

Groton Daily Independent

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

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New library board to be developed

A new library board will need to be created as the library will be moved to the former Wells Fargo building where City Hall will be located. Karyn Babcock will be the council representative and the city will be looking for five more citizens. An active board is required to be with the state library board.

Four bids were submitted for the chip and seal project for this summer. Prices ranged from \$1.664 to \$2.31 per unit price. The council accepted the low bid from TopCoat for a total of \$144,768.

The council gave first reading of the cable franchises, good for 15 years, for both James Valley Telecommunications and Midco. Midco will start at mid year and will finish by the end of the year. Both ordinance will go into effect May 5.

On the bills, it was noted that the insurance for the new city hall (former Wells Fargo building) will increase by \$805.75 as the replacement cost of the building is listed as \$995,049.

The garbage pickup route will be done for one more week and then there is a good chance it will go back to town-wide curbside pickup again.

There was a question if there will be a drop cloth used when the tower is going to be painted. No drop cloth will be used as the paint is heavy enough so it should not drift.

Malt Beverage licenses were approved for Ken's Food Fair, Olde Bank 'n Cafe, MJ's Sinclair and Dollar General.

The Minnesota Twins Fields for Kids gave the city \$5,000 for dugouts. Finance Officer Hope Block said that the Minnesota Twins has given Groton \$15,000 in grants for the dugouts.

Overall, the tower project is seeing a decrease in the price. Originally, it was \$1.057 million and to date, it is \$1.043 million

After an executive session, the council hired the following: Wyatt Locke as assistant junior Legion coach, Bryson Wambach as gatekeeper, Bradin Althoff and Kaleb Hoover as peewee and midget coaches at \$750 each, Matt Locke and Set Erickson as peewee and midget coaches at \$500 each, and grounds keepers Cole Simon, Tate Larson, Steven Paulson and Allyssa Thayer.

The cemetery caretaker wage was set at \$14.50 an hour.

Medicare has changed.

Find out how it can affect you.

Important changes to the federal Medicare program became effective at the beginning of the year. As a result, retirees in your state may be eligible for coverage with new options.

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The Travels of Kittie the Stagecoach

Kittie was welcomed warmly when she returned to South Dakota.

She's the stagecoach now displayed in the museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

"The Governor (George S. Mickelson) unveiled the stagecoach in January at his third annual reception for the South Dakota Legislature, and she was very well received. The stage now is on display in the exhibition wing," wrote J.R. Fishburne, then the director of the South Dakota State Historical Society, in a 1991 letter.

Kittie was one of four stagecoaches used by the Medora Stage & Forwarding Company to transport passengers and freight between Medora and Deadwood, Dakota Territory. The company was organized by the Marquis de Mores, a wealthy Frenchman who had come to what is now the North Dakota badlands in 1883 and founded the town of Medora, named after his wife. The gold fields in the Black Hills were already connected with stage lines from the east, south and west. The Medora Stage & Forwarding Company would connect Deadwood to Medora, which was connected to the Northern Pacific Railroad, on the north.

Four used Concord stagecoaches and harnesses were purchased from Gilmer, Salisbury and Company, a freight and stage transportation firm. The stagecoaches were named Kittie, Medora, Dakota and Deadwood, and the name of each stagecoach was painted on it. De Mores hoped that the company would be awarded a contract to carry mail, and the letters "U S M" for United States Mail were also painted on each coach in anticipation of being awarded the contract. The company established 13 stations over the 215-mile stretch between Medora and Deadwood and purchased 150 well-bred western stage horses. Each station had a tender, who cared for the horses and served the passengers when necessary. In South Dakota, the route passed near Buffalo and through Belle Fourche and Spearfish before reaching Deadwood.

The first stagecoach to roll into Deadwood from Medora arrived about noon on Sunday, Oct. 5, 1884.

"It created a great deal of enthusiasm as it passed up Main street, drawn by six horses," stated The Black Hills Daily Pioneer in Deadwood.

Three cheers were heartily given as the stagecoach halted in front of the ticket office.

The stage headed back to Medora the next day.

The trip between Medora and Deadwood took about 36 hours and cost passengers \$21.50 or 10 cents a mile. Stages departed from both Medora and Deadwood on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings and arrived at their destination the evening of the following day.

The business venture quickly folded, however, as Mores failed to get the mail contract he had hoped for as well as the freight business needed in order for the venture to financially survive.



The May 28, 1885, issue of the Turner County Herald carried the news that "The Medora Stage Line to the Black Hills has been abandoned." Other sources state that the Medora Stage & Transport Company ceased to exist in the winter of 1885-1886.

De Mores' other business ventures in Dakota Territory also failed, and the de Mores family moved back to France. The Marquis was murdered in 1896 while in Africa.

Kittie's history did not end with the Medora to Deadwood stage.

In 1896, Andrew Olson of Pelan, Minn., purchased the coaches Kittie and Medora from the estate of the Marquis, according to Paul Englund. He wrote the South Dakota State Historical Society that his great-

SOUTH DAKOTA

HISTORY & HERITAGE

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grandparents were probably the last people to have a route using Kittie when they ran a stagecoach route in approximately 1909 between Karlstad and Greenbush, in northwestern Minnesota. Before that, his great-grandparents had a way-station along the stage route between Stephen and Roseau, also in northwestern Minnesota. Kittie ran between Stephen and the half-way point of Pelan and the Medora ran between Pelan and Roseau, according to Englund.

Eventually, Harry Miller of Jamestown, N.D., went to Roseau, Minn., and returned to Jamestown with Kittie.

Kittie appeared in all the city's parades, according to a letter to the South Dakota State Historical Society from Mary F. Young of Jamestown. A photograph taken in 1936 shows South Dakota Gov. Tom Berry in a parade in Jamestown, riding on a stagecoach that was identified as Kittie.

Miller eventually moved to California and left Kittie and another stagecoach in Jamestown. In a letter written from California in 1949, Miller stated that a man in Jamestown was looking after the stagecoaches. "They have been standing in the open more or less since I came out here during the war," he wrote.

By 1969, according to an article in the Minot, N.D. Daily News, the stagecoaches Kitty and Medora were owned by Osborne (Ozzie) Klavestad of Shakopee, Minn. He owned a tourist attraction in the form of a pioneer village. A bill of sale indicates that Klavestad sold two stagecoaches in 1980.

In 1990, the South Dakota State Historical Society obtained Kittie from a private collector.

The stagecoach's presence in the museum is a reminder of this historic and once invaluable form of transportation.

This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at www.sdhsf.org. Contact us at info@sdhsf.org to submit a story idea.

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#408 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I think we picked up the holiday weekend lull's make-up numbers today. There were 80,000 new cases today. We're now at 30,864,900 total cases, 0.3% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations were up slightly to 41,672. And we're now up to 555,939 deaths, 0.2% more than yesterday's total. There were 1010 deaths reported today. We'll see how the rest of the week looks before we freak out at these numbers; it's been more than a month since we've seen anything this big.

One year ago on April 6, 2020, we were finally reaching our first peak and leveling off on the final ascent. Our problem was that the declines in New York and New Jersey took such a disproportionate share of cases with them that they were masking a rapid increase in other states. We'd been warned that rolling peaks might sweep across the country, but we weren't getting it. Nonetheless, our doubling time was up from three days to eight days, a major accomplishment. The infection count on the USS Theodore Roosevelt was up to 173 crew members. Testing was still short. We went over 10,000 deaths on this day, ending at 10,925. The US Surgeon General said this week would be "the hardest and saddest" we'll have.

There were additional reports of infections in big cats—some lions to go with the tigers reported earlier. None of them were very sick. We had our first report of a DNA vaccine (thinking it was Oxford/AstraZeneca because the timeline fits, but I did not specify in this Update) going into phase 1 clinical trials. That company was already planning to make a million doses by year's end, just in case it worked out—one of our strengths as we moved into this year. I discussed the benchmarks that must be met before reopening occurred. I'll admit now I was naïve to think we would actually follow any sort of science on this. I will note too that at this point Bill Gates was one of the first to recommend "wasting" money on promising vaccine candidates on the chance they would pan out so we'd have doses ready to go. I am pleased that's exactly what we did to excellent effect, as it turned out. Some stores were limiting the number of shoppers in their stores. The US Army paused the arrival of new recruits to basic training. The US Open golf tournament was postponed to fall. The British Open golf tournament, scheduled for the UK, was canceled.

Worldwide, we had over 1.27 million cases and more than 69,000 deaths. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson went into intensive care on this day. Iran passed 60,000 cases on this day and also recorded a total of 3739 new cases, a record. The Taoiseach (prime minister) of Ireland signed back up to their medical register as a physician so he could work once a week to help out during the pandemic. New Zealand's Prime Minister assured children in the country that the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny are essential workers and would show up for them when needed.

Today Michigan is in real trouble. The threshold for "unchecked" transmission is 25 daily new cases per 100,000 residents; Michigan's close to 70 and still rising. We're seeing a lot of B.1.1.7 in those numbers; this highly-transmissible and possibly more lethal variant is really spreading fast. At one hospital it represents fully 40 percent of cases being analyzed. The seven-day average hospital admission rate is above where it was during the big surge in the fall. In the 30 to 39 year age group, the seven-day average is at 43 daily; this was at 26 during the fall and winter surge. In the 40 to 49 year age group, we're looking at 58 today compared with 33 in the fall and winter. Hospital admissions have declined in the over-60 age group, likely due to the high vaccination rate in that group.

A shift to a younger demographic wouldn't be so concerning if it were not also accompanied by the hospitalization rates we're seeing. What appears to be driving this surge, in addition to this variant is that schools have reopened and, far more worryingly, youth sports are in full swing. This time of year, that still means mostly indoor activities, although that problem should begin to resolve itself as the outdoor sports are able to move outdoors when the weather permits. I'd say spring can't come soon enough to the upper Midwest.

The European Medicines Agency is the EU's version of our FDA, the regulatory body in charge of approving all manner of medications, including vaccines. In what I'm going to call a signal, one of the agency's top vaccine people made a statement about the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clots, saying "it is clear there is an association with the vaccine." The agency's guidance still says the benefits of this vaccine outweigh the risks, and they may well be right about that, but I think this is the first public

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statement from anyone at the regulatory agency acknowledging there's a link at all. We had a fairly thoroughgoing discussion of that whole situation just the other night. If you missed that and are interested, have a look at my Update #406 posted April 4, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4590415820974788>. The UK's regulatory agency and the WHO haven't changed their guidance which says, while they are investigating, the vaccine is safe. I will be very interested to see what our own FDA does with this candidate; the company expected to deliver trial data to them early this month—I had sort of expected this week. I'd guess the agency will be even more cautious than they were with the first three candidates they evaluated. There is certainly no need for hurry because it very much looks as though our vaccine supply is assured already. It is important to recognize, however, that whatever decision the FDA makes will resonate around the globe; regulators in many places have been known to take their signals from the FDA. I would say this is an extraordinarily far-reaching and important decision.

Can I say I watched with some concern the videos of the crowd at last night's Texas Rangers baseball game? There was a capacity crowd on hand, so no social distancing was observed, and despite Major League Baseball's rule applying to all teams that masks must be worn in the stadium, pretty much no one was wearing one. The official crowd was 38,238 in this 40,000-seat stadium. The Rangers website does assure fans that there are touchless hand sanitizer stations all around the park and that social distancing will be observed in concession lines and such; I guess that's to keep folks safe until they get to their seats. The roof on the stadium was open, but I have concerns. Texas is not notably ahead of the rest of the country in vaccinations; in fact, they're just a bit behind. I hope this doesn't become a superspreader site: There's a whole lot of home games in a season.

Norwegian Cruise Line has asked the CDC to permit it to sail beginning on July 4 if it requires everyone on the ship to be vaccinated. The requirement would cover all passengers and all staff, and the vaccinations would need to be completed a minimum of two weeks before sailing. They also propose public health measures on the ship. I do see this as a way forward for a number of industries which, like cruise lines, have been most damaged by the pandemic. I'll be curious to see what the CDC has to say about this proposal.

This morning, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, was on Good Morning America, and—wouldn't you know it?—the topic of Covid-19 happened to come up. He addressed the disproportionate rise in cases among young people, including children. There has been concern that this could mean B.1.1.7, the rapidly-spreading variant first seen in the UK, preferentially infects children. He says he doesn't think that's necessarily what we're facing. He told his interviewer, "We're finding out that it's the team sports where kids are getting together, you know, obviously many without masks, that are driving it, rather than in the classroom spread. When you go back and take a look and try and track where these clusters of cases are coming from in the school, it's just that." That would be good news in that we know what to do about this if it's not some characteristic of the virus we need to deal with. The bad news is it's some characteristic of the people we need to deal with, and they're not very amenable to change. Fauci also weighed in on the issue of taking cruises, saying he would strongly recommend anyone who wishes to go on a cruise to be vaccinated.

I am going to close tonight with the very words I used to close a year ago today. It's probably time for a reminder.

"With that, I'll leave you with words I copied down a week or so ago. I neglected to note whose words they are, so with apologies to the now-anonymous author, here they are:

"Seemingly small social chains get large and complex with alarming speed.

"If your son visits his girlfriend, and you later sneak over for coffee with a neighbor, your neighbor is now connected to the infected office worker that your son's girlfriend's mother shook hands with.

"This sounds silly, it's not.

"This is not a joke or a hypothetical.

"We as epidemiologists see it borne out in the data time and time again and no one listens.

"Conversely, any break in that chain breaks disease transmission along that chain."

A few more weeks is all we need if we don't mess thing thing up. Let's try to give ourselves that.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	461	440	905	15	Minimal	9.5%
Beadle	2879	2793	6196	40	Substantial	8.5%
Bennett	387	378	1213	9	Minimal	11.8%
Bon Homme	1515	1479	2178	26	Moderate	3.1%
Brookings	3893	3709	12788	37	Substantial	8.3%
Brown	5343	5164	13378	91	Substantial	9.4%
Brule	699	687	1940	9	Minimal	2.0%
Buffalo	423	408	910	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	1012	984	3356	20	Minimal	6.6%
Campbell	130	126	270	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1354	1299	4134	21	Substantial	5.8%
Clark	427	395	982	5	Substantial	19.2%
Clay	1875	1832	5702	15	Substantial	3.9%
Codington	4241	4087	10138	80	Substantial	8.8%
Corson	476	462	1030	12	Minimal	6.7%
Custer	792	761	2823	12	Moderate	14.8%
Davison	3130	2982	6930	66	Substantial	13.2%
Day	680	643	1878	29	Minimal	5.4%
Deuel	497	481	1195	8	Moderate	19.4%
Dewey	1441	1409	3958	26	Minimal	5.0%
Douglas	450	432	962	9	Moderate	11.8%
Edmunds	495	475	1104	13	Minimal	5.6%
Fall River	567	544	2760	15	Moderate	3.5%
Faulk	365	351	717	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	1012	959	2377	42	Moderate	5.7%
Gregory	573	532	1348	30	Moderate	6.9%
Haakon	261	249	564	10	None	0.0%
Hamlin	755	702	1879	38	Moderate	16.7%
Hand	355	347	866	6	None	0.0%
Hanson	380	372	770	4	Minimal	10.5%
Harding	92	91	189	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2387	2314	6874	37	Substantial	5.1%
Hutchinson	847	786	2506	26	Substantial	13.8%

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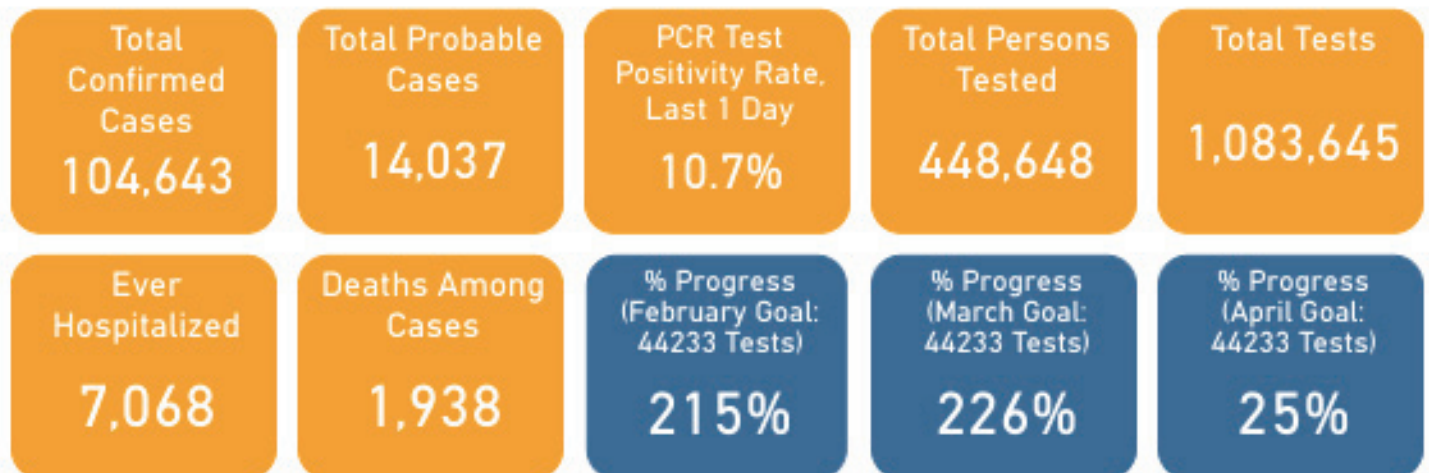
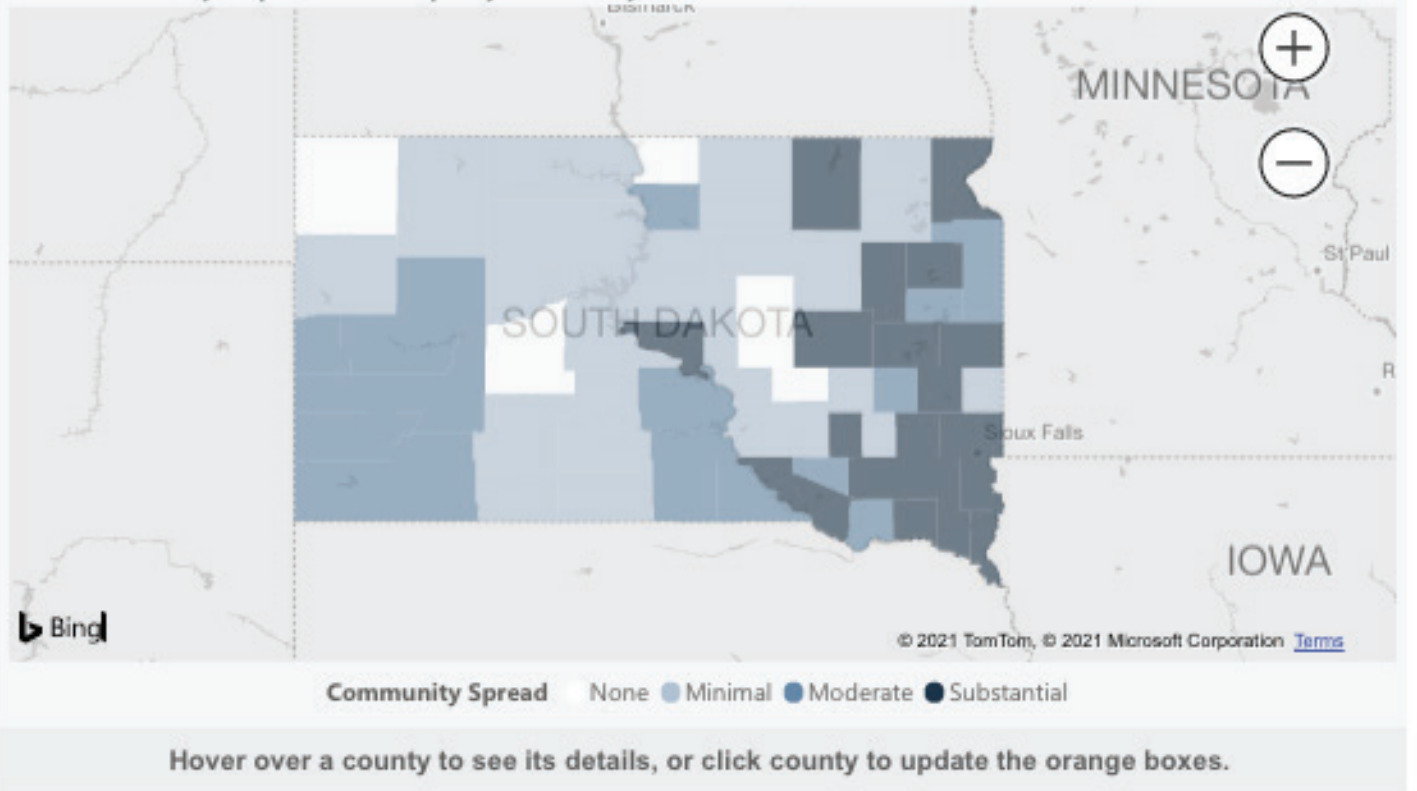
Hyde	140	137	437	1	Minimal	7.1%
Jackson	285	269	941	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	273	257	582	16	None	0.0%
Jones	93	92	244	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	756	685	1772	14	Substantial	25.8%
Lake	1314	1256	3606	18	Substantial	3.7%
Lawrence	2902	2834	8828	45	Moderate	5.9%
Lincoln	8313	8013	21367	77	Substantial	10.1%
Lyman	627	605	1958	11	Moderate	3.8%
Marshall	364	356	1270	6	Minimal	0.0%
McCook	796	752	1748	24	Substantial	17.5%
McPherson	243	236	592	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2705	2642	8040	31	Moderate	7.0%
Mellette	255	252	767	2	Minimal	3.3%
Miner	292	275	609	9	Moderate	18.8%
Minnehaha	30098	28869	82619	344	Substantial	12.2%
Moody	627	604	1832	17	Minimal	1.3%
Oglala Lakota	2090	2031	6836	49	Moderate	3.6%
Pennington	13293	12987	40957	191	Moderate	6.1%
Perkins	352	337	848	14	Minimal	0.0%
Potter	387	382	873	4	Minimal	3.3%
Roberts	1322	1252	4350	38	Substantial	8.4%
Sanborn	340	333	722	3	Minimal	9.5%
Spink	826	792	2218	26	Minimal	4.5%
Stanley	339	337	986	2	Minimal	0.0%
Sully	137	133	330	3	Minimal	20.0%
Todd	1219	1189	4265	29	Minimal	0.7%
Tripp	744	711	1541	17	Moderate	23.8%
Turner	1140	1064	2853	54	Substantial	12.2%
Union	2164	2060	6675	41	Substantial	14.3%
Walworth	757	725	1885	15	Moderate	9.1%
Yankton	2952	2854	9803	28	Substantial	7.0%
Ziebach	341	329	891	9	Minimal	3.2%
Unassigned	0	0	1903	0		

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Community Spread Map by County of Residence



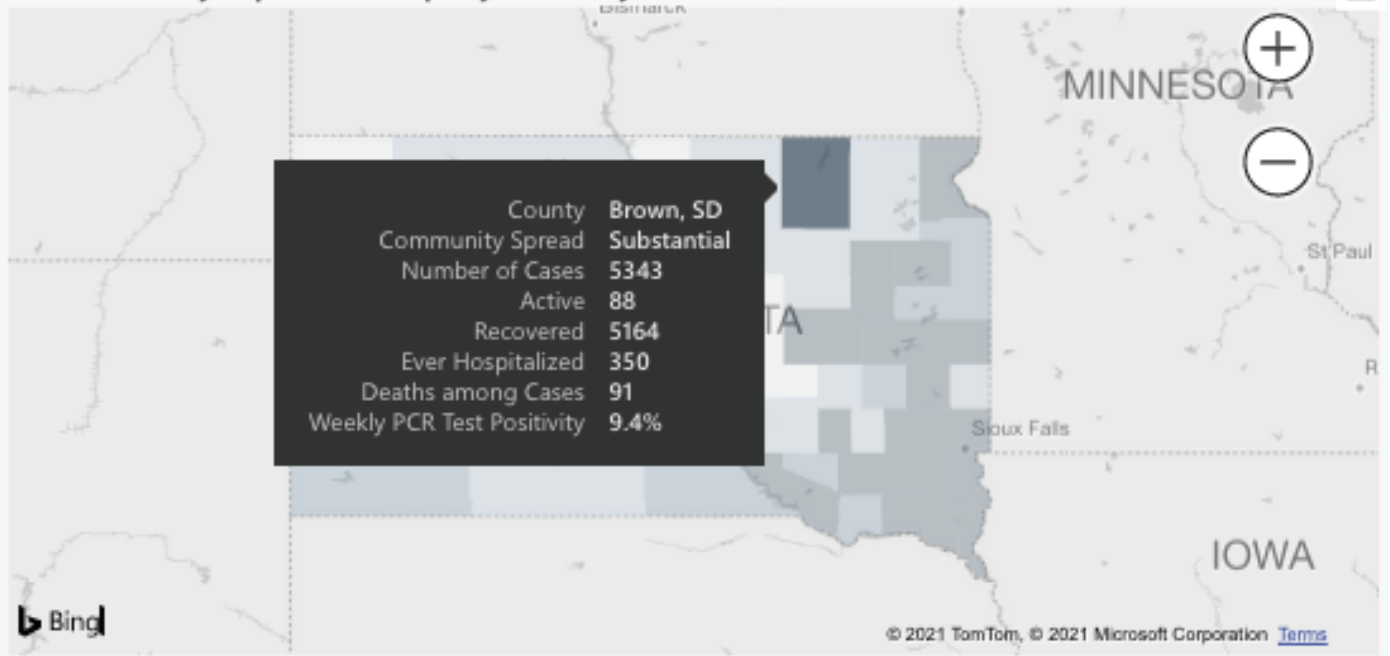
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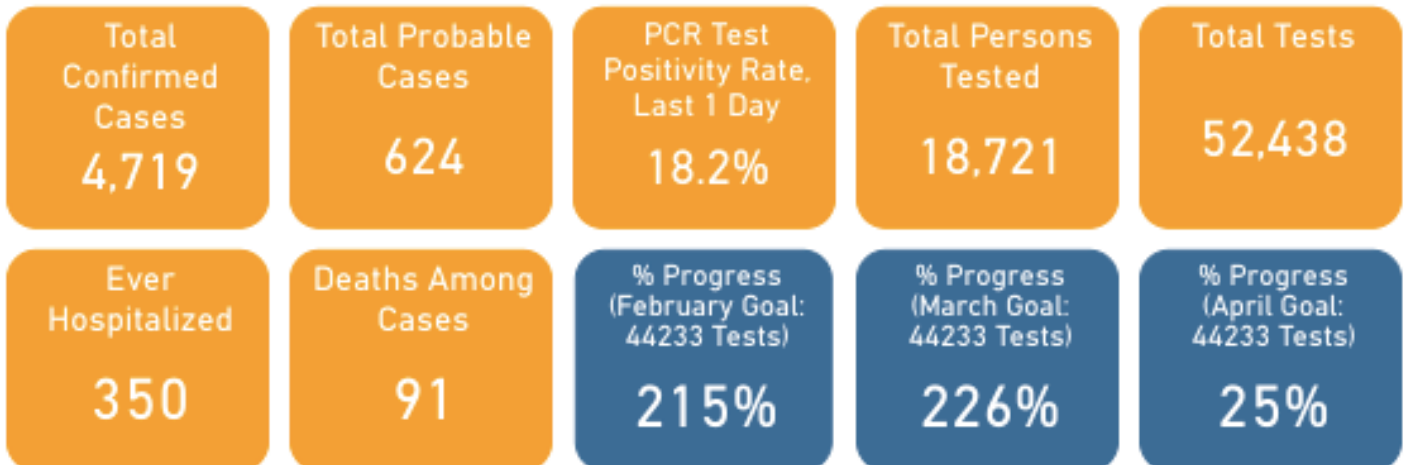
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



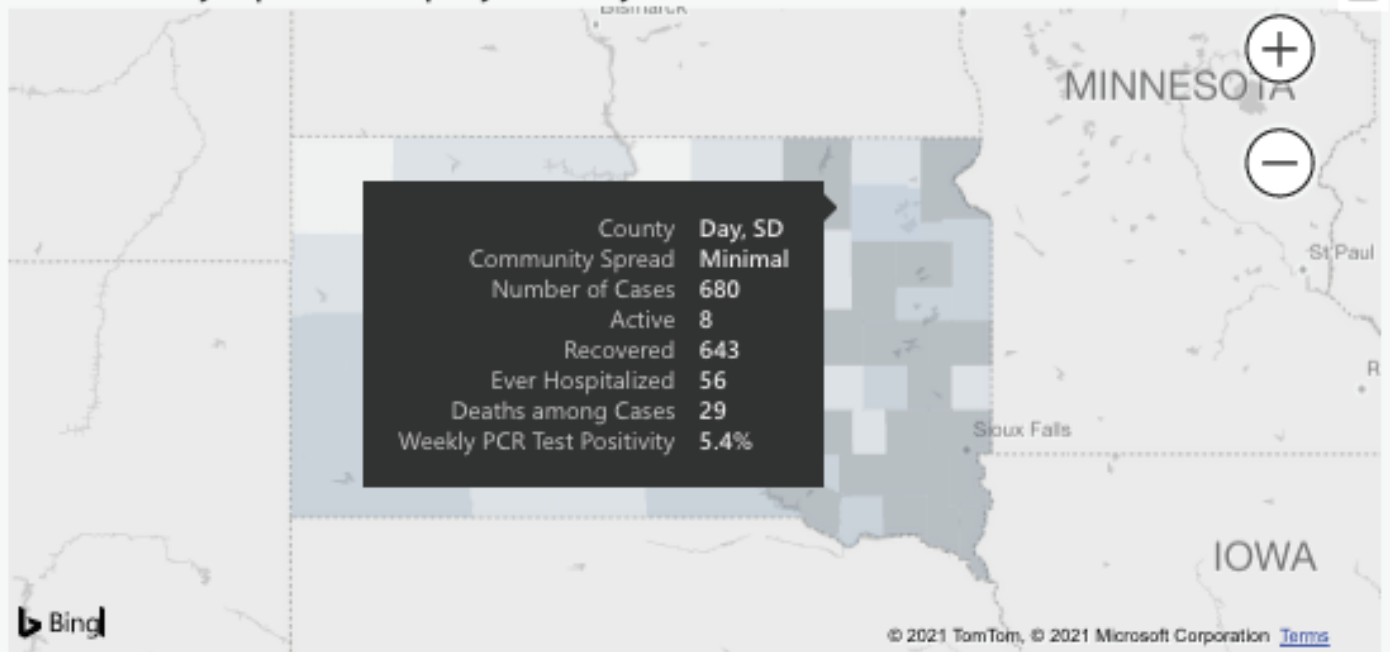
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Day County

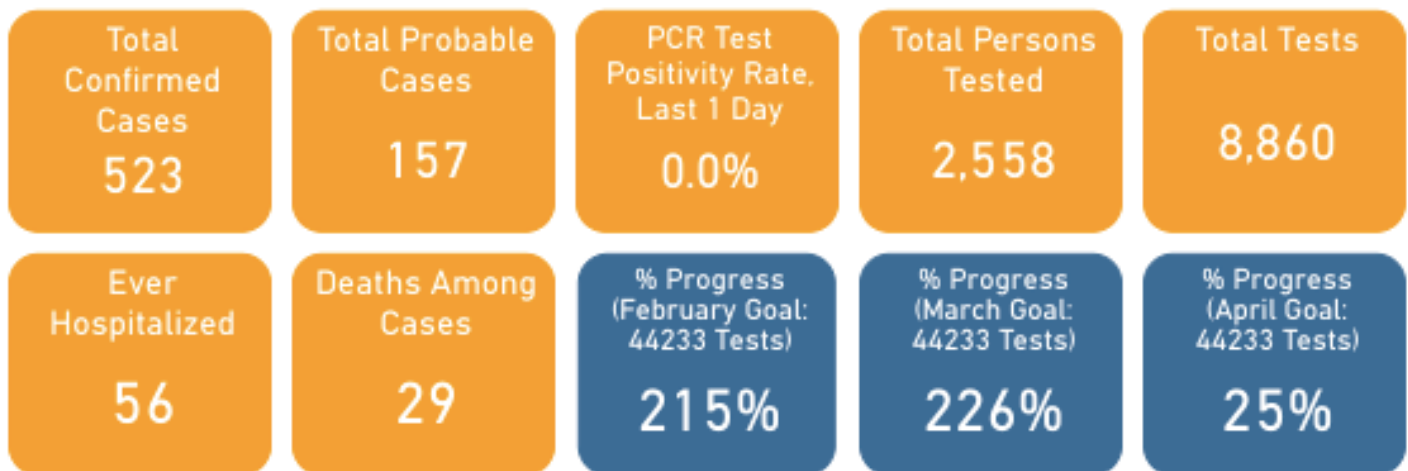


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread: None Minimal Moderate Substantial

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



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Total Doses Administered*

453,870

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine*

276,846

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose**

46%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	9,844
Moderna	209,765
Pfizer	234,261

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	9,844
Moderna - 1 dose	44,435
Moderna - Series Complete	82,665
Pfizer - 1 dose	45,559
Pfizer - Series Complete	94,351

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	46.42%
Series Complete	31.59%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,378	384	497	881
Beadle	9,716	2,419	3,648	6,067
Bennett*	645	127	259	386
Bon Homme*	4,842	652	2,095	2,747
Brookings	15,520	5,602	4,959	10,561
Brown	22,034	4,044	8,995	13,039
Brule*	2,375	401	987	1,388
Buffalo*	157	77	40	117
Butte	3,284	814	1,235	2,049
Campbell	1,346	186	580	766
Charles Mix*	4,197	1,065	1,566	2,631
Clark	1,800	528	636	1,164
Clay	7,987	2,061	2,963	5,024
Codington*	14,464	4,050	5,207	9,257
Corson*	383	49	167	216
Custer*	3,999	771	1,614	2,385
Davison	11,576	2,920	4,328	7,248
Day*	3,654	780	1,437	2,217

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Deuel	2,135	559	788	1,347
Dewey*	450	76	187	263
Douglas*	1,637	379	629	1,008
Edmunds	1,980	310	835	1,145
Fall River*	3,424	570	1,427	1,997
Faulk	1,455	341	557	898
Grant*	4,210	592	1,809	2,401
Gregory*	2,322	488	917	1,405
Haakon*	693	91	301	392
Hamlin	2,518	702	908	1,610
Hand	2,049	499	775	1,274
Hanson	809	231	289	520
Harding	169	47	61	108
Hughes*	11,126	2,666	4,230	6,896
Hutchinson*	4,744	1,097	1,823	2,920
Hyde*	717	131	293	424
Jackson*	523	99	212	311
Jerauld	1,242	288	477	765
Jones*	850	132	359	491
Kingsbury	3,600	906	1,347	2,253
Lake	6,260	1,952	2,154	4,106
Lawrence	12,312	3,062	4,625	7,687
Lincoln	36,345	7,348	14,498	21,846
Lyman*	1,111	239	436	675
Marshall*	2,498	826	836	1,662
McCook	3,095	721	1,187	1,908
McPherson	363	61	151	212

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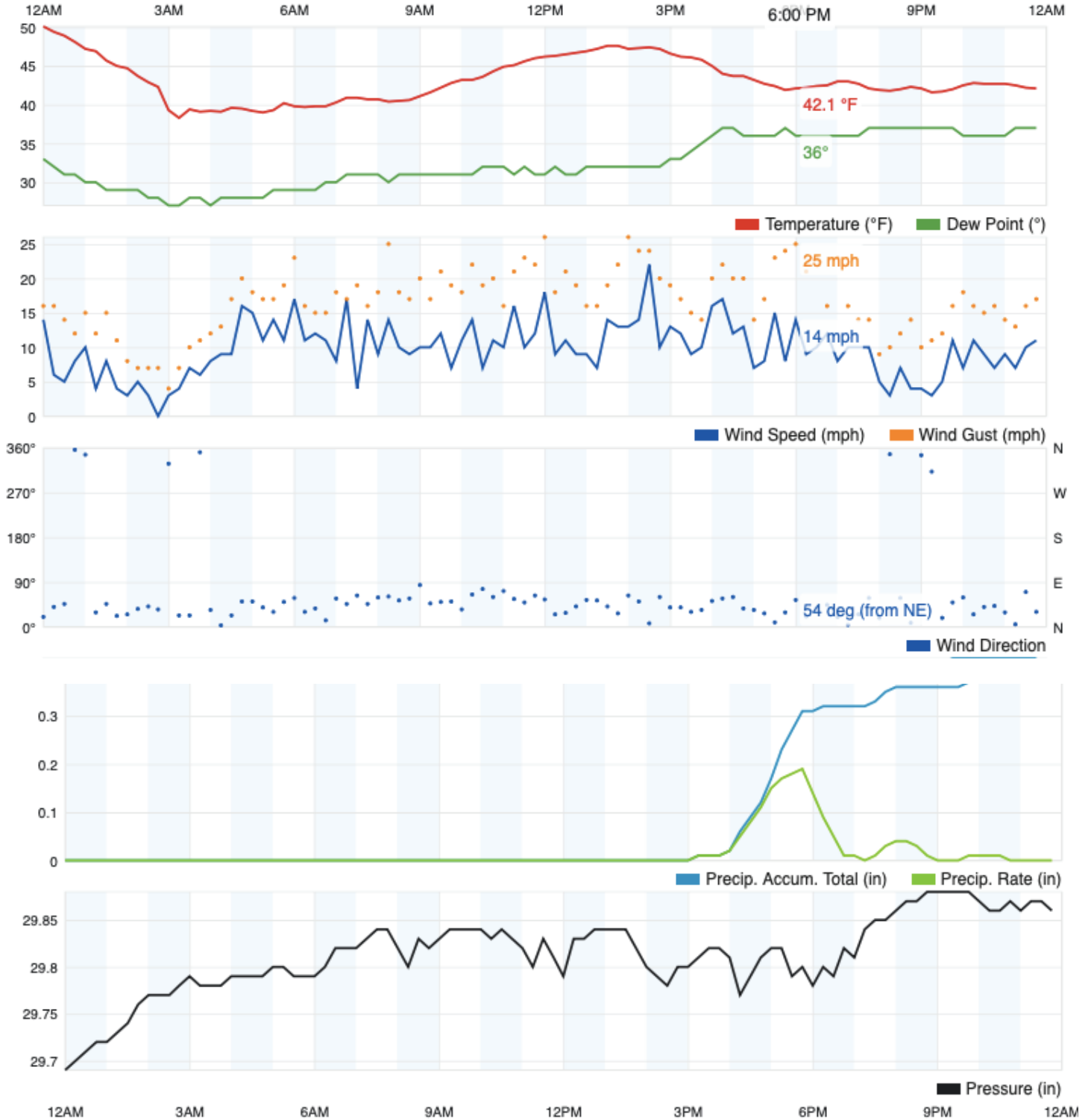
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Meade*	9,035	1,717	3,659	5,376
Mellette*	60	6	27	33
Miner	1,260	314	473	787
Minnehaha*	117,227	25,514	45,854	71,368
Moody*	2,623	649	987	1,636
Oglala Lakota*	235	49	93	142
Pennington*	51,241	8,471	21,385	29,856
Perkins*	965	149	408	557
Potter	1,301	303	499	802
Roberts*	5,752	880	2,436	3,316
Sanborn	1,469	369	550	919
Spink	4,146	762	1,692	2,454
Stanley*	1,670	346	662	1,008
Sully	545	145	200	345
Todd*	223	43	90	133
Tripp*	2,654	438	1,108	1,546
Turner	4,767	951	1,908	2,859
Union	4,818	1,582	1,618	3,200
Walworth*	2,434	468	983	1,451
Yankton	14,490	2,684	5,903	8,587
Ziebach*	76	16	30	46
Other	8,885	2,631	3,127	5,758

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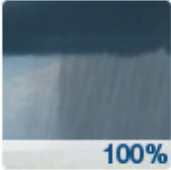
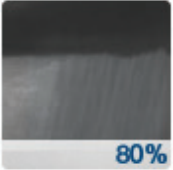



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Showers and Breezy	Showers	Showers Likely then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny then Mostly Cloudy and Breezy
High: 49 °F	Low: 39 °F	High: 58 °F	Low: 36 °F	High: 58 °F




Rain Continues in the East
Breezy and Dry North Central



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



www.weather.gov/abr

Today	Thursday	Friday
		
44 to 61°	48 to 69°	51 to 58°
Rain and a Few Tstorms Coolest East	Rain in the East Coolest East	Rain East and Central

Created 4/7/2021 4:58 AM

A slow moving low pressure system will gradually slide east through Thursday and take most of the rain and thunderstorms with it. However, another weak disturbance will bring some additional rain chances on Friday.

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Today in Weather History

April 7, 2001: Ten inches to two feet of snow fell in central South Dakota in a five-day period, beginning April 8th. Many roads became impassable. Several businesses, government offices, and schools closed on the 11th. Twenty-four inches fell at Ree Heights and Gettysburg, 20.0 inches at Faulkton, 18.0 inches at Kennebec, 16.0 inches at Pierre, and 10.0 inches at Doland.

1926: Lightning started a disastrous oil fire at San Luis Obispo, California, which lasted for five days, spread over 900 acres, and burned over six million barrels of oil. Flames reached 1000 feet, and the temperature of the fire was estimated at 2,500 degrees. The fire spawned thousands of whirlwinds with hundreds the size of small tornadoes. One vortex traveled one mile to the east-northeast of the blaze, destroying a small farmhouse and killing two people. Damage totaled \$15 million.

1948: Six tornadoes ripped through Northern Illinois and Indiana; mainly across the southern and eastern suburbs of Chicago. The hardest hit was from a tornado that moved east from near Manteno, IL to near Hebron, Indiana. This storm left four people dead; three in Grant Park, IL and one near Hebron, IN with 67 injuries and over a million dollars damage. Other strong tornadoes in the area moved from near Coal City, IL to Braidwood, IL and from Calumet City, IL into Indiana. Further south, two strong tornadoes occurred across the northern parts of Champaign and Vermilion Counties in Illinois.

1980: Severe thunderstorms spawned tornadoes that ripped through central Arkansas. The severe thunderstorms also produce high winds and baseball size hail. Five counties were declared disaster areas by President Carter. A tornado causing F3 damage also affected St. Louis and St. Charles counties in Missouri producing \$2.5 million in damage.

2010: The record heat that affected the region on April 6-7 included 93 degrees at the Washington-Dulles Airport on April 6, the earliest 90-degree reading on record. On April 7, Newark, New Jersey, shattered its daily record by seven degrees when the maximum temperature rose to 92 degrees. The Northeast ended up with its second warmest April in 116 years.

1857 - A late season freeze brought snow to every state in the Union. Even as far south as Houston TX the mercury plunged to 21 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1929 - Record heat prevailed across New England. Hartford CT reported an afternoon high of 90 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1935 - Amarillo, TX, reported dust obscuring visibility for twenty hours. Blowing dust was reported twenty-seven of thirty days in the month. On several days the visibility was reduced to near zero by the dust. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - International Falls, MN, with record warm afternoon high of 71 degrees, was warmer than Miami FL, where the high was a record cool 66 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - High winds in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region gusted to 172 mph atop Grandfather Mountain NC. Twenty-nine cities in the southwest and north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Yankton SD with a reading of 91 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-seven cities in the southwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 92 degrees in Downtown San Francisco and 104 degrees at Phoenix AZ established records for April. Highs of 78 degrees at Ely NV and 93 degrees at San Jose CA equalled April records. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Low pressure brought strong winds to the Alaska peninsula and the Aleutian Islands. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Port Heiden two days in a row. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across central Alaska. Yakutat reported a record high of 54 degrees. Unseasonably cold weather prevailed over central sections of the Lower Forty-eight states. A dozen cities from Kansas to Indiana and Alabama reported record low temperatures for the date. Evansville IN equalled their record for April with a morning low of 23 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010 - A temperature of 80 degrees is measured on Grandfather Mountain, NC, the warmest ever measured in April and three degrees short of the all-time record high for any month.

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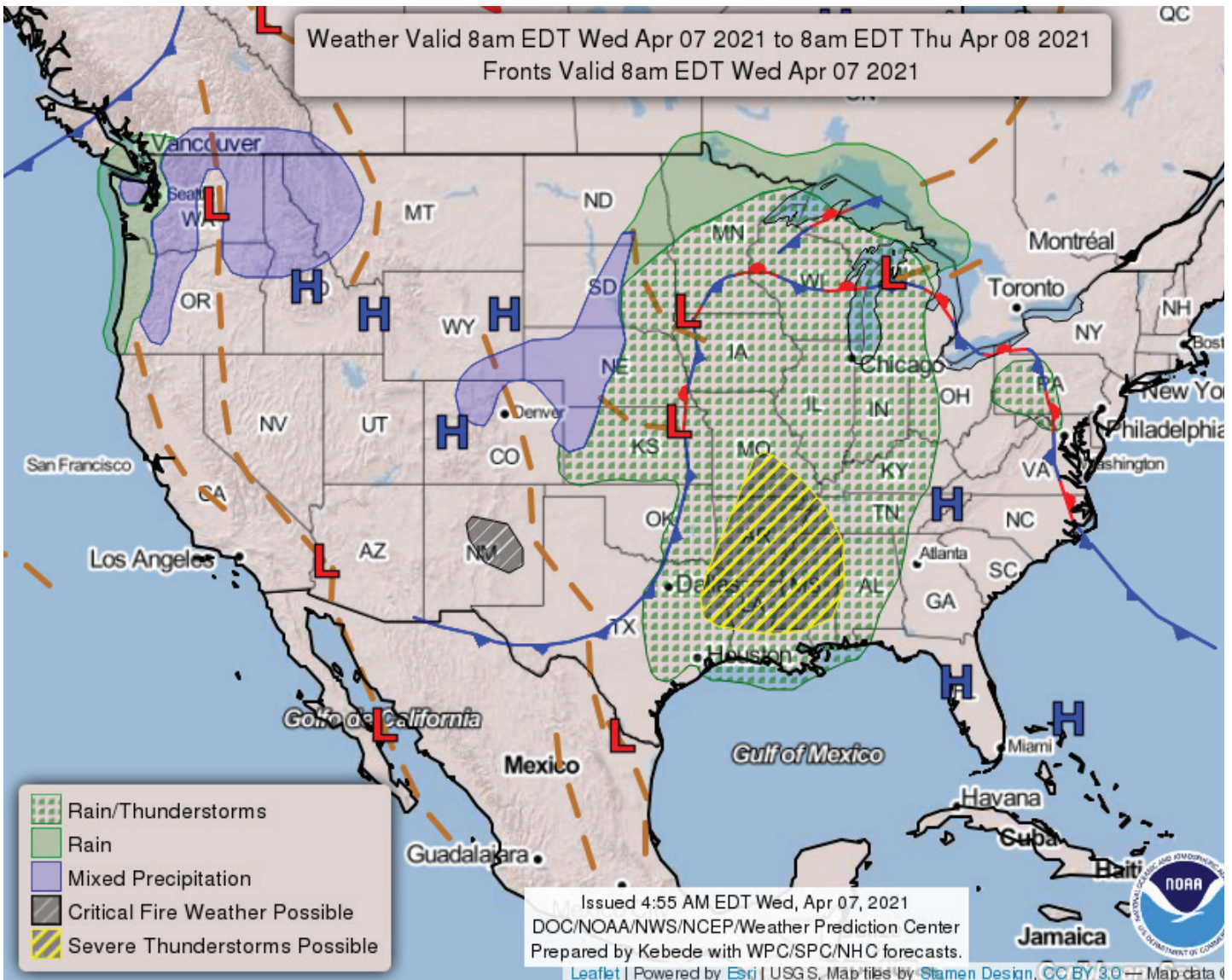
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 50 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 38 °F at 3:04 AM
Wind: 27 mph at 12:00 PM
Precip: .37 + .10 since midnight

Today's Info

Record High: 86° in 1988
Record Low: 2° in 2018
Average High: 52°F
Average Low: 28°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 1.43
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.73
Average Precip to date: 2.45
Precip Year to Date: 0.91
Sunset Tonight: 8:10 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:00 a.m.



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NO FEAR!

"Hear ye! Hear ye!" were the words of the "Town Crier" in many English towns years ago. His job was to stand in public places where people gathered and shout or "cry out" official announcements. When there was an important event, he would often ring a bell to get people to gather quickly to listen to what he was sent to say.

David had received an important message from the Lord. It was so important that he "cried out" for the people to listen to him. "An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked," he shouted. An oracle is an utterance – or a message – linked to God or coming from Him. These were serious words and, as always, reflected the love and concern that God has for people to know Him, come to Him, and worship Him.

David's message was simple, clear, and direct, "Your ears are not open to God, you flatter yourselves so much that you cannot recognize your sins or hate them."

But he does not stop there. He continues, "The words that come out of your mouths are deceitful, you are no longer wise or do good." Quite an indictment.

David's words were true then and are equally true today. He paints a vivid picture of human darkness that includes the mind, heart, and will. When we do not fear God's judgment, our egos become inflated, we flatter ourselves falsely and wicked thoughts come out of minds that deceive ourselves and others. When we no longer fear God we are in serious trouble. We must fear Him, remain in His Word, and rely on His strength.

Prayer: We pray, Father, that Your Spirit will convict us of any sin that would deceive us and destroy us. May the truth of Your Word guide and guard us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In their blind conceit, they cannot see how wicked they really are. Everything they say is crooked and deceitful. They refuse to act wisely or do good. Psalm 36:2-3

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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

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. April 5, 2021.

Editorial: Transgender Battle: A Self-Inflicted Wound

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's recent transgender crusade continues to stagger through a minefield of her own making.

During the legislative session, Noem tried to push through a bill banning transgender athletes from competing in women's sports. The issue seemed to fly in out of nowhere, unless you took a broader view: It reflected efforts that Republican governors in at least three other states were pushing. Such simultaneous national political maneuvers are usually not coincidental.

The bill passed the Senate, died in House committee and was then revived, or "smoked out," in the Senate, which passed the bill and sent it to the governor, who announced she was eager to sign the legislation.

But then something happened. Quite likely, the prospect that the bill would be struck down in court became apparent, and warnings were sounded that the NCAA might retaliate by barring or removing its postseason athletic events from the state, which would cost the state a chunk of revenue.

Noem waited, then vetoed the bill for "style and form," claiming she wanted to change the language to exclude college events from the ban.

At this point, the governor, who had already upset proponents of transgender rights, now angered conservatives who accused her of gutting the original proposal of the measure.

Last week, the Legislature resoundingly rejected her veto and the bill went unsigned, thus killing it.

The governor then issued a pair of executive orders that vaguely banned transgender women and girls from competing in women's sports. The orders do not mention transgender athletes specifically but instead refer to biological sex.

Now, the governor speaks of convening a special legislative session to address the matter.

This has been a completely unforced error over an issue that virtually doesn't exist in this state. And, as we stated before, the South Dakota High School Activities Association already has a procedure in place to assess each case on its merits.

Lawmakers on both sides of the issue are unhappy for a wide variety of reasons.

What's more, none of the problems that come with the passage of such a measure — or the issuing of executive orders — have disappeared.

In particular, the boycott issue could be a costly and painful one for the state. As we're seeing, more companies and groups are willing to take these stands to address what they see as injustices. Late last week, for instance, Major League Baseball announced it would move this summer's All-Star Game from Atlanta due to Georgia's recently passed election laws that critics condemn as racially discriminatory. It's clear that such organizations, which are pressured from within their own ranks, are increasingly unafraid to flex their considerable muscle to make a political statement. (You can deride this as "cancel culture," but what would you call what's happening to transgender woman athletes?)

We reiterate, this is an example of someone trying to score political points by targeting a very small minority of people and exploiting what makes them different. Now, what was basically a non-issue in this state has turned into a major problem that is not only a no-win situation but is also diverting attention from several other issues in this state that need attention.

Ultimately, no good can come from this.

END

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

01-19-20-32-42, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 3

(one, nineteen, twenty, thirty-two, forty-two; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$184 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$43 million

Decision strikes key parts of Native American adoptions law

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Parts of a federal law giving Native American families preference in the adoption of Native American children were effectively struck down Tuesday by a sharply divided federal appeals court, a defeat for tribal leaders who said the 1978 law was important to protecting their families and culture.

The complex ruling from 16 judges of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upholds a lower court's finding that the Indian Child Welfare Act's preferences for Native American families or licensed "Indian foster homes" violate constitutional equal protection requirements.

It also said some of the provisions of the law "unconstitutionally commandeered" state officials' duties in adoption matters.

However, the full implications of the decision on adoptive children in this and future cases were not immediately clear. Some of the key points were the result of 8-8 votes. The lack of a majority meant the lower court's ruling prevailed on those points, but that no binding precedent was set by the appeals court.

Attorneys for both sides were reviewing the 325 pages late Tuesday. The case could wind up at the Supreme Court.

The 1978 law has long been championed by Native American leaders as a means of preserving Native American families and culture. In arguments last year, an Interior Department lawyer said Congress passed the law after finding that adoption standards at the state level were resulting in the breakup of American Indian families.

Opponents of the law include non-Native families who have tried to adopt American Indian children in emotional legal cases.

"Our clients brought this case to protect their families from being torn apart by a discriminatory federal law," Matthew D. McGill, lead attorney for the plaintiff families, said in an email. "We are very pleased that today's ruling has confirmed that ICWA's discriminatory placement preferences are unconstitutional."

Multiple couples seeking to adopt Native American children, a woman who wishes for her Native American biological child to be adopted by non-Natives, and the states of Texas, Louisiana, and Indiana were among the plaintiffs challenging the law.

The Tuesday evening ruling marked a reversal for the appeals court. A three-judge panel voted 2-1 to reverse the district court and uphold the law in 2019. But a majority of the 17-member court agreed to rehear the case. With one member recused, 16 judges heard arguments in the case last year.

The resulting decision included multiple partial dissents and partially concurring opinions. On some issues, a majority of the court agreed. On others, the court tied, meaning the original district court decision on the issue prevailed, although the appeals court ruling on the issues won't be considered precedential in future cases.

Study: Drought-breaking rains more rare, erratic in US West

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Rainstorms grew more erratic and droughts much longer across most of the U.S. West over the past half-century as climate change warmed the planet, according to a sweeping gov-

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ernment study released Tuesday that concludes the situation is worsening.

The most dramatic changes were recorded in the desert Southwest, where the average dry period between rainstorms grew from about 30 days in the 1970s to 45 days between storms now, said Joel Biederman, a research hydrologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Southwest Watershed Research Center in Tucson, Arizona.

The consequences of the intense dry periods that pummeled areas of the West in recent years were severe — more intense and dangerous wildfires, parched croplands and not enough vegetation to support livestock and wildlife. And the problem appears to be accelerating, with rainstorms becoming increasingly unpredictable, and more areas showing longer intervals between storms since the turn of the century compared to prior decades, the study concludes.

The study comes with almost two-thirds of the contiguous U.S. beset by abnormally dry conditions. Warm temperatures forecast for the next several months could make it the worst spring drought in almost a decade, affecting roughly 74 million people across the U.S., the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said.

Water use cutbacks, damaged wheat crops, more fires and lower reservoirs in California and the Southwest are possible, weather service and agriculture officials have warned. Climate scientists are calling what's happening in the West a continuation of a "megadrought" that started in 1999.

While previous research documented a decline in total rainfall for much of the West, the work by Biederman and colleagues put more focus on when that rain occurs. That has significant implications for how much water is available for agriculture and plants such as grasses that have shallow roots and need a steadier supply of moisture than large trees.

"Once the growing season starts, the total amount of rainfall is important. But if it comes in just a few large storms, with really long dry periods in between, that can have really detrimental consequences," study co-author Biederman said in an interview.

The total amount of rain in a year doesn't matter to plants — especially if rains come mostly in heavy bursts with large run-off — but consistent moisture is what keeps them alive, said UCLA meteorologist Daniel Swain, who writes a weather blog about the West and was not part of the study.

The new findings were published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*. Researchers led by University of Arizona climate scientist Fangyue Zhang compiled daily readings going back to 1976 from 337 weather stations across the western U.S. and analyzed rainfall and drought data to identify the changing patterns.

Other parts of the region that saw longer and more variable droughts included the southwest Rocky Mountains, the Colorado Plateau and the Central Plains.

The rainfall study is in line with data that shows climate change already is affecting the planet.

"Climate models project that the American Southwest is very likely to experience more frequent and more severe droughts," said William Anderegg, a University of Utah biologist and climate scientist. "This study and other recent work demonstrates that this dry down has already begun."

The weather station data that was used in the study represents "the gold standard" for an accurate understanding of changes being driven by climate change, said Christopher Field, an earth systems scientist and director of the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment.

Park Williams — who studies changes in water, wildfires and climate at UCLA — cautioned more work was needed to see if the rainfall trends since the 1970s reflect a longer-term natural cycle or are tied to human-caused warming. Regardless, the combination of longer dry spells and warmer temperatures almost certainly adds to increased wildfire size, he said.

Northwestern states were largely spared from the accelerating cycles of drought. The researchers observed higher annual rainfall totals and shorter drought intervals in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and portions of Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas.

That's consistent with predicted alterations in weather patterns driven by climate change in which the jet stream that brings moisture from the Pacific Ocean shifts northward, they said.

Fire chief retires in wake of DUI arrest

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — A long-time fire chief in eastern South Dakota has retired after he was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence.

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported Brookings Fire Chief Darrell Hartmann's last day was Monday. Deputy Fire Chief Pete Bolzer will serve as interim chief.

Hartmann was arrested March 19 on suspicion of driving under the influence after a police officer pulled him over for a traffic violation. He's scheduled to appear in court April 26.

The 60-year-old Hartmann served as Brookings' fire chief since 1998. He was fire chief in Pierre from 1986 to 1998, according to his LinkedIn page.

Noem announces chief of staff leaving for Board of Regents

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem announced Tuesday that her top aide will change for the third time during her tenure as governor when she appoints her current chief of staff to the Board of Regents.

Tony Venhuizen will take join the board later this month, Noem's office said.

Venhuizen said in a statement that he had intended his time in the governor's office to be short. However, he became Noem's longest-serving chief of staff, spending just over a year in the role. Noem has seen consistent turnover of her top staff since she became governor in 2019. Another senior staff member, Maggie Seidel, left Noem's office last month.

"Tony has been an incredible asset to our team, and he will be missed," Noem said.

Venhuizen was previously a member of the Board of Regents, which oversees the state's public universities. He served as its student member from 2003 until 2008. He also worked on education policy while on staff in former Gov. Dennis Daugaard's office.

Rep. Dusty Johnson gets COVID shot, promotes vaccination

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson received a shot for the COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday in Sioux Falls, South Dakota as part of an effort to promote widespread vaccinations in order to extinguish the pandemic.

"This is how we get back to normal," Johnson, a Republican, said shortly after receiving the shot at a Sanford Health facility.

South Dakota opened vaccine eligibility to anyone 16 and older Monday, and it has recorded one of the nation's highest rates of people fully vaccinated. But the congressman noted that as a man in his 40s, he represented a demographic that has been hesitant to get a vaccine. Although Johnson had an opportunity to get the vaccine when members of Congress received early access, he decided to wait until it was widely available.

"Now is the time for people to step up, even if they're young, even if they're healthy," he said.

About 46% of people statewide have received at least one dose of the vaccine, the Department of Health reported. But it also reported 163 new cases and 98 people in the hospital with the virus.

However, active infections fell to 2,419 statewide. No deaths were reported Tuesday, but 1,938 have died since the start of the pandemic.

North Dakota Legislature OKs Juneteenth ceremonial holiday

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota's Republican-led Legislature passed a bipartisan bill Tuesday to recognize Juneteenth as a ceremonial holiday in the state — one of just three that does not observe it in some way.

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West Fargo GOP Rep. Austen Schauer, who carried the bill on the House floor, said the recognition of Juneteenth "is a step of good will toward becoming a nation of respect to each other."

Juneteenth — also known as Emancipation Day and Freedom Day — commemorates when the last enslaved African Americans learned they were free in 1865 in Galveston, Texas, where Union soldiers brought them the news two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Although the North Dakota legislation would make June 19 a state-recognized holiday, it would not be an official paid holiday for state employees — something backers said likely would have hindered the bill's passage.

The House passed the bill 70-22 on Tuesday. The Senate endorsed the measure 44-3 in February. The legislation now heads to GOP Gov. Doug Burgum, who is expected to sign it.

Fargo Democrat Tim Mathern and Grand Forks Republican Ray Holmberg sponsored the North Dakota bill. The pair also backed successful legislation 30 years ago to recognize the third Monday in January as a state holiday honoring slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

South Dakota and Hawaii are the only other states that don't have some sort of official observance of Juneteenth. South Dakota's GOP-controlled House killed a bill in March to legally recognize the holiday.

Burgum and South Dakota GOP Gov. Kristi Noem both recognized June 19 in proclamations last year to commemorate the day, but for 2020 only.

Martin Luther King Day was added as an official North Dakota holiday in 1991. From 1987 until the adoption of the 1991 legislation, the third Monday in January was "designated" as MLK day, but it was not an official holiday.

None of the Legislature's 141 members are Black. According census data, North Dakota's African American population has more than tripled since 2010 to 25,000 but still makes up only about 3% of the overall population.

From the 70s to winter storm warning in western South Dakota

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — From summer-like temperatures to a winter storm warning, the weather in western South Dakota has been all over the map in recent days.

The National Weather Service in Rapid City has issued a winter storm warning for 6 inches (15 centimeters) or more of snow Tuesday in the higher elevations of the Black Hills.

Any accumulation shouldn't be around long with temperatures in the region returning to the mid-60s by Thursday.

The weather service expected snow over the Black Hills to taper off Tuesday night. While higher amount of snow are possible near the foothills, Rapid City is expected to get anywhere from a dusting to 2 inches (5 centimeters).

The winter storm warning is expected to impact the northern, central and southern Black Hills, including Keystone, Mount Rushmore, Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park.

The storm warning comes after a weekend of temperatures in the 70s.

South Dakota to get \$16 million in federal COVID-19 funding

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota will be getting more than \$16 million in federal funding to expand its coronavirus vaccination programs.

The announcement from the White House Tuesday says the award from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will help support local efforts that are focused on creating greater equity and access to COVID-19 vaccines for those disproportionately affected by the virus.

The money is part of \$3 billion in funding the CDC gave to 64 jurisdictions to boost vaccine distribution efforts, according to the White House release.

"Millions of Americans are getting vaccinated every day, but we need to ensure that we are reaching those in the communities hit hardest by this pandemic," CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky stated. "This

investment will support state and local health departments and community-based organizations as they work on the frontlines to increase vaccine access, acceptance and uptake.”

Goals for the funding say 75% must focus on specific programs and initiatives intended to increase vaccine access among racial and ethnic minority communities. And, 60% must go to support local health departments, community-based organizations and community health centers, the Argus Leader reported.

The funds could be used to train community members to conduct door-to-door outreach to raise awareness about COVID-19 vaccines and help individuals sign up for appointments, according to the release.

Turkey sentences dozens to life terms over 2016 failed coup

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — A Turkish court sentenced dozens of people, including former soldiers attached to the presidential guard regiment, to life imprisonment on Wednesday over their involvement in the 2016 failed coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s government, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

A total of 497 defendants had been on trial since 2017 for attempting to seize the military headquarters in Ankara, occupying the headquarters of the state broadcaster TRT, and of forcing a television broadcaster to read out a statement on behalf of the coup-plotters.

The massive trial was one of hundreds of trials against suspected members of a network led by U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara accuses of orchestrating the failed attempt. Gulen, a former Erdogan ally, denies the accusation.

The court in the outskirts of Ankara sentenced 32 defendants to life, including six who received aggravated life terms without the possibility of parole, Anadolu reported.

Among those sentenced to the aggravated life term is a former lieutenant colonel who forced the anchorwoman to read the statement, a former colonel accused of giving the order for the takeover of the TRT building and a former major who led a team that attempted to take over the military headquarters, the agency said.

The court also sentenced one person to 61 years in prison while 106 defendants received terms ranging from six to 16 years. Other defendants were either acquitted or were not given prison terms, Anadolu said.

On July 15, 2016, factions within the Turkish military used tanks, warplanes and helicopters in an attempt to overthrow Erdogan. Fighter jets bombed parliament and other spots in Turkey’s capital. Heeding a call by the president, thousands took to the streets to stop the coup.

A total of 251 people were killed and around 2,200 others were wounded. Around 35 alleged coup plotters were also killed.

The government has designated Gulen’s network a terrorist group, another claim he denies. He lives in the United States.

EU agency to share results of probe into AstraZeneca shot

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — The European Union’s drug regulator will announce the conclusions of its investigation into the possible connection between AstraZeneca’s coronavirus vaccine and rare blood clots later Wednesday, including recommendations that could have far-reaching effects on the use of the shot that is key to global efforts to end the pandemic.

Earlier this week, a senior official from the European Medicines Agency said there was a causal link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and the rare clots that have been seen in dozens of people worldwide, among the tens of millions who have received at least one dose of the shot.

Marco Cavaleri, head of health threats and vaccine strategy at the Amsterdam-based agency, said in comments to Rome’s Il Messaggero newspaper on Tuesday that “it is becoming more and more difficult to affirm that there isn’t a cause-and-effect relationship between AstraZeneca vaccines and the very rare cases of blood clots associated with a low level of platelets.”

But Cavaleri acknowledged the agency hadn’t yet figured out how exactly the vaccine might be causing

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these rare side effects. The agency said its evaluation "has not yet reached a conclusion and the review is currently ongoing."

The EMA is particularly focused on two types of rare blood clots: one that appears in multiple blood vessels and another that occurs in a vein that drains blood from the brain. It is also evaluating reports of people who had low levels of blood platelets, which puts them at risk of severe bleeding.

The EMA, the World Health Organization and numerous other health authorities have said repeatedly that the AstraZeneca vaccine is safe and effective and that the protection it offers against COVID-19 outweighs the small risks of rare blood clots.

As recently as last week, the EMA said "there is no evidence that would support restricting the use of this vaccine in any population" — a response to several countries doing just that — though an expert said more brain clots were being reported than would be expected. To date, most of the cases have been reported in younger women, who are more susceptible to developing such rare clots anyway, making understanding what is causing the clots potentially more difficult.

"The problem is these clots are very unusual, and we don't really know what the background rate of them is, so it's very hard to know if the vaccine is contributing to this," said Dr. Peter English, who formerly chaired the British Medical Association's Public Health Medicine Committee.

A full investigation would likely take months, but English said given the urgency of the continuing pandemic, regulators would likely make a quick decision.

"It's very likely we will see a suspension of the vaccine's use in certain groups while they do the further investigations to give us clearer answers," English said.

In March, more than a dozen countries, mostly in Europe, suspended their use of AstraZeneca over the blood clot issue. Most restarted — some with age restrictions — after the EMA said countries should continue using the potentially life-saving vaccine.

The suspensions were seen as particularly damaging for AstraZeneca because they came after repeated missteps in how the company reported data on the vaccine's effectiveness and concerns over how well its shot worked in older people. That has led to frequently changing advice in some countries on who can take the vaccine, raising worries that AstraZeneca's credibility could be permanently damaged, spurring more vaccine hesitancy and prolonging the pandemic.

English said the back-and-forth over the AstraZeneca vaccine globally could have serious consequences.

"We can't afford not to use this vaccine if we are going to end the pandemic," he said.

That's because the vaccine is cheaper and easier to store than many others, is critical to Europe's immunization campaign and a pillar of the U.N.-backed program known as COVAX that aims to get vaccines to some of the world's poorest countries. It has been endorsed for use in more than 50 countries, including by the 27-nation EU and WHO. U.S. authorities are still evaluating the vaccine.

The latest suspension of AstraZeneca came in Spain's Castilla y León region, where health chief Verónica Casado said Wednesday that "the principle of prudence" drove her to put a temporary hold on the vaccine that she still backed as being both effective and necessary.

"If there are in fact individuals of a certain age group that could have a higher risk (of clotting) then we need to adjust its use," Casado told Spanish public radio. "We are not questioning AstraZeneca. We need all the vaccines possible to reach the goal of 70% of the adult population."

French health authorities said they, too, were awaiting EMA's conclusions and would follow the agency's recommendations, especially for the 500,000 people who have received a first dose of AstraZeneca.

English, the former chair of the British drug regulator, said that even rare, serious side effects are seen with established vaccines and that policymakers often decide that bigger public health goals warrants their use, citing the polio vaccine as an example. For every million doses that are given of the oral polio vaccine, about one child is paralyzed from the live virus contained in the vaccine.

On Tuesday, AstraZeneca and Oxford University, which developed the vaccine, paused a study of the shot in children while the U.K. regulator evaluates the link between the shot and rare blood clots in adults.

Snub in EU-Turkey meeting highlights gender equality issue

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Gender equality issues took center stage Wednesday in Brussels a day after Ursula von der Leyen, one of the EU's most powerful executives, was treated like a second-rank official during a visit to Ankara.

Von der Leyen — the European Commission president — and European Council chief Charles Michel visited Turkey on Tuesday for talks with Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan focusing on the EU-Turkey relations. After they were led in a big room for discussions with Erdogan, TV images showed that only two chairs had been laid out in front of the EU and the Turkish flags for the three leaders.

Michel and Erdogan took the chairs as von der Leyen stood looking at both men, expressing her astonishment with a "ehm" and a gesture of disappointment. Von der Leyen eventually sat on a large beige sofa, away from her male counterparts.

According to a EU source, the meeting between the three leaders lasted more than two hours and a half.

"The important thing is that the president should have been seated exactly in the same manner as the president of the European council and the Turkish president," EU commission chief spokesman Eric Mamer said, adding that Von der Leyen was surprised by the arrangements.

"She decided to proceed nevertheless, prioritizing substance over protocol, but nevertheless let me stress that the president expects that the institution that she represents to be treated with the required protocol, and she has therefore asked her team to take all appropriate contacts in order to ensure that such an incident does not occur in the future," Mamer said.

He added that Von der Leyen's protocol team did not travel to Turkey with her due to the coronavirus pandemic.

There was no immediate comment from the Turkish presidency or the European Council.

The diplomatic incident was abundantly commented on social media. European lawmaker Sophie in 't Veld posted pictures of previous meetings between Michel's and Von der Leyen's predecessors with Erdogan, with the trio of men sitting in chairs next to each other.

"And no, it wasn't a coincidence, it was deliberate," in 't Veld wrote on Twitter, questioning why Michel remained "silent."

"'Ehm' is the new term for 'that's not how EU-Turkey relationship should be,' said Sergey Lagodinsky, another member of the European Parliament, using the hashtags #GiveHerASeat and #womensrights."

Last month, Erdogan pulled Turkey out of a key European convention aimed at combatting violence against women, triggering criticism from EU officials. The move was a blow to Turkey's women's rights movement, which says domestic violence and murders of women are on the rise.

Von der Leyen called for Erdogan to reverse his decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention.

"Human rights issues are non-negotiable. We were very clear about that. We urge Turkey to reverse its decision because it is the first international binding instrument to combat violence against women and children," she said.

Asked whether the commission regarded the incident as specifically gender-related, Mamer said Von der Leyen traveled to Ankara as the president of an EU institution.

"Being a man or a woman does not change anything to the fact that she should have been seated according to the very same protocol arrangements as the two other participants," Mamer said. "She seized the opportunity to specifically tackle the Istanbul convention and women's rights. I believe that the message sent was clear."

Iran ship said to be Red Sea troop base off Yemen attacked

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An Iranian ship believed to be a base for the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and anchored for years in the Red Sea off Yemen has been attacked, Tehran acknowledged Wednesday.

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Iran's Foreign Ministry confirmed the attack on the MV Saviz, suspected to have been carried out by Israel — though Tehran did not immediately blame its regional archenemy. The assault came as Iran and world powers sat down in Vienna for the first talks about the U.S. potentially rejoining the tattered deal aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program, showing events outside the negotiations could derail those efforts.

The ship's long presence in the region, repeatedly criticized by Saudi Arabia, has come as the West and United Nations experts say Iran has provided arms and support to Yemen's Houthi rebels in that country's yearslong war. Iran denies arming the Houthis, though components found in the rebels' weaponry link back to Tehran.

Iran previously described the Saviz as aiding in "anti-piracy" efforts in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb strait, a crucial chokepoint in international shipping. A statement attributed to Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh described the ship as a commercial vessel.

"Fortunately, no casualties were reported ... and technical investigations are underway," Khatibzadeh said. "Our country will take all necessary measures through international authorities."

In an earlier state TV statement, an anchor cited a New York Times story, which quoted an anonymous U.S. official telling the newspaper that Israel informed America it carried out an attack Tuesday morning on the vessel. Israeli officials declined to comment about the assault when reached by The Associated Press, as did the Saviz's owner.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz, while refusing to say if his country launched the attack, described Iran and its regional allies as a major threat.

"Israel must continue to defend itself," Gantz told journalists. "Any place we find an operational challenge and necessity, we will continue to act."

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called the Vienna talks a "success" while speaking to his Cabinet on Wednesday.

"Today, one united statement is being heard that all sides of the nuclear deal have concluded that there is no better solution than the deal," he said.

Iran's semiofficial Tasnim news agency, believed to be close to the Guard, reported that a limpet mine planted on Saviz's hull caused the blast. A limpet mine is a type of naval mine that is attached to the side of a ship, usually by a diver. It later explodes, and can significantly damage a vessel. Iran did not blame anyone for the attack and said Iranian officials likely would offer more information in the coming days.

In a statement, the U.S. military's Central Command only said it was "aware of media reporting of an incident involving the Saviz in the Red Sea."

"We can confirm that no U.S. forces were involved in the incident," the command said. "We have no additional information to provide."

The Saviz, owned by the state-linked Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, came to the Red Sea in late 2016, according to ship-tracking data. In the years since, it has drifted off the Dahlak archipelago, a chain of islands off the coast of the African nation of Eritrea. It likely received supply replenishments and switched crew via passing Iranian vessels using the waterway.

Briefing materials from the Saudi military earlier obtained by the AP showed men on the vessel dressed in military-style fatigues, as well as small boats capable of ferrying cargo to the Yemeni coast. Those materials also included pictures showing a variety of antennas on the vessel that the Saudi government described as unusual for a commercial cargo ship, suggesting it conducted electronic surveillance. Other images showed the ship had mounts for .50-caliber machine guns.

The Washington Institute for Near-East Policy has called the Saviz an "Iranian mothership" in the region, similarly describing it as an intelligence-gathering base and an armory for the Guard. Policy papers from the institute don't explain how they came to that conclusion, though its analysts routinely have access to Gulf and Israeli military sources.

The Saviz had been under international sanctions until Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran receive relief from sanctions in exchange for limiting its enrichment of uranium. The Trump administration later renewed American sanctions on the Saviz as part of its decision to unilaterally

withdraw from the accord.

In June 2019, Saudi Arabia flew a critically ill Iranian off the Saviz after Tehran made a request through the United Nations for assistance.

Amid the wider tensions between the U.S. and Iran, a series of mysterious blasts have targeted ships in the region, including some the U.S. Navy blamed on Iran. Among the ships damaged recently was an Israeli-owned car carrier in an attack Netanyahu blamed on Iran. Another was an Iranian cargo ship in the Mediterranean Sea.

Iran also has blamed Israel for a recent series of attacks, including a mysterious explosion in July that destroyed an advanced centrifuge assembly plant at its Natanz nuclear facility. Another is the November killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a top Iranian scientist who founded the Islamic Republic's military nuclear program two decades ago.

The Latest: European regulator to explain blood clot probe

By The Associated Press undefined

LONDON — The European Medicines Agency will announce the conclusions of its investigation into the possible connection between AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine and rare blood clots later Wednesday.

On Tuesday, a senior EMA official said there was a causal link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and the rare blood clots that have been seen in dozens of people worldwide, among the tens of millions who have received at least one dose.

In comments to Rome's Il Messaggero newspaper, Marco Cavaleri, head of health threats and vaccine strategy at the Amsterdam-based agency, said "it is becoming more and more difficult to affirm that there isn't a cause-and-effect relationship between AstraZeneca vaccines and the very rare cases of blood clots associated with a low level of platelets."

But Cavaleri acknowledged the agency had not yet figured out how exactly the vaccine might be causing these rare side effects.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— Europe's EMA drug regulator to announce the results of its probe into any ties between the AstraZeneca vaccine and rare blood clots.

— The City of London reimages work spaces after the pandemic

— Even as many U.S. states and schools reopen, many students still learn remotely

— Nearly half of new US virus infections are in just five states

— North Korea tells WHO it's still virus-free in latest report

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

TEHRAN — Iran has shattered its daily record for new coronavirus infections for the second consecutive day, with 20,954 new cases reported on Wednesday.

The country is in the midst of one of the most severe surges of the coronavirus to date, following a two-week public holiday for Nowruz, the Persian New Year, which drove millions to travel to vacation spots across the country and congregate in homes in defiance of government health guidelines.

For months, Iran has struggled to curb the worst outbreak of coronavirus in the Middle East. Wednesday's case count brought the total number of infected to 1.98 million, according to official figures. Iran Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari says another 193 people had died in the past 24 hours, raising the country's death toll to 63,699.

Wednesday's infection count easily surpassed the previous record set Tuesday of 17,430 infections.

LONDON — The U.K. is administering the first doses of the Moderna vaccine, the third authorized in the

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country against the coronavirus.

Patients at the West Wales General Hospital were receiving the jab on Wednesday. Britain has ordered 17 million doses of the Moderna vaccine, enough for 8.5 million people.

The rollout comes as the U.K. medical regulator investigates another vaccine, made by Oxford University and AstraZeneca, which has been given to more than 18 million people in Britain.

Several countries have restricted the AstraZeneca jab's use in younger people while scientists investigate a small number of cases of rare blood clots in people who have received the vaccine.

Britain, which has ordered 100 million doses of the AstraZeneca shot, has not restricted its use, but its medical regulator is reviewing the evidence.

Oxford University said late Tuesday it had stopped giving the shot to children involved in a clinical trial until it had received more information from the regulator about reports of rare blood clots in adults.

TOKYO — Japan's Osaka prefecture issued a special warning Wednesday that a rapid surge in coronavirus cases is placing medical systems in the region at the verge of collapse and requested the cancellation of the Olympic torch relay along all roads in the prefecture.

Gov. Hirofumi Yoshimura declared a "medial emergency" in the western Japanese prefecture, where daily cases have reached new highs, and asked hospitals to urgently prepare additional beds.

Yoshimura, who previously asked for a cancellation of the torch relay only in Osaka city, said all segments on public roads should be canceled. The Osaka leg of the Olympic torch run is scheduled for April 13-14.

The Tokyo Olympics are to start in just over three months, as Japan's vaccination drive is still in its initial stages.

"Medical systems are on the verge of collapse," Yoshimura said at a news conference. He attributed the rapid spike in infections to a new variant of the virus.

BERLIN — A Brazilian activist dressed as the grim reaper is taking to the streets of Berlin every night in a one-man protest against what he calls the "deadly health policies" pursued by his homeland's president in the pandemic.

Multimedia artist Rafael Puetter, who has been in Berlin for five years and originally comes from Rio de Janeiro, made his nightly excursion early Wednesday as Brazil for the first time reported a 24-hour tally of COVID-19 deaths exceeding 4,000.

That made Brazil the third nation to cross the threshold. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has long downplayed the risks of the coronavirus and remains fully against lockdowns as too damaging to the economy.

"My performance starts at the Brazilian embassy in Berlin at midnight every night," said Puetter. "I think the president is promoting deadly health policies and I think death's the symbol of this government in many ways."

He then walks to the Brandenburg Gate and the nearby German parliament, in front of which he counts out one sunflower seed to represent each of the people who have died in Brazil over the previous 24 hours and puts them into a glass. He aims eventually to plant the seeds as a memorial.

WASHINGTON — Large numbers of U.S. students are not returning to the classroom even as more schools reopen for full-time, in-person learning, according to a survey released Wednesday by the Biden administration.

The findings reflect a nation that has been locked in debate over the safety of reopening schools during the coronavirus pandemic. Even as national COVID-19 rates continued to ebb, key measures around reopening schools barely budged.

Nearly 46% of public schools offered five days a week of in-person to all students in February, according to the survey, but just 34% of students were learning full-time in the classroom. The gap was most pronounced among older K-12 students, with just 29% of eighth graders getting five days a week of learning at school.

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There were early signs of a shift, however, with more eighth grade students moving from fully remote to hybrid learning.

With the new findings, President Joe Biden came no closer to meeting his goal of having most elementary schools open five days a week in his first 100 days.

PRAGUE — Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis fired his health minister, the third who has lost the job in the pandemic in one of the hardest-hit European countries.

Jan Blatny was expected to be replaced by Petr Arenberger, the director of Prague's University Hospital Vinohrady, who will be sworn in later Wednesday.

Babis has recently repeatedly criticized Blatny over his handling of the pandemic, including imposing strict conditions for use of experimental drugs to treat COVID-19 patients.

Blatny was also under fire from pro-Russian President Milos Zeman, an ally of Babis, who demanded Blatny's dismissal over his refusal to allow the use of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine because it has not been approved by the European Union drug regulator.

Blatny took office on Oct. 29 to replace epidemiologist Roman Prymula who was dismissed after he was photographed as he visited a restaurant that should have been closed as part of restrictive measures to slow down the pandemic.

The nation of 10.7 million has 1.65 million confirmed cases with 27,329 deaths.

BUDAPEST — Hungary began loosening its lockdown restrictions on Wednesday even as another daily record in COVID-19 deaths was broken and a surge in the pandemic gripped the country's hospitals.

A slow downward trend in the number of deaths was interrupted as authorities announced 311 new deaths, coming only hours after Prime Minister Viktor Orban said that certain lockdown restrictions would be lifted on Wednesday. Hungary's government earlier decided that the lockdown could be loosened once 2.5 million Hungarians had received at least a first dose of a vaccine, a milestone reached on Tuesday.

While daily new infections continue to decrease in the hard-hit Central European country, the number of those being treated in hospitals remains over 12,000. Some medical experts have expressed reservations about the plans to lift the lockdown as the current pandemic surge continues to peak.

As of Wednesday, most businesses and services may reopen if they enforce maximum indoor capacity limits and observe social distancing. The start of an overnight curfew in effect since November will be extended by two hours, and the opening hours of businesses will also be extended.

Hungary has the third-worst COVID-19 death rate per 1 million inhabitants in the world, according to Johns Hopkins University.

WARSAW, Poland – Poland is extending its lockdown by another week until April 18, as over 34,500 COVID-19 hospital beds are taken or almost 80% of those available, a level that the health authorities describe as "dangerously" high.

Health Minister Adam Niedzielski also said Wednesday that the Brazilian, South African and Nigerian virus variants have been found in Poland, but the predominant variant is the one first found in Britain, which scientists say is both more transmissible and more deadly.

Amid a sudden spike in cases, Poland registered about 35,000 new daily infections last week and 600 deaths a day on average.

Under the extended lockdown, schools, hotels, shopping malls, restaurants and clubs, theaters and sports facilities remain closed.

Almost 6.8 million vaccine doses have been administered and 55,000 COVID-19 related deaths have been registered in this nation of 38 million.

MADRID — Spain's northwestern region of Castile and León region is temporarily halting use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine while European authorities evaluate links between the jab and rare blood clots.

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Health services in the Spanish region of 2.4 million people said Wednesday the suspension would affect its mass vaccination rollout. No other Spanish regions announced a suspension.

Spain's government recommends giving the jab to people between 18 and 65. It was one of the European countries that briefly halted use of the AstraZeneca vaccine last month over concerns about the rare blood clots.

Castile and León's health chief Verónica Casado said that "the principle of prudence" drove her to put a temporary hold on the vaccine.

"We are not causing a panic. Everyone is watching to see what the EMA will say," Casado told Spanish public radio.

The European Medicines Agency is holding a press conference on its investigation into the blood clot issue later Wednesday.

NEW DELHI — India has hit another new peak with 115,736 coronavirus cases reported in the past 24 hours. New Delhi, Mumbai and dozens of other cities are imposing curfews to try to slow the soaring infections.

The latest rise reported Wednesday overtook Sunday's record of 103,844 infections. Fatalities rose by 630 in the past 24 hours, the highest since November, raising the total death toll in the country to 166,177 since the pandemic began.

Experts say the surge is blamed in part on growing disregard for social distancing and mask-wearing in public spaces. The latest surge in infections is worse than last year's peak of more than 97,000 a day in mid-September.

India now has a seven-day rolling average of more than 78,000 cases per day and has reported 12.8 million virus cases since the pandemic began, the highest after the United States and Brazil.

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea continues to claim a perfect record in keeping out the coronavirus in its latest report to the World Health Organization.

In an email to The Associated Press on Wednesday, the WHO says North Korea has reported that it tested 23,121 people for the coronavirus as of April 1 and that all results were negative.

Outsiders have expressed doubt about whether North Korea has escaped the pandemic entirely, given its poor health infrastructure and a porous border it shares with China, its economic lifeline.

During the pandemic, North Korea has severely limited cross-border traffic, banned tourists, jettied out diplomats and mobilized health workers for quarantines of tens of thousands of people who showed symptoms.

North Korea this week became the first country to drop out of the Tokyo Olympics because of coronavirus fears.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea has reported its highest daily jump in new coronavirus cases in nearly three months as concerns grow about another wave of the virus as the country wrestles with a slow vaccine rollout.

The 668 infections reported Wednesday were the most since Jan. 8 when officials reported 674 new cases. Since the pandemic began, South Korea has had 106,898 confirmed cases, with 1,756 deaths related to COVID-19.

South Korea had been struggling to keep transmissions under control following a major winter surge that erased months of hard-won gains.

There is also concern over the pace of the country's vaccine rollout that is slower than many other developed economies.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee is joining other Republican governors who are speaking against coronavirus vaccine passports, which are being developed in some areas to let inoculated people

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travel, shop and dine more freely.

Speaking to reporters Tuesday, Lee said: "I think vaccine passports are a bad idea. I do not believe that government should impose vaccine requirements or mandates in any way."

The governor is urging Tennessee's General Assembly to advance legislation this year to prohibit such requirements.

SANTIAGO, Chile — With new COVID-19 infections rising and hospital space critical, Chilean lawmakers approved postponing an election to select an assembly tasked with rewriting the country's dictatorship-era constitution.

Under the approval Tuesday, the assembly election, along with local and gubernatorial elections, will be postponed until mid-May.

The elections had been originally scheduled for April 10-11, but with Chile experiencing the worst days since the arrival of the pandemic and intensive care units at 96% capacity, President Sebastián Piñera proposed delaying voting until May 15-16.

In an Oct. 25 plebiscite, nearly 80% of Chilean voters supported seating an assembly to rewrite the constitution inherited from the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet when the South American country returned to democracy.

EXPLAINER: Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and some options

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

The U.S. State Department says it's talking with allies about China's human rights record and how to handle next year's Beijing Winter Olympics.

A department spokesman on Tuesday suggested that an Olympic boycott to protest China's rights abuses was among the possibilities. But a senior official said later that a boycott has not yet been discussed.

Human rights groups are protesting China's hosting of the games, which open on Feb. 4, 2022. They have urged a diplomatic or straight-up boycott to call attention to alleged Chinese abuses against Uyghurs, Tibetans and residents of Hong Kong.

Activists are also reaching out to national Olympic committees, athletes and sponsors after failing to get the Switzerland-based International Olympic Committee to move the games out of China.

Beijing is the first city to win the right to host both the Summer and Winter Olympics. The 2008 Beijing Olympics were held with the hope of improving human rights in the country.

POSITION OF IOC AND CHINA

President Thomas Bach says the IOC must stay out of politics, although it holds observer status at the United Nations and Bach has touted his own efforts to unite the two Koreas at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

"We are not a super-world government where the IOC could solve or even address issues for which not the U.N. security council, no G7, no G20 has solutions," Bach told a news conference last month. He has repeated the IOC must stay "neutral."

China's government warned Washington on Wednesday not to boycott, saying there would be an unspecified "robust Chinese response."

"The politicization of sports will damage the spirit of the Olympic Charter and the interests of athletes from all countries," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said. "The international community, including the U.S. Olympic Committee, will not accept it."

In March, Zhao said a boycott is "doomed to failure."

ACTIVISTS HAVE MET WITH THE IOC

Activists met late last year with the IOC and asked for the 2022 Olympics be moved. They also asked to see documents the IOC says it has in which China gave "assurances" about human rights conditions. Activists say the IOC has not produced the documents. The virtual meeting was headed by IOC member Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr., who oversees preparations for Beijing. His father was the long-time IOC president.

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"We felt like the IOC were having a meeting with us, more so that they could say they were having a meeting with us rather than because they actually wanted to listen and act on anything that we had to say," Gloria Montgomery, campaigns coordinator at the International Tibet Network, said in a recent briefing with other activists.

Frances Hui, director at We The Hongkongers, suggested there was a condescending tone from the IOC in the meeting.

"The first thing we heard is: 'It's a very complicated world.' And I asked again: How are you going to legitimize a games that's based in a country practicing genocide and murdering? Again the reply to me was it's a complex world."

BOYCOTT, DIPLOMATIC BOYCOTT

Activists are talking about softer forms of a boycott, but have not ruled out the kind of boycott led by the United States in the 1980 Moscow Olympics; 65 countries stayed away, including China, and 80 participated.

"I think a diplomatic boycott would be very much welcomed by all of our communities. We have been looking towards accountability, and that is definitely part of that path toward accountability," said Zumretay Arkin, spokeswoman for the World Uyghur Congress.

"Of course the athletes, it's unfair to them. But athletes also have a conscience, an opinion of their own," she added.

WHAT WOULD BOYCOTT ACCOMPLISH?

Bach, who won a gold medal in fencing in the 1976 Games, was deprived of going to Moscow in 1980 as a member of the West German team. He opposes a boycott, which would also severely hurt the IOC's finances and its image.

The IOC earns 91% of its revenue from selling broadcast rights and sponsorships and has seen its income stalled by the postponed Tokyo Olympics.

The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee has also questioned the effectiveness of boycotts. But it's one of the few leverage points activists have.

"Before we called for a boycott, we hoped that the IOC could strip China of hosting the Olympics, but they didn't want to do that," said Teng Biao, an exiled Chinese human-rights lawyer and activist. "I think the Olympics is a thing the Beijing government cares very much about. We should not give up that chance."

Teng also welcomed athletes and other participants to protest if the Olympics take place — with social media posts, by wearing descriptive T-shirts, or by skipping the opening ceremony.

"In terms of the people in Tibet, Uyghurs, Chinese people living in China, I don't encourage them to protest because the Chinese government has been increasingly brutal. I don't want them to take a risk to protest during the Olympics," Teng said.

Several activists cautioned that even athletes and other participants from abroad could be arrested in China under a far-reaching national security law.

"When we call for a boycott, it has to be a coordinated boycott led by democratic countries who are now accepting that the genocide is happening," said Dorjee Tseten, executive director at Students for a Free Tibet. "If we don't stand now, it will be impossible to make China accountable."

China warns Washington not to boycott Winter Olympics

BEIJING (AP) — China's government warned Washington on Wednesday not to boycott next year's Winter Olympics in Beijing after the Biden administration said it was talking with allies about a joint approach to complaints of human rights abuses.

A Foreign Ministry spokesperson rejected accusations of abuses against ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang region. He warned of an unspecified "robust Chinese response" to a potential Olympics boycott.

"The politicization of sports will damage the spirit of the Olympic Charter and the interests of athletes from all countries," said the spokesperson, Zhao Lijian. "The international community including the U.S. Olympic Committee will not accept it."

Human rights groups are protesting China's hosting of the games, due to start in February 2022. They

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have urged a boycott or other measures to call attention to accusations of Chinese abuses against Uyghurs, Tibetans and residents of Hong Kong.

The U.S. State Department suggested an Olympic boycott was among the possibilities but a senior official said later a boycott has not been discussed. The International Olympic Committee and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee have said in the past they oppose boycotts.

Survey: Even as schools reopen, many students learn remotely

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

Large numbers of students are not returning to the classroom even as more schools reopen for full-time, in-person learning, according to a survey released Wednesday by the Biden administration.

The findings reflect a nation that has been locked in debate over the safety of reopening schools during the coronavirus pandemic. Even as national COVID-19 rates continued to ebb in February, key measures around reopening schools barely budged.

Nearly 46% of public schools offered five days a week of in-person to all students in February, according to the survey, but just 34% of students were learning full-time in the classroom. The gap was most pronounced among older K-12 students, with just 29% of eighth graders getting five days a week of learning at school.

There were early signs of a shift, however, with more eighth grade students moving from fully remote to hybrid learning.

With the new findings, President Joe Biden came no closer to meeting his goal of having most elementary schools open five days a week in his first 100 days. Just shy of half the nation's schools offered full-time learning in February, roughly the same share as the previous month.

Despite the slow progress, federal education officials see it as a step forward.

"There was a decrease in enrollment in remote-only learning and an increase in hybrid instruction at grade eight, providing evidence that more students are walking through school doors again," Mark Schneider, director of the Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences, said in a statement.

The findings are based on a survey of 3,500 public schools that serve fourth graders and 3,500 schools that serve eighth graders. It's based on data from schools in 37 states that agreed to participate. This is the second round of data released from a new survey started by the Biden administration to evaluate progress in reopening schools.

The data capture a month that saw building momentum in the push to reopen schools. In February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared that schools could safely reopen with masks, social distancing and other precautions. Days later, Biden reframed his goal around reopening schools after critics said his previous pledge lacked ambition.

As in January, the new results showed dramatic disparities based on region and race. In the South, slightly more than half of all fourth graders were learning entirely at school in February, an uptick from the month before. In the same period, by contrast, the Northeast saw a decrease in the rate of students learning in the classroom five days a week, from 23% to 19%.

Overall, more than a third of students in the South and Midwest were learning entirely at school, compared with less than a quarter in the West and Northeast, according to the survey.

White students continued to be far more likely to be back in the classroom, with 52% of white fourth graders receiving full-time, in-person instruction. By contrast, less than a third of Black and Hispanic fourth graders were back at school full time, along with just 15% of Asian students.

The survey does not ask whether students are learning remotely by choice or because their schools do not offer an in-person option. But the wide gulf between school offerings and student learning data suggests that at least some students are opting to stay remote even after their schools reopen classrooms.

It matches previous findings from some of the nation's largest school districts, where Black students have returned at far lower rates than their white classmates — a disparity that's believed to come down at least partly to trust. Advocates say more must be done to convince parents that their children will be

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safe in school, especially Black families who have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus.

Although wide racial disparities persisted in the new round of data, the Education Department saw a glimmer of hope in a slight increase among Black students learning fully in-person. From January to February, the rate ticked up from 28% to 30%.

"Although white students continue to enroll in full-time in-person instruction at higher rates, we are beginning to see shifts toward full-time in-person learning for other groups," said Peggy Carr, an associate commissioner at the agency's National Center for Education Statistics.

Parents across the U.S. have been conflicted about a return to the classroom, expressing concerns about the virus but also about learning setbacks as their children learn remotely, according to a poll from The University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Worries about learning setbacks were slightly more prevalent than fears of spreading the virus at school, the poll found.

The department also reported progress in bringing more students with disabilities back to school. Among Black and white students with disabilities in the fourth grade, fewer were learning remotely in February than in January, according to the survey.

The survey for the first time collected data on how many teachers have received COVID-19 vaccines, but the findings revealed little. More than half of schools said they did not know how many teachers got at least one shot. Of those with data, just 6% said that between 81% and 100% of their teachers had received a vaccination.

New estimates released by the CDC on Tuesday, however, found that nearly 80% of K-12 employees and child care workers had received at least their first shot by the end of March. Biden said he was pleased with the achievement even though it fell short of his goal to deliver at least one shot to every teacher, school staff member and childcare worker in March.

"That's great progress protecting our educators, our essential workers," he said.

Coronavirus vaccines have not been approved for children under 16.

For the first time, the latest round of survey data also included attendance rates for each type of teaching offered in February. The data is meant to cast light on the issue following reports that many districts have seen a rise in absences during the pandemic, both among students learning virtually and students learning in-person.

Nationwide, the survey found that attendance rates were around 90% for all modes of learning. There were slight differences by race, especially at the eighth grade level, where Black students had attendance rates about 5 percentage points below white students in each mode of learning.

Leaders of Russia and China tighten their grips, grow closer

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — They're not leaders for life — not technically, at least. But in political reality, the powerful tenures of China's Xi Jinping and, as of this week, Russia's Vladimir Putin are looking as if they will extend much deeper into the 21st century — even as the two superpowers whose destinies they steer gather more clout with each passing year.

What's more, as they consolidate political control at home, sometimes with harsh measures, they're working together more substantively than ever in a growing challenge to the West and the world's other superpower, the United States, which elects its leader every four years.

This week, Putin signed a law allowing him to potentially hold onto power until 2036. The 68-year-old Russian president, who has been in power for more than two decades — longer than any other Kremlin leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin — pushed through a constitutional vote last year allowing him to run again in 2024 when his current six-year term ends. He has overseen a systematic crackdown on dissent.

In China, Xi, who came to power in 2012, has imposed even tighter controls on the already repressive political scene, emerging as one of his nation's most powerful leaders in the seven decades of Communist Party rule that began with Mao Zedong's often-brutal regime. Under Xi, the government has rounded up,

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imprisoned or silenced intellectuals, legal activists and other voices, cracked down on Hong Kong's opposition and used security forces to suppress calls for minority rights in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia.

Xi has sidelined rivals, locked up critics and tightened the party's control over information. An ongoing crackdown against corruption has won popular support while also keeping potential competitors in line.

His steady consolidation of power led to the removal of term limits on the Chinese presidency in 2018, demolishing a convention the party had established to prevent a repeat of the abuse produced by Mao's one-person rule. Xi further telegraphed his intention to remain in power by breaking from tradition and not indicating a preferred successor. One who appeared eager to take on the role, Sun Zhengcai, was brought down in 2017 and sentenced to life in prison on corruption charges.

And in Russia, Putin's most outspoken critic, Alexei Navalny, was arrested in January upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin — an accusation Russian authorities have denied. In February, Navalny was sentenced to 2½ years in prison.

In defying the West, Putin and Xi both have tapped nationalist feelings. Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea propelled Putin's approval ratings to nearly 90% before they slackened amid economic woes and unpopular pensions reform.

But the impact of Putin's and Xi's enduring retention of power hardly ends at their respective nations' borders. It ripples outward into the geopolitical balance of power in countless ways.

As Moscow's relations with the West sank to post-Cold War lows amid accusations of election meddling and hacking attacks, Putin has increasingly sought to strengthen ties with China. And while China so far has avoided a showdown with the West like Russia's, it is coming under growing pressure from Washington and its allies over Beijing's human rights record in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and the South China Sea.

U.S. President Joe Biden has taken an increasingly tough line with both leaders, recently describing Putin as a "killer" and having his top national security aides excoriate China for a litany of issues. Such approaches suggest that Moscow and Beijing will have incentives to build an even stronger alliance.

Like their nations, the two leaders themselves have fostered a closer relationship, too.

Putin and Xi have developed strong personal ties to bolster a "strategic partnership" between the two former Communist rivals as they vie with the West for influence. And even though Moscow and Beijing in the past rejected the possibility of forging a military alliance, Putin said last fall that such a prospect can't be ruled out entirely.

While both Putin and Xi each appear to be firmly entrenched, numerous challenges persist. The pandemic, for one, posed a major challenge for both rulers, and they took a similarly cautious approach when it struck.

Putin responded last spring by introducing a sweeping six-week lockdown that severely hurt the already weak Russian economy. His approval rating plummeted to a historic low of 59%. Later, the government eased restrictions and steered clear from new lockdowns, helping reduce economic damage and shore up Putin's ratings.

Xi remained out of the public eye in the first uncertain weeks, possibly fearing that any misstep could have given rivals a chance to topple him. In the end, China controlled the pandemic better than many other places, enhancing Xi's position as leader.

Xi must also figure out how to satisfy ambitious young politicians who may see their careers being stymied by his lengthy tenure. And he has to demonstrate that his extended rule will not lead to the excesses of the Mao years, especially the disastrous and deeply traumatic 1966-76 Cultural Revolution.

"Xi has to manage an essential paradox. He venerates Mao and is building the same cult of personality and centrality of the party," said Daniel Blumenthal, director of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. "But he knows his people fear and loathe Maoism so he has to also pretend he is not Mao. For now, he is an unchallenged strong leader, dealing with cracks and fissures in the party and society through Maoist-style campaigns and purges."

Putin faces even more daunting challenges. Russia's economy is a fraction of China's, and its overwhelming reliance on exports of oil and gas and other raw materials makes it vulnerable to market fluctuations. Western economic and financial sanctions have cut Moscow's access to Western technologies and capital

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markets, slowing down the economy and impeding modernization efforts. Stagnant living standards and falling incomes have fueled growing discontent.

Russia's increasingly close ties with China are part of its strategy to offset Western sanctions. Chinese companies provided substitutes for missing Western technologies, helped with major infrastructure projects like energy supplies to Crimea and channeled cash flows to ease the burden from sanctions on Kremlin-connected tycoons.

"Beijing helped Moscow, at least to some extent, to withstand U.S. and EU pressure," Alexander Gabuev, the top China expert with the Carnegie Moscow Center wrote in a recent analysis. "This assistance also allowed Moscow to become more assertive elsewhere in the world, from being present in the Middle East and Africa to supporting the Venezuelan regime and interfering in U.S. elections."

Military cooperation remains a high-stakes frontier. As U.S. pressure grew, Russia has moved to expand military ties with China. Their armed forces have held a series of joint drills, and Putin has noted that Russia has provided China with cutting-edge military technologies.

But a full-on alliance — putting the joint military might of Xi's and Putin's grips on their nations? Something like that seems less abstract when the increasingly tight relationship between the two long-term leaders is taken into consideration.

"We don't need it," Putin said in October. "But theoretically, it's quite possible to imagine it."

'We failed the test' of COVID-19, says human rights champion

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Agnès Callamard is best known for her investigation into the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and has made a career uncovering extrajudicial killings.

The French human rights expert's focus on rights abuses is taking on new dimensions as she assumes leadership of Amnesty International and turns her attention to what she says is one of the world's most pressing issues — vaccine equity to end the coronavirus pandemic, which has eroded freedoms globally.

Amnesty International released its annual report on Wednesday, arguing that governments have used the coronavirus pandemic as an excuse to clamp down on human rights, whether or not that was the original intent. The wide-ranging report took particular aim at governments in Myanmar and Russia, among others, but also critiqued the use of coronavirus-related police powers in places like Britain and the United States against protesters.

The only way to end the virus — and the abuses that have accompanied it, primarily against the world's most vulnerable — is to distribute vaccines globally and equitably, she told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

"What we found is that the victims of COVID, whether it was in the U.K., in France, in the U.S., in India, in the Middle East, in Brazil, those victims were primarily among the most disenfranchised and vulnerable groups," she said. "As a global community, as a national community, we failed the test that COVID-19 represented."

Callamard rarely hesitates to call out the powerful. In 2019, as a U.N. special rapporteur, she concluded there was "credible evidence" that Khashoggi's killing was state-sanctioned. She also investigated the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and concluded it was unlawful. Earlier this week, she said there was a real risk that Russia was subjecting opposition leader Alexei Navalny to "a slow death."

She said she will no longer lead her own investigations, as she has done for years for the U.N. — but will continue to call out human rights violations as she sees them. And the pandemic exposed plenty. Ending it, she said, will expose even more, especially among wealthy and powerful nations which have purchased more vaccines than they need.

"Not only do we buy everything, but on top of it, we stop others from being able to produce it. In the name of what? In the name of profit and in the name of greed," Callamard said, referring to the European Union and U.S. decision to block a proposal to relax intellectual property restrictions on patents related to coronavirus treatments and vaccines.

One of her proposals falls along the same lines as the Biden administration's call this week for a mini-

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mum global corporate income tax. In a foreword to Amnesty's report that she wrote before Monday's announcement by U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Callamard said the global taxation system had produced more losers than winners.

"Global taxation is a way of rebalancing equality," she said. "It's a way of ensuring that it is not always those who have the least who are requested to give the most."

Asia Today: India sees another record rise in virus cases

NEW DELHI (AP) — India reported a record daily surge in new coronavirus cases for the second time in four days on Wednesday, while New Delhi, Mumbai and dozens of other cities announced they are imposing curfews to try to slow the soaring infections.

The rise of 115,736 coronavirus cases reported in the past 24 hours, tops the 103,844 infections reported Sunday. Fatalities rose by 630 in the past 24 hours, the highest since November, driving the total death toll in the country to 166,177 since the pandemic began.

The federal government has so far refused to impose a nationwide lockdown to contain the latest surge but has asked states to decide on imposing local restrictions.

"The pandemic isn't over and there is no scope for complacency," Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Twitter. He urged people to get vaccinated.

India now has a seven-day rolling average of more than 78,000 cases per day and has reported 12.8 million virus cases since the pandemic began, the highest after the United States and Brazil.

While 85 million Indians have received at least one coronavirus vaccine shot, only 11 million of them have received both.

Due to a surge in infections, India has now delayed exports of large quantities of vaccines. It has shipped 64.5 million doses so far.

Experts say the surge, which is worse than last year's peak in mid-September, is due in part on growing disregard for social distancing and mask-wearing in public spaces.

As health officials continue to warn about gatherings in public places, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party leaders continue to hold mammoth rallies in several states where local elections are underway.

While on the campaign trail Tuesday in West Bengal state, Modi was seen waving at maskless supporters from his car.

His government has also allowed a huge monthlong Hindu festival that draws tens of thousands of devotees daily to go ahead on the banks of the Ganges River in northern Uttarakhand state.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region:

— North Korea has continued to claim a perfect record in keeping out the coronavirus in its latest report to the World Health Organization. At the beginning of the pandemic, North Korea described its efforts to keep out the virus as a "matter of national existence." It shut its borders, banned tourists and jettied out diplomats. The country still severely limits cross-border traffic and has quarantined tens of thousands of people who have shown symptoms. But it still says it has found no case of COVID-19, a widely doubted claim. In an email to The Associated Press on Wednesday, Edwin Salvador, WHO's representative to North Korea, said the North has reported it tested 23,121 people for the coronavirus from the beginning of the pandemic to April 1 and that all results were negative. Salvador said the North said 732 people were tested between March 26 and April 1. WHO officials say the North is no longer providing the U.N. agency with the number of people it quarantines with suspected symptoms.

— South Korea has reported 668 new cases of the coronavirus, its highest daily jump in nearly three months, as concerns grow about another surge and a slow vaccine rollout. The numbers released by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Wednesday brought the national caseload to 106,898, including 1,756 deaths. Most of the new cases were in the Seoul area and other major cities. Officials previously insisted a wait-and-see approach was feasible on South Korea's vaccine rollout because the nation's outbreak wasn't as dire as those in America and Europe. Now, they say they are considering all possible measures to prevent a shortage, and it remains to be seen whether they would consider curbing

exports of AstraZeneca shots produced by local firm SK Bioscience.

— Facing criticism for a vaccine rollout that's behind schedule, Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison notes his country has faced difficulty in getting promised vaccine doses from Europe. He said over 3 million of Australia's contracted AstraZeneca vaccine doses haven't yet arrived — but that shouldn't be taken as him criticizing the European Union. "That's just a simple fact. That's not a dispute. It's not a conflict. It's not an argument. It's not a clash. It's just a simple fact. And I'm simply explaining to the Australian public that supply issues is what's constraining and has constrained, particularly over these recent months, the overall rollout of the vaccine," Morrison told reporters in Canberra. He said he will write again to the European Union and AstraZeneca requesting they send the full order of vaccine doses. Morrison said some of the doses will be sent to help its neighbor Papua New Guinea deal with its virus outbreak. In March, Europe stopped about 250,000 vaccines going to Australia due to concerns about European supply shortages.

— Nepal resumed giving out vaccinations against COVID-19 on Wednesday with vaccines donated by China. The Himalayan nation had begun its vaccination campaign in January with AstraZeneca vaccines manufactured by the Serum Institute in India, but had to suspend it after India cut the supply. China donated 800,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine that was flown in last month. India had first gifted 1 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and Nepal purchased 2 more million from the company. However, only 1 million was supplied and delivery of the other half has been delayed by the company.

'Leave no Tigrayan': In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

HAMDAYET, Sudan (AP) — The atrocities have been seared into the skin and the minds of Tigrayans, who take shelter by the thousands within sight of the homeland they fled in northern Ethiopia.

They arrive in heat that soars above 38 C (100 F), carrying the pain of gunshot wounds, torn vaginas, welts on beaten backs. Less visible are the horrors that jolt them awake at night: Memories of dozens of bodies strewn on riverbanks. Fighters raping a woman one by one for speaking her own language. A child, weakened by hunger, left behind.

Now, for the first time, they also bring proof of an official attempt at what is being called ethnic cleansing in the form of a new identity card that eliminates all traces of Tigray, as confirmed to The Associated Press by nine refugees from different communities. Written in a language not their own, issued by authorities from another ethnic group, the ID cards are the latest evidence of a systematic drive by the Ethiopian government and its allies to destroy the Tigrayan people.

The Amhara authorities now in charge of the nearby city of Humera took Seid Mussa Omar's original ID card displaying his Tigrayan identity and burned it, the soft-spoken nurse said. On his new card examined by the AP, issued in January with the Amharic language, an Amhara stamp and a border of tiny hearts, even the word Tigray had vanished.

"I kept it to show the world," Seid said. He added that only 10 Tigrayans remained of the roughly 400 who worked at the hospital where he had been employed, the rest killed or fleeing. "This is genocide ... Their aim is to erase Tigray."

What started as a political dispute in one of Africa's most powerful and populous countries has turned into a campaign of ethnic cleansing against minority Tigrayans, according to AP interviews with 30 refugees in Sudan and dozens more by phone, along with international experts. The Ethiopian government of Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy Ahmed is accused of teaming up with his ethnic group — his mother was Amhara — and soldiers from neighboring Eritrea to punish around 6 million people. Witnesses say they have split much of Tigray between them, with the Amhara in the west and Eritrean forces in the east.

Ethiopia claims that life in Tigray is returning to normal, and Abiy has called the conflict "tiresome." But the refugees the AP spoke with, including some who arrived just hours before, said abuses were still occurring. Almost all described killings, often of multiple people, rapes and the looting and burning of crops that without massive food aid could tip the region into starvation.

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For months, the people of Tigray have been largely sealed off from the world, with electricity and telecommunication access severed and mobile phones often seized, leaving little to back up their claims of thousands, even tens of thousands, killed. That has begun to change.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted last month that “ethnic cleansing” has taken place in western Tigray, marking the first time a top official in the international community has openly described the situation as such. The term refers to forcing a population from a region through expulsions and other violence, often including killings and rapes.

Refugees told the AP that Amhara authorities and allied forces in western Tigray have taken over whole communities, ordering Tigrayans out or rounding them up. A refugee from Humera, Goitom Hagos, said he saw thousands of Tigrayans loaded into trucks and doesn’t know what happened to them.

The Amhara now control some government offices in western Tigray and decide who belongs — and even whether Tigrayans exist at all. Some were ordered to accept the Amhara identity or leave, and others were told to leave anyway, the refugees said.

Lemlem Gebrehiwet was forced to flee while heavily pregnant and gave birth three days after reaching Sudan. She recalled the new authorities telling her, “This is Amhara.”

Shy, her baby girl waiting, she struggled to comprehend. “Maybe we did something wrong.”

Seid, the nurse, fled Humera early in the conflict after his hospital came under heavy shelling, with the wounded carried in screaming and colleagues killed. He returned in January in the hope that conditions had improved, as Abiy’s government promised.

They hadn’t. His home had been looted, and the remaining Tigrayans had shrunk to a quiet population of the elderly, women and children who were discouraged from speaking their own language, Tigrinya.

At the hospital, Tigrayans had to pay for care, unlike the Amhara. Anyone who came was allowed to speak Amharic only. Tigrayan staffers weren’t paid, and every night there was gunfire.

Ten days after returning to the hospital, Seid left for Sudan. Now, at this dusty post, refugees pass blazing days sprawled on plastic mats under shelters of woven straw. They stay perilously close to the border in the hope that missing loved ones will emerge from Tigray.

The conflict began in November as a political clash of past and present, with all of Ethiopia arguably at stake.

Tigray leaders had dominated the country’s government for nearly three decades, creating a system of ethnic-based regional states. But when Abiy took office in 2018, he moved to centralize power. He sidelined the Tigray leaders and made peace with Eritrea after years of war, earning a Nobel Peace Prize.

After last year’s election was delayed, the defiant Tigray leaders viewed Abiy’s mandate as illegal and held their own vote. The government then opened a military offensive, saying Tigray forces had attacked a military base.

“The federal government is trying to be king. We Tigrayans refuse,” said one refugee, Nega Chekole.

In response to allegations that the Amhara are ordering Tigrayans to leave and issuing new ID cards, the spokeswoman for the prime minister’s office, Billene Seyoum, said the area is under a provisional administration “who are all from the region.”

The Ethiopian government says it rejects “any and all notions and practices of ethnic cleansing” and will never tolerate such practices, “nor will it turn a blind eye to such crimes.” However, almost everyone the AP interviewed said they had watched fellow Tigrayans being killed or seen bodies on the ground.

In her town of more than a dozen ethnic groups, Belaynesh Beyene was dealt a ghastly lesson in just how little Tigrayans suddenly were worth.

In the early days of the fighting, she said she saw 24 bodies in the streets of Dansha in western Tigray. The 58-year-old grandmother and other residents were prevented from burying them by the Amhara youth militia, a practice that witnesses across Tigray have reported as an added insult to grief. The practice applies only to Tigrayan corpses.

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"They accidentally killed an ethnic Oromo in a Tigrayan household," she said. "When they realized their 'mistake,' they came and buried him."

A spokesman for the Amhara regional government, Gizachew Muluneh, didn't answer questions from the AP. The Amhara have said they are taking back land they claim belongs to them.

Soldiers from Eritrea, long an enemy of Tigray's now-fugitive leaders, have also been blamed for some of the worst human rights abuses. Under pressure, Abiy said last month the soldiers will leave, after long denying their presence.

Hiwot Hadush, a teacher from Zalambessa, said scores of people were killed after the Eritreans went house to house, opening fire.

"Even if someone was dead, they shot them again, dozens of times. I saw this," she said. "I saw many bodies, even priests. They killed all Tigrayans."

In another border community, Irob, furniture maker Awalom Mebrahtom described hiding and watching Eritrean soldiers order 18 Tigrayans, mostly young men like him, to lie in a remote field. They were shot to death.

The killings continue. In early March, after months on the run, 30-year-old Alem Mebrahtu attempted a desperate crossing of the Tekeze river. Separated from her three small children in the early chaos of the conflict, she had heard they were in Sudan.

Sympathetic women from the Wolkait ethnic group pleaded with Eritrean soldiers near the river to let Alem cross, while urging her to pretend to be Wolkait, too. It worked, but she saw a grim reminder of what could have happened if she had failed.

Bodies lay scattered near the riverbank, she said. She estimated around 50 corpses.

"Some were face-down. Some were looking up at the sky," she said.

Exhaustion still pressed deep under her eyes, Alem started to cry. There by the river, confronted with death, tears hadn't been allowed. The Eritrean soldiers beat people for expressing grief, she said.

Samrawit Weldegerima, who had arrived just two weeks earlier in Hamdayet, also saw corpses by the river, counting seven. Freshly branded on their temples were the markings some Tigrayans have to express their identity, she said.

"When I saw them, I was terrified," Samrawit said, touching her belly, six months pregnant. "I thought I was already dead."

Those who crossed the river were amazed to find that the Amhara were now in charge in western Tigray. Alem's home in Humera was occupied by Amhara militia. She asked them for her clothes, but they had been burned. She was told to get out.

Reluctantly, to protect herself, she is trying to learn Amharic.

"Their aim is to leave no Tigrayan," she said. "I hope there will be a Tigray for my children to go home to."

The idea of home remains dangerous. Days after Abiy urged people in Tigray to return in late March, at least two men trying to do so from Hamdayet were fatally shot within sight of the border crossing.

They were buried by hundreds of refugees at the Orthodox church in Hamdayet, where the blank walls are being mapped for murals of sacrifice and salvation. Some of the faithful drop to their knees and clutch the stones, deep in prayer. Others rest their foreheads against the entrance, as if they can't go on.

Even as the Amhara fighters took turns raping her, they offered the young woman a twisted path to what they considered redemption.

She had returned to her looted home in Humera. There, she was seized by militia members speaking Amharic. When she asked them to speak her native Tigrinya, which she understood far better, they became angry and started kicking her.

She fell, and they fell upon her. She remembers at least three men.

"Let the Tigray government come and help you," she recalled them saying.

They also made her a proposal: "Claim to be Amhara and we'll give you back your house and find you a husband. But if you claim to be Tigrayan, we will come and rape you again."

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The woman's Amhara neighbor was present during the attack. When she later approached him for help, there was none.

"So what?" she recalled him saying. "You came back. Behave and be quiet."

The woman cried all night. The next day, she found little comfort in learning that many others in her neighborhood had been raped, too.

"One mother and daughter had been forced to watch each other," she said. "One woman was raped on the road, with people watching. Other accounts were worse than mine."

She left for Sudan. It was mid-February. Afraid to speak with anyone, she waited almost a month before seeking medical care.

"I was ashamed," she said, and started to cry. She watched the doorway warily, fearing the rumors that can spread among the refugees.

She said she was grateful to be HIV-negative, but she is pregnant. For a long moment, she was silent. She can hardly think about that yet. Her family back home doesn't know.

The United Nations has said more than 500 rapes in Tigray have been reported to health care workers. But the woman from Humera, whose account was confirmed by her doctor, assumes many more survivors are hiding it just as she did. The AP doesn't name people who have been sexually abused.

Several refugees from different Tigray communities told the AP they watched or listened helplessly as women were taken away by Amhara or Eritrean fighters and raped. It was like taunting, said Adhanom Gebrehanis from Korarit village, who had just arrived in Hamdayet with the welts from a beating by Eritrean soldiers on his back.

"They do these things openly to make us ashamed," he said.

He described watching Eritreans pull aside 20 women from a group of Tigrayans and rape them. The next day, 13 of the women were returned.

"Go," Adhanom said the Eritreans told the others. "We already have what we want."

A midwife from Adwa, Elsa Tesfa Berhe, described treating women secretly after Eritrean soldiers swept through health centers, looting even the beds and telling patients to leave. As Berhe snuck out to deliver babies and care for the wounded, she saw people trying to bury bodies at the risk of being shot, or pouring alcohol on corpses in an attempt to hide the smell.

With the health centers destroyed, little if any care remains for women and girls who have been raped. No one knows how many now carry the children of their attackers.

Berhe had just arrived in Sudan. She cried as she recalled a 60-year-old woman who was raped vaginally and anally by Eritrean soldiers and then waited for days, trying to hide the bleeding, before seeking help.

"She didn't want to tell anyone," Berhe said. She heard the woman ask, "Can anyone trust me if I say I was raped?"

Another woman was raped by four Eritrean soldiers while her husband hid under the bed, Berhe said. Her husband recounted the attack when they sought an abortion.

A third woman described how Eritrean soldiers ordered her father to rape her, then shot and killed him when he refused. The soldiers raped her instead.

Berhe fears that the situation in rural areas is even worse, as described by the displaced people arriving in cities. So far, few from the outside world can reach the areas where the majority of Tigrayans lived before the conflict, as fighting continues.

"Do you think there is a word to explain this? There is no word," said a midwife from Humera, who gave only her first name, Mulu.

In Hamdayet she befriended seven women from the same village, Mai Gaba, who said they were raped separately by various fighters, including Ethiopian federal forces. Mulu fears that Mai Gaba is a conservative example and estimates that some communities have seen scores of assaults.

"This is to harm the community psychologically," Mulu said. "Most of the people in Tigray support the (fugitive Tigray leaders). To destroy them, you must destroy Tigrayans."

There is more to come.

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Almost every person interviewed described a worrying shortage of food, and some said Tigrayans are being starved. Many recalled seeing crops being looted or burned in communities by Amhara or Eritrean fighters, a toll that even shows up in satellite imagery.

Kidu Gebregirgis, a farmer, said he was questioned almost daily about his ethnicity, his shirt yanked aside to check for marks from the strap of a gun. He said the Amhara harvested around 5,000 kilograms (5.5 short tons) of sorghum from his fields and hauled it away, a task that took two weeks. He shook his head in amazement.

The conflict began shortly before the harvest in the largely agricultural region. Now the planting season approaches.

"But there is no seed," Kidu said. "There's nothing to start again."

The prospect is terrifying, said Alex de Waal, the author of a new report warning of mass starvation in Tigray and a researcher at the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

"What I fear is that millions of people are in the rural areas, staying because they are hopeful they will be able to plant," he said. "If they're not able to plant, if food supplies run out, then all of a sudden we could see a mass migration."

Tigrayans who passed through rural communities described starving people, often elderly, begging outside churches. Sometimes they did, too.

Alem, the exhausted mother, begged for money and tightened her clothes to control the hunger pangs. Abedom, a day laborer who only gave one name, begged while roaming the mountains and villages for three months.

"It was normal to go a whole day without food," he said. "So many people were hungry. They loot everything, so if they take it all, how do I survive?"

The hunger was staggering. One refugee saw a man faint on the road in Adi Asr, close to death. Another described a fellow traveler so tired he simply stopped walking. Yet another saw a child, too weak to go on, left behind.

Again, ethnicity was crucial. Belaynesh, from Dansha, said she made sure to speak Amharic when approaching farmhouses in western Tigray for food.

Ethiopia, under international pressure, has said food aid has been distributed to more than 4 million people in Tigray. Refugees disagreed, saying they saw no such thing in their communities or asserting that food was being diverted.

Maza Girmay, 65, said she heard food was being distributed, so she went to the government office in her community of Bahkar to inquire.

"They told me, 'Go home, you're Tigrayan,'" she said. "We Tigrayans are Ethiopian. Why do they treat us as non-Ethiopian?"

The rejection brought her to tears. An Orthodox cross tattooed on her forehead, long faded from childhood, wrinkled with her sorrow.

In the community of Division, farmer Berhane Gebrewahid said he was shot by Amhara fighters seeking his cattle. He said food aid was distributed in February by Amhara authorities but refused to Tigrayans, including him. Even the name of his homeland had been changed to Northern Gondar, after a major city in Amhara.

A colonel with the Tigray fighters, Bahre Tebeje, worried that starvation will kill more people than the war itself.

"Most food aid returns to the Amhara and Eritreans," he asserted, leaning forward intently, a tattered black-and-white kaffiyeh around his neck. "It's not being distributed to the people."

Severe malnutrition is already above emergency levels as humanitarian workers rush to reach communities, the U.N. has said. In Hamdayet, a handful of such cases were recently sent to a regional hospital for treatment, according to a doctor there. One woman, recovering, still couldn't produce milk for her baby, who whimpered and sucked at a limp breast.

Battered and hungry, Tigrayans still arrive daily at the border post where Sudanese soldiers watch a no man's land in the shadow of a fading flag. One recent evening, the AP saw three new refugees approaching.

In Sudan, the Tigrayans are registered and asked for their ethnicity. For once, they are free to answer.

Beyond the Pandemic: London's financial hub seeks a rebirth

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — On the surface, London's financial district appears to be a shell of its former self. No one is rushing to meetings. Chairs are flipped upside down on tables inside closed cafes and pubs. The roads are ghostly quiet on a bright spring morning.

But a hive of activity is taking place at one spot, as builders lay the groundwork for the latest skyscraper to transform the skyline. Developers of the tower, called 8 Bishopsgate, are confident that when construction ends late next year, workers and firms will return to fill all 50 floors of the gleaming new office space.

When the coronavirus struck, nearly 540,000 workers vanished almost overnight from the business hub, known as the City of London, or simply "the City." A year on, most haven't returned.

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

While many believe that some degree of working from home will become the new normal, city planners say they aren't worried about empty office buildings. Rather, they say the uncertainties and changes are just a catalyst for the reinvention of one of the world's top financial centers.

"We're very clear that the office is not dead, from all that we're hearing," said Catherine McGuinness, head of policy at the City of London Corporation, the governing body of the historic district.

"(Businesses) are telling us that they're really keen to get back to their offices, but they'll use it in a different way," she added. "They'll build on some of these new ways of working that they've learned."

It's been a year like no other for the City of London, the ancient core of the capital and historically its wealthiest and most powerful area. Another nickname is "the Square Mile," a reference to its size. The district sits within the Roman walls of Londinium, the original name of the city founded on the banks of the River Thames around 50 A.D.

A January report on London's future from the mayor's office predicted that while companies won't abandon the capital, many will need to improve the quality of their office space to encourage more employees to return and use it.

The workers' return will be crucial for the survival of many shops, restaurants, theaters and museums. Although offices and city centers all over the world have emptied out during the pandemic, the report said London was hit particularly hard by the shift to remote working because it has many fewer people living in the core of the city, compared with New York or Paris.

Hubert Zanier, who co-owns a chain of Southeast Asian takeout restaurants called Nusa Kitchen in the financial district, has struggled to keep his business afloat with all six branches closed. While technically allowed to open under the government's virus restrictions, it was clear this wasn't an option with practically zero foot traffic in the City.

"We were quite hopeful when we first closed down, but little did we know the whole thing would last 12 months with all the ups and downs — more downs than ups," he said.

Zanier is preparing to reopen as restrictions gradually ease, and his best-case scenario is for 75% of workers to return on a regular basis in the summer.

"It's clear the world will look different," he said. "But you have to be optimistic — if you're not, you might as well pack up your stuff and go."

Firms like Amazon have recently stated that they plan a return to an "office-centric culture," though many studies both in the U.K. and beyond have suggested that more flexible working policies and increased remote working are here to stay.

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Like many others, Smriti Jha, a project manager in an investment bank, has barely set foot in her office since March 2020. The 45-year-old single mother has recently changed jobs — she was interviewed and hired via Zoom — and her new workplace has no return-to-office plan. She doesn't miss the crowded commute, and sees a five-day week in the City as "a bit excessive."

"Before the pandemic, it was generally working moms who choose to work from home," she said. "There was always this kind of sense of stigma — it's like, well, are they actually working or not? But I think that's being blown away."

For now, office developers and investors say they aren't worried. Although office leasing slumped to record lows last year as many businesses reassessed their needs, demand seems to have bounced back.

McGuinness, at the City of London Corp., say that in the first three months of 2021, the body already has approved the equivalent of 80% of the number of planning applications for office space submitted last year.

On Bishopsgate, two new side-by-side skyscrapers are set to open soon, and each stress they are armed with spacious offices and a host of amenities to entice workers back.

At 62 stories, 22 Bishopsgate is the second-tallest tower in the U.K. and dwarfs everything else nearby. Billed as "Europe's first vertical village," it boasts a huge food hall and a gym, and 60% of its office space already has been leased to companies before its opening in the autumn.

Together with its neighboring tower at 8 Bishopsgate, the two will offer enough space for about 17,000 workers.

Kevin Darvishi, leasing director at Stanhope, the developer behind 8 Bishopsgate, said demand for top-quality office buildings will remain strong in the post-pandemic world.

"What you'd end up with is a two-tier market where older buildings are discounted considerably because they can't cater to the needs of the next generation of the workforce," he said.

In a broader sense, officials say COVID-19 also has accelerated plans to make the financial district a friendlier, more diverse place that's more open-minded about flexible working — as well as giving people a reason to stay after work.

More space for pedestrians and cyclists is planned, as well as more affordable or flexible workplaces that can attract people from the creative industries. By 2025, the City of London wants to see a 50% increase in weekend and evening visitors.

"I hope we build positively. I hope we come out of this with a better concept of the work-life balance," McGuinness said. "This will be a new evolution."

Battle for Yemen desert city now a key to Iran, US tension

By JON GAMBRELL and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The battle for an ancient desert city in war-torn Yemen has become a key to understanding wider tensions now inflaming the Middle East and the challenges facing any efforts by President Joe Biden's administration to shift U.S. troops out of the region.

Fighting has been raging in the mountains outside Marib as Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who hold Yemen's capital of Sanaa, attempt to seize the city, which is crucial to the country's energy supplies.

Saudi Arabia, which has led a military coalition since 2015 backing Sanaa's exiled government, has launched airstrike after airstrike to blunt the Houthi advance toward Marib. The Houthis have retaliated with drone and missile attacks deep inside Saudi Arabia, roiling global oil markets.

The battle for Marib likely will determine the outline of any political settlement in Yemen's second civil war since the 1990s. If seized by the Houthis, the rebels can press that advantage in negotiations and even continue further south. If held, Yemen's internationally recognized government saves perhaps its only stronghold as secessionists challenge its authority elsewhere.

The fight also squeezes a pressure point on the most powerful of America's Gulf Arab allies and ensnarls any U.S. return to Iran's nuclear deal. It even complicates efforts by Biden's administration to slowly shift the longtime mass U.S. military deployments to the Mideast to instead counter what it sees as the emerging threat of China and Russia.

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Losing Marib would be “the final bullet in the head of the internationally recognized government,” said Abdulghani al-Iryani, a senior researcher at the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies. “You’re looking at a generation of instability and humanitarian crisis. You also will look at a free-for-all theater for regional meddling.”

Marib, 120 kilometers (75 miles) east of Yemen’s capital, Sanaa, is now home to over 800,000 refugees fleeing the Houthis, according to the United Nations’ refugee agency. The fighting disrupts their access to water, electricity, food and education for their children.

“It was once a rare place in Yemen that enjoyed a degree of security and stability,” said Mohsen Nasser al-Mouradi, political activist living near the city. “Now we hear the sounds of heavy weapons all day. We are under constant siege.”

For a while, beginning in the fall of 2019, Saudi Arabia reached a detente with the Houthis, said Ahmed Nagi, a non-resident Yemen expert at the Carnegie Middle East Center. Citing two Houthi officials familiar with the discussions, Nagi said a back channel agreement saw both the Saudis and the rebels refrain from attacking populated areas.

But when the Houthis began to push again into Marib, the Saudis resumed a heavy bombing campaign.

For the Houthis, “they think they gain through war more than peace talks,” Nagi said. For the Saudis, who increasingly signal they want an end to the conflict, “if they lose Marib, they’ll have zero cards on the negotiating table.”

Biden early in his term announced the U.S. would halt support for Saudi Arabia’s offensive combat operations in Yemen, saying: “This war has to end.” He also removed the Houthis from a list of “foreign terrorist organizations.”

But fighting around Marib has only escalated. Iran’s frustration over the Biden administration’s failure to swiftly lift sanctions has contributed to “an intensification of attacks by groups in Iraq, and the same in Yemen,” said Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, an Iran scholar at Britain’s Royal United Services Institute.

“Iran is trying to deliver a message to the U.S.,” Tabrizi said, “a message that the status quo is not sustainable.”

While experts debate how much control Iran exerts over the Houthis, the rebels increasingly launch bomb-laden drones previously linked to Tehran deep inside the kingdom.

“The U.S. administration’s removal of the Houthis from the (foreign terrorist organization) list, unfortunately, appears to have been misinterpreted by the Houthis,” the Saudi government said in a statement to The Associated Press. “This misreading of the measure has led them, with support from the Iranian regime, to increase hostilities.”

Since the war began, the Houthis have launched over 550 bomb-laden drones and more than 350 ballistic missiles toward Saudi Arabia, the kingdom said. While that has caused damage, injuries and at least one death, the war in Yemen reportedly has seen over 130,000 people killed. Saudi Arabia repeatedly has been criticized internationally for airstrikes killing civilians and embargoes exacerbating hunger in a nation on the brink of famine.

Biden’s efforts to end the U.S. involvement in Yemen’s war come as his administration attempts to re-enter Iran’s nuclear deal with world powers. Indirect talks began Tuesday in Vienna.

“The Iranians are keen to trade in their Yemen card for something more durable,” said al-Iryani, the Sanaa Center researcher.

Such a deal might suit American interests. Biden’s Defense Department is conducting a renewed look at troop deployments, particularly those in the Mideast, amid what experts refer to as the “great powers conflict” America faces with China and Russia.

However, such moves likely will be easier said than done.

U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Meanwhile, the Gulf Arab nations like Saudi Arabia rely on U.S. forces stationed in their countries as a counterweight to Iran.

Overall, American forces will remain in the Mideast, which remains crucial to global energy markets and includes three major choke points at sea for trade worldwide, said Aaron Stein, the director of research at

the Philadelphia-based Foreign Policy Research Institute. What those forces look like, however, will change as the U.S. weighs how to approach China and Russia while still trying to counterbalance Iran through a return to the nuclear deal, he said.

"It doesn't solve the Iranian issue," Stein said. "It puts us in a place to manage it, like we're in hospice care."

At Clemson, unmarked slave graves highlight plantation past

By MICHELLE LIU Associated Press/Report for America

CLEMSON, S.C. (AP) — On the sloping side of a cemetery on the campus of Clemson University, dozens of small white flags with pink ribbons have replaced the beer cans that once littered a hill where football fans held tailgate parties outside Memorial Stadium.

The flags are a recent addition, marking the final resting places of the enslaved and convicted African American laborers who built the school, and before that, the plantation on which it sits. Hundreds more of the flags are dotted among existing gravestones, and until lately, most visitors stepped unknowingly over their remains.

"Cemetery Hill" has served as the final resting place for some of Clemson's faculty and trustees for nearly a century. Now, researchers have identified more than 600 previously unmarked African American graves, some overbuilt by the marked graves of white people, dating back to the early 1800s.

The revelation has prompted Clemson to reconsider the Woodland Cemetery's function on campus amid a national reckoning by universities to properly acknowledge their legacies of slavery and forced labor.

Rhondda Thomas, a professor of African American literature at Clemson, leads a team working to piece together the identities of the dead in this "sacred space," and memorialize "those who have been so dishonored and disrespected over time," she said.

"As a university we have a responsibility to teach our students and our campus community how to embrace complex, painful, troubling history, and we need to start with our own," Thomas said in an interview.

The Fort Hill plantation was established by John C. Calhoun in 1825, the same year he became the nation's 7th vice president. Calhoun later became a U.S. senator, and zealously defended slavery before the Civil War. His family bequeathed the plantation to South Carolina in 1888, leading to the university's creation. The state then built the campus using convicted laborers, many of them arrested on petty charges to force them to work without pay.

Thomas has spent much of her tenure documenting the experiences of African Americans in the university's history through a project known as "Call My Name." A related tour she designed includes a fenced-off area where the university relocated a few dozen African American graves in the 1960s.

"The narrative tells the story of Clemson's indebtedness to Black labor for its existence," Thomas said. "I thought it was very important for the public, and for the campus community, to be able to access that history."

Campus archives and court documents show the school has known for decades about some of the unmarked graves below the hilltop spot where the Calhouns buried their first family member in 1837.

A college committee recommended honoring them with a permanent marker in 1946, though none was installed. In 1960, Clemson was allowed by a judge to disinter some of the remains to facilitate the "orderly and proper development of the campus." A 2003 planning document noted that parts of the site could contain unmarked burial plots.

But Clemson only began investigating in earnest last year, after two undergraduates, upset over the graves' condition, approached Thomas.

Sarah Adams, now a senior, said she'd become distraught, after taking one of the campus tours Thomas created, over the stark discrepancy between the neatly maintained graves of faculty and trustees and the unkempt state of the African American plots.

Thomas connected Adams and another concerned student, Morgan Molosso, with cemetery grounds staff and University Historian Paul Anderson, prompting the effort to clean up and memorialize the site.

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They secured funding from the provost's office to search for graves with ground-penetrating radar. Three rounds of searches have now increased the number to 667, as of January 2021.

"We don't want to hide anything," Anderson said. "We're truth tellers."

Documents posted online by the university show that after Calhoun died in 1850, the U.S. Census recorded 50 slaves on the plantation. Inventoried as property when his son bought Fort Hill four years later, they ranged from a 100-year-old woman named Phebe to multiple children under two. A dozen years later, near the end of the Civil War, 139 enslaved people were living on the plantation.

Field stones and archival documents had provided some indication of how many people were buried, but seeing the hundreds of flags interspersed among the graves of Clemson employees left Thomas speechless as she grappled with the proof of a burial ground desecrated over time.

Touring the site now requires stepping gingerly around dozens of white circles spray-painted onto the ground. In some places, graves have been paved over to create walkways. In others, many flags are clustered around each other, possibly marking where extended families buried their dead for generations, researchers said.

There is no way to know whether Clemson football games are played over the remains of slaves. Construction of the stadium would have destroyed any graves, said tour guide La'Neice Littleton, a postdoctoral fellow. But the white circles extend to within steps of the stadium wall.

The initial discovery of 215 unmarked graves amid the Black Lives Matter movement last summer led some students and faculty to call for broader changes in how the school treats Black students and surrounding African American communities. Clemson is South Carolina's second-largest university, but just 6% of its students are Black, in a state where some 27% of residents are.

Thomas has suggested that reparations could come in the form of tuition scholarships for descendants of the people buried in the cemetery, akin to a program Georgetown University launched in 2019.

Already, some professors are incorporating the cemetery's uncomfortable history into classes. Admissions office guides include it in campus tours. Thomas said she's also assembled a council of surrounding community members to help shape a memorial to the men, women and children whose forced labor made Clemson what it is today.

Boat, snowmobile, camel: Vaccine reaches world's far corners

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — After enduring 40-knot winds and freezing sea spray, jostled health care providers arrived wet and cold on two Maine islands in the North Atlantic late last month to conduct coronavirus vaccinations.

As they came ashore on Little Cranberry Island, population 65, residents danced with excitement.

"It's a historic day for the island," said Kaitlyn Miller, who joined a friend in belting out "I'm not giving away my shot!" from the Broadway show Hamilton when the crew arrived.

Around the world, it is taking extra effort and ingenuity to ensure the vaccine gets to remote locations. That means shipping it by boat to islands, by snowmobile to Alaska villages and via complex waterways through the Amazon in Brazil. Before it's over, drones, motorcycles, elephants, horses and camels will have been used to deliver it to the world's far corners, said Robin Nandy, chief of immunization for UNICEF.

"This is unprecedented in that we're trying to deliver a new vaccine to every country in the world in the same calendar year," he said.

Although the vaccination rollout has been choppy in much of the world and some places are still waiting for their first doses, there's an urgent push to inoculate people in hard-to-reach places that may not have had COVID-19 outbreaks but also may not be well equipped to deal with them if they do.

"It's a race against the clock," said Sharon Daley, medical director of the Maine Seacoast Mission, which is providing shots on seven islands off the Maine coast.

And though coronavirus vaccinations can present unique challenges, including adequate refrigeration, health care providers are fortunate to have an infrastructure in place through the systems they use to

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conduct childhood vaccinations for measles and other diseases, Nandy said.

In the rough and roadless terrain of southwestern Alaska, the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. chartered planes and used snowmobiles this winter to deliver the vaccine to nearly four dozen villages spread out over an area the size of Oregon.

The vaccination effort there began in December, when temperatures still hovered around minus 20 or minus 30 Fahrenheit (minus 20 to minus 34 Celsius) and workers had to ensure the vaccine didn't freeze in the syringes' needles. Despite the challenges, the health corporation delivered thousands of doses to 47 villages in a month. In one village, residents were anguished after COVID-19 killed one person and sickened two others, including the local health worker.

"People were just really desperate to get vaccinated there, and it was pretty emotional to just kind of be able to bring something to them, to protect them," said Dr. Ellen Hodges, the health corporation's chief of staff.

In India, workers recently trekked to the tiny village of Bahakajari, a village along the mighty Brahmaputra River in the remote northeastern state of Assam, to start vaccinating its nearly 9,000 residents.

The vaccines were first sent to the nearest town, Morigaon, before they were driven the final leg by car. People from on a nearby island were brought to the health center by boat, and women in bright sarees and men lined up to get vaccinated. By the end of the day, 67 had received a shot, with officials planning to vaccinate 800 more within the next three days.

In Brazil, remote Amazon communities presented a challenge that meant traveling for hours on small planes and boats. Like many remote locales, getting the vaccine to the villages was important because most jungle communities have only basic medical facilities that aren't equipped to treat severe COVID-19 cases.

Just like in other parts of the world, including the U.S., health care workers had to overcome the challenge of persuading some villagers that it was safe and important to get the shot.

"Vaccine hesitancy is a complex issue and it's extremely important that high quality information is provided to all groups within society," said a spokesperson for the public-private partnership GAVI, formerly the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, which is focused on improving vaccinations in poor countries.

In Maine, there was relief when the century-old Seacoast Mission took on the task of getting the vaccine to the islands.

For islanders, getting to the mainland in the best of circumstances would've meant a daylong trip to get the vaccine. Rough weather can delay ferries and mailboats, leaving residents stuck for days. And some are too infirm to travel.

"Life on the islands is remote. And it's isolated. And I think that isolation is both the attraction but the heart of the challenge," said John Zavodny, the Seacoast Mission's president.

On a recent day, it was too windy to take the mission's boat that's equipped with medical gear, so a smaller one was used. The team also commandeered a lobster boat for the short trip to Little and Great Cranberry Islands.

Islanders are used to a certain degree of isolation, but this winter was particularly tough on Little Cranberry Island because the community couldn't even hold its potluck suppers or other regular gatherings due to coronavirus restrictions, said Lindsay Eysnogle, who teaches five children on the island ranging from pre-K to second grade.

The vaccine provides hope that islanders can resume something akin to normalcy.

"Omigosh we are so thrilled," she said. "This will provide relief from the level of isolation that we're unaccustomed to out here. It's just a relief."

Senate gives Biden a big tool to work around GOP filibuster

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a powerful new tool, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has fresh options for potentially advancing President Joe Biden's infrastructure package and other priorities past

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Republican obstruction in the 50-50 split Senate.

Republicans still pledge to do all they can to halt Biden, but an official parliamentarian's opinion this week is a potential game-changer. It unleashes multiple options for Democrats to advance parts of Biden's agenda — including immigration and Medicare legislation — with 51 votes in the 100-member Senate rather than the 60 typically needed to move major legislation past filibuster threats.

There has been talk of trying to change the filibuster rules, but that would be a very heavy political lift in the divided and tradition-devoted Senate.

The White House was heartened by the parliamentarian's ruling but isn't giving up on support from some Republicans, despite their strong opposition to paying for much of the infrastructure plan with a corporate tax increase. The president, said press secretary Jen Psaki, "continues to believe ... that there is a bipartisan path forward."

However, it is clear that the deep partisan polarization in Washington has led to a new era in legislating. The seasoned policy wonks on Capitol Hill are digging deep into the procedural toolbox to find ways around the gridlock that typically leaves Congress at a standstill.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell chided Biden for partisanship, and declared Tuesday that his side would not be supporting the \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package that Biden wants to pay for with the tax hike on corporations.

"For a president who ran as a bipartisan, I haven't seen that yet," McConnell told reporters in Kentucky. McConnell said Biden is a "terrific person I know him well, I like him. We've been friends for years. A moderate he has not been."

While congressional Democrats had already planned on resorting to "budget reconciliation," a special, budget-linked procedure with a 51-vote threshold to pass parts of Biden's \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package, the parliamentarian's ruling opens the door to using it on certain other priorities.

Talks are swirling around an immigration overhaul that could provide a pathway to citizenship for some. There is also discussion about using the process to lower the Medicare retirement age from 65 to 60 and other agenda items.

Schumer's office said no decisions have been made. Any action still involves wresting consensus from all 50 senators in the Democratic caucus, progressives and centrists alike, which could prove daunting. But spokesman Justin Goodman welcomed the parliamentarian's opinion as "an important step forward that this key pathway is available to Democrats if needed."

Using the budget rules to pass sweeping legislation on a party line vote is not new. Congress used the budget reconciliation process last month to approve Biden's sweeping \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue despite no Republican support.

First used in 1980, the process has been employed most years since, according to a Congressional Research Service report.

In 2017, a Congress controlled by Republicans used budget reconciliation to approve the Trump-era GOP tax cuts on a party line vote. In 2010, Democrats used it for the Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare. George W. Bush relied on reconciliation twice to approve tax cuts, including once when Vice President Dick Cheney cast the tie breaking vote.

But the opinion by the nonpartisan Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth McDonough, late Monday means the process can potentially be used multiple times this year -- rather than just two or three times, as had been expected.

Typically, Congress has one budget resolution every fiscal year, or two each calendar year since the fiscal year starts Oct. 1. The parliamentarian signaled if the annual budget resolution is revised, the process can be used again.

That's a quicker route to passage for certain Biden priorities than gutting the Senate filibuster, the long-running practice that some senators and critics say is a throw-back used by pro-segregationists to block Civil Rights legislation and should be changed.

The filibuster enables any single senator to object to consideration of legislation or other matters, and

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can usually only be overcome with a 60-vote threshold — a tall order in the now evenly split chamber.

Democrats hold the majority in the 50-50 Senate because the party's vice president, Kamala Harris, can cast a tie-breaking vote.

While Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., and other leading progressives have advocated changing the filibuster rules, more centrist Democrats including Joe Manchin of West Virginia are not on board.

Using the budget reconciliation could provide a short-term fix, but it is not without drawbacks. It involves a cumbersome process and sometimes all-night Senate sessions called "vote-a-ramas" as senators offer multiple amendments.

Moreover, the budget tools have other limits in that the proposals need to hew to budgetary guidelines, which means not all bills would qualify.

Already, the parliamentarian earlier this year rejected a proposal to hike the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour as part of the COVID-19 package because it did not meet budgetary guidelines.

Voting rights, gun violence bills and other legislation would likely run into similar limits.

Those seeking changes to the filibuster rules welcomed the budget tool but said changes to the filibuster practice are still needed.

"It is great that Senate Democrats are going to be able to pass many of their economic priorities with a simple majority," said Eli Zupnick of Fix our Senate, a group advocating filibuster changes.

But he said "that won't be nearly enough if the filibuster remains as a tool."

Biden makes all adults eligible for a vaccine on April 19

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said he's bumping up his deadline by two weeks for states to make all adults in the U.S. eligible for coronavirus vaccines. But even as he expressed optimism about the pace of vaccinations, he warned Americans that the nation is not yet out of the woods when it comes to the pandemic.

"Let me be deadly earnest with you: We aren't at the finish line. We still have a lot of work to do. We're still in a life and death race against this virus," Biden said Tuesday in remarks at the White House.

The president warned that "new variants of the virus are spreading and they're moving quickly. Cases are going back up, hospitalizations are no longer declining." He added that "the pandemic remains dangerous," and encouraged Americans to continue to wash their hands, socially distance and wear masks.

Biden added that while his administration is on schedule to meet his new goal of distributing 200 million doses of the vaccine during his first 100 days, it will still take time for enough Americans to get vaccinated to slow the spread of the virus.

But he expressed hope that his Tuesday announcement, that every adult will be eligible by April 19 to sign up and get in a virtual line to be vaccinated, will help expand access and distribution of the vaccine. Some states already had begun moving up their deadlines from the original May 1 goal.

"No more confusing rules. No more confusing restrictions," Biden said.

Biden made the announcement after visiting a COVID-19 vaccination site at Immanuel Chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria. During his visit, he thanked everyone for administering the shots and for showing up to receive them.

"That's the way to beat this," Biden said. "Get the vaccination when you can."

The president also said no one should fear mutations of the coronavirus that are showing up in the U.S. after being discovered in other countries. He acknowledged that the new strains are more virulent and more dangerous, but said "the vaccines work on all of them."

Biden also announced that 150 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been shot into arms since his inauguration on Jan. 20. That puts the president well on track to meet his new goal of 200 million shots administered by his 100th day in office on April 30.

Biden's original goal had been 100 million shots by the end of his first 100 days, but that number was reached in March.

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Still, he acknowledged Tuesday that his administration fell short of its goal to deliver at least one shot to every teacher, school staff member and childcare worker during the month of March, to try to accelerate school reopenings. Biden announced the target early last month and directed federal resources toward achieving it, but said Tuesday that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that about 80% of teachers, school staff and childcare workers had received a shot.

Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, also spent the day Tuesday focused on promoting the COVID-19 vaccine, each touring a vaccination center, Harris in Chicago and Emhoff in Yakima, Washington.

Harris praised the workers and those receiving their vaccine at a site set up at a local union hall, and spoke of spring as "a moment where we feel a sense of renewal."

"We can see a light at the end of the tunnel," she said.

Some states are making plans to ease their health restrictions, even as the country is facing a potential new surge in virus cases.

On Tuesday, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, warned that the country is in a "critical time" because "we could just as easily swing up into a surge."

"That would be a setback for public health, but that would be a psychological setback, too," he said during an interview with the National Press Club. He noted that Americans are experiencing "COVID-19 fatigue" after more than a year of lockdowns and restrictions to public life aimed at slowing the spread of the virus.

Biden and many of his advisers have warned against reopening the economy too quickly and easing mask mandates, at the risk of driving a fresh surge in virus cases.

"We just don't want to have to go back to really shutting things down. That would be terrible," Fauci said.

But Biden's announcement of the April 19 deadline was aimed at injecting optimism into a public that's grown weary of the restrictions, and it comes as a flood of vaccine is being sent to states this week.

Jeff Zients, the White House coronavirus coordinator, told governors Tuesday during a weekly conference call that more than 28 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines will be delivered to states this week, White House press secretary Jen Psaki announced at her daily briefing.

That allocation brings the total amount of vaccine distributed over the past three weeks to more than 90 million doses, Psaki said.

At least a dozen states opened eligibility to anyone 16 and older on Monday alone, while New Jersey and Oregon announced this week that all residents 16 and older will become eligible on April 19.

The president had announced just last week that 90% of adults would be eligible for one of three approved COVID-19 vaccines by April 19, in addition to having a vaccination site within 5 miles of their home.

But eligibility isn't the same as actually being vaccinated. Being eligible means people can sign up to reserve their place in a virtual line until they can schedule an appointment.

"That doesn't mean they will get it that day," Psaki said, speaking of a vaccine shot. "It means they can join the line that day if they have not already done that beforehand."

Seniors still waiting to be vaccinated should seek appointments quickly "because the lines are going to become longer" after April 19, Psaki said. "There are going to be more people waiting."

The White House said Monday that nearly 1 in 3 Americans and over 40% of adults have received at least one shot, and nearly 1 in 4 adults is fully vaccinated. Seventy-five percent of people older than 65 have now received at least one shot, and more than 55% of them are fully vaccinated.

Two of the three vaccines requires two doses administered several weeks apart. The third vaccine requires just one shot.

EXPLAINER: Senate eyes budget rule to push past filibuster

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the Senate split 50-50, leaders of the Democratic majority are looking for ways to advance their priorities and President Joe Biden's agenda around the typical 60-vote threshold needed to overcome a filibuster by opponents.

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This week, the Senate parliamentarian ruled that one tool, budget reconciliation, could be used more often than expected to pass certain measures with a 51-vote threshold. That potentially opens new opportunities for approving not only President Joe Biden's \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package, as had been expected, but other legislation on a party-line vote without Republicans.

A look at the process and what's ahead:

WHY THE SENATE STALEMATE?

Democrats hold the majority in the evenly split 50-50 Senate because the vice president of their party, Kamala Harris, can provide as a tie-breaking vote.

But most major legislation requires 60 votes to advance, overcoming an objection from a filibuster, which can be waged by any senator who wants to halt action.

That's a tall order in the narrowly divided Senate, and a recipe for gridlock especially in partisan times.

Key senators want to change the filibuster rules, ending the 60-vote threshold they view as a throwback — a procedural relic of segregation before the passage of civil rights legislation.

But changing the filibuster rules has been difficult and requires the majority to be on board. Leading centrist Democrats, including Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, have said they want to keep it in place.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION VS FILIBUSTER

Under the congressional budget process, certain measures regarding revenues, spending and the debt can be approved with a 51-vote threshold.

Congress has used this so-called budget reconciliation process before, more than 20 times since its was first unveiled in 1980.

Democrats used it to approve the Affordable Care Act, or "Obamacare," in 2010. Republicans used it in 2017 to pass tax cuts.

Biden relied on it for party-line approval of his sweeping \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 package last month when all Republicans voted no.

It can't be used for just any legislation, but provides a way for some budget-related measures to pass with a simple 51-vote majority.

WHAT DID THE PARLIAMENTARIAN SAY?

The Senate parliamentarian's opinion this week suggested the budget reconciliation procedure can be used more than once — not only on the annual budget, but on a subsequent budget revision.

Already Democrats have two budgets lined up this year, one for the current fiscal 2021 year that ends Sept. 30, and another for the coming fiscal 2022 year that starts on Oct. 1.

That opens the door to multiple opportunities for deploying the budget process on bills that would use the 51-vote threshold.

WHAT BILLS CAN PASS WITH RECONCILIATION?

While talks are swirling over ways to use budget reconciliation to advance immigration or Medicare legislation as soon as April, it is no sure-fire route.

Already elements of Biden's American Jobs Plan, the big infrastructure bill, were expected to use the reconciliation process this summer. Others could follow.

Approval would still will require Democrats to wrestle their slim majority to consensus, which is no guarantee in the diverse caucus made up of progressives like Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and centrists like Manchin, presuming Republicans are opposed.

Some legislation won't qualify for the budget process, which requires that bills revolve around revenues, spending or debt.

Already, the parliamentarian rejected a proposal to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour because it didn't fit budget rules.

Voting rights, gun violence and other policy measures may not be eligible.

VOTE-A-RAMA AND WHAT'S NEXT

If Senate Democrats do push ahead, the budget process can be long and cumbersome.

A budget bill or revision needs to be drawn up, debated in the committee and brought to the floor.

Typically there's a lengthy "vote-a-rama" process — an hourslong, all-night session of senators amending and debating the budget bill.

Only then can it be brought forward for a final vote.

Minneapolis officers line up to reject Chauvin's actions

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The parade of Minneapolis police officers rejecting a former officer's actions in restraining George Floyd continued at his murder trial, including a use-of-force instructor who said officers were coached to "stay away from the neck when possible."

Lt. Johnny Mercil on Tuesday became the latest member of the Minneapolis force to take the stand as part of an effort by prosecutors to dismantle the argument that Derek Chauvin was doing what he was trained to do when he put his knee on George Floyd's neck last May.

Several experienced officers, including the police chief himself, have testified that Floyd should not have been kept pinned to the pavement for close to 9 1/2 minutes by prosecutors' reckoning as the Black man lay face-down, his hands cuffed behind his back.

According to testimony and records submitted Tuesday, Chauvin took a 40-hour course in 2016 on how to recognize people in crisis — including those suffering mental problems or the effects of drug use — and how to use de-escalation techniques to calm them down.

Sgt. Ker Yang, the Minneapolis police official in charge of crisis-intervention training, said officers are taught to "slow things down and re-evaluate and reassess."

Records show Chauvin also underwent training in the use of force in 2018. Mercil said those who attended were taught that the sanctity of life is a cornerstone of departmental policy and that officers must use the least amount of force required to get a suspect to comply.

Under cross-examination by Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson, Mercil testified that officers are trained in some situations to use their knee across a suspect's back or shoulder and employ their body weight to maintain control.

But Mercil added: "We tell officers to stay away from the neck when possible."

Nelson has argued that the now-fired white officer "did exactly what he had been trained to do over his 19-year career," and he has suggested that the illegal drugs in Floyd's system and his underlying health conditions are what killed him, not Chauvin's knee.

In fact, Nelson sought to point out moments in the video footage when he said Chauvin's knee did not appear to be on Floyd's neck.

Nelson showed Mercil several images taken from officers' body-camera videos, asking after each one whether it showed Chauvin's knee appearing to rest more on Floyd's back, shoulder or shoulder blades than directly on Floyd's neck. Mercil often agreed.

Nelson acknowledged the images were difficult to make out. They were taken at different moments during Floyd's arrest, starting about four minutes after he was first pinned to the ground, according to time stamps on the images.

In other testimony, Jody Stiger, a Los Angeles Police Department sergeant serving as a prosecution use-of-force expert, said officers were justified in using force while Floyd was resisting their efforts to put him in a squad car. But once he was on the ground and stopped resisting, "at that point the officers ... should have slowed down or stopped their force as well."

Stiger said that after reviewing video of the arrest, "my opinion was that the force was excessive."

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death May 25. Floyd, 46, was arrested outside a neighborhood market after being accused of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill. A panicky-sounding Floyd writhed and claimed to be claustrophobic as police tried to put him in the squad car.

Bystander video of Floyd crying that he couldn't breathe as onlookers yelled at Chauvin to get off him sparked protests around the U.S. that descended into violence in some cases.

Instead of closing ranks to protect a fellow officer behind what has been dubbed the "blue wall of si-

lence," some of the most experienced members of the Minneapolis force have taken the stand to openly condemn Chauvin's actions as excessive.

Chauvin had been certified to perform CPR, and Minneapolis Officer Nicole Mackenzie, who trains members of the force in medical care, testified Tuesday that department policy required him to start aid before paramedics arrived, if possible.

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 got there, even after he became unresponsive, according to testimony and video footage.

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.

"Have you ever had a circumstance where an individual has lost their pulse and suddenly come back to life and become more violent?" prosecutor Steve Schleicher asked Mercil, suggesting that Floyd was held down long past the point where he might be a threat.

"Not that I'm aware of, sir," Mercil replied.

Arkansas lawmakers enact transgender youth treatment ban

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas lawmakers on Tuesday made the state the first to ban gender confirming treatments and surgery for transgender youth, enacting the prohibition over the governor's objections.

The Republican-controlled House and Senate voted to override GOP Gov. Asa Hutchinson's veto of the measure, which prohibits doctors from providing gender confirming hormone treatment, puberty blockers or surgery to anyone under 18 years old, or from referring them to other providers for the treatment.

Opponents of the measure have vowed to sue to block the ban before it takes effect this summer.

Hutchinson vetoed the bill Monday following pleas from pediatricians, social workers and the parents of transgender youth who said the measure would harm a community already at risk for depression and suicide. The ban was opposed by several medical and child welfare groups, including the American Academy of Pediatrics.

"This legislation perpetuates the very things we know are harmful to trans youth," Dr. Robert Garofalo, division head of adolescent and young adult medicine at Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago, told reporters on a press conference call held by the Human Rights Campaign. "They're not just anti-trans. They're anti-science. They're anti-public health."

The bill's sponsor dismissed opposition from medical groups and compared the restriction to other limits the state places on minors, such as prohibiting them from drinking.

"They need to get to be 18 before they make those decisions," Republican Rep. Robin Lundstrum said.

The Family Council, a conservative group that backed the measure, praised lawmakers for enacting "historic legislation."

Hutchinson said the measure went too far in interfering with parents and physicians, and noted that it will cut off care for transgender youth already receiving treatment. He said he would have signed the bill if it had focused only on gender confirming surgery, which currently isn't performed on minors in the state.

"I do hope my veto will cause my Republican colleagues across the country to resist the temptation to put the state in the middle of every decision made by parents and health care professionals," Hutchinson said in a statement after the vote.

The law will take effect in late July at the earliest. The American Civil Liberties Union said it planned to challenge the measure before then.

"This is a sad day for Arkansas, but this fight is not over — and we're in it for the long haul," Holly Dickson, ACLU of Arkansas' executive director, said in a statement.

The override, which needed only a simple majority, passed easily in both chambers, with the House voting 72-25 in favor and the Senate 25-8.

The ban was enacted during a year in which bills targeting transgender people have advanced easily in

Arkansas and other states. Hutchinson recently signed legislation banning transgender women and girls from competing on teams consistent with their gender identity, a prohibition that also has been enacted in Tennessee and Mississippi this year.

Hutchinson also recently signed legislation that allows doctors to refuse to treat someone because of moral or religious objections.

And the Legislature isn't showing signs of letting up. Another bill advanced by a House committee earlier Tuesday would prevent schools from requiring teachers to refer to students by their preferred pronouns or titles.

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBTQ rights group, said more than 100 bills have been filed in statehouses around the country targeting the transgender community. Similar treatment bans have been proposed in at least 20 states.

The foundation established by the family of Bentonville-based Walmart's founder on Tuesday raised concerns about the recent measures in Arkansas targeting LGBTQ people.

"This trend is harmful and sends the wrong message to those willing to invest in or visit our state," Tom Walton with the Walton Family Foundation said in a statement released before the override vote.

One lawmaker opposed to the measure compared it to the anti-integration bills Arkansas' Legislature passed in 1958 in opposition to the previous year's desegregation of Little Rock Central High School.

"What I see, this bill, is the most powerful again bullying the most vulnerable people in our state," Democratic Sen. Clarke Tucker said before the vote.

Police official: Chauvin trained to avoid neck pressure

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minneapolis police are taught to restrain combative suspects with a knee on their back or shoulders if necessary but are told to "stay away from the neck when possible," a department use-of-force instructor testified Tuesday at former Officer Derek Chauvin's murder trial.

Lt. Johnny Mercil became the latest member of the Minneapolis force to take the stand as part of an effort by prosecutors to dismantle the argument that Chauvin was doing what he was trained to do when he put his knee on George Floyd's neck last May.

Several experienced officers, including the police chief himself, have testified that Floyd should not have been kept pinned to the pavement for close to 9 1/2 minutes by prosecutors' reckoning as the Black man lay face-down, his hands cuffed behind his back.

According to testimony and records submitted Tuesday, Chauvin took a 40-hour course in 2016 on how to recognize people in crisis — including those suffering mental problems or the effects of drug use — and how to use de-escalation techniques to calm them down.

Sgt. Ker Yang, the Minneapolis police official in charge of crisis-intervention training, said officers are taught to "slow things down and re-evaluate and reassess."

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But Mercil added: "We tell officers to stay away from the neck when possible."

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In other testimony, Jody Stiger, a Los Angeles Police Department sergeant serving as a prosecution use-of-force expert, said officers were justified in using force while Floyd was resisting their efforts to put him in a squad car. But once he was on the ground and stopped resisting, "at that point the officers ... should have slowed down or stopped their force as well."

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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.

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"Not that I'm aware of, sir," Mercil replied.

Nearly half of new US virus infections are in just 5 states

By RUSS BYNUM and MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

Nearly half of new coronavirus infections nationwide are in just five states — a situation that is putting pressure on the federal government to consider changing how it distributes vaccines by sending more doses to hot spots.

New York, Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania and New Jersey together reported 44% of the nation's new COVID-19 infections, or nearly 197,500 new cases, in the latest available seven-day period, according to state health agency data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Total U.S. infections during the same week numbered more than 452,000.

The heavy concentration of new cases in states that account for 22% of the U.S. population has prompted some experts and elected officials to call for President Joe Biden's administration to ship additional vaccine doses to those places. So far, the White House has shown no signs of shifting from its policy of dividing vaccine doses among states based on population.

Sending extra doses to places where infection numbers are climbing makes sense, said Dr. Elvin H. Geng, a professor in infectious diseases at Washington University. But it's also complicated. States that are more successfully controlling the virus might see less vaccine as a result.

"You wouldn't want to make those folks wait because they were doing better," Geng said. "On the other hand, it only makes sense to send vaccines to where the cases are rising."

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The spike in cases has been especially pronounced in Michigan, where the seven-day average of daily new infections reached 6,719 cases Sunday — more than double what it was two weeks earlier. Only New York reported higher case numbers. And California and Texas, which have vastly larger populations than Michigan, are reporting less than half its number of daily infections.

Though Michigan has seen the highest rate of new infections in the past two weeks, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has said she does not plan to tighten restrictions. She has blamed the virus surge on pandemic fatigue, which has people moving about more, as well as more contagious variants.

"Taking steps back wasn't going to fix the issue," Whitmer said as she got her first vaccine Tuesday at Ford Field in Detroit, home of the NFL's Lions. "What we have to do is really put our foot down on the pedal on vaccines" and urge people to wear masks, keep their social distance and wash their hands.

Whitmer got the shot the day after Michigan expanded eligibility to everyone 16 and older. She asked the White House last week during a conference call with governors whether it has considered sending extra vaccine to states battling virus surges. She was told all options were on the table.

In New York City, vaccination appointments are still challenging to get. Mayor Bill de Blasio has publicly harangued the federal government about the need for a bigger vaccine allotment almost daily, a refrain he repeated when speaking to reporters Tuesday.

"We still need supply, supply, supply," de Blasio said, before adding, "But things are really getting better."

On the state level, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has not called publicly for an increase in New York's vaccine allotment, even as cases ticked up in recent weeks and the number of hospitalized people hit a plateau.

In New Jersey, where the seven-day rolling average of daily new infections has risen over the past two weeks, from 4,050 daily cases to 4,250, Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said he is constantly talking to the White House about demand for the coronavirus vaccine, though he stopped short of saying he was lobbying for more vaccines because of the state's high infection rate.

Vaccine shipments to New Jersey were up 12% in the last week, Murphy said Monday, though he questioned whether that's enough.

"We constantly look at, OK, we know we're going up, but are we going up at the rate we should be, particularly given the amount of cases we have?" Murphy said.

New virus variants are clearly one of the drivers in the increase, said Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, chair of the department of epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of California at San Francisco. Failure to suppress the rise in cases will lead to more people getting sick and dying, she said, and drive increases in other parts of the country.

"More vaccine needs to be where the virus is," Bibbins-Domingo said, adding that people should get over the "scarcity mindset" that has them thinking surging vaccine into one place will hurt people elsewhere.

In Florida, relaxed safeguards during a busy spring break season likely helped spread virus variants, said University of South Florida epidemiologist Jason Salemi. The state's seven-day average of daily new infections has exceeded 5,400, an increase of 20% in the past two weeks.

While many new infections appear to be among younger people, Salemi said he's worried about Florida's seniors. About 78% of residents age 65 and older have received at least one vaccine dose, but roughly 1 million more still have not gotten any shots.

"We seemingly have the supply," Salemi said. "Are these people not planning to get vaccinated?"

Talk of sending extra shots to some states comes at a time when the number of daily infections in the U.S. has fallen dramatically compared to a January spike following the holiday season. However, the seven-day average of daily infections been rising slowly since mid-March.

The five states seeing the most infections stand out. As of Tuesday, 31 U.S. states were reporting seven-day averages of fewer than 1,000 new daily cases.

White House coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients said Tuesday more than 28 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines will be delivered to states this week. That allocation will bring the U.S. total to more than 90 million doses distributed in the past three weeks.

The news came as Biden announced more than 150 million coronavirus shots have been administered since he took office, and that all adults will be eligible to receive a vaccine by April 19.

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About 40% of U.S. adults have now received at least one COVID-19 shot, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 23% of American adults have been fully vaccinated — including more than half of Americans 65 and older.

Geng said the nation should take a step back and go slow. Even just a few more weeks of Americans sticking with social distancing and other precautions could make a huge difference.

"The take-home message here is, let's not jump the gun," Geng said. "There's light at the end of the tunnel. We all see it there. And we will get there. Slow and steady."

Navy medic shoots 2 US sailors; is stopped, killed on base

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

FREDERICK, Md. (AP) — A Navy medic shot and wounded two U.S. sailors at a military facility Tuesday, then fled to a nearby Army base where security forces shot and killed him, police and Navy officials said.

Authorities said they had yet to determine what drove 38-year-old Fantahun Girma Woldesenbet to open fire at the facility, located in an office park in Frederick, Maryland.

"We're still trying to sort through stacks of paper ... to figure out exactly what the motive would be," said Frederick Police Lt. Andrew Alcorn.

Woldesenbet shot the sailors with a rifle inside the facility at the Riverside Tech Park on Tuesday morning, causing people inside to flee, said Frederick Police Chief Jason Lando.

Woldesenbet, a Navy medic assigned to Fort Detrick but who lived in town, then drove to the base, where gate guards who had been given advance notice told him to pull over for a search, said Brig. Gen. Michael J. Talley. But Woldesenbet immediately sped off, making it about a half-mile into the installation before he was stopped at a parking lot by the base's police force. When he pulled out a weapon, the police shot and killed him, Talley said.

The two sailors, who Talley said were assigned to Fort Detrick, were airlifted to a hospital. Police said one victim is in critical but stable condition, and the other is in serious condition but expected to be released Wednesday.

Talley said investigators will determine as much as they can, including why the suspect went back to the base.

"(I) don't know his mental status at the time, and we're certainly going to find all that out," he said.

The brigadier general said the facility where the shooting took place was not under his command. He declined to identify the facility more specifically or describe the work that was done there.

Fort Detrick is home to the military's flagship biological defense laboratory and several federal civilian biodefense labs. About 10,000 military personnel and civilians work on the base, which encompasses about 1,300 acres (526 hectares) in the city of Frederick.

The base is a huge economic driver in the region, drawing scientists, military personnel and their families. Frederick Mayor Michael O'Connor noted that various defense contractors are located near Fort Detrick and that it wouldn't be unusual for a member of the military to be off base and working with a private firm that does business with the U.S. government.

"When these incidents happen in other places, you're always grateful that it's not your community," O'Connor added. "But you always know, perhaps in the back of your mind, that that's just luck — that there isn't any reason why it couldn't happen here. And today it did."

By early afternoon, the Nallin Farm gate at Fort Detrick through which the shooter entered remained closed and two officers were standing by.

Police cordoned off Woldesenbet's garden-style apartment building in Frederick City, a few miles from the site of the shooting.

A neighbor, Ava Target, said she knew Woldesenbet only by sight, and that he lived on the top floor of the apartment complex with a wife and two kids. She wasn't aware of any problems.

Another neighbor, Rachel Tucker, said she saw police escort Woldesenbet's wife and two young children from the apartment early Tuesday afternoon.

She said she believed the family had lived in the apartment for about a year and she never noticed anything out of the ordinary.

Frederick police Lt. Andrew Alcorn said the crime scene unit had recovered multiple items from Wolde-senbet's apartment, but he declined to categorize them.

He said Wolde-senbet's wife had been at the apartment earlier Tuesday and that police brought her in for questioning.

Mark Nelson, a firefighter who lives in a row of townhomes across the street from the base, said he heard the base blast warning sirens Tuesday morning.

"I heard, I don't know what they call it, but they were like air raid sirens, and I knew something was going on," Nelson said.

Lando called the shootings "very tragic."

"It's happening too frequently," he said. "Every time we turn on the TV we're seeing something like this happening. And now it's happening in our backyards."

NCAA may consider single site for part of future tourneys

By MICHAEL MAROT AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The NCAA used the single-site concept for its marquee championship out of necessity.

Now it could become part of the tournament's future.

A day after crowning a national champion for the first time since 2019, NCAA senior vice president of basketball Dan Gavitt told reporters that the successful men's college basketball tournament held primarily in Indianapolis and exclusively in Indiana could create a late-round model for future tourneys.

"If it's the desire of the committee and the membership to consider something along these lines for the future, I think we would give it significant consideration," he said Tuesday on a video call. "I would hesitate to say, though, I don't think a 68-team single site, short of another pandemic, would be something we would have great interest in. However, once you get down to a fewer amount of teams, say the Sweet 16 and on, having teams in the same location may provide some opportunities the membership, coaches and all would want to consider for the future."

Whatever happens, it won't be anytime soon — at least not by choice.

The NCAA already has awarded preliminary round games through 2026 and intends to play those games as scheduled, something it couldn't do this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced everyone to rethink how they could safely host games a year after the tournament was scrapped.

Players, coaches and staff members were tested daily for the coronavirus throughout the three-week event. Seating capacity was capped at 25% in the six playing venues. Fans were required to wear masks and those in the closest contact with teams, deemed Tier 1 personnel, essentially lived in an NCAA version of a bubble.

By almost any measure, the protocols worked.

Gavitt said there were 15 positive tests among the 28,311 conducted. The 66 games drew 173,592 fans, including nearly 8,000 Monday at Lucas Oil Stadium, where they watched Baylor end Gonzaga's perfect season with an 86-70 victory.

And though the television ratings for the Final Four were down from 2019, according to Sports Business Journal, the UCLA-Gonzaga game drew nearly 15 million viewers and was not only the most-watched program Saturday night but also the most watched non-football game since the pandemic began.

Sure, there were obstacles.

Six referees were sent home before the first game because one tested positive. Another ref, Bert Smith, was wheeled off the court during a Sweet 16 game after collapsing from a medical issue unrelated to COVID-19.

Alabama student Luke Ratliff, 23, died after a brief illness just several days after he had attended a game at Hinkle Fieldhouse. Ratliff's death prompted Indiana health officials to investigate whether anyone had

been exposed to COVID-19 by Alabama residents.

A coronavirus outbreak among employees at St. Elmo's forced the popular local restaurant to close and created consternation initially inside NCAA offices.

"We did get notification that the staff putting together the takeout meals was not involved," Gavitt said. "But that's why we had all these things in place. I think we had over 3,500 meals delivered into a controlled environment and none of those meals were directly touched by anyone who was being tested. I think the contactless portion of the plan was very important."

But ultimately what mattered most was that only one game, UCLA-VCU, was canceled and Baylor won the title just a short walk away from the governing body's headquarters in a city that is likely to find itself at the center of future tourneys, too, and as the NCAA's top backup option.

Or perhaps as a single-site city again.

"Knowing what we were able to pull off here in such a short amount of time, I think gives me and the NCAA staff incredible confidence that we have minimally an incredible backup plan if we're presented with a challenge and have to shift," Gavitt said. "I think it will only lead to more opportunities for NCAA championships and other NCAA activities and events that we know will work so well in this convention center and surrounding facilities."

Refugee families urge Biden to keep promise to up admissions

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The families of refugees and their supporters, including 124 elected officials, sent President Joe Biden a letter Tuesday urging him to make good on his promise to boost refugee admissions to the United States during the current budget year, replacing the record low number set by his predecessor.

Biden presented a plan to Congress two months ago to raise the ceiling on admissions to 62,500 and to eliminate restrictions imposed by former President Donald Trump that have disqualified a significant number of refugees, including those fleeing war.

But Biden has not issued a presidential determination since his administration notified Congress, as required by law. The action does not require congressional approval and past presidents have issued such presidential determinations that set the cap on refugee admissions shortly after the notification to Congress.

The Biden administration has given no explanation as to why the president has kept the refugee admissions cap of 15,000 set by Trump, the lowest it has been in the 41-year-old U.S. Refugee Resettlement program's history. The White House had no immediate response to the letter Tuesday.

"This continues to have a devastating impact on people in dire need of humanitarian protection," states the letter signed by the families of refugees, resettlement agencies and 124 state and local elected officials from 35 states.

Only about 2,050 refugees have been allowed in to the United States because of the restrictions set by Trump, agencies said.

Every day that passes without any action "leaves hundreds of refugee families in limbo in refugee camps and many waiting to be reunited with their loved ones here in the U.S. waiting for us to uphold our promise to protect," the letter states.

"We hope that President Biden will listen to our voices," said Nejra Sumic, one of the refugee organizers of the letter.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the president is committed to "ensuring that the United States is, again, a leader when it comes to refugees," but it will take time to restore the program that was decimated by the previous administration. The drop in admissions under Trump forced many resettlement offices to close and let staff go.

"There's a great deal of rebuilding that needs to take place in order to have a refugee program that allows us to achieve what we wanted to achieve in a way that is both effective and that is safe," Price said without elaborating.

The State Department, which coordinates flights with resettlement agencies, booked 715 refugees to

come to the United States with the anticipation that Biden would have acted by March, but those flights were canceled since the refugees were not eligible under Trump's rules, according to resettlement agencies.

Most of the refugees are from Africa and fleeing armed conflict or political persecution. Most spots are allocated for people fleeing religious persecution, Iraqis who have assisted U.S. forces there, and people from Central America's Northern Triangle, the resettlement agencies say.

Among those who had their tickets canceled was a pregnant woman from Congo who can no longer fly because she is now in her third trimester, said Mark Hetfield, president of HIAS, a Maryland-based Jewish nonprofit that is one of nine agencies that resettles refugees in the U.S.

"There is simply no rationale for not making this change at this time," he said, adding that it is creating "so much extra stress for refugees."

Viral thoughts: Why COVID-19 conspiracy theories persist

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Daniel Roberts hadn't had a vaccination since he was 6. No boosters, no tetanus shots. His parents taught him inoculations were dangerous, and when the coronavirus arrived, they called it a hoax. The vaccine, they said, was the real threat.

So when the 29-year-old Tennessee man got his COVID-19 shot at his local Walmart last month, it felt like an achievement. A break with his past.

"Five hundred thousand people have died in this country. That's not a hoax," Roberts said, speaking of the conspiracy theories embraced by family and friends. "I don't know why I didn't believe all of it myself. I guess I chose to believe the facts."

As the world struggles to break the grip of COVID-19, psychologists and misinformation experts are studying why the pandemic spawned so many conspiracy theories, which have led people to eschew masks, social distancing and vaccines.

They're seeing links between beliefs in COVID-19 falsehoods and the reliance on social media as a source of news and information.

And they're concluding COVID-19 conspiracy theories persist by providing a false sense of empowerment. By offering hidden or secretive explanations, they give the believer a feeling of control in a situation that otherwise seems random or frightening.

The findings have implications not only for pandemic response but for the next "infodemic," a term used to describe the crisis of COVID-19 misinformation.

"We need to learn from what has happened, to make sure we can prevent it from happening the next time," said former U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona, who served in George W. Bush's administration. "Masks become a symbol of your political party. People are saying vaccines are useless. The average person is confused: Who do I believe?"

About 1 in 4 Americans said they believe the pandemic was "definitely" or "probably" created intentionally, according to a Pew Research Center survey from June. Other conspiracy theories focus on economic restrictions and vaccine safety. Increasingly, these baseless claims are prompting real-world problems.

In January, anti-vaccine activists forced a vaccine clinic at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles to close for a day. In Europe, dozens of cell towers burned because of bizarre claims that 5G wireless signals were triggering the infection. Elsewhere, a pharmacist destroyed vaccine doses, medical workers were attacked, and hundreds died after consuming toxins touted as cures — all because of COVID-19 falsehoods.

The most popular conspiracy theories often help people explain complicated, tumultuous events, when the truth may be too troubling to accept, according to Helen Lee Bouygues, founder and president of the Paris-based Reboot Foundation, which researches and promotes critical thinking in the internet age.

Such theories often appear after significant or frightening moments in history: the moon landing, the Sept. 11 attacks, or the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, when many found it difficult to accept that a lone, deranged gunman could kill the president. Vast conspiracies involving the CIA, the mob or others are easier to digest.

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"People need big explanations for big problems, for big world events," said John Cook, a cognitive scientist and conspiracy theory expert at Monash University in Australia. "Random explanations — like bats, or wet markets — are just psychologically unsatisfying."

This drive is so strong, Cook said, that people often believe contradictory conspiracy theories. Roberts said his parents, for instance, initially thought COVID-19 was linked to cell towers, before deciding the virus was actually a hoax. The only explanations they didn't entertain, he said, were the ones coming from medical experts.

Distrust of science, institutions and traditional news sources is heavily associated with stronger beliefs in conspiracy theories, as is support for pseudoscience.

Trust in American institutions has been further eroded by false statements from leaders like President Donald Trump, who repeatedly downplayed the threat of the virus, suggested bleach as a treatment, and undermined his administration's own experts.

An analysis by Cornell University researchers determined Trump to be the greatest driver of false coronavirus claims. Studies also show conservatives are more likely to believe conspiracy theories or share COVID-19 misinformation.

Carmona said he was addressing a group of executives about the coronavirus recently when one man declared that the pandemic was created by the Chinese government and Democrats to hurt Trump's re-election bid.

"When people start believing their own facts and rejecting anything the other side says, we're in real trouble," he said.

A shared distrust in American institutions has helped to unite several groups behind the banner of COVID-19 conspiracy theories. They include far-right groups upset about lockdowns and mask mandates, anti-vaccine activists and adherents of QAnon, who believe Trump is waging a secret war against a powerful cabal of satanic cannibals.

Besides gaining insight into COVID-19 conspiracy theories, researchers are thinking about what works — and what doesn't — when it comes to talking to friends and family who have embraced baseless claims.

And they are finding possible solutions to the broader problem of online misinformation. They include stronger efforts by social media companies and new regulations.

Facebook, Twitter and other platforms have long faced criticism for allowing misinformation to flourish. They have acted more aggressively on COVID-19 misinformation, suggesting the platforms could do more to rein in misinformation about other topics, such as climate change, Cook said.

"It shows it is a matter of will and not a matter of technical innovation," Cook said.

Addressing our species' attraction to conspiracy theories might be more challenging. Teaching critical thinking and media literacy in schools is essential, experts said, since the internet will only grow as a news source.

In recent years, an idea called inoculation theory has gained prominence. It involves using online games or tutorials to train people to think more critically about information.

One example: Cambridge University researchers created the online game Go Viral!, which teaches players by having them create their own misleading content.

Studies show the games increase resistance to online misinformation, but like many vaccines, the effects are temporary, leading researchers to wonder, as Cook said, "How do you give them the booster shot?"

Someday, these games might be placed as advertisements before online videos, or promoted with prizes, as a way to regularly vaccinate the public against misinformation.

"The true fix is education," said Bouygues. "COVID has shown us how dangerous misinformation and conspiracy theories can be, and that we have a lot of work to do."

Wildfire in Theodore Roosevelt National Park 45% contained

MEDORA, N.D. (AP) — Firefighters are making headway against a blaze in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota.

The fire in the park's North Unit tripled in size on Sunday, threatening park staff housing, maintenance

buildings and the CCC Campground. North Dakota Forest Service Acting Outreach and Education Manager Beth Hill said Tuesday that the blaze is 45% contained.

But she said the fire has consumed about 5,000 acres, or nearly eight square miles (20 square kilometers). The campground, other infrastructure and some private homes on the fire's north end remain at risk.

Federal forestry officials have closed more areas in the park, including the CCC Campground, Summit Campground, several trails and the Summit Overlook, Beth said.

They also have issued emergency restrictions on fires and shooting in all national forest lands in a host of North Dakota counties since conditions are ripe for fires.

Wildfires have burned more than 47 square miles (121 square kilometers) in North Dakota this spring. Fewer than 15.6 square miles (40 square kilometers) burned all of last year.

Doormen fired for failing to intervene in anti-Asian attack

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two New York City apartment building workers have been fired for failing to help an Asian American woman as she was being violently attacked on the sidewalk outside, the building's management company said Tuesday.

Surveillance video of the March 29 attack near Times Square showed that the doormen didn't step outside and approach the woman until more than a minute after the violence stopped and the assailant walked away.

The men watched from the lobby as 65-year-old Vilma Kari was repeatedly kicked and stomped, the video showed. One of them closed the building's door as Kari lay on the ground seconds after the attack ended.

The building's management company, The Brodsky Organization, initially suspended the doormen pending an investigation. That investigation was completed on Tuesday and the doormen were fired, the company said.

"While the full lobby video shows that once the assailant had departed, the doormen emerged to assist the victim and flag down an NYPD vehicle, it is clear that required emergency and safety protocols were not followed," the company said in a statement.

The Brodsky Organization also pledged to give all building services employees training on emergency response protocols, anti-bias awareness and bystander intervention.

The doormen's union, SEIU 32BJ, said the workers are challenging their terminations under a grievance process outlined in their collective bargaining agreement. The process can take months, the union said.

"We believe we must root out systemic racism in all its forms," 32BJ SEIU President Kyle Bragg said in a statement. "We believe that all union workers, especially workers of color who are often the subject of unfair treatment on the job, have a right to a fair process as outlined in their contract."

The union previously said that the doormen waited until the attacker walked away to check on Kari and flag down a nearby patrol car because they thought he had a knife.

The surveillance video shows a police car pulling up about a minute after the doormen went outside. The workers and officers are seen with her on the sidewalk for several more minutes before the video cuts off.

Brandon Elliot, a 38-year-old parolee convicted of killing his mother nearly two decades ago, was charged with assault and attempted assault as hate crimes. He is scheduled to be arraigned on a felony indictment on April 21. His lawyers have urged the public to "reserve judgment until all the facts are presented in court."

Kari, who emigrated from the Philippines several decades ago, was attacked outside a luxury apartment building while walking to church. She suffered serious injuries including a fractured pelvis and spent a day in the hospital.

Kari's daughter, Elizabeth Kari, posted Sunday on a fundraising webpage she set up for her mother's care that Vilma Kari "has been resting these past few days and wants to send her best as your energy, prayers, and thoughts have reached her and our family."

The attack, among the latest in a national spike in anti-Asian hate crimes, drew widespread condemna-

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tion and raised alarms about what appeared to be the failure of bystanders to help. Police said no one called 911 and that patrol officers driving by came upon Kari after she was assaulted.

Elizabeth Kari said that a person across the street who was not seen on surveillance video helped by screaming to distract the attacker.

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

Netanyahu asked to form new government, but faces long odds

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's president on Tuesday handed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the difficult task of trying to form a new government, giving the embattled Israeli leader a chance to extend his lengthy term in office.

But with the newly elected parliament deeply divided and the prime minister on trial for corruption charges, Netanyahu had little to celebrate.

He now has up to six weeks to lure his political foes into a coalition, an effort that appears to have slim odds of success. At the same time, those opponents will be working to form an alternative government that could end his 12-year reign.

In a meeting with members of his Likud party, Netanyahu struck a statesmanlike tone, saying he would be the prime minister of all of Israel's citizens, Jewish and Arab, religious and secular.

"We will take care of everyone," he said, vowing to "take Israel out of the cycle of recurring elections and to establish a strong government for all citizens of Israel."

President Reuven Rivlin turned to Netanyahu in the wake of Israel's fourth inconclusive election in the past two years.

In a post-election ritual, Rivlin had consulted Monday with each of the 13 parties elected to the Knesset, or parliament, in hopes of finding a consensus on a candidate for prime minister. But neither Netanyahu, nor his main rival, Yair Lapid, received the endorsement of a majority of lawmakers.

As he announced his decision Tuesday, an anguished Rivlin said no candidate had the support needed to form a majority coalition in the 120-seat Knesset. He also noted that there are many misgivings about Netanyahu remaining in office while on trial.

Yet he said there was nothing in the law preventing Netanyahu from continuing as prime minister and said he believed that Netanyahu had a better chance than his rivals of cobbling together a coalition.

"This is not an easy decision on a moral and ethical basis," Rivlin said. "The state of Israel is not to be taken for granted. And I fear for my country."

Netanyahu did not attend Tuesday's announcement, as is tradition, and later Rivlin did not appear with Netanyahu in the usual photo of the new parliament's swearing-in — moves local media interpreted as a show of the president's unhappiness with the situation.

Netanyahu now has an initial period of 28 days to put together a coalition, a period that Rivlin could extend for an additional two weeks.

Netanyahu has received the endorsement of 52 lawmakers, more than his rivals, but still short of the 61-seat majority needed to form a government.

Securing the support of nine more lawmakers will not be easy. Netanyahu will use his formidable powers of persuasion, coupled with generous offers of powerful government ministries, to court his potential partners.

Netanyahu will likely require the backing of Raam, a small Arab Islamist party. Raam's leader, Mansour Abbas, has left the door open to cooperating with Netanyahu if he aids Israel's Arab sector, which has long suffered from crime, discrimination and poverty.

But one of Netanyahu's allies, the Religious Zionist party, has an openly racist platform and refuses to serve in a government with Arab partners. Netanyahu could appeal to the rabbis who serve as the party's spiritual guides in hopes of changing minds.

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Netanyahu will also likely need the support of Yamina, a religious nationalist party led by former ally turned rival, Naftali Bennett, who also has been cool to an alliance with Arab parties.

Bennett, a former aide to Netanyahu, promised Tuesday to negotiate in "good faith," but made no promises to his former mentor.

Netanyahu's last hope will be to try to lure "defectors" from other opposition parties. For now, however, Netanyahu's opponents have vowed to stand firm, especially after the painful experience of the previous government.

Following elections last year, Netanyahu and his main rival at the time, Benny Gantz, agreed to an "emergency" government to confront the coronavirus crisis. Their partnership was plagued by infighting and collapsed in half a year, triggering the March 23 election.

"The chances of Netanyahu to form a government, as it seems right now, are quite low," said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank.

Looming over the negotiations will be Netanyahu's corruption trial, which resumed this week with testimony from the first of a string of witnesses to testify against him.

Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals. He denies the charges and this week compared the case to "an attempted coup."

Lapid, head of the centrist Yesh Atid party, acknowledged Tuesday that the law left Rivlin "no choice," but nonetheless said that tapping Netanyahu was a "shameful disgrace that tarnishes Israel."

Lapid has offered an alternative: a power-sharing arrangement with Bennett that would see the two men rotate between the prime minister's job. They are expected to hold intense negotiations in the coming weeks.

Plesner, a former Knesset member, said the partnership between Bennett and Lapid has "a reasonable likelihood of materializing."

Lapid would be able to deliver his key campaign promise of ousting Netanyahu, while Bennett, whose party has just seven seats, would be the first to be prime minister.

"For both of them, it's a very lucrative deal," Plesner said.

Gayil Talshir, a political scientist at Israel's Hebrew University, said that Netanyahu's opponents who share his hard-line ideology, including Bennett, would prefer to see him fail before banding together against him.

"Otherwise, they would've been thought of, from their own right-wing base perspective as traitors," she said.

The new parliament takes office at a time of deep polarization in Israeli society. Last month's election was seen as a referendum on Netanyahu's divisive leadership style, and the result was continued deadlock.

Netanyahu's supporters view him as a global statesman who is uniquely suited to leading the country. His opponents accuse him of pushing the country through repeated elections in hopes of producing a parliament that will grant him immunity from criminal prosecution.

In a sign of those divisions, about 100 protesters hoisted LGBT pride flags and a mock submarine in a noisy demonstration outside the Knesset as the new parliament was sworn in. The pride flags were aimed at the pro-Netanyahu Religious Zionists, whose members are openly homophobic, while the submarine points to a graft scandal involving the purchase of German subs.

As the new Knesset was sworn into office, Rivlin appealed for unity. It was the last time Rivlin will address such a gathering, and the outgoing president, who leaves office this summer, appeared emotional.

"If we do not learn and find a model of partnership that will allow us to live here together, out of mutual respect for each other, out of commitment to each other, and genuine solidarity, our national resilience will be in real danger," he said.

Official: EU agency to confirm AstraZeneca blood clot link

By NICOLE WINFIELD and PAN PYLAS Associated Press

ROME (AP) — A top official at the European Medicines Agency says there's a causal link between AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine and rare blood clots, but that it's unclear what the connection is and that

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the benefits of taking the shot still outweigh the risks of getting COVID-19.

Marco Cavaleri, head of health threats and vaccine strategy at the Amsterdam-based agency, told Rome's *Il Messaggero* newspaper on Tuesday that the European Union's medicines regulator is preparing to make a more definitive statement on the topic this week.

Asked about Cavaleri's comments, the EMA press office said its evaluation "has not yet reached a conclusion and the review is currently ongoing." It said it planned a press conference as soon as the review is finalized, possibly Wednesday or Thursday.

Based on the evidence so far, Cavaleri said there's a clear association between the AstraZeneca vaccine and the dozens of rare blood clots that have been reported worldwide amid the tens of millions of AstraZeneca shots that have been given out.

"It is becoming more and more difficult to affirm that there isn't a cause-and-effect relationship between AstraZeneca vaccines and the very rare cases of blood clots associated with a low level of platelets," Cavaleri was quoted as saying.

AstraZeneca did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Late in the day, however, the pharmaceutical company and Oxford University, which developed the vaccine, announced they were pausing the trial of their jabs in children while British regulators investigate the potential blood clot link in adults.

"Whilst there are no safety concerns in the pediatric clinical trial, we await additional information" from the British regulator, an Oxford spokesperson said in a statement.

In Geneva, the World Health Organization said its experts were also evaluating a possible link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and rare blood clots — and that it might have a "fresh, conclusive assessment" before Thursday.

In March, more than a dozen countries, including Germany, suspended using AstraZeneca over the blood clot issue. Most EU nations restarted on March 19 — some with age restrictions — after the EMA said the benefits of the vaccine outweighed the risks of not inoculating people against COVID-19. At the time, the EMA recommended the vaccine's leaflet be updated with information about the rare clots.

Any further doubts about the AstraZeneca vaccine would be a setback for the shot, which is critical to Europe's immunization campaign and a linchpin in the global strategy to get vaccines to poorer countries. The AstraZeneca vaccine is cheaper and easier to use than rival vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna and has been endorsed for use in over 50 countries, including by the 27-nation EU and the World Health Organization. U.S. authorities are still evaluating the vaccine.

Cavaleri said while EMA was prepared to declare a link, further study was still needed to understand why and how the phenomenon occurs.

He said the rare blood clots, including some in the brain, coupled with a low level of blood platelets that may make people at risk of serious bleeding, "seem to be the key event to study further." Cavaleri promised more details soon, adding: "In the coming hours, we will say that the link is there, how this happens we still haven't figured out."

Cavaleri said the biological mechanism for how the vaccine might be causing the rare clots was still unknown and if it was linked to how the shot is made, other vaccines with similar technologies might also need to be evaluated.

He stressed the risk-benefit analysis remained positive for the AstraZeneca jab, even for young women who appear to be more affected by the clots.

"Let's not forget that young women also end up in intensive care with COVID. So we need to do very meticulous work to understand if the risk-benefit analysis remains for all ages," he was quoted as saying.

He ruled out a preventive therapy to address the rare blood clots, saying there is still too much unknown about the phenomenon.

Even after the March 19 restart, the Dutch and German governments suspended the jabs for people under 60 and some Europeans have been shying away from getting a shot.

Romania's national vaccination committee's chief, Valeriu Gheorghita, said Tuesday that since March, 207,000 people in Romania had canceled their AstraZeneca vaccine appointments and another 92,000 simply didn't show up.

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"It is a high percentage, a third of people scheduled who did not show up," Gheorghita told reporters. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson declined to be drawn directly into the latest warnings about the vaccine but urged people to look at the advice from Britain's independent Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency.

"Their advice to people is to keep going out there, get your job, get your second job," he said during a visit Tuesday to an AstraZeneca facility in Macclesfield, in northwest England.

Last week, Britain's MHRA said seven people had died in the U.K. due to blood clots after getting the AstraZeneca jab. It said it wasn't clear if the shots are causing the clot and that it was undertaking a "rigorous review" into the reports. The agency said it had identified 30 blood clot cases out of 18.1 million AstraZeneca jabs given by March 24.

Adam Finn, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Bristol, said the latest surge of COVID-19 cases that is filling up hospitals across Europe should prompt people to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

"If you are currently being offered a dose of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, your chances of remaining alive and well will go up if you take the vaccine and will go down if you don't," he said.

World powers seek to bring US back into Iran nuclear deal

By DAVID RISING and ALEX SCHULLER Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Officials from five world powers began a new effort Tuesday to try to bring the United States back into the foundering 2015 nuclear deal they signed with Iran, a delicate diplomatic dance that needs to balance the concerns and interests of both Washington and Tehran.

The meeting in Vienna of envoys from Russia, China, Germany, France, Britain and Iran came as the U.S. was due to start its own indirect talks with Iran. It would be one of the first signs of tangible progress in efforts to return both nations to the accord, which restricted Iran's nuclear program in return for relief from U.S. and international sanctions.

Following the closed meetings of the signatories to the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Russia's delegate, Mikhail Ulyanov, tweeted that the initial talks were "successful."

"The restoration of JCPOA will not happen immediately. It will take some time. How long? Nobody knows," he wrote. "The most important thing after today's meeting of the Joint Commission is that practical work towards achieving this goal has started."

In 2018, then-President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. unilaterally out of the accord, opting for what he called a maximum-pressure campaign involving restored and additional American sanctions.

Since then, Iran has been steadily violating restrictions in the deal, like the amount of enriched uranium that it can stockpile and the purity to which it can be enriched. Tehran's moves have been calculated to pressure the other nations in the deal to do more to offset crippling U.S. sanctions reimposed under Trump.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who was vice president under Barack Obama when the original deal was negotiated, has said he wants to bring the U.S. back into the JCPOA but that Iran must reverse its violations.

Iran argues that the U.S. violated the deal first with its withdrawal, so Washington has to take the first step by lifting sanctions.

Following the meeting in Vienna, Iranian state television quoted Iran's negotiator, Abbas Araghchi, as reiterating that message during the opening round of talks.

"Lifting U.S. sanctions is the first and the most necessary action for reviving the deal," Araghchi was quoted as saying. "Iran is fully ready to reverse its activities and return to complete implementation of the deal immediately after it is verified sanctions are lifted."

At the meeting, participants agreed to establish two expert-level groups, one on the lifting of sanctions and one on nuclear issues, which were "tasked to identify concrete measures to be taken by Washington and Tehran to restore full implementation of JCPOA," Ulyanov tweeted.

They are to start work immediately, and report their conclusions to the main negotiators.

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

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amount it had before the nuclear deal was signed.

In the latest announced violation, Behrouz Kamalvandi, a spokesman for Iran's civilian nuclear program, said officials had begun mechanical testing of an IR-9 prototype centrifuge. That centrifuge would enrich uranium 50 times faster than the IR-1s allowed under the accord, he said, according to the semi-official ISNA news agency.

The clock is ticking on trying to get the U.S. back into the deal, with the goal of returning Iran to compliance, with a number of issues to consider.

In late February, Iran began restricting international inspections of its nuclear facilities, but under a last-minute deal worked out during a trip to Tehran by Rafael Grossi, the head of the Vienna-based U.N. atomic watchdog, some access was preserved.

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

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in March also urged the U.S. to act quickly, noting that as his country's June elections approach, Washington will find itself dealing with a government unable to make progress in the nuclear talks.

In addition, one of the JCPOA's major so-called sunset clauses, a United Nations arms embargo on Iran, expired last year and others are set to expire in the coming years.

The small window for negotiation will make it even more difficult for the U.S. to try to bring new concerns into the deal, such as Iran's regional influence and its ballistic missile program.

Though not taking part in the JCPOA talks, a U.S. delegation headed by the administration's special envoy for Iran, Rob Malley was also in the Austrian capital.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the delegation was there to hold talks structured around the working groups being formed by the Europeans.

Price said Monday the talks are a "healthy step forward" but added that "we don't anticipate an early or immediate breakthrough, as these discussions, we fully expect, will be difficult."

"We don't anticipate at present that there will be direct talks with Iran," he said. "Though of course we remain open to them. And so we'll have to see how things go."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday there was value to having U.S. diplomats on the ground in Vienna even though they won't be in direct talks with Iran.

"I think it's important to convey to our partners ... that we believe diplomacy is the best step forward," Psaki said.

Zarif on Friday reiterated Iran's position that no additional talks on the JCPOA are needed, since the deal and its parameters have already been negotiated.

"No Iran-US meeting. Unnecessary," he tweeted.

The JCPOA Joint Commission was expected to meet again Friday, and in the meantime, Enrique Mora, the European Union official who chaired the talks, said he would be reaching out individually to all sides.

"As coordinator I will intensively separate contacts here in Vienna with all relevant parties, including U.S.," he tweeted.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric, asked for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' reaction to the meetings, said: "We welcome all of these efforts by the JCPOA participants ... to hold constructive dialogue. We hope this is a first step in the right direction."

Floyd's family takes its seat in ex-officer's murder trial

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A member of George Floyd's family often occupies a reserved seat in the back corner of the Minneapolis courtroom where former police Officer Derek Chauvin is on trial in Floyd's death. The seat reserved for Chauvin's family goes unclaimed.

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Floyd's younger brother Philonise Floyd, of Houston, has attended several days of the trial to bear witness on behalf of his family. He has watched the often-excruciating bystander, police body camera and security videos of his brother's fatal encounter with Chauvin on May 25, and listened to testimony from eyewitnesses and police.

"This is life-changing," Philonise Floyd said during a break in the proceedings. "All this testimony is so hard on everyone."

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

Nobody from Chauvin's family has taken the seat they're entitled to use. It usually has been occupied by a bailiff. Chauvin was recently divorced, and few details have emerged about the rest of his family. Courtroom seating has been strictly limited due to coronavirus concerns. Only two rotating pool reporters are allowed in at a time, but they're able to observe what's not on the official video feed, including the family and the jury.

Any additional Floyd family members present must watch from another room, and they're getting support from outside the courtroom. While admission to the courthouse is strictly limited, civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump, who represents the Floyd family, and the Rev. Al Sharpton were seen there Tuesday morning with some members of the Floyd family, waiting for an elevator. Gwen Carr, the mother of the late Eric Garner, was with them. Sharpton, Crump and Carr held a prayer vigil with members of the family outside the courthouse during the midday break Tuesday.

Philonise Floyd told reporters he's been trying to stop crying and has kept a box of tissues on the floor next to his chair. He said his family members and seemingly everyone he meets in Minneapolis can't stop crying, either. But he said he's grateful for the support his family is getting from the community, including the protesters who often gather outside the courthouse.

He was in the courtroom last week as George Floyd's girlfriend, Courtney Ross, recounted both happy and sad times during their relationship — and their struggles with opiate addiction. He paid close attention, sometimes hanging his head as she recounted their life together, as part of prosecutors' efforts to humanize George Floyd to the jury by portraying him as more than a crime statistic and giving a sympathetic explanation for his drug use.

At one point Philonise Floyd shook his head and turned his eyes away from the TV screen as it showed his brother laying unresponsive on a stretcher. But the jurors watched closely and stopped taking notes. A Black juror covered her mouth. Philonise Floyd rubbed the top of his head in distress as he lowered his head almost between his knees.

Rodney Floyd, George Floyd's youngest brother, who also came up from Houston for the trial, heard tearful testimony last week from Charles McMillian, an older bystander who recognized Chauvin from the neighborhood. McMillian told the officer after an ambulance took Floyd away that he didn't respect what Chauvin had done.

During a graphic video of officers struggling with George Floyd inside and then outside the squad car, yelling "Mama" and "I can't breathe," Rodney Floyd held his hands and looked down, shaking his head, refusing to watch. He later told a reporter in the hallway, through tears, that he did watch some of the video out of the corner of his eye.

He watched at least some of the other videos too. His jaw visibly clenched and his head shook as he heard his brother's cries for help. But he turned his head as one video showed Chauvin's knee on his brother's neck.

Rodney Floyd watched as body camera video from Officer Thomas Lane showed Lane approach the SUV that George Floyd was driving. The video showed the officer ordering his brother to show his hands, then drawing his gun and using expletives as he demands that Floyd put his hands on the wheel. Rodney Floyd shook his head from side to side, as if to signal "no." He glared briefly at Chauvin at one point. But he mostly endured the video, looking stoic and sad, hugging his midsection lightly and swiveling just a

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bit in his chair.

Subrina Montgomery, one of several relatives who lives in the Minneapolis area, attended a day of jury selection and told reporters she hadn't learned that she was a cousin to Floyd until after his death. She said she wished she had known of the relationship so she could have met with him.

Shareeduh Tate, a Floyd cousin from Houston, who also attended a day of jury selection, told a reporter she had been encouraged by the often-emotional testimony from bystanders who pleaded with the officers to ease up.

"I could almost feel like I was living in that moment with them," she said. "Countless times I myself have wished I had been able to intervene."

EXPLAINER: Can Biden add energy jobs? Hope mixes with doubt

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Good-paying jobs — many of them.

That's the seductive idea around which President Joe Biden is proposing a vast transformation of the energy sector, with the promise of making it far more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly. As Biden portrays it, his plan to invest in infrastructure — and accelerate a shift to renewable energy and electric vehicles, to more efficient homes and upgrades to the power grid — would produce jobs at least as good as the ones that might be lost in the process.

His plans call for 100% renewable energy in the power sector by 2035. To people who have devoted careers to the fossil fuel industries, those plans may look more like a dire threat. To the president, though, out-of-work oil workers could be shifted to other jobs — plugging uncapped oil wells, for example — and thousands more positions would be created to help string power lines and build electric vehicles and their components.

"We think that's a lot of jobs to fill, and one of the key questions is: How do we build the right skill base that can help fill those jobs?" said Matt Sigelman, CEO of Burning Glass Technologies, a labor market analytics firm.

The outlook for the energy industry's coming decades, as Biden's plan would have it, includes good wages and good benefits, reinforced by a revival of labor unions.

"I'm a union guy," he said at a union training center in Pittsburgh. "I support unions, unions built the middle class, and it's about time they started to get a piece of the action."

A speedier transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy would hardly be as simple as longtime wildcaters transforming themselves into solar installers. So many unknowns overhang the shift toward greener energy that no one knows how the industries and its jobs will evolve in the coming years.

For one thing, many experts say the transition to electric vehicles will likely mean fewer factory workers than are now employed in producing internal combustion engines and complex transmissions. EVs have 30% to 40% fewer moving parts than vehicles that run on petroleum.

Yet economists have warned that climate change poses such a grave threat that the United States must accelerate its transition to renewable energy to ensure its economic security.

COULD GREEN-ENERGY JOBS REALLY REPLACE LOST FOSSIL-FUEL JOBS?

Even with favorable policies, it can take generations to create jobs in individual industries. During his presidency, for example, Barack Obama encouraged tax incentives for the development of solar and wind energy. That effort did achieve some progress. Yet solar and wind remain to this day small sectors of the overall energy industry.

"If you're thinking about incentives and disincentives, it's easy to kill something; it's hard to create something," said Rob Sentz, chief innovation officer at Emsi, a data analytics firm.

The renewable energy industry employed about 410,000 people in 2019, including those in the solar, wind, geothermal, hydroelectric, biomass and biofuels industries, according to Burning Glass. By comparison, employment for oil and gas alone in 2020 was 516,000 counting extraction, pipelines, refining and other elements of the industry. An additional 485,000 people were working at gas stations, though gas station

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jobs are technically classified as retail, according to Burning Glass.

"It's a pipe dream to imagine that we're going to achieve full decarbonization in a short period of time," Sigelman said. "Jobs in the carbon economy will continue in great numbers for some time to come."

That said, Sigelman estimates that the renewable energy industry could grow up to 22% over the next five years to a total of 465,000 jobs.

WHAT ABOUT PAY?

It depends on the type of job — and whom you ask. Many in the oil and gas industry say they fear that their wages would shrink if they transitioned to a job in renewable energy. But many economists say incomes might be comparable, whether a worker is laboring in an oil field or a wind farm.

The median annual pay of solar installers was about \$44,650 in 2020, according to Emsi. For wind turbine service technicians it was about \$52,100.

In the oil industry, derrick operators, rotary drill operators, service unit operators and excavating and loading machine operators earned median annual pay ranging from \$44,700 to \$55,000, Emsi says. The median for roustabouts and extraction work helpers was \$37,000 to \$39,000.

Oil and gas field service technicians earn a median of about \$39,000 a year, Sigelman said. Those workers could, in theory, transition into such areas as electrical technician work, which pays roughly \$25,000 more a year, or construction foreman jobs, whose median is about \$27,000 more per year.

SOME JOBS SPAN THE DIVIDE

One point often missed in any debate over green energy vs. fossil fuel jobs is that the line between the two can blur. To install wind turbines, for example, you need truckers, electricians and mechanics.

"It's the same people doing the work," Sentz said. "You call it green, but it's still a trucker."

Likewise, jobs involved in installing or repairing power and transmission lines are critical to both the renewable energy and fossil fuel industries. The renewables growth that Biden envisions will need a massive buildout of transmission and power lines to deliver electricity from the solar farms and wind farms on sunny plains to energy-gulping coasts. Whether for fossil fuel or renewable projects, electrical workers who string the lines are already in demand.

The number of advertisements for job postings in the electric power distribution industry grew 35% in the past two years, Emsi says, and the number for jobs in power and communication line construction rose 63%.

"They're having a hard time finding the people they need for the jobs they're doing," Sentz said.

Power line installers, in demand everywhere, earn around \$72,000 a year, higher than some others in the energy sector, according to Emsi.

"Every county in the country needs them," Sentz said.

An electrician who spent 20 years working on transmission lines for coal-fired power plants will be in high-demand when building infrastructure for renewable energy projects, and those tend to be union jobs, said Bob Keefe, executive director of E2, a nonpartisan group that advocates for policies that serve the economy and the environment.

"Stringing power lines is stringing power lines," Keefe said. "We're just doing it better and more efficiently and hooking them up to the right places that need it to move some of the renewable energy that we're producing now where it needs to be."

ARE OLD JOBS DISAPPEARING FASTER THAN NEW ONES ARE APPEARING?

It's hard to say. The oil, gas and chemical industries lost 107,000 jobs from March to August last year, according to a Deloitte study. That occurred after the pandemic crushed demand for jet fuel and gasoline as tens of millions of people stayed home.

Coal mining jobs have been declining for years, from a high of 92,000 workers in 2011 to 52,804 in 2019, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Biden wants to spend \$16 billion to put hundreds of thousands of those people back to work capping unplugged oil wells and mines. Any such spending, though, would need congressional approval, so the number of jobs that might be created remains unclear.

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Offshore wind projects in the United States generated about 7,500 jobs in 2020. And projects developed off U.S. coasts are expected to produce 85,000 jobs over the next decade, though those jobs aren't necessarily filled within the United States, according to Rystad Energy, a consulting firm. Many construction and maintenance jobs are handled outside the U.S. despite the project sites off American shores.

Meanwhile, demand grew for solar sales representatives by 70%, based on the number of job postings, and for solar installers by 56% from 2019 through 2020, according to Burning Glass. It's unclear, though, whether the number of workers employed in such jobs increased or declined because the pandemic delayed many solar installation projects.

No one disputes, though, that it will take time for a majority of workers in the fossil fuel industries to be able to find work in renewables.

"It's going to be incumbent on companies to help their existing workers adapt," Sigelman said.

Myanmar forces arrest comedian, break up doctors' protest

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Authorities in Myanmar arrested the country's best-known comedian on Tuesday as they continue to crack down on people they accuse of helping incite nationwide protests against February's military coup.

The comedian Zarganar was taken from his home in Yangon by police and soldiers who arrived in two army vehicles, fellow comedian Ngepyawkyaw said on his own Facebook page. Zarganar, 60, is a sharp-tongued satirist who has been in and out of prison since he was active in a failed 1988 popular uprising against a previous military dictatorship. He is also well known for his social work, especially arranging assistance for victims of Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

In the past week, the junta has issued arrest warrants for about 100 people active in the fields of literature, film, theater arts, music and journalism on charges of spreading information that undermines the stability of the country and the rule of law. It was not immediately clear what Zarganar, whose real name is Maung Thura, has been charged with.

Many ordinary protesters and activists are also being arrested every day, according to numerous reports on social media.

In Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, security forces used stun grenades and fired guns Tuesday to break up a march by medical workers who have defiantly continued to protest almost every day against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The army's takeover set back Myanmar's gradual return to democracy after five decades of military rule.

A participant who asked to remain anonymous for his own safety told The Associated Press that doctors, nurses and medical students were attacked as they gathered at about 5 a.m. by security forces who also used cars to run into protesters on motorbikes. The online news site The Irrawaddy reported that four doctors were arrested.

At least 570 protesters and bystanders, including 47 children, have been killed in the crackdown since the takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests. The group says 2,728 people, including Suu Kyi, are in detention.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said U.N. officials in Myanmar are "deeply concerned" about the impact of the continuing violence on the country's health system, pointing to at least 28 attacks against hospitals and health personnel since Feb. 1. And they are also concerned at violence against the education system, pointing to 7 attacks against schools and school personnel since the coup, he said.

"Health volunteers are attacked, and attacks against ambulances are preventing life-saving help reaching civilians wounded by security forces," Dujarric said.

Activists have begun organizing a boycott of next week's official celebration of Thingyan, the country's traditional New Year, usually a time for family reunions and merry-making.

In leaflets and social media posts, they are imploring people not to hold any Thingyan celebrations, saying it would be disrespectful to "fallen martyrs" to enjoy the festival.

The leaders of Brunei and Malaysia announced Monday that leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian

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Nations will meet to discuss the situation in Myanmar.

No date was given in the announcement, issued during a visit by Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to Brunei. He and Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah said they "expressed serious concern on the ongoing crisis in Myanmar and the rising number of fatalities." Indonesian President Joko Widodo had proposed a summit on Myanmar last month.

There was no word on whether the ASEAN leaders would participate in person or by video, or if Myanmar, one of the group's 10 members, would attend.

Myanmar's junta also has been battling in some border areas where ethnic minority groups maintain their own armed forces. Several major groups, most notably the Karen and the Kachin, have expressed solidarity with the anti-coup movement and vowed to protect protesters in the territory they control.

The Kachin in the country's north have engaged in combat with government forces, but the Karen in the east have borne the brunt of the junta's military assaults.

The area where the Karen National Union holds sway has been subject to air attacks by the Myanmar military from March 27 through Monday, said David Eubank of the Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian organization that has for many years provided medical assistance to Karen villagers. Burma is another name for Myanmar.

Eubank said his group has verified that 14 civilians died and more than 40 were wounded in the air strikes. He said Tuesday that Myanmar's military is mounting a ground offensive into Karen territory, driving villagers from their homes and increasing the number of displaced people in the area to more than 20,000, many of whom have to hide in caves or the jungle and are in desperate need of food and other necessities.

"The situation now seems, from our perspective, to be all-out war to the finish," Eubank wrote Monday in an emailed message. "Unless there is a miracle, the Burma Army will not hold back in their attempt to crush the Karen and any other ethnic group that stands against them, just as they have not held back killing their own Burman people in the cities and plains of Burma."

Capitol police officer to lie in honor at rotunda April 13

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The 18-year U.S. Capitol Police veteran killed in the line of duty is being remembered as a man with a sense of humor who loved baseball and golf and was most proud of one particular title: Dad.

William "Billy" Evans, 41, was killed Friday when a vehicle rammed into Evans and another officer at a barricade just 100 yards from the Capitol. The driver, Noah Green, 25, came out of the car with a knife and was shot to death by police, officials said. Investigators believe Green had been delusional and increasingly having suicidal thoughts.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., announced Tuesday that Evans will lie in honor in the United States Capitol Rotunda on April 13, a tribute reserved for the nation's most eminent private citizens.

The U.S. Capitol Police also released a statement from Evans family, saying: "His death has left a gaping void in our lives that will never be filled."

Evans, a father of two, grew up in North Adams, Massachusetts, a close-knit town of about 13,000 in the northwest part of the state.

Jason LaForest knew Evans for more than 30 years. He was a close friend of Evans' older sister, Julie, and recalled Evans as a prankster who made sure the subjects of his jokes laughed as well.

"As a young kid, Billy, of course, was the annoying little brother of one of my best friends, a title which he held on to for most of his life," said LaForest, a North Adams city councilman. "But it was a joy to watch him grow up and become a talented athlete and a dedicated police officer, and, of course, the role in life that he loved the most, which was a dad."

Sports, particularly baseball, was another important part of Evans' life.

"He came from a long line of family members that loved baseball and especially the Boston Red Sox,"

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LaForest said. "He excelled in baseball and enjoyed playing baseball most of his life. It's a passion that he instilled in his children."

Evans' father, Howard, died about seven years ago. His mother, Janice, still lives in Massachusetts.

He attended Western New England University, graduating in 2002 as a criminal justice major. He joined the Capitol Police the next year.

Robert E. Johnson, the university's president, said in a statement that Evans was a member of the school's baseball and bowling teams and the campus activities board. He said that Evans' friends at the university described him as "extremely welcoming and friendly, humble, and always willing to help others."

John Claffey, a professor of criminal justice, said that when news of Evans' death first aired, he had the sense that he knew that smile. "I immediately said that's a face I recognize," Claffey said.

He recalled Evans as a student who knew what he wanted to do — a "very focused kid."

Over the weekend, Claffey received four calls from former students who just wanted to talk to him about Evans.

"This has shaken a lot of people's worlds," he said. "A lot of people from Western New England, who haven't been here in 18 years, it's still having an impact on them."

Members of Evans' family said in the statement through the U.S. Capitol Police that the most important thing in Evans' life was his two children, Logan and Abigail.

"His most cherished moments were those spent with them -- building with Lego, having lightsaber duels, playing board games, doing arts and crafts, and recently finishing the Harry Potter series," the family said. "He was always so eager to show how proud he was of everything they did. Any opportunity to spend time with his children brightened both their lives and his. Their dad was their hero long before the tragic events of last week."

The family said Evans was proud of his job and that his friendship with colleagues near the "North Barricade" of the Capitol complex was one of the best parts of his job.

"We hold them in our hearts, as we know they acutely share our grief," the family's statement read.

The death of Evans came nearly three months after the Jan. 6 rioting at the Capitol that left five people dead, including Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick. He died a day after the insurrection.

Lawmakers issued a wave of statements offering their condolences and gratitude to Evans after the Good Friday attack. Capitol Hill aides and members of the press corps that cover Capitol Hill also weighed in, recalling him as friendly and professional.

In a joint statement released Tuesday, Schumer and Pelosi said they hoped next week's tribute in the Capitol Rotunda would provide comfort to Evans' family and express the nation's gratitude to members of the U.S. Capitol Police.

"In giving his life to protect our Capitol and our Country, Officer Evans became a martyr for our democracy. On behalf of the entire Congress, we are profoundly grateful," Schumer and Pelosi said.

LaForest said Evans never considered himself to be a hero.

"He wanted to serve his country as a Capitol police officer and looked forward to seeing lawmakers and visitors who came to the Capitol every day, many of whom became friends of Billy's in large part because of his good-natured sense of humor," LaForest said. "And, unfortunately, Billy paid the ultimate price defending his country."

Olympic gold: Colleges, Team USA search for new ways to win

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — It's a point of pride that stretches across dozens of universities, many of them rivals, and all the college sports leagues, many of which compete for the same dollars and the same talent. As one banner on the Pac-12 conference's website puts it: "Olympians made here."

The coronavirus pandemic, along with the substantial changes in the college-sports business model that will come into play as soon as this year, have led many leaders in both the college and Olympic worlds to wonder if that will still be true a decade from now.

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In one question from a survey sent by The Associated Press to Division I college athletic directors across the country, nearly 65% of those who responded said "Yes" when asked if the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee should pay part of the bill to the universities that run sports programs that, in turn, feed the U.S. Olympic pipeline.

At stake is a stretch of Olympic dominance that has seen the U.S. win a world-leading 678 medals in both Summer and Winter Olympics since 2000. A huge portion of that success is underwritten by a college industry that, according to one estimate, spends \$5 billion a year on Olympic sports programs. At the Rio Games in 2016, nearly 80% of America's 558 athletes competed in a college program.

"The fact that we're one of the few countries that competes at the level we do on the Olympic stage without having government fund the program is because of college athletics and what it does to develop Olympic athletes," said Florida AD Scott Stricklin.

Stricklin is chairing a task force that includes about two dozen leaders of major programs and conferences who are looking for ways to keep the pipeline running. The mission takes on an even greater sense of urgency with the United States poised to host its first Summer Olympics in a generation in 2028. A key question looming over those home games is whether America's colleges will be able to produce world-class athletes at the same clip they have over the past several decades.

The AP sent its survey to all 357 ADs in Division I, and received 99 responses to multiple-choice questions about their views of how upcoming changes will affect the college-sports landscape. The ADs were also given a chance to add comments, and they were granted anonymity in exchange for candor.

The Olympics question received a jarringly high number of "Yes" answers to a proposal that might not be a true reflection of what's possible – the USOPC depends on the largesse of the colleges to develop talent more than the other way around – but rather, on how concerned the universities are about their ability to keep operating business as usual.

"I think it's important to get the conversation going because NCAA is a vital piece in the Olympic process," said gymnast Shane Wiskus, an Olympic hopeful who moved to the Olympic Training Center (OTC) in Colorado Springs after his college program, Minnesota, announced it would be shutting down its program.

"NCAA gymnastics has done a lot for me and I do fear that if changes aren't made, that could go away and maybe even affect the Olympic process," Wiskus said.

While Wiskus and other athletes who are good enough have an option to train at OTC and other centers funded by their individual sports' national governing bodies, a cut in college programs could strain that system. Before most athletes even reach that elite level, they're invested in years of expensive training and see limited opportunities for a payoff. A college scholarship has long been one of the key gateways for the fencers, gymnasts, rowers and others with an Olympic dream looming but a lack of resources to take that final step.

But most of the 85 programs cut by Division I universities since the coronavirus pandemic hit last year have involved Olympic sports. Next on the horizon are proposals being debated by the NCAA and in Congress that would allow players to cut sponsorship deals and make money off their names, likeness and images (NIL). A more far-reaching bill proposes revenue sharing between the sports programs and athletes.

Once any of these proposals go into play, it's likely that the billions of dollars generated by the two biggest sports on most campuses, football and men's basketball, will be further divvied up. That will leave less to be used to underwrite the dozens of Olympic sports that aren't self-sustaining.

In a related question in the AP survey, 73% of the ADs answered "Yes" to the question: "If your school were to offer compensation beyond scholarships to students, are there any sports that would lose funding or be cut by your school?"

Most of those sports feed the Olympic team.

A few of the most striking examples of the impact dwindling funds have already had on colleges:

—Last year, Stanford announced it was cutting nine Olympic sports from one of the nation's most prolific athletic departments; when Stanford's women's basketball team wrapped up the national championship Sunday night, it marked the 45th straight year the school has brought home some sort of title.

—The Clemson men's track team is being disbanded.

—The sport of men's gymnastics will lose two more programs – Iowa is joining Minnesota in shutting down – in continuing a steady decline for that sport that began well before COVID-19 hit.

"In America, the entire ecosystem is tethered back to football and basketball," said Sarah Wilhelmi, the USOPC's director of collegiate partnerships. "The thing we need to do is lean in and look at youth, college and elite sports across the board, up and down. We need to look at other opportunities we haven't thought of yet."

One that almost certainly won't work is asking the government to provide financial help. Though Congress is getting involved in shaping the look of both Olympic and college sports, the law passed in 1978 that governs the Olympic operation in the United States dictates that taxpayer money not be used to fund the team or its ancillary organizations.

"If football revenue is split with football players, that is fine," one AD wrote in the AP survey. "But if that were the case, there is no way those other women's sports can be sustained and the men's sports outside of football would have to be impacted as well. We cannot have it both ways."

It boils down to a stark reality that few people are willing to articulate: While many agree that football and basketball players are exploited for the free labor they produce to bankroll a billion-dollar industry, much of that revenue is sunk back into sports that bring gold medals back to America.

What the Olympic movement has to figure out is what to do about this relationship. Some propose linking events such as NCAA championships and U.S. national championships or Olympic trials to create more visibility and better illustrate the clear connection between the two levels.

Others see this as a time to completely blow up the college model and try to start over.

"If there's a different way to fund elite athletes through schools that's not coming through football, that's great," said Victoria Jackson, who teaches sports history at Arizona State. "But the problem now is, it's coming through football. If they can figure out a way to have the money come from some sort of Olympic development support instead of football, that would be a good thing for everyone."

Musician couple host concerts to fundraise for food pantry

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and EMILY LESHNER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When Erin Shields belted out "Being Alive" — the showstopper from the Broadway classic "Company" — the title had extra levels of meaning.

This virtual concert, broadcast from Shields' living room, helped fund the food pantry at Mosaic West Queens Church, which is feeding hungry residents of the Sunnyside neighborhood. It also gave Shields and her husband, David Shenton, an opportunity to resume their artistic lives.

The couple, touring musicians, lost gigs worldwide during the coronavirus pandemic. With the concerts, they've used their art to raise thousands of dollars.

It began when they saw the lines that stretched for blocks outside the pantry, which is near their apartment. Several friends had lost jobs after Broadway closed, and they felt the need to help.

"When your entire industry shuts down, you think, 'well, how are we going to do this?'" Shields said. "Seeing the people in line ..., you go, 'I can be that person and that could be my family member.'"

In September, they joined the volunteers at the church who distribute more than 1,000 boxes of food to families twice a week. As time passed, they felt the need to do more for others during the pandemic.

"I thought, I'm not a doctor ... I don't really have much to offer. But then I thought, well, you know, we can perform," said Shields, a soprano from Illinois who sings with her husband, a British composer, pianist and violinist. Other talented friends were willing to join for a good cause.

"We have all these connections to Broadway singers outside of their work on Broadway, so we wanted to capitalize on that," Shenton said.

During a recent concert, smiling families on Zoom clapped and sang along (on mute). Among the performers were Broadway musicians known for their work in everything from "Hamilton" and "The Little Mermaid" to "Tootsie" and "Les Misérables."

Shields sang crowd favorites, including "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" from "The Wizard of Oz" — she

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played Dorothy in her high school's production, her first big role. Shenton played a huge Bösendorfer 225 piano that he lovingly calls the couple's baby. He named it "Wolfgang Kathryn," in memory of his late mother and her favorite composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

For years, the couple have performed at churches in New York. And they're no strangers to good deeds — they've sung to older adults and Alzheimer's patients in Illinois, taught music to kids in Arizona and followed their passion for animal rights by traveling to Zimbabwe to take care of elephants and protect other vulnerable wildlife.

Shields said volunteering became especially important last year when New York turned into the epicenter of the pandemic, with the sirens of ambulances rushing patients to hospitals resounding throughout the city.

"It's just something my mom always said: 'If you're feeling low, volunteer, give back to other people, because it will make you feel better,'" Shields said. "And it's so true."

IMF upgrades forecast for 2021 global growth to a record 6%

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines and vast sums of government aid will accelerate global economic growth to a record high this year in a powerful rebound from the pandemic recession, the International Monetary Fund says in its latest forecast.

The 190-country lending agency said Tuesday that it expects the world economy to expand 6% in 2021, up from the 5.5% it had forecast in January. It would be the fastest expansion for the global economy in IMF records dating back to 1980.

In 2022, the IMF predicts, international economic growth will decelerate to a still strong 4.4%, up from its January forecast of 4.2%.

"A way out of this health and economic crisis is increasingly visible," IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath told reporters.

The agency's economists now estimate that the global economy shrank 3.3% in 2020 after the devastating recession that followed the coronavirus' eruption across the world early last spring. That is the worst annual figure in the IMF's database, though not as severe as the 3.5% drop it had estimated three months ago. Without \$16 trillion in global government aid that helped sustain companies and consumers during COVID-19 lockdowns, IMF forecasters say, last year's downturn could have been three times worse.

The U.S. economy, the world's biggest, is now forecast to expand 6.4% in 2021 — its fastest growth since 1984 — and 3.5% in 2022. The U.S. growth is being supported by President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion relief package, while an acceleration in the administering of vaccines is beginning to let Americans return to restaurants, bars, shops and airports in larger numbers.

The world's second-largest economy, China, which imposed a draconian COVID-19 clampdown a year ago and got a head start on an economic recovery, will record 8.4% growth this year and 5.6% in 2022, the IMF estimates.

The monetary fund expects the 19 countries that share the euro currency to collectively expand 4.4% this year and 3.8% in 2022. Japan is expected to register 3.3% growth this year and 2.5% next year.

Gopinath warned that the economic recovery is likely to be uneven. The rebound is expected to be slower in poor countries that can't afford massive government stimulus and in those dependent on tourism. Economic damage from the health crisis is "reversing gains in poverty reduction" and last year increased the ranks of extreme poor by 95 million compared with pre-pandemic projections.

She also predicted that "many of the jobs lost are unlikely to return" — because of trends accelerated by the pandemic, such as stepped-up automation and a shift toward e-commerce and away from brick-and-mortar stores.

A faster recovery in the United States means U.S. interest rates could rise "in unexpected ways," rattling financial markets and pulling investment out of hard-hit, debt-ridden emerging markets.

In the IMF's estimation, the global rebound will gradually lose momentum and return to pre-COVID levels of just above 3% growth. Countries will again encounter the obstacles they faced before the pandemic,

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including aging work forces in most rich countries and in China.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, April 7, the 97th day of 2021. There are 268 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 7, 1915, jazz singer-songwriter Billie Holiday, also known as "Lady Day," was born in Philadelphia.

On this date:

In 1862, Union forces led by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant defeated the Confederates at the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee.

In 1922, the Teapot Dome scandal had its beginnings as Interior Secretary Albert B. Fall signed a secret deal to lease U.S. Navy petroleum reserves in Wyoming and California to his friends, oilmen Harry F. Sinclair and Edward L. Doheny, in exchange for cash gifts.

In 1927, the image and voice of Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover were transmitted live from Washington to New York in the first successful long-distance demonstration of television.

In 1945, during World War II, American planes intercepted and effectively destroyed a Japanese fleet, which included the battleship Yamato, that was headed to Okinawa on a suicide mission.

In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower held a news conference in which he spoke of the importance of containing the spread of communism in Indochina, saying, "You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly." (This became known as the "domino theory," although Eisenhower did not use that term.)

In 1957, shortly after midnight, the last of New York's electric trolleys completed its final run from Queens to Manhattan.

In 1962, nearly 1,200 Cuban exiles tried by Cuba for their roles in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion were convicted of treason.

In 1966, the U.S. Navy recovered a hydrogen bomb that the U.S. Air Force had lost in the Mediterranean Sea off Spain following a B-52 crash.

In 1984, the Census Bureau reported Los Angeles had overtaken Chicago as the nation's "second city" in terms of population.

In 1994, civil war erupted in Rwanda, a day after a mysterious plane crash claimed the lives of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi; in the months that followed, hundreds of thousands of minority Tutsi and Hutu moderates were slaughtered by Hutu extremists.

In 2010, North Korea said it had convicted and sentenced an American man to eight years in a labor prison for entering the country illegally and unspecified hostile acts. (Aijalon Mahli Gomes was freed in August 2010 after former U.S. President Jimmy Carter secured his release.)

In 2015, Michael Thomas Slager, a white South Carolina police officer, was charged with murder in the shooting death of Black motorist Walter Lamer Scott after law enforcement officials saw a cellphone video taken by a bystander. (Slager pleaded guilty to federal civil rights charges and was sentenced to 20 years in prison; prosecutors agreed to drop state murder charges that remained after a jury couldn't agree whether he had committed a crime.)

Ten years ago: A man shot and killed 12 children at the Tasso da Silveira public school in Rio de Janeiro; the gunman, a onetime student at the school, shot and killed himself after being cornered by police. A powerful aftershock struck Japan near the same area that had been devastated by a mighty earthquake and tsunami nearly a month earlier; no giant wave or loss of life was reported.

Five years ago: Russian President Vladimir Putin denied any links to offshore accounts and described the Panama Papers document leaks scandal as part of a U.S.-led plot to weaken Russia. In a brazen assault near the Syrian capital, Islamic State militants abducted 300 cement workers and contractors from their workplace northeast of Damascus. "American Idol" crowned 24-year-old Trent Harmon its 15th and final

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winner as the influential TV show came to an end.

One year ago: Wisconsin went ahead with in-person voting after the state Supreme Court blocked the governor's order to postpone the primary; thousands waited in line in Milwaukee amid fears that the voting would bring a spike in the state's coronavirus cases. Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly resigned after lambasting the officer he'd fired as the captain of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, which had been stricken by a coronavirus outbreak; James McPherson was appointed as acting Navy secretary. President Donald Trump removed Glenn Fine, the acting Defense Department inspector general, who was supposed to oversee the \$2.2 trillion rescue package for businesses and individuals affected by the coronavirus.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Bobby Bare is 86. R&B singer Charlie Thomas (The Drifters) is 84. Former California Gov. Jerry Brown is 83. Movie director Francis Ford Coppola is 82. Actor Roberta Shore is 78. Singer Patricia Bennett (The Chiffons) is 74. Singer John Oates is 73. Former Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels is 72. Singer Janis Ian is 70. Country musician John Dittrich is 70. Actor Jackie Chan is 67. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Tony Dorsett is 67. Actor Russell Crowe is 57. Christian/jazz singer Mark Kibble (Take 6) is 57. Actor Bill Bellamy is 56. Rock musician Dave "Yorkie" Palmer (Space) is 56. Rock musician Charlie Hall (The War on Drugs) is 47. Former football player-turned-analyst Tiki Barber is 46. Actor Heather Burns is 46. Christian rock singer-musician John Cooper (Skillet) is 46. Actor Kevin Alejandro is 45. Retired baseball infielder Adrian Beltre is 42. Actor Sian Clifford is 39. Rock musician Ben McKee (Imagine Dragons) is 36. Christian rock singer Tauren Wells is 35. Actor Ed Speleers is 33. Actor Conner Rayburn is 22.