts to the first economic backlash against Georgia for the voting law that Republican Gov. Brian Kemp quickly signed into law March 25.

Kemp has insisted the law's critics have mischaracterized what it does, yet GOP lawmakers adopted the changes largely in response to false claims of fraud in the 2020 elections by former President Donald Trump and his supporters. The law includes new restrictions on voting by mail and greater legislative control over how elections are run.

MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred made the decision to move the All-Star events and the amateur draft from Atlanta after discussions with individual players and the Players Alliance, an organization of Black players formed after the death of George Floyd last year, the commissioner said in a statement. A new ballpark for the events wasn't immediately revealed.

Manfred said he also spoke with the Major League Baseball Players Association, which at the time of the commissioner's decision said it had still not taken a stance.

"I have decided that the best way to demonstrate our values as a sport is by relocating this year's All-Star Game and MLB draft," Manfred said. "Major League Baseball fundamentally supports voting rights for all Americans and opposes restrictions to the ballot box."

The White House said President Joe Biden supports the decision.

"The President has made his concerns about the bill passed in Georgia clear, given its extreme provisions that impact the ability of so many citizens to cast their votes," the White House said. "He said earlier this week that if the decision was made by Major League Baseball to move the All-Star game, he would certainly support that decision — and now that MLB has made that choice, he certainly does."

In a statement, Trump blasted the move and urged his supporters to "boycott baseball and all of the woke companies that are interfering with Free and Fair Elections."

Kemp called MLB's action a "knee-jerk decision" that means "cancel culture and woke political activists

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are coming for every aspect of your life, sports included. If the left doesn't agree with you, facts and the truth do not matter."

"This attack on our state is the direct result of repeated lies from (President) Joe Biden and Stacey Abrams about a bill that expands access to the ballot box and ensures the integrity of our elections," Kemp said in a statement, referring to the Democratic candidate whom he narrowly defeated in the 2018 election. "I will not back down. Georgians will not be bullied."

Georgia state House Speaker David Ralston, a powerful Republican, vowed to stand behind the new law, which adds strict identification requirements for voting absentee by mail, limits the use of ballot drop boxes and makes it a crime to hand out food or water to voters waiting in line, among many other provisions.

Georgia Republicans say changes were needed to maintain voter confidence in the election system. Democrats and voting rights groups say the law will disproportionately affect communities of color. On Wednesday, two of Georgia's most prominent business leaders sided with the law's opponents.

Delta CEO Ed Bastian labeled the law "unacceptable," while Coca-Cola chief executive James Quincey called the legislation a "step backward."

The Atlanta Braves issued a statement Friday saying the team is disappointed by Manfred's decision.

"We are saddened that fans will not be able to see this event in our city," the team said. "The Braves organization will continue to stress the importance of equal voting opportunities and we had hoped our city could use this event as a platform to enhance the discussion."

Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, who is to guide the National League All-Star team, applauded MLB for moving the game from Georgia.

"I think in a world now where people want and need to be heard — and in this particular case, people of color — for Major League Baseball to listen and do something about it, to be proactive, it sets a tone," said Roberts, the son of a Black father and Japanese mother.

Abrams, who has championed voting rights since her loss to Kemp, blasted the new voting law. The Democrat is being closely watched to see if she seeks a rematch against Kemp in 2022.

"Georgia Republicans must renounce the terrible damage they have caused to our voting system and the harm they have inflicted on our economy," Abrams said.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, a Democrat, said she supports MLB's decision. Atlanta will no doubt share in the economic loss, though the Braves' home stadium is now located outside the city, in suburban Cobb County.

"Unfortunately, the removal of the MLB All-Star Game from Georgia is likely the first of many dominoes to fall until the unnecessary barriers put in place to restrict access to the ballot box are removed," Bottoms said in a statement.

Some Democrats from the Georgia county where the game was to be held said they oppose MLB's move. Lisa Cupid, the Black chairwoman of the Cobb County Commission, said she urged the league to stay rather than harm hotels and other businesses still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic.

State Rep. Teri Anulewicz, a Democrat whose district includes the stadium, added: "I don't know who Major League Baseball feels they are punishing. The governor, from his statement, has made clear he doesn't feel he is being punished."

The relocation of high-profile sports events from cities in response to social issues has a long history in the U.S.

The NFL originally awarded the 1993 Super Bowl to Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Arizona, but decided in March 1991 to move it to Pasadena, California, after the state failed to make Martin Luther King Jr. Day an official holiday. Arizona became the last state to adopt an MLK Holiday when voters approved it in November 1992.

The NBA first scheduled its 2017 All-Star Game at the Spectrum Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, then shifted it in July 2016 because of its objections to a North Carolina law that limited anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people. The law was partially repealed in 2017, and the 2019 All-Star Game was held in Charlotte.

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Manfred said despite the change of venue, MLB still plans to use the All-Star Game this year to honor Hank Aaron, the Braves' Hall of Famer and former career home run champion who died on Jan. 22 at age 86.

Houston Astros manager Dusty Baker, a former teammate of Aaron's, applauded the move and said the late outfielder "always had the rights of the people in the forefront of his mind and in his heart."

"This is what Hank would have liked, even if it was his town," Baker told reporters.

## Unique 4/3/21 date draws lines for Vegas wedding licenses

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Soon-to-be newlyweds lined up out the door of the marriage license office in Las Vegas on Friday, ahead of a unique date to tie the knot: 4/3/21.

Nearly 700 couples obtained licenses for the Saturday date, said Jeff Klein, a spokesman for the Clark County Marriage Bureau, as the city where Elvis can be part of the wedding party got set to mark yet another quirky date for nuptials. The clerk's office marked the occasion with keepsake marriage certificates.

"Specialty dates like 4/3/21 are always immensely popular," said county Clerk Lynn Goya, who noted that more than 1,800 couples were married on Dec. 13, 2014.

April is usually busy for weddings, and past dates with notable numeric sequences have tallied more than 1,000 weddings in a day, Goya said.

The office is bracing for a busy first 10 days this December, offering what the clerk dubs "palindrome days" for numbers reading the same forward and backward.

Nearly 2,700 couples married on 10/10/10; more than 1,800 tied the knot on 12/12/12; and 3,125 were wed on 11/11/11.

The most popular date to date?

Goya said 7/7/7 took the cake, with 4,492 marriages.

## Few in GOP rush to defend Gaetz amid sex trafficking probe

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The political peril for conservative Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz deepened Friday as the often outlandish, Trump-styled provocateur appeared politically isolated amid a federal sex-trafficking investigation.

Few Republicans rushed to offer any kind of support to the three-term Florida congressman known for espousing high-volume attacks — sometimes against those in his own party — during his frequent media appearances. Several GOP lawmakers and top aides who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive situation said Gaetz's prospects for remaining in Congress were bleak and were complicated in particular by his unpopularity among colleagues in his own party.

Federal prosecutors are examining whether Gaetz and a political ally who is facing sex trafficking allegations may have paid underage girls or offered them gifts in exchange for sex, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Friday.

The scrutiny of Gaetz stemmed from the Justice Department's probe into the political ally, Joel Greenberg, the people said. Greenberg, a former Florida tax collector, was indicted last year and is accused of a number of federal crimes. He has pleaded not guilty.

Republican congressional leaders have largely been silent about the investigation, which continues.

That reflected the serious nature of the charges in a story that seems to add new elements by the day, giving lawmakers little motivation to attach themselves to Gaetz.

In one potentially ominous sign, Gaetz spokesman Luke Ball has resigned, according to one Republican who was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Part of the investigation is examining whether Gaetz, 38, had sex with a 17-year-old and other underage girls and violated federal sex trafficking laws, the people familiar with the probe told the AP. Federal agents suspect Greenberg may have enticed the girls and then introduced some of them to Gaetz, and they are examining whether both men may have had sex with the same girls, the people said.

The people with knowledge of the investigation could not discuss details publicly and spoke to The

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Associated Press on condition of anonymity. Details of the investigation were first reported by The New York Times.

Gaetz has vehemently denied the allegations and said in a statement earlier this week that "No part of the allegations against me are true."

For those who have watched the congressman's rise in Florida and Washington, there have been few surprises.

As a former state legislator, he was widely known in Tallahassee before arriving in the nation's Capitol where he made a splash attaching himself to Trump.

Many colleagues on Capitol Hill view Gaetz as being obsessed with self-promotion, as illustrated by his numerous television appearances, which are unusually frequent for a lawmaker not in a senior position. This is Gaetz's fifth year in Congress.

They are especially upset with his willingness to publicly take on fellow Republicans, which many consider needlessly divisive.

That was most clearly on display when he traveled to Wyoming in January to urge voters there to not reelect Rep. Liz Cheney. Days earlier, Cheney, the No. 3 House GOP leader, was among just 10 House Republicans to vote to impeach Trump.

Among the rare lawmakers to express support for Gaetz is freshman GOP Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, another rising figure in the GOP propelled by her media appearances and use of social media to spread baseless conspiracy theories.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., told reporters this week that accusations against Gaetz were "serious."

The Gaetz investigation, which has been going on since at least the summer of 2020, reached the highest levels of the Justice Department, and former Attorney General William Barr was briefed on the matter several times, the people said.

In the last few months, investigators have also interviewed several witnesses in the case and have been scrutinizing documents, including travel and financial records, the people said.

Greenberg was the elected tax collector in Seminole County near Orlando when he resigned last June after his arrest on federal charges. Initially, those included stalking a political opponent, trafficking a minor for sex and illegally using a state database to create fake drivers licenses and other ID cards.

Since then, the case against Greenberg has ballooned to more than 30 charges, including wire fraud and other charges involving efforts to divert at least \$400,000 from the tax collectors office into cryptocurrency he controlled and for his own personal use, such as the purchase of memorabilia autographed by NBA greats Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant, federal prosecutors say. Other charges accuse him of using two companies he controlled to attempt to fraudulently obtain coronavirus relief funds.

Gaetz has said the allegations against him are part of an extortion plot by an attorney in Florida, who worked decades ago as a federal prosecutor and whom Gaetz identified as David McGee.

In response, McGee's law firm said the allegation that Gaetz made about the supposed extortion attempt was "both false and defamatory." The firm said that McGee had served in top positions at the U.S. attorney's office in Florida about 25 years ago and that his "reputation for integrity and ethical conduct was impeccable."

The Justice Department has a separate investigation into the extortion allegations, being led out of the U.S. attorney's office in northern Florida, according to a person familiar with the investigation who also could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Gaetz has said that his family has been cooperating with the FBI and that his father was wearing a recording device, at the FBI's direction, "to catch these criminals." He also demanded the Justice Department release the recordings.

The Justice Department has not commented.

**Man charged with 4 counts of murder in California shooting**

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By STEFANIE DAZIO and AMY TAXIN Associated Press

ORANGE, Calif. (AP) — A man was charged Friday with murder and attempted murder in a shooting rampage at a Southern California office building this week that left four people dead, including a 9-year-old boy whose mother was critically wounded.

Police have not revealed a motive for Wednesday's attack but said the gunman had targeted the business, Unified Homes, and had personal and business relationships with the victims.

The suspect, Aminadab Gaxiola Gonzalez, is married to a longtime employee of the company, Aleyda Mendoza. It's not known where she was at the time of the shooting.

Mendoza answered the phone and confirmed to The Associated Press she is Gaxiola's wife. She said she would provide a written statement but did not immediately send one. According to her LinkedIn account she was a broker assistant at Unified Homes since 2011.

Gaxiola, 44, was charged with four murder counts and three attempted murder counts for firing at two officers who were not hit and for critically wounding the boy's mother, authorities said. Bicycle-type locks were used to shut two gates to the business complex before the attack, forcing arriving officers to use bolt cutters to gain entrance.

"The taking of the life of another human being is the most serious of crimes and the slaughter of multiple people while they were essentially locked in a shooting gallery is nothing short of terrifying," Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said in a statement.

Gaxiola was shot and remained in a hospital in critical but stable condition. Authorities are investigating whether he was wounded by police or self-inflicted gunfire.

He couldn't be arraigned because he was unconscious, and the hearing was delayed until Monday, said Kimberly Edds, a spokeswoman for the district attorney's office.

Ken Morrison, assistant public defender, declined to discuss the charges and urged the district attorney to respect the judicial process and avoid releasing details that could affect his client's ability to have a fair trial.

The shooting in the city of Orange, southeast of Los Angeles, was the nation's third major mass shooting in just over two weeks. The other shootings — in Colorado and Georgia — left 18 dead.

Authorities identified the people killed in the California attack as Luis Tovar, 50, who owned Unified Homes; Leticia Solis Guzman, 58; and Jenevieve Raygoza, 28, and her brother, Matthew Farias, 9.

Matthew, a third-grader from nearby Santa Ana, was a humble boy who loved bike riding and his dog, said Zef Farias, the boy's uncle. Usually, Matthew was at day care after school but Wednesday afternoon he was with his mother, Blanca Tamayo, who worked at Unified Homes.

She was the only person shot who survived. When police arrived Tamayo was cradling her dead son, Spitzer said.

Matthew "normally doesn't go there," Farias said, fighting back tears. "They were just part of the collateral damage."

Tovar had a previous relationship with Tamayo and they were Raygoza's parents, said Rosie Farias, the boy's aunt.

"We are devastated and in disbelief," she said, recalling outings to the beach and bike riding with her nephew. "He was just the brightest star ever. He made all of us happy. He had so much energy."

Tovar, attended high school in nearby Anaheim and raised his five children in the city, The Orange County Register reported. His daughter, Vania Tovar, told the newspaper that he coached her and her sisters in soccer when they were younger and was active in their lives.

"My dad was the most amazing dad and grandfather," she said, describing him as hilarious and "extremely outgoing, but serious when he needed to be."

"Our world is shattered," she said.

Gaxiola, from nearby Fullerton, was staying at a motel in the neighboring city of Anaheim and used a rented car to arrive at the office building on Wednesday afternoon. He chained the front and rear gates to the two-story complex and then went into the second-floor offices of Unified Homes, authorities said.

Police released a frame from a security video inside the office. It showed the gunman wearing a bandana

over his face, brandishing a semiautomatic handgun and hauling a backpack that contained pepper spray, handcuffs and ammunition, authorities said.

Gaxiola has a limited criminal record. He was charged in 2015 in Orange County with cruelty to a child and other counts. 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.

## Man rams car into 2 Capitol police; 1 officer, driver killed

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, NOMAAN MERCHANT and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Capitol Police officer was killed Friday after a man rammed a car into two officers at a barricade outside the U.S. Capitol and then emerged wielding a knife. It was the second line-of-duty death this year for a department still struggling to heal from the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Video shows the driver of the crashed car emerging with a knife in his hand and starting to run at the pair of officers, Capitol Police Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman told reporters. Authorities shot the suspect, who died at a hospital.

"I just ask that the public continue to keep U.S. Capitol Police and their families in your prayers," Pittman said. "This has been an extremely difficult time for U.S. Capitol Police after the events of Jan. 6 and now the events that have occurred here today."

Police identified the slain officer as William "Billy" Evans, an 18-year veteran who was a member of the department's first responders unit.

Two law enforcement officials told The Associated Press that investigators initially believed the suspect stabbed one of the officers, but it was later unclear whether the knife actually made contact, in part because the vehicle struck the officers with such force. The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss the investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Authorities said there wasn't an ongoing threat, though the Capitol was put on lockdown for a time as a precaution. There was also no immediate connection apparent between Friday's crash and the Jan. 6 riot.

Law enforcement officials identified the suspect as 25-year-old Noah Green. Investigators were digging into his background and examining whether he had any mental health history as they tried to discern a motive. They were also working to obtain warrants to access his online accounts.

Pittman said the suspect did not appear to have been on the police's radar. But the attack underscored that the building and campus — and the officers charged with protecting them — remain potential targets for violence.

Green described himself as a follower of the Nation of Islam and its founder, Louis Farrakhan, and spoke of going through a difficult time where he leaned on his faith, according to recent messages posted online that have since been taken down. The messages were captured by the group SITE, which tracks online activity.

"To be honest these past few years have been tough, and these past few months have been tougher," he wrote. "I have been tried with some of the biggest, unimaginable tests in my life. I am currently now unemployed after I left my job partly due to afflictions, but ultimately, in search of a spiritual journey."

President Joe Biden said in a statement that he and his wife were heartbroken to learn of the attack and expressed condolences to Evans' family. He directed flags at the White House to be lowered to half staff.

The crash and shooting happened at a security checkpoint near the Capitol typically used by senators and staff on weekdays, though most were away from the building for the current recess. The attack occurred about 100 yards (91 meters) from the entrance of the building on the Senate side of the Capitol. One witness, the Rev. Patrick Mahoney, said he was finishing a Good Friday service nearby when he heard three shots ring out.

The Washington region remains on edge nearly three months after a mob of insurrectionists loyal to former President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol as Congress was voting to certify Biden's presidential win.

Five people died in the Jan. 6 riot, including Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick, who was among a badly outnumbered force trying to fight off the intruders seeking to overturn the election. Authorities installed

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a tall perimeter fence around the Capitol and for months restricted traffic along the roads closest to the building, but they had begun pulling back some of the emergency measures. Fencing that prevented vehicular traffic near that area was only recently removed.

Evans was the seventh Capitol Police member to die in the line of duty in the department's history, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page, which tracks deaths of law enforcement. In addition, two officers, one from Capitol Police and another from Washington's Metropolitan Police Department, died by suicide following the Jan. 6 attack.

Almost 140 Capitol Police officers were wounded in that attack, including officers not issued helmets who sustained head injuries and one with cracked ribs, according to the officers' union. It took hours for the National Guard to arrive, a delay that has driven months of finger-pointing between that day's key decision makers.

Capitol Police and National Guard troops were called upon soon afterward to secure the Capitol during Biden's inauguration and faced another potential threat in early March linked to conspiracy theories falsely claiming Trump would retake the presidency.

"Today, once again, these heroes risked their lives to protect our Capitol and our country, with the same extraordinary selflessness and spirit of service seen on January 6," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a statement. "On behalf of the entire House, we are profoundly grateful."

The U.S. Capitol complex was placed on lockdown for a time after Friday's shooting, and staffers were told they could not enter or exit buildings. Video showed Guard troops mobilizing near the area of the crash.

Video posted online showed a dark colored sedan crashed against a vehicle barrier and a police K-9 dog inspecting the vehicle. Law enforcement and paramedics could be seen caring for at least one unidentified individual.

## Christians mark Good Friday, Holy Week under virus woes

By JOSEPH KRAUSS and FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Christians in the Holy Land marked Good Friday without the mass pilgrimages usually seen in the days leading up to Easter because of the coronavirus, and worshippers in many other predominantly Christian countries where the virus is still raging observed their second annual Holy Week with tight restrictions on gatherings.

In Jerusalem, many holy sites were open, thanks to an ambitious Israeli vaccination campaign. It was a stark contrast to last year, when the city was under lockdown. In neighboring Lebanon, Christians observed Good Friday under a lockdown and suffering a severe economic crisis.

In Latin America, penitents from Mexico and Guatemala to Paraguay carried tree branches covered with thorns and large crosses in Passion Plays reenacting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. At the Vatican, Pope Francis presided over a torch-lit Way of the Cross ceremony in St. Peter's Square, foregoing for a second year the traditional Colosseum procession that draws thousands of pilgrims, tourists and Romans.

Worshippers in the Philippines and France marked a second annual Holy Week under movement restrictions amid outbreaks fanned by more contagious strains. In the U.S., officials urged Christians to celebrate outdoors, while social distancing, or in virtual ceremonies.

In Jerusalem's Old City, 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, singing hymns and pausing to offer prayers.

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

Despite one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns, air travel to and from Israel is still limited by quarantine and other restrictions, keeping away the foreign pilgrims who usually throng Jerusalem during Holy Week. In past years, tens of thousands of pilgrims would descend on the city's holy sites.

"In regular years we urge people to come out. Last year we told people to stay at home," said Wadie



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Abunassar, an adviser to church leaders in the Holy Land. "This year we are somehow silent."

"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."

In Lebanon, Christians observed Good Friday 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."

At the Vatican, candles flickering in a breeze were placed in a circle around St. Peter's Square's central obelisk and along a path leading to steps outside St. Peter's Basilica. There, Francis sat under a canopy in the darkness on a warm evening, listening to children reading meditations composed by other children that recounted sorrowful episodes in their lives.

One child wrote of loneliness in the COVID-19 pandemic, not being able to visit grandparents to keep them safe from contagion and missing schoolmates and teachers since schools in Italy have been closed for long stretches due to lockdown. Another wrote about grandpa dying of COVID-19 without family members in a hospital.

At one point, Francis prayed that God would give people his hope so that "we will be able to recognize you even in the darkest moments of our life."

Anti-pandemic measures have devastated tourism in Italy and largely reduced religious pilgrimages to a trickle. Only a few hundred participants, including prelates, were allowed to attend.

In the U.S., faithful of all denominations were urged to abide by COVID-related capacity restrictions at houses of worship, to observe online services and to take mask-wearing and social distancing precautions at outdoor ceremonies.

The congregation of First Baptist Church in Medford, Wisconsin held graceful, low-key and socially-distanced indoor services that were livestreamed.

George Myers, pastor of student ministries, focused their attention on the final thing Jesus said on the cross: "It is finished." Those words were not about His death, but about His completion of the work He was sent to do, Myers said.

"So FBC, don't miss this. This is the moment when Jesus undid the curse of sin and the curse of death," Myers assured his congregants.

At St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Denver, celebrants wearing face masks staged an elaborate outdoor reenactment of the Stations of the Cross featuring Roman soldiers on horseback and jeering onlookers using fake leather whips on a condemned Jesus Christ carrying a cross. Police officers escorted the entourage through the neighborhood as church workers handed out face masks to those not wearing them in the crowd of onlookers.

In New York, Archbishop Timothy Dolan presided over a Celebration of the Passion of the Lord at St. Patrick's Cathedral attended by mask-wearing clergy and worshippers. That service, an evening Stations of the Cross ceremony and a reflection on the passion and death of Christ were broadcast on the Catholic Channel on Sirius XM and livestreamed on the cathedral's YouTube channel and website.

"We may be separated by distance, but we are united in Faith," the archdiocese said in its invitation to Holy Week celebrations.

In France, a nationwide 7 p.m. curfew forced parishes to move Good Friday ceremonies forward in the day, the traditional Catholic night processions 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."

Fire-ravaged Notre Dame did not hold a Good Friday Mass this year, but the cathedral's "Crown of Thorns" was being venerated by the cathedral's clergy at its new temporary liturgical hub in the nearby church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.

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In Spain, there were no traditional processions for a second year in a row. Churches limited the number of worshippers. Many parishes went 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 breathing life into its suffering economy, but infections surged last month, apparently because of more contagious strains, increased public mobility and complacency.

In Kenya, all churches were ordered to close as part of a ban on large gatherings to contain a worsening outbreak. Joseph Karinga went to his church anyway and prayed outside the shuttered doors, in a garden near a shrine to Mary.

"I will just say my rosary here and go home," he said.

## Moderation, sometimes, for Georgia GOP despite voting law

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Amid a supernova of criticism over Georgia's new voting law, Republicans are still trying to appeal to swing voters in a state where Democrats have now proved they can win.

As the last minutes of the 2021 General Assembly ticked away Wednesday, a bill making it easier for visitors to carry guns in Georgia and mandating protections for gun-related businesses was dying. It needed one quick House vote to reach Republican Gov. Brian Kemp for signature into law. However, the bill never came up. House Speaker David Ralston told reporters it was too soon after the shooting deaths of eight people at massage businesses in metro Atlanta.

"We needed to be very, very sensitive to any gun legislation," said Ralston, a Blue Ridge Republican. "You know we're less than two weeks out from two major mass killings and so, you know, that heightens my level of sensitivity to that."

State Rep. Shea Roberts, an Atlanta Democrat who narrowly unseated a Republican opponent in 2020, said Ralston shied away from the gun bill to avoid political fallout.

"I'm glad we didn't expand gun rights. I think that was just one more thing they knew they would take a hit on if they did it," Roberts said.

Georgia Republicans are trying to be conservative — but not too conservative — as they work to retain moderate suburban voters while Democrats led by 2018 gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams challenge once-secure Republican rule. Candidates for 2022 are already announcing, and redistricting looms for congressional and state lawmakers. So Kemp and other Republicans are walking a narrow line, seeking to continue to rule the state and prevent Democratic U.S. Sen Raphael Warnock's reelection next year.

"It's marginal, but right now Georgia is living on the margins. As long as Georgia is living on the margins, this balance is working," Republican political consultant Brian Robinson said. He said Republican leaders strived to govern "from the center right, not from the far right," even when they were winning easily.

It's unclear if Republican gestures toward moderation will matter amid the overwhelming reaction to the voting law, including Major League Baseball pulling its All-Star Game from the Atlanta Braves stadium Friday.

"I think that's probably going to be the single biggest thing remembered from the session," said Republican Sen. Clint Dixon, who represents a competitive district in suburban Gwinnett County.

There's also a push for stronger action, like the vote the House took to strip Delta Air Lines of a jet fuel tax break after CEO Ed Bastian sharpened criticism of the voting law. That measure was never likely to pass, but some Republicans relished expressing displeasure against metro Atlanta's largest private employer.

"You don't feed a dog that bites your hand," Ralston said.

University of Georgia political scientist Charles Bullock said tension exists between what devoted Republicans desire and what the party needs to win.

"A party or its members can get caught in a vise between what some of the core members of the party want, or even demand, and where the broader electorate is," Bullock said.

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It's also unclear if Republicans can differentiate themselves at the state level in a polarized national environment.

"They do not operate in a bubble," Robinson said. "State parties cannot exist outside of their national parties as far as public perception today."

Ralston has taken a go-slow approach on many socially conservative proposals after a bruising 2016 debate over whether religious freedom legislation would legalize discrimination against gay and lesbian people. That caution was rewarded in 2020, when Republicans maintained majorities in the General Assembly even as Joe Biden won Georgia's electoral votes and Warnock and Jon Ossoff defeated Republicans in January runoffs to give Democrats control of the U.S. Senate.

Republican lawmakers did ban cities and counties from sharply cutting police funding this year, blocking "defund the police" movements. That was paired with a nearly unanimous repeal of Georgia's citizen's arrest law after the 2020 killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man pursued and shot by white men who claimed they believed he had committed a crime.

"Some of what we have done, we can call progress," Senate Democratic Minority Leader Gloria Butler of Stone Mountain said.

Republicans abandoned a bill banning transgender girls from playing on girls sports teams in high schools as similar bills sailed into law in other Republican-controlled states. Dixon cited that failure and the gun bill as disappointments, but said, "There is a balance you've got to strike."

Kemp has welcomed partisan combat over the voting law since signing it, fortifying himself among Republicans after withering attacks from President Donald Trump for Kemp's refusal to overturn Biden's victory in Georgia. But the governor is also planning partial expansion of Medicaid, although the Biden administration is rejecting Kemp's insistence on work requirements.

That's one of a series of small-bore policies, including paid parental leave for state employees, extended Medicaid for mothers after childbirth and easier children's health insurance enrollment. All undermine Democratic pushes for broader changes.

"They do these other things so they can say 'Look, we care,'" Roberts said. "They do these incremental things, but there's so much more we could be doing."

## 'Crisis management': Nats' COVID outbreak scraps Mets series

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP National Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A COVID-19 outbreak affecting more than a third of the Washington Nationals' roster caused the postponement of the 2019 World Series champions' season-opening three-game series against the visiting New York Mets.

Four of Washington's players have tested positive for the illness caused by the novel coronavirus, and another five were quarantining after contact tracing determined they might have been exposed, general manager Mike Rizzo said Friday in a video call with reporters.

"We're in crisis management mode," Rizzo said.

His team is also in a holding pattern, uncertain when it actually will be allowed to play a game — or even hold workouts.

After games against the Mets scheduled for Thursday, Saturday and Sunday at Nationals Park were scratched, the next possible contest for Washington would be at home against the NL East champion Atlanta Braves on Monday.

"Depending on what happens in the next day or so, we'll be in contact with MLB, and we'll make the decision on whether we're playing or not," Rizzo said. "But we are, as of right now, preparing to play Monday."

That would require calling up several players who did not make the cut at the end of spring training and are now at the Nationals' training site in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

"Our depth is going to have to shine," the GM said.

Rizzo has not identified any of the players involved in the outbreak — and said Friday he would not.

"The hardest part is probably what they're going through right now. They still probably have some un-

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known: Is it going to keep going on? ... You don't know when you're going to play. You don't know what's going to happen. You're in quarantine. You can't do anything," said Miami Marlins manager Don Mattingly, whose team put 17 players on the injured list because of the coronavirus and was idle for more than a week early in the truncated 2020 season but wound up reaching the playoffs.

"That uncertainty is the hardest part," Mattingly said. "Trying to stay ready is a tough part. You try to think about doing that safely for guys when you come back. This first week is probably going to be the toughest time."

The Nationals did not report a single positive COVID-19 test throughout their six-week spring training camp that ended at the start of this week. The team flew from Florida to Washington on Monday; the first positive of the current outbreak came from testing that day.

Other positives arose from testing Wednesday.

"A virus is a virus. It's very contagious. So I think it could happen in many, many different ways. I don't think it's a breach of protocol or inadequate protocols," Rizzo said. "But it's something that happened. We're going to try to find out how it happened and investigate it and see if we can stop it from happening again."

One of Washington's players had a fever, according to Rizzo, but others involved were not showing symptoms.

He is hoping players will be allowed to practice in small, staggered groups at Nationals Park beginning Saturday.

"You can't just go from a dead stop in this postponement to ramping up to play the Atlanta Braves and not expect (there) to be injuries," Rizzo said.

"But these other players, it's just hard to have them sitting and playing video games or whatever for two or three days and then to ramp up again. To me, it's a safety issue and we've got to get these guys' blood flowing," he said. "We've got to get them moving around so they don't go into the season going from zero to 100 miles an hour without preparation for the last couple of days."

Major League Baseball and the players' union issued a testing update Friday, saying there were four new positive tests — three players and one staff member — from the 14,354 tests administered over the past week across all of the sport, a 0.03% rate.

That presumably does not include Washington's fourth positive player. Rizzo originally designated that person as a "likely positive" on Thursday, before updating that Friday to say the result was considered a positive.

There is also one Nationals staff member who was put in quarantine after contact tracing.

"It's unfortunate that they're going through kind of what we went through last year, but this virus isn't going away," said Marlins first baseman and outfielder Garrett Cooper, one of Miami's players who got sick in 2020. "One slip-up with COVID, it can take down a whole team."

## **EXPLAINER: Analyzing use of force by police officers**

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

As former Officer Derek Chauvin stands trial in George Floyd's death, a central question is whether he followed the Minneapolis Police Department's guidelines on the use of force — and used that force reasonably.

The department's longest-tenured officer sharply criticized Chauvin's actions in testimony Friday, at one point calling Chauvin's lengthy restraint of Floyd "totally unnecessary."

Lt. Richard Zimmerman laid out a range of actions that officers can take in using force. He joined a retired Minneapolis police sergeant who also testified for the prosecution, as well as use-of-force experts interviewed by The Associated Press, in questioning Chauvin's actions.

### **USE-OF-FORCE CONTINUUM**

Zimmerman, who has been on the Minneapolis force since 1985, told jurors that department policy spells out the use-of-force guidelines officers are expected to follow.

The lowest level, he said, is a police officer simply showing up in uniform at an event. One step up is

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using verbal skills to gather information and try to defuse a situation, he said.

"The next step would be like a soft, soft technique, escorting the person by their arm, that type of thing," Zimmerman said. "The next level would be a hard technique. That's where you would use your, uh, you know, you maybe have to use your Mace or handcuffs, that kind of thing."

Finally, Zimmerman said, comes deadly force.

**WAS CHAUVIN'S USE OF THE RESTRAINT REASONABLE?**

Zimmerman's testimony suggested not. Asked by a prosecutor what officers should do when a person has been handcuffed and is less combative, Zimmerman said officers "may just have them sit down on a curb or the idea is to calm the person down. And if they are not a threat to you at that point, you try to, you know, to help them so that they're not as upset as they may have been in the beginning."

Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, sought to show that Floyd could still have been a threat to officers. He also noted that the decision to use force can depend on outside factors, too, such as whether officers felt threatened by bystanders.

Use-of-force experts have questioned how Chauvin and three other officers handled Floyd after they were called to a report of a person accused of passing a phony \$20 bill. Body camera video played at trial shows Floyd saying over and over that he was claustrophobic as he struggled to avoid being forced into a police SUV.

Mylan Masson, who once headed police training at Hennepin Technical College and served on the Minnesota Police Officers Standards and Training Board for more than 20 years, said officers should have been asking whether Floyd knew the bill was counterfeit and whether he had others in his possession.

Masson questioned why they decided to arrest him at all, noting that "he didn't seem to be a harm to other people."

"The trajectory of the event could have been slowed down," said Geoffrey Alpert, a criminology professor at the University of South Carolina. "There was no rush, no split-second decision. There was no reason to push things."

Alpert and Masson both questioned why the officers didn't try to put Floyd into a larger vehicle such as an ambulance or van, given that he said he was claustrophobic.

Police departments nationwide have been trying for years to train officers to avoid violence. In 2016, the Minneapolis Police Department rewrote its use of force policy to emphasize the "sanctity of life," and began training officers in de-escalation — calming people down to prevent violence.

**WHY DOES IT MATTER AT TRIAL?**

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death. Prosecutors say the since-fired police officer knelt on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, as he pleaded that he couldn't breathe. The most serious charge against Chauvin carries up to 40 years in prison.

Prosecutors contend Floyd's death was caused by Chauvin's knee. But the defense has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do and blame Floyd's drug use, heart disease, high blood pressure and adrenaline.

Alex Piquero, chairman of the University of Miami's sociology department, said it is important for prosecutors to show that Chauvin, along with the other officers, made a series of decisions that led to Floyd's death.

He said police officers often work with limited information and have to make decisions quickly. But he said it's clear that regardless of what happened before Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck, it was wrong.

"This is not the way you want to handle someone who is supposedly trying to pass a counterfeit bill," he said.

## **Lieutenant: Kneeling on Floyd's neck 'totally unnecessary'**

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, AMY FORLITI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Kneeling on George Floyd's neck while he was handcuffed and lying on his stomach was top-tier, deadly force and "totally unnecessary," the head of the Minneapolis Police Department's

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homicide division testified Friday.

"If your knee is on a person's neck, that can kill him," said Lt. Richard Zimmerman, adding that when a person is handcuffed behind their back, "your muscles are pulling back ... and if you're laying on your chest, that's constricting your breathing even more."

Zimmerman, who said he is the most senior person on the police force, also testified at Derek Chauvin's murder trial that once Floyd was handcuffed, he saw "no reason for why the officers felt they were in danger — if that's what they felt — and that's what they would have to feel to be able to use that kind of force."

"So in your opinion, should that restraint have stopped once he was handcuffed and thrown on the ground?" prosecutor Matthew Frank asked.

"Absolutely," replied Zimmerman, who said he has received use-of-force training annually — as all officers do — since joining the city force in 1985.

He said he has never been trained to kneel on someone's neck if they're handcuffed behind their back and in the prone position.

"Once you secure or handcuff a person, you need to get them out of the prone position as soon as possible because it restricts their breathing," Zimmerman said, adding "you need to turn them on their side or have them sit up."

He also testified that officers have a duty to provide care for a person in distress, even if an ambulance has been called.

Officers kept restraining Floyd — with Chauvin kneeling on his neck, another kneeling on Floyd's back and a third holding his feet — until the ambulance arrived, even after he became unresponsive.

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The officers also rebuffed offers of help from an off-duty Minneapolis firefighter who wanted to administer aid or tell officers how to do it.

Under cross examination, Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson peppered Zimmerman with questions about the use of force, pointing out that officers must consider the entire situation — including what is happening with a suspect, whether the suspect is under the influence, and other surrounding hazards, such as a crowd.

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 not by the knee on his neck — as prosecutors contend — but by drugs, his underlying health conditions and adrenaline. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Chauvin is also heard on body-camera footage defending his decision to an onlooker after Floyd was taken away by paramedics, saying: "We gotta control this guy 'cause he's a sizable guy ... and it looks like he's probably on something."

Chauvin, 45 and white, is charged with 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.

Zimmerman agreed with Nelson that a person who is handcuffed still can pose a threat and can continue to thrash around.

And he agreed when Nelson asked if officers who believe they're in a fight for their lives could use "whatever force is reasonable and necessary," including by improvising.

"Did you see any need for Officer Chauvin to improvise by putting his knee on Mr. Floyd for 9 minutes and 29 seconds?" Frank later asked Zimmerman.

"No, I did not," said Zimmerman, who said that based on his review of police body camera footage, the officers did not appear to be in danger from Floyd or about 15 onlookers.

Nelson has suggested that the bystanders — many of whom were shouting at Chauvin to get off Floyd — may have distracted officers and affected their response. The prosecution, however, noted that officers on the scene did not call for backup.

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Floyd's death triggered large protests around the U.S., scattered violence and widespread soul-searching over racism and police brutality. Chauvin, who was fired, is charged with murder and manslaughter. The most serious charge against him carries up to 40 years in prison.

## Lieutenant: Kneeling on Floyd's neck 'totally unnecessary'

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, AMY FORLITI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Kneeling on George Floyd's neck while he was handcuffed and lying on his stomach was top-tier, deadly force and "totally unnecessary," the head of the Minneapolis Police Department's homicide division testified Friday.

"If your knee is on a person's neck, that can kill him," said Lt. Richard Zimmerman, adding that when a person is handcuffed behind their back, "your muscles are pulling back ... and if you're laying on your chest, that's constricting your breathing even more."

Zimmerman, who said he is the most senior person on the police force, also testified at Derek Chauvin's murder trial that once Floyd was handcuffed, he saw "no reason for why the officers felt they were in danger — if that's what they felt — and that's what they would have to feel to be able to use that kind of force."

"So in your opinion, should that restraint have stopped once he was handcuffed and thrown on the ground?" prosecutor Matthew Frank asked.

"Absolutely," replied Zimmerman, who said he has received use-of-force training annually — as all officers do — since joining the city force in 1985.

He said he has never been trained to kneel on someone's neck if they're handcuffed behind their back and in the prone position.

"Once you secure or handcuff a person, you need to get them out of the prone position as soon as possible because it restricts their breathing," Zimmerman said, adding "you need to turn them on their side or have them sit up."

He also testified that officers have a duty to provide care for a person in distress, even if an ambulance has been called.

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## 'First step:' US, Iran to begin indirect nuclear-limit talks

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and RAF CASERT Associated Press

The United States and Iran said Friday they will begin indirect negotiations with intermediaries next week to try to get both countries back into compliance with an accord limiting Iran's nuclear program, nearly three years after President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the deal.

The announcement marks one of the first bits of tangible progress in efforts to return both nations to terms of the 2015 accord, which bound Iran to restrictions in return for relief from U.S. and international sanctions.

President Joe Biden came into office saying that getting back into the accord and getting Iran's nuclear program back under international restrictions was a priority. But Iran and the United States have disagreed over Iran's demands that sanctions be lifted first, and that deadlock has threatened to become an early foreign policy setback for the new U.S. president.

Administration officials played down expectations for next week's talks. State Department spokesperson Ned Price called the resumption of negotiations, scheduled for Tuesday in Vienna, "a healthy step forward." But Price added, "These remain early days, and we don't anticipate an immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead."

"This is a first step," Biden Iran envoy Rob Malley tweeted. He said diplomats were now "on the right path."

Trump pulled the U.S. out of the accord in 2018, accusing Iran of continuous cheating and opting for what he called a maximum-pressure campaign of stepped-up U.S. sanctions and other tough actions. Iran responded by intensifying its enrichment of uranium and building of centrifuges in plain violation of the accord, while maintaining its insistence that its nuclear development was for civilian and not military purposes.

Israel, Saudi Arabia and other U.S. allies and strategic partners are on perpetual alert against the possibility of their top rival, Iran, attaining nuclear arms, keeping tensions up in a region where the U.S. military is present and has often intervened.

Iran's enrichment was seen as upping the pressure for a U.S. return to the nuclear deal and a lifting of Trump's sanctions, which included banking measures aimed at cutting off the country from the international financial system. Other Trump administration measures sanctioned Iran's oil sales and blacklisted top government officials.

Agreement on the start of indirect talks came after the European Union helped broker a virtual meeting of officials from Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and Iran, all of which have remained in the accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Price said next week's talks will be structured around working groups that the European Union was forming with the remaining participants in the accord, including Iran.



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"The primary issues that will be discussed are the nuclear steps that Iran would need to take in order to return to compliance with the terms of the JCPOA, and the sanctions relief steps that the United States would need to take in order to return to compliance as well," Price said.

The United States, like Iran, said it did not anticipate direct talks between the two nations now. Price said the United States remains open to that idea, however.

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

Iranian state television quoted Abbas Araghchi, Iran's nuclear negotiator at the virtual meeting, as saying during Friday's discussions 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 "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."

Events since Trump pulled out of the deal complicate the United States' return.

Iran since the U.S. withdrawal from the pact has been steadily violating its restrictions, like the amount of enriched uranium it can stockpile and the purity to which it can enrich it.

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

Iran in January increased uranium enrichment at its underground Fordo facility to 20% levels. That puts Tehran a comparatively easier technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium to convert to a higher level of enrichment and make a bomb.

Iran insists it is not seeking to make nuclear bombs.

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

As part of its ongoing violations of the deal, Iran last month began restricting inspections of its nuclear facilities. Under a last-minute agreement 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 facilities with the International Atomic Energy Agency but 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.

In the U.S., conservatives have pushed the Biden administration to broaden talks to address other complaints against Iran, including its crucial support to armed groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen and Syria and its detention of American citizens, as a condition for lifting sanctions. The administration has pledged in principle to push Iran on those matters, but State Department spokespeople on Friday declined to say if or when those additional points of friction might be raised in resumed talks..

## Many still hesitate to get vaccine, but reluctance is easing

By ANDREW SELSKY, HANNAH FINGERHUT and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

So few people came for COVID-19 vaccinations in one county in North Carolina that hospitals there now allow anyone 16 or older to get a shot, regardless of where they live. Get a shot, get a free doughnut, the governor said.

Alabama, which has the nation's lowest vaccination rate and a county where only 7% of residents are fully vaccinated, launched a campaign to convince people the shots are safe. Doctors and pastors joined the effort.

On the national level, the Biden administration this week launched a "We Can Do This" campaign to

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encourage holdouts to get vaccinated against the virus that has claimed over 550,000 lives in the U.S.

The race is on to vaccinate as many people as possible, but a significant number of Americans are so far reluctant to get the shots, even in places where they are plentiful. Twenty-five percent of Americans say they probably or definitely will not get vaccinated, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

They are leery about possible side effects. They tend to be Republican, and they are usually younger and less susceptible to becoming critically ill or dying if they catch COVID-19.

There's been a slight shift, though, since the first weeks of the nation's largest-ever vaccination campaign, which began in mid-December. An AP-NORC poll conducted in late January showed that 67% of adult Americans were willing to get vaccinated or had already received at least one shot. Now that figure has climbed to 75%.

That, experts say, moves the nation closer to herd immunity, which occurs when enough people have immunity, either from vaccination or past infection, to stop uncontrolled spread of a disease.

Anywhere from 75% to 85% of the total population — including children, who are not currently getting the shots — should be vaccinated to reach herd immunity, said Ali Mokdad, professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington School of Public Health.

A little over three months after the first doses were given, 100 million Americans, or about 30% of the population, have received at least one dose.

Andrea Richmond, a 26-year-old freelance web coder in Atlanta, is among those whose reluctance is easing. A few weeks ago, Richmond was leaning toward not getting the shot. Possible long-term effects worried her. She knew that an H1N1 vaccine used years ago in Europe increased risk of narcolepsy.

Then her sister got vaccinated with no ill effects. Richmond's friends' opinions also changed.

"They went from, 'I'm not trusting this' to 'I'm all vaxxed up, let's go out!'"

Her mother, a cancer survivor, whom Richmond lives with, is so keen for her daughter to get vaccinated that she signed her up online for a jab.

"I'll probably end up taking it," Richmond said. "I guess it's my civic duty."

But some remain steadfastly opposed.

"I think I only had the flu once," said Lori Mansour, 67, who lives near Rockford, Illinois. "So I think I'll take my chances."

In the latest poll, Republicans remained more likely than Democrats to say they will probably or definitely not get vaccinated, 36% compared with 12%. But somewhat fewer Republicans today are reluctant. Back in January, 44% said they would shy away from a vaccine.

The hesitance can be seen in Alabama's rural Winston County, which is 96% white and where more than 90% of voters backed then-President Donald Trump last year. Only 6.9% of the county's roughly 24,000 residents are fully vaccinated, the lowest level in Alabama.

Elsewhere in Alabama, health officials tried to counter problems that include reluctance in heavily Black areas where distrust of government medical initiatives runs deep. They targeted a few counties with a pro-vaccine message, especially in the old plantation region where a large percentage of the population is Black and many are poor.

The campaign enlisted doctors and pastors and used virtual meetings and the radio to spread the word.

Dr. Karen Landers, assistant state health officer, said the effort had positive results. For example, in Perry County, where 68% of the population of about 9,300 is Black, more than 16% of the population is fully vaccinated, among the highest levels. Officials likely will make similar efforts for other parts of the state, she said.

Nationwide, 24% of Black Americans and 22% of Hispanic Americans say they will probably or definitely not get vaccinated, down from 41% and 34% in January, respectively. Among white Americans, 26% now say they will not get vaccinated. In January, that number was 31%.

The Biden administration's campaign features TV and social media ads. Celebrities and community and religious figures are joining the effort.

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Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, is trying to win over the one-third of adult Iowans who will not commit to getting a vaccine by emphasizing that the shots will help return life to normal.

In North Carolina's Cumberland County, fewer than 1 in 6 residents have gotten at least one shot.

Amid worries there would be an unused surplus of vaccines, Cape Fear Valley Health hospital systems opened up the shots last week to everyone 16 or older.

"Rather than have doses go unused, we want to give more people the chance to get their vaccine," said Chris Tart, a Cape Fear Valley Health vice president. "We hope this will encourage more people to roll up their sleeve."

On Wednesday, Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, tweeted a video of him getting a free doughnut from the Krispy Kreme chain. Customers who show their vaccine card can get a free doughnut every day for the rest of the year.

"Do it today, guys!" Cooper encouraged viewers. Nearly 36% of North Carolina adults have been at least partially vaccinated, state data show.

Younger people are more likely to forgo a shot. Of those under 45, 31% say they will probably or definitely forgo a shot. Only 12% of those aged 60 and older say they will not get vaccinated.

Ronni Peck, a 40-year-old mother of three from Los Angeles, is one of those who plans to avoid getting vaccinated, at least for now. She's concerned that vaccines have not been studied for long-term health effects. She senses that some friends disapprove of her stance.

"But I've stopped caring about whether or not I feel ostracized and instead have learned to spend more time caring about if I'm doing the right thing for myself and my kids," Peck said.

Deborah Fuller, a professor with the University of Washington School of Medicine, said if the herd immunity level cannot be reached soon, a more realistic target could be vaccinating at least 50% of the population by this summer, with a higher vaccination rate among the most vulnerable to reduce severe disease, hospitalizations and deaths.

"In this scenario, the virus would persist in the population but cease being a major health threat that overburdens our health care systems," Fuller said.

## **EXPLAINER: What does Georgia's new GOP election law do?**

By BEN NADLER and JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The sweeping rewrite of Georgia's election rules represents the first big set of changes since former President Donald Trump's repeated, baseless claims of fraud following his presidential loss to Joe Biden.

Georgia has been at the center of that storm. Trump zeroed in on his loss in the state, even as two Democrats won election to the U.S. Senate in January, flipping control of the chamber to their party. The 98-page measure that was signed into law Thursday by Republican Gov. Brian Kemp makes numerous changes to how elections will be administered, including a new photo ID requirement for voting absentee by mail.

Republican supporters say the law is needed to restore confidence in Georgia's elections. Democrats say it will restrict voting access, especially for voters of color. Here's a look at some of the top issues:

### **CAN THE STATE TAKE OVER LOCAL ELECTION OFFICES?**

Much of the work administering elections in Georgia is handled by the state's 159 counties. The law gives the State Election Board new powers to intervene in county election offices and to remove and replace local election officials. That has led to concerns that the Republican-controlled state board could exert more influence over the administration of elections, including the certification of county results.

One target for intervention could be Fulton County, a Democratic stronghold that contains most of Atlanta. The heavily populated county has been plagued by problems, including long lines, and it is often singled out by Republican officials. Under the law, the board could intervene in up to four counties at a time and install a temporary superintendent with the ability to hire and fire personnel including elections directors and poll officers.

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**ARE PEOPLE BANNED FROM HANDING OUT SNACKS OR WATER TO VOTERS IN LINE?**

The new law makes it a misdemeanor to hand out "any money or gifts, including, but not limited to, food and drink" to anyone standing in line to vote. The prohibition extends 150 feet from a polling place and 25 feet from any person standing in line.

Advocates of the law say they are attempting to crack down on political organizations or advocacy groups trying to influence voters just before they cast a ballot. Critics say it's cruel and would penalize even nonpartisan groups or individuals for something as simple as giving water to someone waiting in a long line. Democratic state Senate Minority Leader Gloria Butler slammed the proposal Thursday before the bill was signed into law, saying: "They want to make it a crime to bring Grandma some water while she's waiting in line."

Polling places would be able to, but not required to, set up self-serve water dispensers for voters.

**DOES THE BILL ELIMINATE SUNDAY VOTING?**

Republicans had proposed at one time to limit early voting on weekends, a time when many Black churches conduct "souls to the polls" efforts to take congregants to vote. But Republicans reversed themselves, and the measure now expands weekend early voting. Previously, one day of weekend voting was required, with counties given the option of offering more. Now two Saturdays will be required, and counties can offer two Sunday voting days as well. Republicans point to this provision to argue they are actually expanding, rather than restricting, voting access.

"Contrary to the hyper-partisan rhetoric you may have heard inside and outside this gold dome, the facts are that this new law will expand voting access in the Peach State," Kemp said Thursday.

**HOW WILL RUNOFFS CHANGE?**

Georgia is the only state in the nation that mandates runoff elections between the top two finishers following general elections in which no candidate achieves a majority. Like some other states, Georgia also mandates runoffs for candidates who do not win a majority in a party primary.

The system came under scrutiny from Republicans after Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff won twin runoffs in January.

The new law shortens the time for runoffs from nine weeks to four, with lawmakers saying the current span is "exhausting" and needs to be shortened to a "more manageable period."

Military and overseas voters will use ranked-choice absentee ballots to rank all possible candidates before a primary or general election, allowing their preferences to be determined in any possible runoff. Georgia only had three weeks before runoffs until 2013, when a federal judge ordered a longer gap to give military and overseas voters more time to return ballots.

The shorter period means less time for early and mail voting. Early voting had lasted three weeks before runoffs. Now early voting would begin "as soon as possible" but no later than the second Monday before the election, possibly leaving as little as five weekdays and no weekend days of early voting. Voters would also have less time to apply for a mail ballot.

No new voters could be registered in the period before a runoff because the registration deadline would be the day before the earlier election.

**WHAT'S NEXT?**

Three groups filed a lawsuit late Thursday to try to block the law. The New Georgia Project, Black Voters Matter and Rise Inc. say the law violates the First and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, as well as parts of the federal Voting Rights Act that say states cannot restrict Black voter participation.

"These unjustified measures will individually and cumulatively operate to impose unconstitutional burdens on the right to vote, to deny or abridge the voting rights of Black Georgians, and to deny Black voters in Georgia an equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process and elect candidates of their choice," says the lawsuit, which is filed against Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and Georgia's State Elections Board.

Opponents are also looking to Congress, which is considering nationwide voting standards. A Democratic-backed measure passed the House earlier this month, but faces opposition from Senate Republicans wary of a federal takeover of state elections.

The federal proposal would create automatic voter registration nationwide, allow former felons to vote,

and limit the ways states can remove registered voters from their rolls. It would expand voting by mail, promote early voting and give states money to track absentee ballots.

## Fully vaccinated people can travel safely again, CDC says

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Add travel to the activities vaccinated Americans can safely enjoy again, according to new U.S. guidance issued Friday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its guidance to say fully vaccinated people can travel within the U.S. without getting tested for the coronavirus or going into quarantine afterward.

Still, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky urged caution and said she would “advocate against general travel overall” given the rising number of infections.

“If you are vaccinated, it is lower risk,” she said.

According to the CDC, more than 100 million people in the U.S. — or about 30% of the population — have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. A person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the last required dose.

The agency has said it would update its guidance on allowed activities for vaccinated people as more people get the shots and evidence mounts about the protection they provide.

Outside a San Francisco convention center, Kara Roche, a consultant with a tech company, welcomed the news after getting her second Pfizer shot.

“I’m thrilled that this summer there might be opportunities for us to go somewhere,” she said.

Roche said she normally travels overseas for vacation at least twice a year. Since the pandemic started, she’s only traveled to Utah and Texas for work.

“I’ll still be cautious. I’m not looking to go on a cruise. I’m not looking to be in mass crowds and I’ll probably not go overseas,” she said. “But absolutely, if it’s open and the CDC says we can do it, I’m looking forward to going somewhere in the states.”

For people who haven’t been fully vaccinated, the CDC is sticking to its recommendation to avoid unnecessary travel. If they do travel, the agency says to get tested one to three days before the trip, and three to five days after. People should also stay home and quarantine for seven days after travel, even if their COVID-19 test is negative, the agency says.

According to data through Thursday from Johns Hopkins University, the U.S. is averaging 66,000 daily new cases this past week, up from 55,000 two weeks ago.

The new guidance says:

— Fully vaccinated people can travel within the U.S., without getting tested for the coronavirus or quarantining. People should still wear a mask, socially distance and avoid crowds, the agency says.

— For international travel, the agency says vaccinated people do not need to get a COVID-19 test before leaving, unless the destination country requires it.

— For travelers coming into the U.S., vaccinated people should still get a negative COVID-19 test before boarding a flight, and be tested three to five days after arrival. They do not need to quarantine. The agency noted the potential introduction of virus variants and differences in vaccine coverage around the world for the cautious guidance on overseas travel.

Already, air travel in the United States has been picking back up. Although traffic remains down by nearly half from a year ago, more than 1 million travelers daily have been going through U.S. airports in recent weeks.

“I was surprised that our flight was kind of full,” said Telva Aguilar, after arriving at Oakland airport from Southern California to visit her grandchildren on Friday.

Aguilar works in a hospital and has been vaccinated, but said she is still being cautious.

Airlines do not require COVID-19 tests or proof of vaccination for travel in the U.S.; a few states have testing or quarantine rules for travelers.

The CDC cited recent research on the real-world effects of the vaccines for its updated guidance. Last

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month, the agency said fully vaccinated people could visit with each other indoors without wearing masks or social distancing. It also said vaccinated people could visit with unvaccinated people from a single household under similar conditions, as long as the unvaccinated individuals were at low risk for severe illness if infected.

The U.S. began its vaccine rollout in mid-December. Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses given a few weeks apart. A one-shot vaccine by Johnson & Johnson was given the green light by regulators at the end of February.

Despite getting his second Pfizer shot on Friday, Mick Peacock, a fire inspector in San Francisco, isn't planning on traveling anytime soon. If he and his wife do any traveling this year, he said they would rent an RV and hit the road.

"I think we all want a beach holiday right now but I don't think it's safe," he said. "I don't look at the numbers anymore, because we've all been looking at those numbers too long."

## AP Sources: NCAA has not tested for drugs at championships

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The NCAA has not tested players for performance-enhancing drugs at March Madness and other recent college championships, The Associated Press has learned. Three people with direct knowledge of NCAA testing protocols said full-scale testing has not resumed since the coronavirus pandemic shut down college sports a year ago.

Although athletes may have been tested on campus, either through the NCAA program or those run by schools, the NCAA has not ramped up its usual testing program at national championships such as the men's and women's basketball tournaments. The tournaments wrap up with Final Four games starting with the women's semifinals Friday.

The NCAA has tested for drugs since 1986, and has changed and enhanced its policy over the years. Unlike some leagues and anti-doping organizations, it does not reveal the number of tests it conducts. Players who test positive can be kicked out of championships, and can lose a year or more of eligibility.

But the three people familiar with testing protocols told AP that the number of tests received from NCAA events went to zero after the COVID-19 pandemic shut down sports last spring. They said testing has recently resumed sporadically, but only via on-campus collections.

The people, who did not want their names used because of the sensitivity of the subject, all confirmed the same thing: No tests from the organization's signature events — the men's and women's basketball tournaments and, earlier this year, the college football playoffs — have been received by the labs that analyze the NCAA tests.

The NCAA wouldn't answer questions about specifics of its drug-testing program, and says the mere possibility of unannounced tests can be a deterrent to doping. In an email exchange with the AP, NCAA spokesman Chris Radford would not answer whether testing was being conducted for players after they arrived in Indianapolis and San Antonio for the tournaments in mid-March.

"We do not confirm drug testing at championships sites, especially when they are ongoing," the NCAA's chief medical officer, Brian Hainline, told AP in a follow-up email. "That would defeat the purpose of our unannounced testing at championships. Further, we do not announce when we perform our extensive year-round unannounced drug testing outside of championships."

This shutdown comes as the NCAA focuses on coronavirus testing as a way of keeping March Madness on track. On Thursday, NCAA president Mark Emmert said the association had conducted more than 41,000 COVID-19 tests over the course of the basketball tournaments.

Though drug testing in college sports doesn't receive as much scrutiny as in Olympic sports, the issue has impacted major programs.

At the college football playoff that closed the 2018 season, three Clemson players were suspended after testing positive for a performance-enhancing drug. In 2015, the NCAA sanctioned the Syracuse basketball program for a variety of violations, including not following its own drug-testing rules.

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The NCAA manual on drug-testing says: "NCAA drug-testing is a possibility at any and all NCAA championship rounds and sites. However, as a best practice, the NCAA will not announce whether or not drug testing will occur at any specific venue."

While the unpredictability can work as a deterrent, some sports officials say not conducting actual tests can leave a sport open to doped athletes winning championships.

"If you don't actually follow through and do the testing, that could be perceived as a weak link," said Bob Copeland, who cleaned up a steroid-addled football program when he was athletic director at University of Waterloo in Canada. Copeland said he was speaking about doping protocols in general and wasn't familiar with the NCAA's rules.

The NCAA wasn't alone in putting its testing program on hiatus in the immediate aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak. Sending collectors out to gather urine and blood samples was deemed too risky, and most U.S. and international testing programs went dark.

The anti-doping tests were deemed too important to leave shuttered for the long-term, however, and when major events such as the Olympics were placed back on the schedule, sports organizations started finding new ways to resume testing.

It's possible the NCAA didn't want to add sample collectors to the mix of people that would have to be cleared to have close contact with players at the arenas, which is where the urine collection traditionally takes place. It's also possible that the shift in focus has come as the NCAA invested heavily in COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 protocols. Typically, a doping test for college sports would cost between \$150 and \$200 to process, and only a fraction of players in a given game would be tested.

The NCAA spokesman, Radford, told AP "the NCAA has conducted drug testing in the month of March and also in preceding months," but he would not reveal whether it had been done at the tournament.

College sports have long been criticized for employing testing protocols that are considered beneath the standards set at the Olympics, the the NFL or Major League Baseball. One main critique of the colleges is a lack of uniformity. Most of the testing and decisions about punishments are left to individual schools, which sometimes write their own rules, or, in other cases, adhere to a conference policy.

Copeland said a compromised testing program, whether in college sports or elsewhere, can lead to obvious inequities, and also serve to undercut confidence in the system.

"It's a matter of fairness for clean athletes, and a matter of gaming the system for those who are on the fence," he said. "They might see something like this and think, 'Maybe next time, I'll roll the dice if they're not testing.'"

## **NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week**

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Delivering grandma's ballot not a crime under Georgia law

CLAIM: "Georgia's new anti-voting law makes it a jail-time crime to drop off grandma's absentee ballot in a drop box."

THE FACTS: Delivering grandma's ballot won't land you behind bars in Georgia, despite posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter falsely claiming it will. The election bill known as SB 202, signed into law on March 25, has an exception allowing people to drop off ballots on behalf of their relatives. Social media posts making the false claim referenced an excerpt from the law that says any person who "accepts an absentee ballot from an elector for delivery or return to the board of registrars except as authorized by subsection (a) of Code Section 21-2-385 shall be guilty of a felony." However, that referenced section of the Georgia code also explains that family members — including grandchildren and grandparents — can mail or deliver ballots for each other. The code also allows a caregiver to deliver a completed ballot on

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behalf of a disabled person, or a jail employee to deliver a completed ballot on behalf of someone who is in custody.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in Seattle contributed this report.

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False cancer claim circulates around COVID-19 test

CLAIM: COVID-19 tests cause cancer because they are sterilized with ethylene oxide.

THE FACTS: Ethylene oxide is a gas commonly used to sterilize medical equipment. It is also used in the sterilization of spices and cosmetics. While it is listed by federal agencies as a carcinogen with long-term exposure, experts say the gas is used only in small amounts to sterilize COVID testing kits and would not present cancer hazard. A video being shared online makes the claim citing nose swab tests used for COVID-19 detection. In the video, a man illustrates the point using a COVID-19 home test kit from the National Health Service in the United Kingdom, which has a label noting it was sterilized with ethylene oxide. "They are purposely killing us," the man says. "It is one of the worst, worst chemicals for causing cancer and people are sticking it up their kids' noses to get them into school." But ethylene oxide is not a component of the test. Dr. Alexander Edwards, an associate professor in biomedical technology at the University of Reading in England, told The Associated Press that the gas is used in the sterilization process because it does not affect the product like heat or steam would when used in the sterilization process. "It's not going to be present in any meaningful way at the time that you actually opened your test," Edwards said. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ethylene oxide is often used to sterilize medical equipment that are moisture or heat sensitive. Posts making the false claims were shared on TikTok, Facebook and Instagram. "Did you know the con-vid 19 swab test contains a highly carcinogenic sterilizer called ethylene oxide? The most toxic cancer causing substance ever produced," one Facebook said. The Department of Health and Social Care in the U.K. addressed the falsehood on Facebook. "There are false and misleading reports that lateral flow tests can give you cancer," the post said. "These rapid #COVID19 tests have been rigorously tested and are safe." The U.S. Food and Drug administration created strict standards for the use of ethylene oxide on medical devices after it was found that the gas could cause cancer with long-term and occupational exposure. Experts say there is no concern about the gas being left on COVID-19 tests. "It is not something that would linger on the product," Edwards said.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

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Farmworker union's flag was the backdrop for Jill Biden speech

CLAIM: First lady Jill Biden gave a speech with the Nazi flag in the background.

THE FACTS: On Wednesday, Biden made a visit to The Forty Acres, the first headquarters of the United Farm Workers labor union, in Delano, Calif., and gave a speech in front of the union's flag — not a Nazi flag. The flag features a black eagle surrounded by a white circle on a red background. Yet multiple social media users made false claims about the flag. "I don't know if there are words to fully convey how hilarious it is that 'Dr' Jill Biden butchered the Spanish language while giving a speech in front of a Nazi flag," said one Twitter user. Lauren Araiza, an associate professor who teaches history at Denison University, called the effort to draw similarities between the eagle used on the UFW flag and the one associated with the Nazis "ridiculous." Araiza said the eagle on the red and black flag was something Mexican Americans could easily relate to. "It's based on the Aztec eagle, and they made it stylized in that way because they wanted a graphic that anybody could draw and then it would be easily printable," said Araiza, author of the book, "To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farm Workers." The flag was created in the 1960s by Chávez's brother, Richard Chávez, and his cousin, Manuel Chávez. The union's website includes a quote from Chávez explaining the flag's design: "A symbol is an important thing. That is why we chose an Aztec eagle. It gives pride...When people see it they know it means dignity." In addition to red and black being eye-catching colors, the tone of red used in the flag was inexpensive for printers, Araiza explained. "These people are just trying to use scare tactics to delegitimize the president and first lady's open support of the UFW and, by extension, all Mexican Americans," Araiza said. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, a



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professor of history at Fairfield University, who specializes in the history of Nazi Germany, also knocked down the claims. "One source of subtle confusion may be the fact that many Nazi flags featured an eagle with a swastika, the latter being a very geometric shape; the UFW flag also features a very geometrically rendered Aztec-style eagle that could evoke the geometric aspects of a swastika," Rosenfeld said in an email. "But of course, there's no swastika on the UFW whatsoever."

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this report.

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Nike not involved in Satan-themed sneaker release

CLAIM: The sports apparel company Nike is releasing a shoe dedicated to Satan.

THE FACTS: Nike was not involved in a collaboration between rapper Lil Nas X and New York-based art collective MSCHF to design Satan-themed sneakers displaying the Nike brand. Nike is suing MSCHF to stop the release of the shoes, which were made "without Nike's approval or authorization," the company told the AP on Monday. The music video for Lil Nas X's new song "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" shows the musician, whose real name is Montero Lamar Hill, descending into hell, dancing for Satan and claiming the devil's horns as his own. Following the video's release on March 25, MSCHF announced on its website that it would collaborate with the rapper on a limited release of "Satan shoes" — 666 pairs of black Nike Air Max 97 sneakers with a pentagram-shaped charm. MSCHF claimed the sneakers also contained a drop of human blood. Responding to the news, thousands of social media users shared viral posts claiming Nike was responsible for the Satan-themed shoes. "Nike & Lil Nas X will launch their new demonic shoes on March 29, 2021 for \$1,018 USD," read a Saturday Facebook post. But Nike sent The Associated Press a statement saying it did not participate in the development or marketing of the themed sneakers. "We do not have a relationship with Lil Nas X or MSCHF," the statement read. "Nike did not design or release these shoes and we do not endorse them." In a later statement, Nike said it filed a trademark infringement and dilution complaint against MSCHF on Monday to stop the release of the shoes. MSCHF CEO Gabe Whaley told the AP in an email that Nike "did not have any involvement whatsoever" in the project. MSCHF purchased the shoes from Nike, then made its own modifications to the shoes before marketing them, Whaley confirmed.

— Ali Swenson

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Oxford University is not scrapping sheet music

CLAIM: The U.K.'s University of Oxford is considering removing sheet music from its music curriculum as part of sweeping changes intended to "decolonize" the program.

THE FACTS: There are no plans under consideration to remove sheet music or western musical notation from the music curriculum at Oxford University, according to Stephen Rouse, head of university communications. Social media users circulated the false claim based on stories in the British media. "Attack of the woke: Oxford University is considering removing sheet music from its curriculum over claims that musical notation has roots in "colonialism" and "complicity in white supremacy," one Facebook user wrote on Monday. The bogus claims, shared thousands of times, have roots in an article published in Britain's Daily Telegraph. The article reported that documents showed some faculty members had proposed reforms to address the music program's focus on white European culture, including "rethinking the study of musical notation." It did not report that the complaints meant the university was considering ditching sheet music altogether. Tabloids and right-wing media outlets made that false assumption in their coverage of the article. Rouse told The Associated Press that while the music faculty is planning to expand its music curriculum to broaden offerings, cutting sheet music is not part of the plan. He added that many of the views the Telegraph article attributed to "professors" came from a single individual. Rouse shared a statement from the university's music faculty. "While retaining (and in no way diminishing) our traditional excellence in the critical analysis, history and performance of the broad range of western art music, we are exploring ways to enhance our students' opportunities to study a wider range of non-western and popular music from across the world than is currently on offer, as well as music composition, the psychology and sociology of music, music education, conducting, and much more," the statement read. The music faculty

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said claims that the university is considering removing sheet music from its curriculum are “completely incorrect.” “No such proposal or suggestion has been made about sheet music or western musical notation,” the statement read.

## 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.

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.

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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 and the Masters to pull the tournament — the sport's first major championship of the year — out of Georgia by not playing at Augusta National.

The National Black Justice Coalition also urged professional golfers not to refuse to play in Georgia until the law is repealed.

The PGA Tour has no control over the Masters. The tournament is run by Augusta National, an exclusive club that has previously faced protests over its one-time exclusion of Blacks and women from the membership rolls. The club ignored the request and carried on with a women's amateur event that leads into next week's Masters.

The PGA Tour holds its season finale at East Lake in Atlanta, and it has another tournament in the fall on the Georgia coast at Sea Island.

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 on June 24-27.

The PGA of America said in a statement, "The KPMG Women's PGA Championship is a partnership between three organizations committed to diversity, equity and inclusion: PGA of America, LPGA and KPMG. Like many entities, we are monitoring developments related to the new state legislation on voting access. We believe elections should be accessible, fair and secure, and support broad voter participation."

## Dutch temporarily halt AstraZeneca shots for under-60s

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The Dutch government said Friday it is temporarily halting AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccinations for people under 60 following reports of very small number of people suffering unusual blood clots after receiving the shot.

The Dutch decision comes three days after authorities in Germany also stopped using the AstraZeneca's vaccine in the under-60s, citing fresh concerns over unusual blood clots reported in a tiny number of those who received the shots.

Earlier Friday, a Dutch organization that monitors vaccine side effects said it had received five reports of blood clots with low blood plate counts following vaccinations. All the cases occurred between seven and 10 days after the vaccinations and all the people affected were women aged between 25 and 65 years.

The organization said in the period when the five cases were reported, some 400,000 people were vaccinated in the Netherlands with the AstraZeneca shot.

Health Minister Hugo de Jonge says the temporary halt is a precautionary measure.

"I think it is very important that the Dutch reports are also properly investigated," De Jonge said. "We must err on the side of caution."

The news is another setback for the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is critical to Europe's immunization

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campaign and a linchpin in the global strategy to get shots to poorer countries, for it is cheaper and easier to use than rival vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna. It comes two weeks after the EU drug regulator said the vaccine does not increase the overall incidence of blood clots following a similar scare.

The European Medicines Agency said at the time that the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks, but it could not rule out a link between the shot and some unusual kinds of clots, and recommended adding a warning about possible rare side effects.

Most European Union countries, including Germany, resumed using the AstraZeneca vaccine on March 19.

De Jonge said the Dutch pause comes ahead of an update next week from the EU medicines agency on the AstraZeneca vaccine.

## 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 European nations that are facing a resurgence of the virus.

The Department for Transport said Friday 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.

Under the travel bans, international visitors who have departed from or traveled through red-list countries 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.

The measures are aimed at reducing the risk posed by new virus variants into the U.K., which has recorded Europe’s highest COVID-related death toll, with over 126,500 deaths.

No European nations are on the British red list, even though much of Europe is witnessing a 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 identified 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 U.K. has seen new coronavirus infections and deaths fall sharply since the winter amid a strict 3-month lockdown and a rapid rollout of coronavirus vaccines. The U.K. has now given a first vaccine shot to over 31 million people, or around 46% of its population, a much higher rate than the rest of Europe.

This week restrictions on gatherings in England were relaxed following a big drop in new cases from a daily rate of around 70,000 earlier this year. The U.K. on Friday recorded 3,402 new infections, its lowest level since mid-September. The main easing this week allows groups of up to six people, or two households, to meet outdoors.

Johnson on Friday urged people to follow the rules and to not mix indoors during this Easter weekend even if people have received a vaccine shot.

“Even though your friends and family members may be vaccinated, the vaccines are not giving 100% protection, and that’s why we just need to be cautious,” he said during a question and answer session on Twitter. “We don’t think that they entirely reduce or remove the risk of transmission.”

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## 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 ship, 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. "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 getaways.

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"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 the pandemic 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," Ace said. "Why should large cruise ships be allowed to return before they have addressed these concerns?"

## Train hits truck that slid onto track in Taiwan, killing 51

By RALPH JENNINGS and JOHNSON LAI Associated Press

HUALIEN COUNTY, Taiwan (AP) — A train barreled into an unmanned truck that had rolled onto the track Friday in Taiwan, leaving at least 51 people dead and dozens injured in the island's deadliest rail disaster. Many passengers were crushed, while some survivors were forced to climb out of windows and walk along the train's roof to safety.

The truck's emergency brake was not properly engaged, according to the government's disaster relief center, and the vehicle slid about 20 meters (65 feet) down a hillside. Minutes later, the train's lead car crashed into it, according to Railways Administration official Weng Hui-ping, just before the train entered a tunnel.

The train, which was carrying more than 400 people, 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, including many families with children. Images from the scene showed the train's cars wedged against the tunnel's walls. 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 the assistant driver — and said more than 100 people were injured.

The service earlier said all passengers had been accounted for, but a spokesperson later said there may

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be more bodies trapped in the mangled cars and the death toll may still rise. The spokesperson spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to release the information to media.

Weng, of the Railways Administration, called the crash Taiwan's deadliest rail disaster.

He said a construction truck whose owner was a contractor for the administration slid from a work site above the track. No one was in the truck at the time. An investigation has been launched, and Hualien police have interviewed one person, Weng said.

The stretch of track where the orange-striped train came to a halt hugs the coastline and lacks any protective fencing. 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.

With much of the train still inside the tunnel, many escaping passengers had to scramble out of doors and windows and scale the sides of the train to walk along the roof in darkness to safety.

One young man interviewed by Taiwanese media at a hospital said he had traveled with friends for the holiday but now had no idea where they were.

"Everyone just went flying all over the place," said the man, who only gave his surname as Chen and who was in a wheelchair, his arm in a cast. Obviously distraught and in pain, he said the cars and seats had been twisted out of shape.

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 where the crash happened is popular with tourists, many of whom travel there by train to avoid mountain roads.

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, sometimes called the Taroko Express, is one of Taiwan's newer models.

## 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

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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.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday April 3, the 93rd day of 2021. There are 272 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 3, 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. delivered what turned out to be his final speech, telling a rally of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, that "I've been to the mountaintop" and "seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!" (About 20 hours later, King was felled by an assassin's bullet at the Lorraine Motel.)

On this date:

In 1860, the legendary Pony Express began carrying mail between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. (The delivery system lasted only 18 months before giving way to the transcontinental telegraph.)

In 1865, Union forces occupied the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia.

In 1882, outlaw Jesse James was shot to death in St. Joseph, Missouri, by Robert Ford, a member of James' gang.

In 1936, Bruno Hauptmann was electrocuted in Trenton, New Jersey, for the kidnap-murder of Charles Lindbergh Jr.

In 1942, during World War II, Japanese forces began their final assault on Bataan against American and Filipino troops who surrendered six days later; the capitulation was followed by the notorious Bataan Death March.

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Smith v. Allwright*, struck down a Democratic Party of Texas rule that allowed only white voters to participate in Democratic primaries.

In 1946, Lt. Gen. Masaharu Homma, the Japanese commander held responsible for the Bataan Death March, was executed by firing squad outside Manila.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed the Marshall Plan, designed to help European allies rebuild after World War II and resist communism.

In 1973, the first handheld portable telephone was demonstrated for reporters on a New York City street corner as Motorola executive Martin Cooper called Joel S. Engel of Bell Labs.

In 1990, jazz singer Sarah Vaughan died in suburban Los Angeles at age 66.

In 1996, Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee) was arrested at his remote Montana cabin.

In 2005, a day after the death of Pope John Paul II, the body of the pontiff lay in state. Millions prayed and wept at services across the globe, as the Vatican prepared for the ritual-filled funeral and conclave that would choose a successor.

Ten years ago: The United States agreed to NATO's request for a 48-hour extension of American participation in coalition air strikes against targets in Libya.

Five years ago: An international coalition of media outlets published the "Panama Papers," thousands of pages of leaked documents relating to offshore accounts that revealed attempts by world leaders, celebrities and businesses to dodge taxes in their home countries. A southbound Amtrak train struck a piece of heavy equipment just south of Philadelphia and derailed; two Amtrak workers were killed.



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One year ago: President Donald Trump announced new federal guidelines recommending that Americans wear face coverings when in public to help fight the spread of the coronavirus, but Trump immediately said he had no intention of following that advice himself; he said he could not envision himself covering his face while sitting in the Oval Office greeting world leaders. Trump said he was preventing the export of N95 respirator masks and surgical gloves under the Defense Production Act, a move he said was necessary to ensure that medical supplies were available in the U.S. The government reported that more than 700,000 jobs were lost in March because of the pandemic, and economists predicted far worse data ahead. Passengers from two cruise ships were freed from their cabins and allowed to disembark in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, after the removal of 14 critically ill people who were taken to hospitals.

Today's Birthdays: Conservationist Dame Jane Goodall is 87. Actor William Gaunt is 84. Songwriter Jeff Barry is 83. Actor Eric Braeden is 80. Actor Marsha Mason is 79. Singer Wayne Newton is 79. Singer Tony Orlando is 77. Comedy writer Pat Proft is 74. Folk-rock singer Richard Thompson is 72. Country musician Curtis Stone (Highway 101) is 71. Blues singer-guitarist John Mooney is 66. Rock musician Mick Mars (Motley Crue) is 65. Actor Alec Baldwin is 63. Actor David Hyde Pierce is 62. Rock singer John Thomas Griffith (Cowboy Mouth) is 61. Comedian-actor Eddie Murphy is 60. Rock singer-musician Mike Ness (Social Distortion) is 59. Rock singer Sebastian Bach is 53. Rock musician James MacDonough is 51. Olympic gold medal ski racer Picabo Street is 50. Actor Jennie Garth is 49. Actor Jamie Bamber is 48. Actor Adam Scott is 48. Christian rock musician Drew Shirley (Switchfoot) is 47. Comedian Aries Spears is 46. Actor Matthew Goode is 43. Actor Cobie Smulders is 39. Rock-pop singer Leona Lewis is 36. Actor Amanda Bynes is 35. Actor-comedian Rachel Bloom is 34. Actor Hayley Kiyoko is 30. Rock musician Sam Kiszka (Greta Van Fleet) is 22.