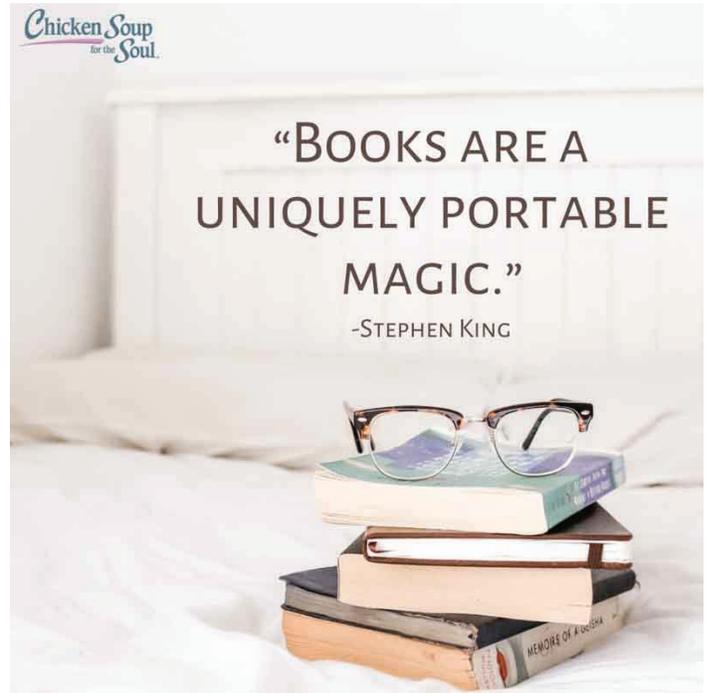


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NOW HIRING

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



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

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2020-21 Groton Area Girls Basketball Letter Winners
Front row: Brooke Gengerke, Allyssa Locke, Alyssa Thaler, Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Jaedyn Penning.
Back row: Anna Fjeldheim, Gracie Traphagen, Kenzie McInerney, Aspen Johnson, Sydney Leicht, Lydia Meier. Not pictured: Emma Schinkel. (Photo by Deb Gengerke)



2020-21 Groton Area Girls Basketball Individual Winners
Left to right: Allyssa Locke, Defensive MVP; Brooke Gengerke, Tiger Award; Gracie Traphagen, Offensive MVP and Second-Team All Northeast Conference (NEC); Kenzie McInerney, Northeastern SD Senior All-Star Game; Aspen Johnson, Hustle & Heart Award; Alyssa Thaler, Coaches Award; Talli Wright, Most Improved. (Photo by Deb Gengerke)

Dale Kurth is turning 80!

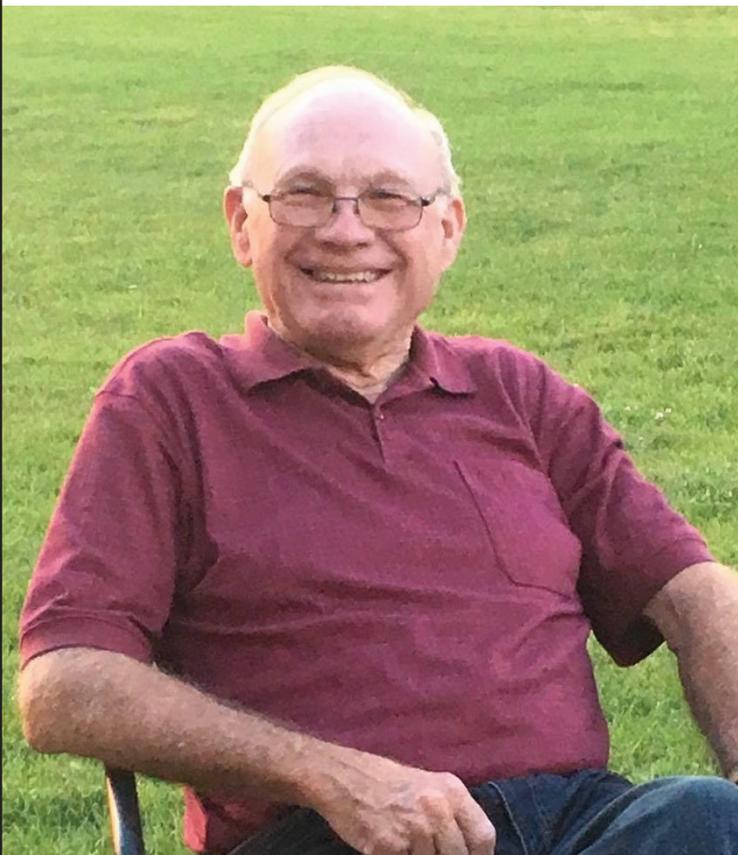
**April 11th is the day...so let's
get some cards sent his way!!**

Please send cards too:

Dale Kurth

41122 119th Street

Claremont, SD 57432



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Carry Nation's Drinking Problem

Deadwood was the wickedest city in America and Aberdeen had fewer righteous people in it than Sodom and Gomorrah.

Such were the beliefs that South Dakota newspapers attributed to prohibition activist Carry Amelia Nation. Nation, 1846-1911, was already famous for her hatchet-wielding, saloon-smashing activities when she came to South Dakota, first presenting her lecture "For God and Country" in Madison on Jan. 1, 1910. She went on to speak at several other locations throughout the state that year.

"Speaking forth a strong denunciation of the saloon, of republicans, tobacco users, democrats, members of the Masonic order and of all forms of vice, Mrs. Carrie Nation delivered an address Wednesday evening in the opera house before an audience of about two hundred," stated an article attributed to the Huronite that appeared in the Jan. 6, 1910, Philip Weekly Review. "Mrs. Nation spoke mostly of her experience as a 'saloon smasher' and of the course and reasons which impelled her to follow such a course in attacking that institution. At no time during her discourse did she display any hesitancy in speaking out her opinion, and she spared neither 'saint nor sinner' from her onslaughts."

Nation's efforts to get alcohol banned may have stemmed from quickly realizing after her marriage in 1867 to Charles Gloyd that he was an alcoholic.

Gloyd died in 1869 and Carry married David Nation, a journalist, lawyer and preacher 19 years her senior in 1874. David Nation divorced her in 1901 on the grounds of desertion. After the Nations moved to Medicine Lodge, Kan., in 1889, Carry began her temperance work by organizing a chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the most active group favoring the prohibition of alcohol.

Nation wrote in her autobiography that she "told the Lord to use me any way to suppress the dreadful curse of liquor." That "way" resulted in Nation going to Kiowa, Kan., in 1900, walking into saloons and smashing bottles of liquor, mirrors and other bar fixtures.

She continued her destructive tactics, attracting attention to herself and her cause. A hatchet became her preferred instrument of destruction, and she came to call her bar smashings "hatchetations."

By the time Nation arrived in South Dakota, newspapers reported she had decided that the spoken word was mightier than the hatchet. She had given up smashing saloons in favor of lecture tours.

To raise money, Nation sold copies of her autobiography, pictures of herself and miniature souvenir hatchets.

While most newspaper accounts spelled Nation's first name as "Carrie," the spelling "Carry" was used by her father in the family Bible. Nation told an audience in Centerville that "her name was not an accident, but the divine plan of God pointing out her life work to 'Carry A Nation's' burdens on her mind and heart, and use her talents for the world's betterment."

SOUTH DAKOTA

HISTORY & HERITAGE



The photograph is from the Gustav Johnson Collection of the State Archives. It was taken when she spoke in Philip in February 1910. Nation is third from the left, In the background are men standing in front of a saloon. (South Dakota State Historical Society – State Archives)

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Standing 6-feet tall, Nation must have presented a formidable presence when she lectured. The Lead Pioneer-Times described her as "Attired in a dress of dark material, and a little old-fashioned cap to match, with a touch of white lace at the throat in contrast ... Her eyes flash fire from behind the steel-bowed spectacles as she gives an audience the benefit of her observations."

While at Lemmon, Nation was a guest at a wedding. Nation fastened a "hatchet" on the bride and groom when congratulating the couple, "accompanying the act with appropriate remarks, urging them to 'carry a nation' for righteousness," reported the State-Line Herald.

Nation was often greeted with large crowds, curious to hear what the famous speaker had to say. While lecturing in Huron, she called President William Howard Taft "that rotten piece of meat at Washington."

She had her detractors, though.

"Carrie has a habit of consigning every one to hell but herself, and she must be anticipating a lonesome career through the eternal ages," noted the Citizen Republican in Scotland, S.D.

In Yankton, college boys sang drinking songs as the curtain went up at the opera house in which she spoke.

The Union County Courier in Elk Point noted, "She is worth seeing and hearing, but converts and convinces no one. She is an extremist, makes bold and unsupported assertions and is rightly regarded as a freak."

Nation spoke out against many things, but she was an advocate for woman suffrage and the rights of the poor and homeless.

She died a year after her lecture tour in South Dakota, on June 9, 1911.

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.

-30-

An article about Nation's lecture in Philip appeared in the March 3, 1920 Philip Weekly Review. It stated:

Aunt Carry in Philip

Mrs. Carry A. Nation, the noted saloon smasher, lectured in the Grand opera house Friday evening, under her own auspices. The announcement that she was to be here brought out a crowd that jammed the house, and many could not obtain seats.

The lecture itself was the same stereotyped talk given in every part of the country, but Mrs. Nation, at the same time, is keen enough to handle herself in any emergency that might arise. She is a rank prohibitionist, not only as pertains to the buying and sale of liquor, but in every fault to which the human race is subject. In her show of fire-eating, she lands into those who tolerate liquor and saloons, to the user of tobacco, and to the lodge joiner, and especially the masons.

From bitter experiences of her days, she is perhaps fitted to talk against intemperance and for strict prohibition. That she has no use for any of the political parties, except the straight-laced prohibitionists, she made manifest in few words.

Her basis for attack on secret societies is not founded on her own experiences, but from hearsay, and is most ill-advised. She has been denounced from the pulpit and through the press for her stand on the subject, but if there is anything the old lady likes it is a show of fight on the part of those she attacks. She challenges anyone who is a member of societies she attacks to prove that what she says is false, but this could not be done by the member of any secret order, without violation of obligations.

From the standpoint of the earnest advocates of the temperance cause, it is certain that Mrs. Nation is not getting them anything. To the average person, her crusade appears to be nothing but a huge graft, with herself along as the beneficiary.

Go it, Aunt Carry. You are most certainly the only thing in your line."

**Weber
Landscaping
Greenhouse
opening this
Spring!**



**We will have a full greenhouse of beautiful
annuals and vegetables.**

**Planning on opening May 1st but if weather
allows will be open sooner!**

**Located behind 204 N State St, Groton
(Look for the flags)**

**LET US HELP YOU BRIGHTEN
UP YOUR YARD!**

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#409 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I really hope we're just fluctuating around the weekend's reporting delay. There were 72,700 new cases reported today. To put that into perspective, this is close to last summer's ugly peak. That means we're up to 30,937,600 cases, a 0.2% increase in the total. Another day like this, and we'll be at 31 million tomorrow; if not, then Friday. There's a milestone I'd have happily forgone. Hospitalizations are up substantially to 43,044, some 5000 above our most recent low point on March 24. And there were 2476 deaths reported today; it's been six weeks since they were this high. We have now lost 558,515 lives to this virus in the US, 0.5% more than yesterday.

On April 7, 2020, one year ago today, the US had 395,090 cases and 12,786 deaths, setting a single-day record for deaths with 2491; the previous record, set on April 4 was 1421. While new case reports were slowing, deaths were increasing sharply; deaths are always a lagging indicator and so could be expected to continue to rise well after new cases leveled off. Physicians were starting to sound the alarm that we were seriously undercounting deaths because we were so short of tests that we were not confirming many of the cases before people died. Hospitals were reporting extreme shortages of supplies and staff, ventilators too.

Worldwide, there were 1,363,365 cases and 76,420 deaths. The US had the most cases followed by Spain and Italy, both under 150,000. Italy had the most deaths at 16,523 followed by Spain and the US.

A couple of days ago, I told you I'd seen this before—this pattern of increasing transmission followed by increasing hospitalization followed by increasing deaths. Here's another way the right-now looks a lot like the long-ago: In our first wave, the surge was led almost entirely by just a handful of states. Today, just about half of new cases are concentrated in five states; some of them are the same states too. Last time it was New York, New Jersey, Michigan, California, and Louisiana, with Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois, and Georgia rounding out the top 10. Today, it's New York, Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

It appears Minnesota may be following the path laid out by Michigan with increasing numbers of cases, an increasing proportion of them caused by B.1.1.7, a demographic shift to a younger population, and increased linkage to schools and sports. There has been some indication that the activities around sports—team travel and other gatherings—may be as large an issue as the practices and games themselves. A bit of better news is that, while younger people are finding themselves hospitalized more than earlier in the pandemic, children are still at very small risk for severe disease, hospitalization, and deaths. There have been severe cases and deaths among referees and coaches.

The patterns of transmission are different with this variant. We are seeing a great deal more spread to the community from children, something we were not seeing much previously. There is also a much higher attack rate within households; the likelihood of more household members being infected by another member of the household is greater too. Early in the pandemic, we were seeing a small number of cases doing almost all of the transmission, so that an outbreak was driven largely by a few superspreaders. Now we're seeing more people transmitting to a few others instead of few people transmitting to many others. This may be simply a reflection of higher transmissibility, which we already know is a feature of B.1.1.7; but it seems pretty clear schools are more a source of transmission in the community than before.

Here's a piece of good news: The CDC reported yesterday that 80 percent of Pre-K-12 teachers, school staff, and child care workers have received at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccine. That should go a fair way toward making schools safer, especially for the adults in them who at highest risk of serious disease. There was a real effort in March to reach all of those workers, and it appears to have worked.

Canada seems to be seeing the same demographic shift in cases and hospitalizations as we noted yesterday in Michigan. They also are seeing B.1.1.7 becoming predominant in many parts of the country; they're seeing increasing numbers of infections with P.1 too. More of the admitted patients are needing intensive care as well. I don't know the status of school closings/reopenings in the country, so I don't know whether they could be seeing impact from that as we did in Michigan. If there's not a school/sports link in young people in Canada, then it's going to start looking like B.1.1.7 does, indeed, favor young people,

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which would be a very bad thing.

We've administered over 171 million doses of vaccine in the US out of the 225 million delivered so far. We're still averaging over three million doses per day, although today was a bit under that. Over one-third of us (and over 40 percent of the 16-and-up population who are eligible) have received at least a dose and almost one in five are fully vaccinated. After last week's Pfizer data showing robust protection as long as six months after vaccination, Moderna released results today showing much the same thing for that vaccine.

A new paper from a group at the University of Oxford, published yesterday in *The Lancet Psychiatry*, looked at medical records for people who have had Covid-19. The work involved the records of nearly a quarter-million patients, most of them in the US. The comparison group was people who had suffered from other respiratory infections during the same time period. They found that, within six months of infection, more than one in three of these people were diagnosed with a neurological or psychological problem and that they were 16 percent more likely to develop these disorders than those with other respiratory infections. The disorders ranged from anxiety to strokes.

Those who were hospitalized were at highest risk, but even those with moderate cases had an elevated risk. Those who were very severely ill are more likely to develop neurologic complications, but mental health complications were seen across the spectrum of severity, and the psychological complications were more common. Two conditions which have been associated with other viral infections, Parkinson's disease and Guillain-Barre syndrome, were not seen more frequently in any of the folks with respiratory infections, whether Covid-19 or another infection. There have been other, smaller studies which have pointed to the same sorts of conclusions. When the study involves such a large sample of patient records as this one did, its findings tend to be more robust; so it seems quite likely there's really something here.

A point the study's authors made is that this indicates there will be a significant cost and burden on the health care system in the long term imposed by dealing with these sequelae. Paul Harrison, professor of psychiatry at the University of Oxford and a lead author, told CNN, "Although the individual risks for most disorders are small, the effect across the whole population may be substantial for health and social care systems due to the scale of the pandemic and that many of these conditions are chronic. As a result, health care systems need to be resourced to deal with the anticipated need, both within primary and secondary care services." Which translates to, "We're not finished with paying for this pandemic yet—not even close."

There's news from Europe's and the UK's regulators on the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. The European Medicines Agency (EMA), which is the EU's analogous agency to our FDA, stated in a news conference today that there is a "possible link" to these rare blood clots we've been hearing about. They also described this complication as "very rare," citing in data from Germany the incidence of reported clots as one in 100,000 doses given with a lower incidence in the UK. It was noted that this is less than the risk from birth control pills. They added that, after review of cases seen in the EU and the UK where about 25 million doses have been administered, most cases were in women younger than 60 and within two weeks of vaccination, but did not identify any particular risk factors. EMA's executive director added, "The risk of mortality from COVID is much greater than the risk of mortality from these side effects." The EMA has asked AstraZeneca to update their labeling to warn of this "extremely rare potential side effect(s)." Each country in the EU is free to make whatever regulations about administration of this vaccine that they see fit. Some are resuming vaccinations; others are still suspended; and still others will proceed with vaccination of people over 60. We're seeing a variety of different approaches outside of Europe as well.

Britain's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization also held a press conference today to discuss this vaccine, citing "strengthening evidence" of a link to the blood clots. This agency recommended this vaccine not be administered to adults under 30 where possible. The head of the Joint Committee said, "We are not advising a stop to any vaccination for any individual in any age group. We are advising a preference for one vaccine over another vaccine for a particular age group . . . out of the utmost caution rather than because we have any serious safety concerns." They also requested updated labeling with a similar warning.

In a separate statement, AstraZeneca said that "the vaccine offers a high-level of protection against all severities of COVID-19 and that these benefits continue to far outweigh the risks." There is still concern on the part of many who are working on vaccination efforts that the damage to the vaccine's credibility from

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the turmoil we've seen surrounding it have dealt a serious blow to vaccination efforts around the world, in much of which this is still the most available and affordable vaccine on the market. It could serve also to undermine confidence in all the other vaccines which have not had safety issues. No one needed this.

Here's something weird that's been showing up as a side effect from Covid-19 vaccine: a metallic taste in your mouth. It occurs very soon, almost immediately, after the vaccine is administered and generally lasts a day or two. Patients report it is quite intense, and it seems to be more common with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. No one is really sure what causes it because you don't have taste receptors for metallic flavors, so it's not like there is interference with one or another type of taste bud. We do know this also happens as a rare side effect with some other vaccinations; these new vaccines are not the only ones associated with it. One expert speculated to NBC News that it could be what's called a vagal response. This is related to a pair of nerves collectively called the vagus nerve that are involved in a whole lot of what goes on in your body; the relevant features here are that it coordinates the sensations of queasiness, sweating, light-headedness, and racing heartbeat you may feel when you are under stress. The thought is that these folks' vagus nerves are being stimulated with the injection and one manifestation of that would be this off taste sensation. I'm not equipped to evaluate the strength of the argument, so we'll leave it there. I'll add that this is in no way a dangerous or scary response, just an odd and unpleasant one. Something to note is that, when this occurs, it happens very quickly. If several hours or a day after your vaccination you experience alterations in your sense of taste, get in for a Covid-19 test; it's likely you're infected, not just having a side effect from the vaccine.

There's a new kid on the vaccine block, and it could make an enormous difference in getting the world vaccinated—if it works. Early-phase human trials just got underway in Brazil, Mexico, Thailand, and Vietnam; so we have a while to wait. It does have a good pedigree.

We've talked a lot about how vaccines work, how they take some antigenic component of this virus and get it into people so that we develop an immune response with immunological memory from the vaccine, arming us in advance for the day when we're exposed to the real virus. Whether the vaccine is mRNA, DNA, or a protein subunit, in every case what we're trying to do is expose you to the virus's spike (S) protein, the one that binds to our cells so the virus can make its way inside and replicate; interfering with the spike keeps that virus out.

There's a thing about that spike though: It changes shape as it infects your cells; it has what are called prefusion and postfusion forms. Fusion is when the virus melds its envelope into your cell membrane on its way in, and that's when it changes shape. So this spike protein has one specific shape that enables it to bind to, or fuse with, those ACE2 receptors on our cells; this would be the prefusion protein. Then as it crosses the cell membrane, it changes shape, yielding the postfusion protein. We've talked a few times about how critical shape is to protein function; turns out it's critical to our immune response too. Antibodies made against postfusion spikes don't work to prevent viral entry; they don't recognize the prefusion protein because it has a different shape. That means, when you're designing a Covid-19 vaccine, you want to make sure you're exposing the immune system to prefusion spikes, or your vaccine doesn't protect. (If you missed our latest discussion on protein structure and function or need a refresher, check out my Update #377 posted March 6, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4500262516656786>.)

So our story actually starts a few years ago in 2015 when MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) showed up, caused by MERS-CoV, a cousin of our good friend SARS-CoV-2 (which, of course, didn't exist yet then, at least not that we knew of). A structural biologist at Dartmouth, Jason McLellan, and a group of colleagues decided to make a vaccine against MERS, targeting the spike protein. That's when his team bumped up against this prefusion/postfusion protein problem; when they tried to make their vaccine, they had a whole lot of their spikes shifted to postfusion shapes so their vaccines didn't work. But the whole point of structural biology is stuff like this: the influence of protein structure on protein shape and of protein shape on protein function, so this was just their sort of problem. These folks started messing around with the structure of their S protein to see whether they could stabilize it in the prefusion form. This is an approximately 1000-amino-acid protein, and what they discovered is, if they substituted proline (a different amino acid) for a particular two of the original amino acids, they still had a functional, antigenically rec-

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ognizable spike, and it was sort of locked into its prefusion shape, the one they wanted. Problem solved. They called their modified spike 2P for the two prolines they'd tucked in there. They tested their vaccine in mice, and it worked great. They filed for a patent. And then MERS turned out to be sort of a non-issue. It doesn't transmit very easily, so it never really got underway as a pandemic-level virus and there was no way to even test a vaccine—not enough cases. So much for that.

Until this current mess. This time around, McLellan, now at the University of Texas at Austin was already familiar with coronavirus spikes, so his team got into the action early, designing a 2P version of the SARS-CoV-2 spike. That's the technology on which Moderna based its mRNA vaccine—the one designed over a long weekend last January. The design proved popular: Pfizer/BioNTech, Janssen/Johnson & Johnson, Novavax, and Sanofi are all using the 2P spike in their vaccines. And yes, McLellan is generally considered to be a genius in the vaccine community.

Rather than move on to the next interesting problem, the folks at UT Austin decided to try to improve their spike. They also had an eye to the issue of vaccinating the world. So McLellan and two colleagues, Illya Finkelstein and Jennifer Maynard, built some 100 spikes, each with its own substitution, tested them all, and then combined the ones that looked good, ending up with a spike protein with the original 2P substitutions plus four more proline substitutions. They called it HexaPro for the six prolines. This one was far more stable, less fragile than 2P. Then they set up the licensing so low- and middle-income countries could make vaccine using HexaPro without paying any licensing fees. And they got together with a non-profit focused on bringing vaccines (and other medicines) to underserved parts of the world called PATH – Center for Vaccine Innovation and Access to figure out how to develop a vaccine technology that could be produced in many countries at low cost without fancy technology and sophisticated factories; the ones in use in the US right now will always be a stretch for lower-income countries.

They went for the obvious: embryonated chicken eggs. This is how influenza vaccines are produced in countries all around the world at extremely low cost; it's a relatively low-tech, easy-to-implement platform. The embryos in those eggs, living things that are a whole lot cheaper to tend than tissue cultures in a lab, can make a lot of antigen for a vaccine in a hurry. So the collaboration set to work to see how they could put chick embryos to work making Covid-19 vaccine. And they got some help from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai where researchers had been messing around with Newcastle virus, which infects birds. You know—like chickens. These folks at Icahn knew how to engineer a nucleic acid into this virus, use it to infect embryonated eggs, and then let the eggs serve as little virus factories, replicating and replicating this modified virus. When they engineered HexaPro genes into their pet viruses and then infected the eggs, they ended up with viruses that carry a ton of HexaPro spikes on their surfaces, many of these spikes in the prefusion form. Perfect. They named their almost-vaccine NDV-HXP-S for Newcastle disease virus, HexaPro S.

They had a vaccine factory in Vietnam that usually makes flu vaccine run them up a batch, and they tested it in mice and hamsters. It worked! It didn't just work; it knocked this out of the park. It worked so well they needed only a few viruses in each dose, which means it could be easier, faster, and cheaper to produce lots of doses than they originally expected. It is important to remember, however, that it worked in mice: no idea yet how it works in people. That's next, thus the early-stage clinical trials just getting underway in Brazil, Mexico, Thailand, and Vietnam. The trials are being Vietnam's Institute of Vaccines and Medical Biologicals. And they've licensed the vaccine to Mexico's Avi-Mex to see whether they can make an intranasal vaccine work. Just think how fast you could give this stuff out: no needles, just a puff into your nose. And think of a vaccine of any kind that is locally produced, no reliance on global supply chains, no waiting until the rich countries have what they need. It's a ways off—probably next year at the soonest, but current projections say much of the world will still be trying to get enough vaccine next year. If this stuff works, maybe, just maybe, the next pandemic—and there will most certainly be a next pandemic—will look very different. I'm in favor of that.

This is the longest and most sciencey closing story I've ever employed; but it makes me happy, and since this is my Update, that's good enough for me. So there you go.

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	906	15	Minimal	9.5%
Beadle	2882	2796	6199	40	Substantial	8.5%
Bennett	387	378	1214	9	Minimal	11.8%
Bon Homme	1515	1480	2186	26	Moderate	3.1%
Brookings	3907	3724	12837	37	Substantial	8.3%
Brown	5356	5174	13408	91	Substantial	9.4%
Brule	699	688	1950	9	Minimal	2.0%
Buffalo	423	408	910	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	1013	985	3363	20	Minimal	6.6%
Campbell	130	126	270	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1356	1300	4150	21	Substantial	5.8%
Clark	428	399	987	5	Substantial	19.2%
Clay	1877	1834	5708	15	Substantial	3.9%
Codington	4252	4097	10154	80	Substantial	8.8%
Corson	476	463	1032	12	Minimal	6.7%
Custer	798	765	2826	12	Moderate	14.8%
Davison	3133	2991	6950	66	Substantial	13.2%
Day	682	644	1881	29	Minimal	5.4%
Deuel	497	483	1197	8	Moderate	19.4%
Dewey	1443	1409	3963	26	Minimal	5.0%
Douglas	450	432	962	9	Moderate	11.8%
Edmunds	497	475	1106	13	Minimal	5.6%
Fall River	569	546	2769	15	Moderate	3.5%
Faulk	365	351	720	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	1016	959	2381	42	Moderate	5.7%
Gregory	573	533	1351	30	Moderate	6.9%
Haakon	261	249	565	10	None	0.0%
Hamlin	758	702	1879	38	Moderate	16.7%
Hand	355	347	868	6	None	0.0%
Hanson	381	372	776	4	Minimal	10.5%
Harding	92	91	189	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2392	2316	6899	37	Substantial	5.1%
Hutchinson	857	789	2519	26	Substantial	13.8%

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Hyde	140	137	439	1	Minimal	7.1%
Jackson	285	270	942	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	273	257	585	16	None	0.0%
Jones	93	92	244	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	763	690	1772	14	Substantial	25.8%
Lake	1325	1256	3612	18	Substantial	3.7%
Lawrence	2905	2835	8838	45	Moderate	5.9%
Lincoln	8346	8033	21405	77	Substantial	10.1%
Lyman	627	608	1958	11	Moderate	3.8%
Marshall	364	356	1272	6	Minimal	0.0%
McCook	796	755	1751	24	Substantial	17.5%
McPherson	243	236	593	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2708	2646	8050	31	Moderate	7.0%
Mellette	255	252	770	2	Minimal	3.3%
Miner	293	277	611	9	Moderate	18.8%
Minnehaha	30205	28928	82810	344	Substantial	12.2%
Moody	627	604	1833	17	Minimal	1.3%
Oglala Lakota	2089	2030	6853	49	Moderate	3.6%
Pennington	13315	12997	41011	191	Moderate	6.1%
Perkins	352	337	848	14	Minimal	0.0%
Potter	387	382	878	4	Minimal	3.3%
Roberts	1324	1256	4372	38	Substantial	8.4%
Sanborn	340	333	724	3	Minimal	9.5%
Spink	826	793	2220	26	Minimal	4.5%
Stanley	339	337	989	2	Minimal	0.0%
Sully	137	133	331	3	Minimal	20.0%
Todd	1219	1189	4272	29	Minimal	0.7%
Tripp	745	711	1547	17	Moderate	23.8%
Turner	1143	1068	2861	54	Substantial	12.2%
Union	2169	2066	6686	41	Substantial	14.3%
Walworth	757	728	1886	15	Moderate	9.1%
Yankton	2963	2859	9809	28	Substantial	7.0%
Ziebach	341	329	892	9	Minimal	3.2%
Unassigned	0	0	1907	0		

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New Confirmed Cases

212

New Probable Cases

83

Active Cases

2,511

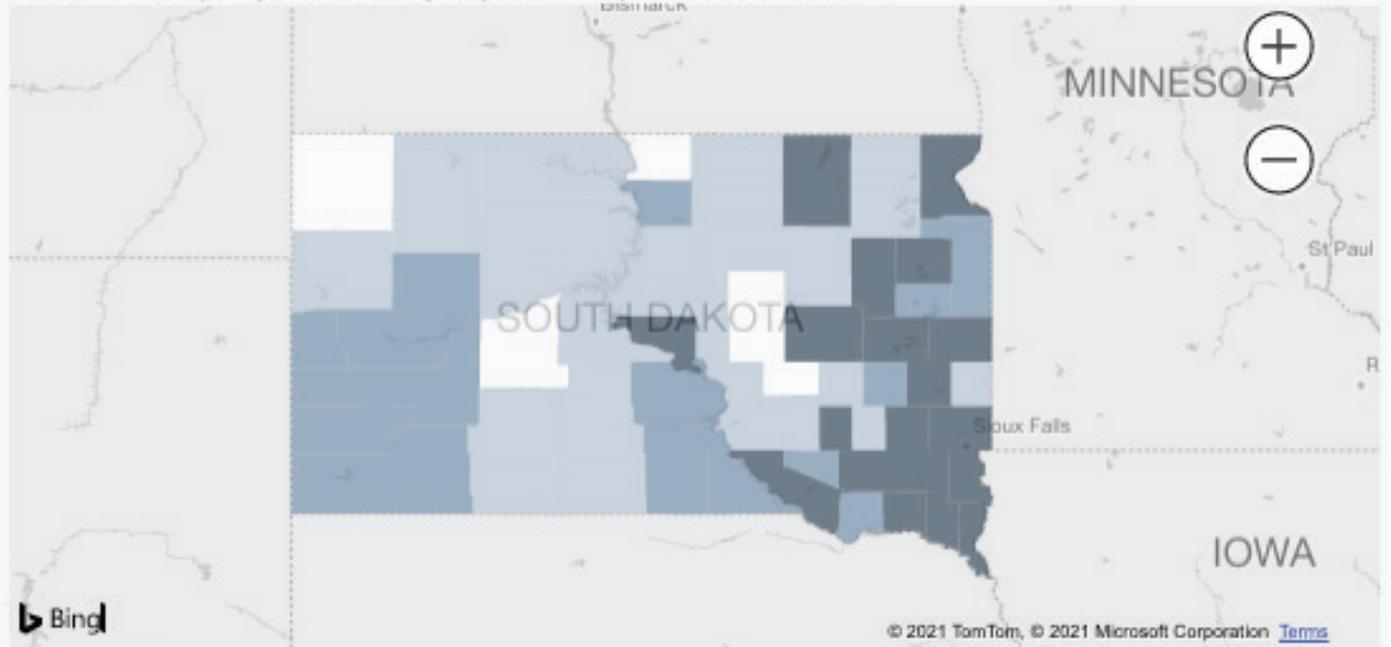
Recovered Cases

114,526

Currently Hospitalized

94

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.

Total Confirmed Cases

104,855

Total Probable Cases

14,120

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

13.0%

Total Persons Tested

449,621

Total Tests

1,088,531

Ever Hospitalized

7,087

Deaths Among Cases

1,938

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

215%

% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)

226%

% Progress (April Goal: 44233 Tests)

36%

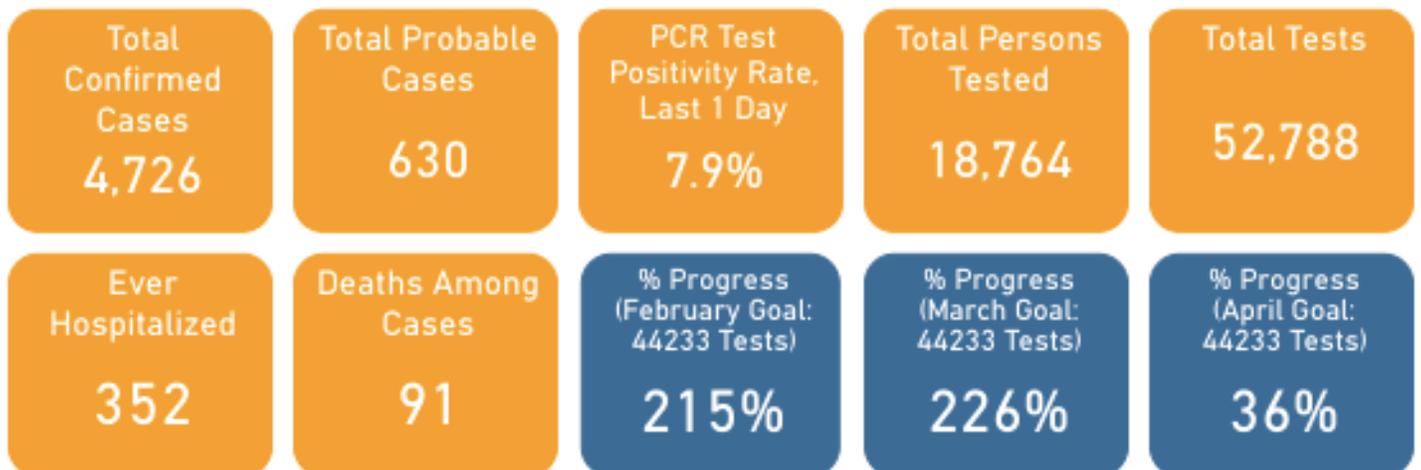
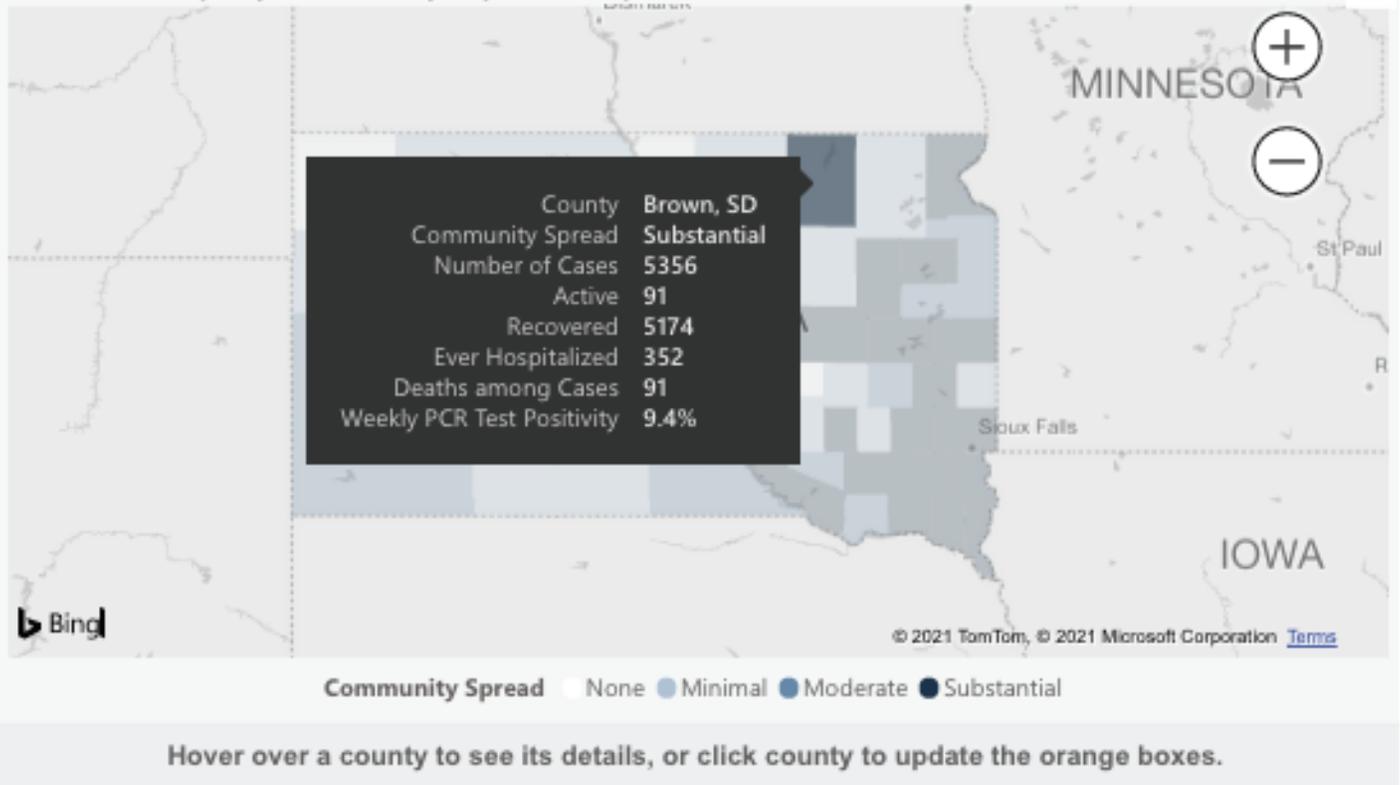
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



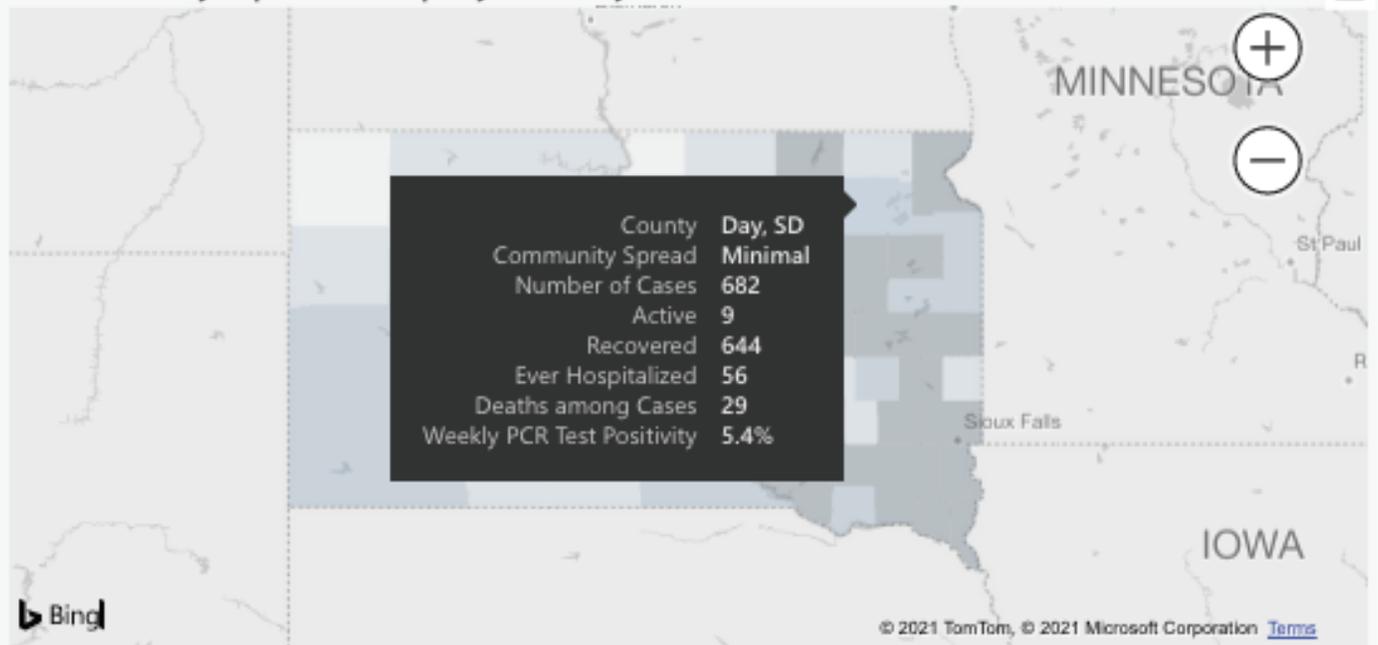
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Day County

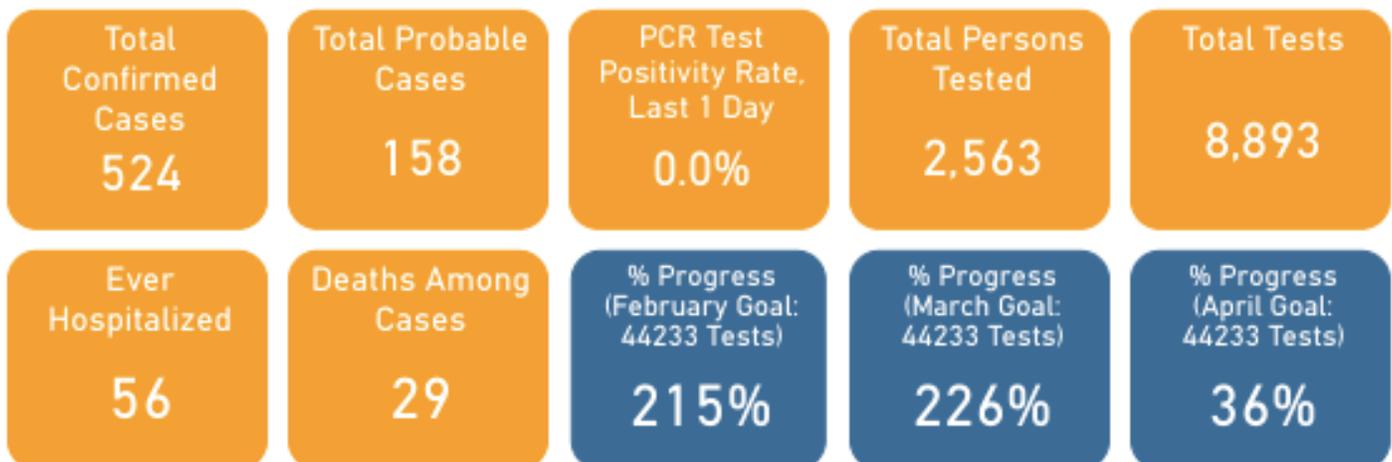


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

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



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Total Doses Administered*

460,688

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine*

280,942

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose**

47%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	10,524
Moderna	212,061
Pfizer	238,103

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	10,524
Moderna - 1 dose	43,855
Moderna - Series Complete	84,103
Pfizer - 1 dose	46,833
Pfizer - Series Complete	95,635

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	47.08%
Series Complete	32.16%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,402	404	499	903
Beadle	9,803	2,412	3,695	6,107
Bennett*	651	125	263	388
Bon Homme*	4,858	658	2,100	2,758
Brookings	15,644	5,608	5,018	10,626
Brown	22,381	4,349	9,016	13,365
Brule*	2,409	417	996	1,413
Buffalo*	158	78	40	118
Butte	3,343	799	1,272	2,071
Campbell	1,347	187	580	767
Charles Mix*	4,252	1,076	1,588	2,664
Clark	1,810	536	637	1,173
Clay	8,120	2,136	2,992	5,128
Codington*	14,602	4,030	5,286	9,316
Corson*	396	52	172	224
Custer*	4,076	746	1,665	2,411
Davison	11,648	2,910	4,369	7,279
Day*	3,668	784	1,442	2,226

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Deuel	2,141	565	788	1,353
Dewey*	454	80	187	267
Douglas*	1,661	367	647	1,014
Edmunds	2,012	342	835	1,177
Fall River*	3,438	572	1,433	2,005
Faulk	1,468	346	561	907
Grant*	4,233	573	1,830	2,403
Gregory*	2,359	459	950	1,409
Haakon*	699	95	302	397
Hamlin	2,531	711	910	1,621
Hand	2,147	433	857	1,290
Hanson	813	235	289	524
Harding	171	47	62	109
Hughes*	11,239	2,673	4,283	6,956
Hutchinson*	4,900	1,043	1,928	2,971
Hyde*	738	128	305	433
Jackson*	529	99	215	314
Jerauld	1,247	287	480	767
Jones*	856	136	360	496
Kingsbury	3,649	931	1,359	2,290
Lake	6,358	1,886	2,236	4,122
Lawrence	12,486	3,106	4,690	7,796
Lincoln	36,913	7,582	14,665	22,247
Lyman*	1,117	241	438	679
Marshall*	2,623	813	905	1,718
McCook	3,136	742	1,197	1,939
McPherson	364	62	151	213

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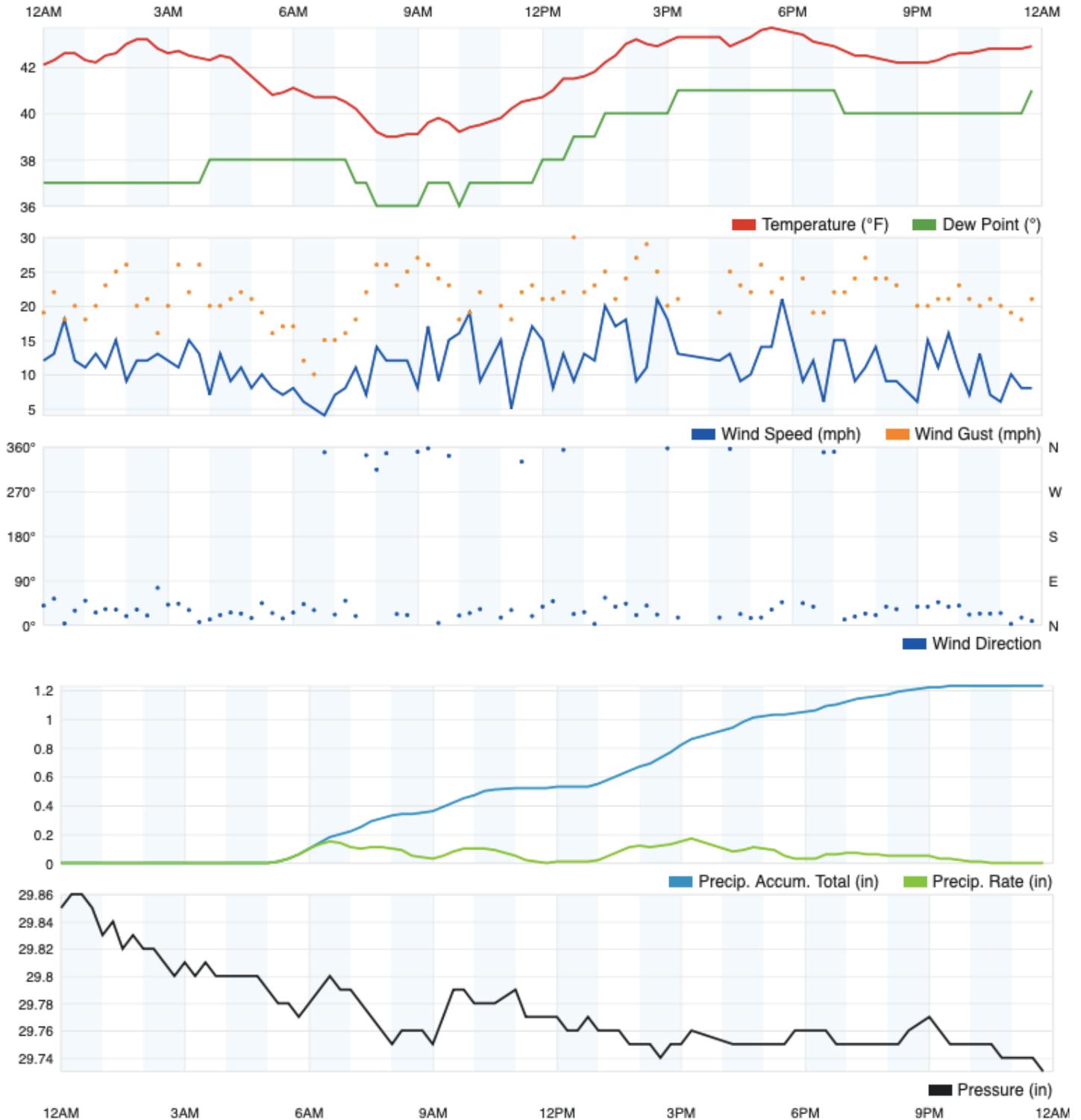
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Meade [^]	9,165	1,741	3,712	5,453
Mellette [^]	60	6	27	33
Miner	1,265	317	474	791
Minnehaha [^]	119,389	26,218	46,583	72,801
Moody [^]	2,663	625	1,019	1,644
Oglala Lakota [^]	236	48	94	142
Pennington [^]	52,278	8,600	21,839	30,439
Perkins [^]	982	138	422	560
Potter	1,304	304	500	804
Roberts [^]	5,788	872	2,458	3,330
Sanborn	1,490	372	559	931
Spink	4,155	771	1,692	2,463
Stanley [^]	1,683	345	669	1,014
Sully	547	145	201	346
Todd [^]	224	44	90	134
Tripp [^]	2,655	439	1,108	1,547
Turner	4,845	975	1,935	2,910
Union	4,968	1,464	1,752	3,216
Walworth [^]	2,435	469	983	1,452
Yankton	14,549	2,709	5,920	8,629
Ziebach [^]	76	16	30	46
Other	9,081	2,725	3,178	5,903

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Chance Showers

High: 55 °F

Tonight



Chance Showers

Low: 36 °F

Friday



Mostly Cloudy and Breezy

High: 56 °F

Friday Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 31 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 61 °F

Rainy and Cool East

Today

Rain East, Sunny West

HIGHS: 46 to 69

Warmest North Central

Tonight

Rain continues East

LOWS: 30s

Friday

Showers East of the James and West River

HIGHS: 50s

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Aberdeen, SD 4/8/2021 4:34 AM  

Rain will wrap back into eastern SD and west central MN today before slowly exiting Friday. Central SD will see warm and sunny weather briefly today before some showers slide southeast through the area on Friday.

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Today in Weather History

April 8, 1995: 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.

1938: Snow began to fall over central Oklahoma during the previous evening and continued to this day. In Oklahoma City, several snowfall records for the month soon fell to the storm, including the record for most total snowfall during April. The Oklahoma City snowfall totals of 0.8 inches on the 7th and 3.3 inches on the 8th remain daily records. In fact, the 3.3 inches of snow on the 8th is the most ever to fall on any single April day. The 4.1 inch total for the month is still the largest April monthly snowfall total.

1973: The state of Iowa and southwest Wisconsin saw severe blizzard conditions from April 8 through the 10th. Sustained wind of 40 to 50 mph, with gusts to 65 mph was reported with falling snow. Highways were closed, travel was suspended, and properties were damaged. Livestock and turkey losses approximated 20 million dollars. Record snowfall was reported in several localities. Belle Plaine had 20.3 inches; Dubuque had 19.2 inches, and Grundy Center saw 19 inches. Snow drifted as high as 16 feet. In southwest Wisconsin, this storm was quoted as being the "worst since 1921."

1989: Two-dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Phoenix AZ equaled their record for April of 104 degrees established just the previous day.

1998: A major F5 tornado struck western Jefferson County in Alabama leveling the communities of Oak Grove, Rock Creek, Edgewater, McDonald's Chapel, Sylvan Springs and Pratt City. The tornado lifted just two miles from downtown Birmingham. The twister had a track of 20 miles with the damage path averaging between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile in width. 34 people were killed, 221 injured and 1,000 homes destroyed.

1919 - A tornado swarm in northern Texas resulted in the deaths of 64 persons. (David Ludlum)

1926 - The lightning-set oil depot fire near San Luis Obispo CA boiled over and engulfed 900 acres. Many tornado vortices resulted from the intense heat of the fire. One such tornado traveled 1000 yards, picked up a house and carried it 150 feet, killing the two occupants inside. (The Weather Channel)

1973 - A severe storm brought high winds and heavy snow to Iowa. Belle Plain received 20 inches of snow, and 19 inches blanketed Dubuque, record totals for both locations for so late in the season. Snow drifts up to sixteen feet high closed highways. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A cold front crossing the Northern Plateau and the Northern Rocky Mountain Region produced high winds in northeastern Wyoming. Winds gusting to 69 mph at Sheridan WY downed power lines and caused some property damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong northerly winds ushered cold air into the north central U.S. The strong winds, gusting to 60 mph at Rapid City SD and Williston ND, reduced visibilities in blowing dust over the Dakotas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Two dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Phoenix AZ equalled their record for April of 104 degrees established just the previous day. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Twenty-two cities reported record low temperatures for the date as readings dipped into the 20s and 30s across much of the eastern U.S. Freezing temperatures severely damaged peach and apple orchards in West Virginia, where prolonged mild weather since January had caused an early blooming of spring vegetation. State and Federal agencies estimated a 50 percent loss in production for peaches and "Delicious Red Apples". (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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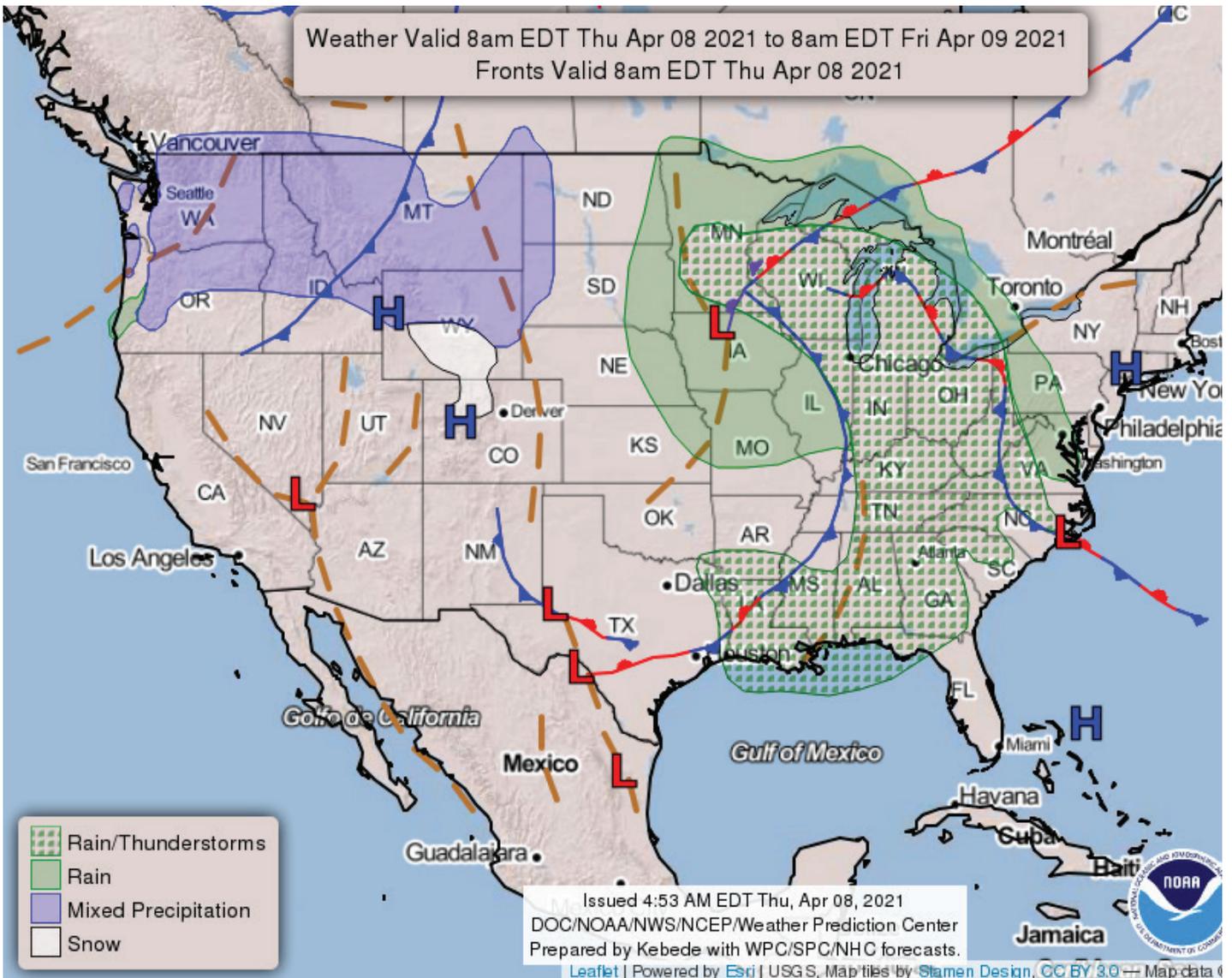
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 43.7
Low Temp: 39.0
Wind: 30 mph
Precip: 1.23 (Total: 1.60)

Today's Info

Record High: 85° in 1945
Record Low: 6° in 1997
Average High: 53°F
Average Low: 29°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 1.48
Precip to date in Mar.: 1.96
Average Precip to date: 2.50
Precip Year to Date: 2.14
Sunset Tonight: 8:11 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:59 a.m.



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GOD'S LIGHT – MAN'S NEED

Lights shine more brightly when the night is at its darkest moment. Stars illuminate the skies with more beauty and brilliance when there is no glare from the glow of a city.

Light also brings shadows and can cause blindness. Light even creates illusions of things that do not exist – like streams of water on parched desert sand.

But there is one Light that enables us to see the light. It is the Light of God that comes from the Word of God when His Word and His ways are illuminated by His Holy Spirit.

Psalm 36 contains an important theme for the Christian. All too often we willingly accept the teachings of individuals who offer a solution to our problems from sources that are not consistent with God's truth. David clearly warns us about this problem. He writes that we may unwisely "flatter" ourselves because we are "deceived" by not being able to see the truth and "detect sin." He offers the solution for the method we are to use to discriminate the truth about sin: "in Your light we see light."

John emphasized this fact also, "God is light," he assures us, "and in Him, there is no darkness." Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Darkness, on the other hand, represents what is foreboding, sinful, and evil. The truest source of light comes from God's Word, is true and reliable, and will guide us from the darkness of sin into the Light of God's love, mercy, grace, and hope. His Light will save us from a life of self-deception and certain death and ultimately lead us into His presence.

Prayer: With grateful hearts, Lord, we thank You for becoming the Light of the world and the Light of our lives. May we see the beauty of Your light. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see. Psalm 36:9

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

04-09-21-22-25

(four, nine, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$114,000

Lotto America

07-12-22-28-39, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 3

(seven, twelve, twenty-two, twenty-eight, thirty-nine; Star Ball: ten; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$4.63 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$201 million

Powerball

27-35-39-51-66, Powerball: 16, Power Play: 5

(twenty-seven, thirty-five, thirty-nine, fifty-one, sixty-six; Powerball: sixteen; Power Play: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$43 million

Noem pitches transgender sports ban; lawmakers say not now

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Despite South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's renewed push for lawmakers to take up issues she feels were left unsettled during the regular legislative session, including banning transgender girls from girls' sports, lawmakers said they won't address it during a special session this year.

The Republican governor's office held a conference call Wednesday with legislative leaders to discuss summoning them back to Pierre for a special session, which would also include discussions on how to spend over \$1 billion that is flowing into the state from a federal COVID-19 rescue package and changes to a voter-passed medical marijuana bill set to go into effect July 1. She pitched tackling a ban on transgender girls and women from sports leagues that match their gender identity in two bills, addressing collegiate sports and high school sports separately.

However, Republican legislative leaders like House Speaker Spencer Gosch said transgender athletes won't be addressed this year, pointing out the move would die in the Senate. Gosch supported a bill that was passed by the Legislature last month, but it died after Noem vetoed parts of it.

Senate Pro Tem Lee Schoenbeck, a Republican who opposed the bill, has said he doesn't think a special session should be used to address issues that were already hashed out during the regular session.

Advocates for transgender people have decried any bans as a solution for a problem that doesn't exist. There are currently no transgender girls playing in girls' sports, according to the high school activities association, and only one transgender girl has ever competed in girls' sports. Instead, advocates say the efforts are a political ploy that hurts transgender people.

As the session ended last month, key Republican lawmakers were left sparring with Noem, resulting in the demise of two high-profile bills. One bill would have banned transgender girls and women from participating in sports leagues that align with their gender identity; while the other would have delayed a voter-passed law to legalize medical marijuana.

Facing criticism from social conservatives for scuttling the transgender sports bill, Noem issued an executive order to push school boards and the high school activities association to change its policy of evaluating applications from transgender athletes on a case-by-case basis. She had described the orders as "temporary" until she called a special session in May or June, but said this week they could stay in

place if the Legislature doesn't address a ban.

"I can call a session, but it's really up to the Speaker of the House, Spencer Gosch, if he thinks it's important enough to have a discussion or if they would like to ... move forward and keep the executive orders in place," the governor said in an interview with Dakota Radio Group this week.

However, critics of Noem's orders have said they don't carry the force of law and amount to little more than a recommendation. Indeed, school boards and administrators have shied away from Noem's order, indicating they will stick with the high school sports activities association's current policy, at least until the issue comes to some resolution in the Legislature.

Gosch also refuted the notion that the special session is up to him, pointing out that the governor's role is to issue the proclamation and determine the scope for a special legislative session.

He said that when the Legislature meets in June, he saw the changes to the medical marijuana law as "easy fixes.". The governor has proposed setting a limit on the number of cannabis plants allowed in medical users' homes, prohibiting patients under 21 from smoking marijuana and clarifying the Department of Health's authority to track marijuana before it is sold.

More governors publicly vaccinated, but Florida's kept mum

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has received a single-dose coronavirus vaccine, his office confirmed Wednesday. He did so out of the public eye even as governors elsewhere across the political spectrum have been vaccinated publicly to reassure Americans that the shots are safe.

A spokesperson for the Republican governor initially declined to provide details, including when exactly the Republican governor received the dose. But it was later disclosed that the governor received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine last week.

The spokesperson, Meredith Beatrice, acknowledged the governor's vaccination during an interview. The disclosure came after a DeSantis news conference at the Capitol assailing the TV news program "60 Minutes" for a story airing Sunday that suggested a "pay-to-play" vaccine distribution deal with a super-market chain that donated to the governor's political committee.

DeSantis had recently said he would be vaccinated soon -- but no announcement was made by his office when he received it and no journalists were on hand. Even some of his top lieutenants said they were unaware the governor had been vaccinated as they continued to urge Floridians to get inoculated against a virus that has killed nearly 34,000 people statewide. More than 2 million people in Florida have been infected.

Many governors of both parties have drawn public attention to their vaccinations, hoping that will help convince more people to get the shot — allowing their states and the country to more quickly achieve herd immunity, even if it is not known what percentage of the population needs to be vaccinated to stop the spread of the virus.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the federal government's top infectious disease expert, has urged other public officials — particularly former President Donald Trump — to use their influence to get people vaccinated.

Trump has in fact urged people to get vaccinated, but he hasn't been among other public officials — including former presidents — to get vaccinated on camera. He was vaccinated in private before leaving the White House for Florida in January.

It was unclear whether Florida's governor had intended to publicly announce that he had been vaccinated. The news was revealed during a casual conversation between The Associated Press and the governor's spokeswoman, who then declined to answer questions. She later confirmed in an email that DeSantis, who is preparing to run for reelection and is said to be considering a run for president in 2024, had been vaccinated last week with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

DeSantis had previously said he preferred getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine because it requires just one dose, unlike the two-shot regimen required by the two other vaccines approved for use in the U.S.

DeSantis is now one of more than 6.6 million Floridians, less than a third of the state's population, who

have been vaccinated. Florida earlier this week opened vaccinations to anyone over age 16 as the state attempts to reach so-called "herd immunity."

Some governors, including DeSantis, had not rushed to get vaccinated, saying they would wait their turn. But eligibility requirements are now nearly universal — except for children under the age of 16.

Last month, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee was vaccinated without fanfare, and only revealed it when asked by a reporter.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, another Trump ally, was vaccinated this week with little ado. When the state opened vaccines to anyone 16 and older on Monday, she posted a photo on Twitter of herself receiving a shot. By comparison, the state's sole congressman, Rep. Dusty Johnson, invited journalists on Tuesday to cover him going through the vaccination process, saying it was a way to encourage people to get shots.

Other Republican governors have been more public.

Oklahoma's Kevin Stitt, a Republican who in July became the first U.S. governor to announce testing positive for COVID-19, flashed a thumbs up to reporters after getting his shot late last month. "I think that me being here as the governor of a state like Oklahoma, hopefully I can encourage others to follow my lead," he said at the time.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who faces a recall because of his handling of the outbreak, received the Johnson & Johnson jab last week in a livestreamed event. His state pushed to get more people protected against the virus and as Newsom tries to regain his political footing.

Tiny houses for homeless veterans planned for Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A national organization that builds tiny houses for homeless veterans has plans to bring a project to Sioux Falls.

The Veterans Community Project has asked that about 2 acres of land near Axtell Middle School be rezoned for the project which would include 22 individual homes and eight family homes, along with a community center.

The project would also include transitional support services for veterans, including a case manager.

Representatives from the organization briefed City Council members on the project Tuesday.

Vice president of national construction, Ben Hendershot, says the project has been in discussion since 2019, but was delayed somewhat because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The local leadership in Sioux Falls around here has been nothing short of perfect," Hendershot told the Argus Leader.

The group has a 49-home village operating in Kansas City, Missouri and two more under construction in St. Louis and Longmont, Colorado.

The organization's co-founder, Vincent Morales, says construction of the homes would also create volunteer opportunities for residents, local businesses and organizations. Morales noted that Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes painted one of the homes in their first village.

The city's Planning Commission will review the rezoning request on Wednesday. If approved, the plan would go to a first reading by the council on April 20.

If final approval for the project is granted, Hendershot says it could be operational within two years.

35-year sentence imposed for fatal shooting in Pine Ridge

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A man who opened fire on a Pine Ridge house, killing one of its many occupants, has been sentenced to 35 years in prison.

Ricky Bagola earlier pleaded guilty to second-degree in the January 2020 death of 30-year-old Casey Long Weston who was killed after the defendant blindly fired seven rounds into the house in a dispute over methamphetamine.

Two of the rounds hit Weston, who was one of seven people in the house. Court documents make no mention of Weston being involved in the drug dispute.

Federal prosecutors say Bagola drove over to the house after his girlfriend accused someone in the

residence of not providing enough methamphetamine for the money she paid. Bagola knocked on the doors and windows of the home, then fired seven rounds into the house.

During sentencing in federal court Tuesday, Judge Jeffrey Viken noted the "multigenerational expression of grief" from Weston's relatives who spoke about his dedication to Lakota spiritual traditions and their sadness for his four children who will grow up without a father, according to the Rapid City Journal.

Defense lawyer Alecia Fuller asked for a 15-year sentence for the 34-year-old defendant who she said feels "incredibly remorseful" for his actions after he initially tried to evade responsibility.

Prosecutor Megan Poppen asked for a 25-year sentence, telling the judge Bagola doesn't provide for his children because he's been busy providing drugs to the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Asia Today: Modi gets 2nd vaccine dose as India hits record

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's prime minister received his second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine as the country hit another peak Thursday with 126,789 new cases reported in the past 24 hours.

"Vaccination is among the few ways we have to defeat the virus. If you are eligible for the vaccine, get your shot soon," Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted. He received his first vaccine shot on March 1.

India started its vaccination drive in January. So far, more than 90 million health workers and Indians older than 45 have received at least one shot. Only 11 million of them have received both doses as India tries to build immunity to protect its nearly 1.4 billion people.

The new cases reported by the Health Ministry overtook Wednesday's 115,736 infections with dozens of cities and towns imposing night curfews to try to contain infections.

Fatalities rose by 685 in the past 24 hours, the highest since November, raising the nation's toll to 166,862 dead.

The western state of Maharashtra, the worst hit in the country, accounted for nearly 47% of new infections.

The federal government has refused to impose a second nationwide lockdown, after the first last year had a steep economic impact, but it has asked states to decide on imposing local restrictions to contain the spread of the virus.

India now has a seven-day rolling average of more than 80,000 cases per day and has reported 12.9 million virus cases since the pandemic began, the third-highest total after the United States and Brazil.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region:

— Australia has become the latest country to restrict use of the AstraZeneca vaccine by recommending that it not be given to people under age 50. The announcement came after drug regulators held a series of urgent meetings Thursday. That followed advice from the European Medicines Agency that it had found a possible link between the shot and rare blood clots. The Australian Technical Advisory Group said that only when the benefit clearly outweighs the risk should an initial AstraZeneca shot be given to someone under 50. Healthcare workers under 50 who were due to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine will now be prioritized for the Pfizer vaccine, which will likely delay the inoculation process. Indeed, under Australia's vaccine strategy, most people were due to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine.

— Philippine health officials are temporarily suspending the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for people below age 60. The Department of Health and the Food and Drug Administration said experts are reviewing information about AstraZeneca's side effects to prepare a recommendation on the vaccine's use. AstraZeneca and a vaccine developed by China-based Sinovac Biotech are the only COVID-19 vaccines received so far by the Philippines and are being used in an immunization campaign that has been saddled with delays. "I want to emphasize that this temporary suspension does not mean that the vaccine is unsafe or ineffective — it just means that we are taking precautionary measures to ensure the safety of every Filipino," FDA Director General Eric Domingo said. "We continue to underscore that the benefits of vaccination continue to outweigh the risks and we urge everyone to get vaccinated when it's their turn."

— Cambodia is closing the Angkor temple complex to visitors because of a growing outbreak. Cambodia has confirmed 3,028 cases since the pandemic began, but hundreds have been infected in the outbreak that began in February. On Thursday, the Health Ministry said 113 cases were reported from local transmis-

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sion, with two deaths. The ministry traced the outbreak to a foreign resident who broke hotel quarantine to visit a nightclub. The government closed schools and entertainment venues in response, but as the outbreak grows, a defunct hotel has been converted into a coronavirus hospital and criminal punishments are being imposed for violating health rules. The temples at Angkor are Cambodia's biggest tourist attraction, though the pandemic has reduced the number of visitors dramatically. The Apsara Authority that oversees the site says the ban on visitors will last until April 20.

— South Korea reported another 700 new cases as the coronavirus spreads at a rate near what was seen during the worst of its outbreak in winter. Around 500 of the new cases came from the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area, which has been the center of the country's outbreak. Health authorities are expected to announce stronger social distancing steps on Friday. They say they will decide over the weekend whether to resume administering AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccines to people 60 and younger. The injections were paused while regulators in Europe reviewed a possible link with rare blood clots. South Korea's immunization campaign has mainly relied on AstraZeneca shots produced by local firm SK Bioscience.

— Another 11 people have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in China's only active outbreak. Cases in the Yunnan province city of Ruili have topped 100, including those not showing symptoms, but a vaccination campaign and stay-home orders appear to have curbed large-scale transmission. Ruili also reported one new case of a person testing positive for COVID-19 without displaying symptoms, the National Health Commission reported Thursday. The city's Communist Party secretary, its top official, has been dismissed from his post and handed administrative punishment for his "serious dereliction of duty in epidemic prevention and control," according to the party's provincial disciplinary watchdog. Thursday also marks the anniversary of the end of a 76-day lockdown in Wuhan, where the virus was first detected, that saw more than 11 million people confined to their homes in a Herculean effort to contain the virus' spread after initial missteps that China has yet to acknowledge.

— New Zealand is temporarily halting travel from India as more arrivals from that country test positive for the coronavirus. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the suspension takes effect on Sunday and will remain in place until April 28. She said it's the first time New Zealand has suspended travel for its own citizens attempting to return home, and she emphasized the measure was temporary. The announcement comes after a security guard at a New Zealand quarantine hotel tested positive for the virus. There is no evidence the outbreak has spread any further. New Zealand has managed to stamp out the spread of the virus, so whenever somebody who is not in quarantine tests positive it represents a significant concern.

— About 50 people of various nationalities have boarded a chartered flight from Macao to Malaysia after many were stranded for months by the pandemic and border restrictions. The flight to Kuala Lumpur was organized by Malaysia's consulate in Hong Kong and Macao to repatriate its citizens from the territory. There are currently no direct commercial flights between Macao and Malaysia due to travel restrictions. Many of the people on the chartered flight had been stranded in Macao since the pandemic began. The passengers included about 30 Malaysians, three Singaporeans and nine South Koreans.

N Ireland leaders call for calm after night of violence

By PETER MORRISON and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Young people set a hijacked bus on fire and hurled gasoline bombs at police in Belfast in at least the fourth night of serious violence in a week in Northern Ireland, where Britain's exit from the European Union has unsettled an uneasy political balance.

People also lobbed bricks, fireworks and gasoline bombs Wednesday night in both directions over a concrete "peace wall" that separates Protestant, British loyalist and Catholic, Irish nationalist neighborhoods.

Police Service of Northern Ireland Assistant Chief Constable Jonathan Roberts said several hundred people gathered on both sides of a gate in the wall, where "crowds ... were committing serious criminal offenses, both attacking police and attacking each other."

He said a total of 55 police officers have been injured over several nights of disorder.

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The recent violence, largely in loyalist, Protestant areas, has flared amid rising tensions over post-Brexit trade rules for Northern Ireland and worsening relations between the parties in the Protestant-Catholic power-sharing Belfast government. Britain's economic split from the EU last year has disturbed the political balance in Northern Ireland, where some people identify as British and want to stay part of the U.K., while others see themselves as Irish and seek unity with the neighboring Republic of Ireland, which is an EU member.

U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned the unrest, and Northern Ireland's Belfast-based government was holding an emergency meeting Thursday on the violence.

Johnson appealed for calm, saying "the way to resolve differences is through dialogue, not violence or criminality." Northern Ireland First Minister Arlene Foster, of the pro-British Democratic Unionist Party, and Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, of Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein, both condemned the disorder and the attacks on police.

The latest disturbances followed unrest over the Easter long weekend in pro-British unionist areas in and around Belfast and Londonderry, also known as Derry, that saw cars set on fire and projectiles and gasoline bombs hurled at police officers.

Authorities have accused outlawed paramilitary groups of inciting young people to cause mayhem.

"We saw young people participating in serious disorder and committing serious criminal offenses, and they were supported and encouraged, and the actions were orchestrated by adults at certain times," said Roberts, the senior police officer.

A new U.K.-EU trade deal has imposed customs and border checks on some goods moving between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K. The arrangement was designed to avoid checks between Northern Ireland and Ireland because an open Irish border has helped underpin the peace process built on the 1998 Good Friday accord.

That accord ended decades of violence involving Irish republicans, British loyalists and U.K. armed forces in which more than 3,000 people died. But unionists say the new checks amount to a new border in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K. They fear that undermines the region's place in the United Kingdom and could bolster ties with the Irish Republic, strengthening calls for a united Ireland.

Both Britain and the EU have expressed concerns about how the agreement is working, and the Democratic Unionist Party, which heads the Northern Ireland government, has called for it to be scrapped.

Katy Hayward, a professor at Queen's University Belfast and senior fellow of the U.K. in a Changing Europe think tank, said unionists felt that "the union is very much under threat, that Northern Ireland's place is under threat in the union and they feel betrayed by London."

Unionists are also angry at a police decision not to prosecute Sinn Fein politicians who attended the funeral of a former Irish Republican Army commander in June. The funeral of Bobby Storey drew a large crowd, despite coronavirus rules barring mass gatherings.

The main unionist parties have demanded the resignation of Northern Ireland's police chief over the controversy, claiming he has lost the confidence of their community.

"You have a very fizzy political atmosphere in which those who are trying to urge for calm and restraint are sort of undermined," Hayward said.

Biden seems ready to extend US troop presence in Afghanistan

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Without coming right out and saying it, President Joe Biden seems ready to let lapse a May 1 deadline for completing a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Orderly withdrawals take time, and Biden is running out of it.

Biden has inched so close to the deadline that his indecision amounts almost to a decision to put off, at least for a number of months, a pullout of the remaining 2,500 troops and continue supporting the Afghan military at the risk of a Taliban backlash. Removing all of the troops and their equipment in the next three weeks — along with coalition partners that cannot get out on their own — would be difficult logistically,

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as Biden himself suggested in late March.

"It's going to be hard to meet the May 1 deadline," he said. "Just in terms of tactical reasons, it's hard to get those troops out." Tellingly, he added, "And if we leave, we're going to do so in a safe and orderly way."

James Stavidis, a retired Navy admiral who served as NATO's top commander from 2009 to 2013, says it would be unwise at this point to get out quickly.

"Sometimes not making a decision becomes a decision, which seems the case with the May 1 deadline," Stavidis said in an email exchange Wednesday. "The most prudent course of action feels like a six-month extension and an attempt to get the Taliban truly meeting their promises — essentially permitting a legitimate 'conditions based' withdrawal in the fall."

There are crosscurrents of pressure on Biden. On the one hand, he has argued for years, including during his time as vice president, when President Barack Obama ordered a huge buildup of U.S. forces, that Afghanistan is better handled as a smaller-scale counterterrorism mission. Countering Russia and China has since emerged as a higher priority.

On the other hand, current and former military officers have argued that leaving now, with the Taliban in a position of relative strength and the Afghan government in a fragile state, would risk losing what has been gained in 20 years of fighting.

"A withdrawal would not only leave America more vulnerable to terrorist threats; it would also have catastrophic effects in Afghanistan and the region that would not be in the interest of any of the key actors, including the Taliban," a bipartisan experts group known as the Afghan Study Group concluded in a February report. The group, whose co-chair, retired Gen. Joseph Dunford, is a former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, recommended Biden extend the deadline beyond May, preferably with some sort of agreement by the Taliban.

If the troops stay, Afghanistan will become Biden's war. His decisions, now and in coming months, could determine the legacy of a 2001 U.S. invasion that was designed as a response to al-Qaida's Sept. 11 attacks, for which the extremist group led by Osama bin Laden used Afghanistan as a haven.

Biden said during the 2020 campaign that if elected he might keep a counterterrorism force in Afghanistan but also would "end the war responsibly" to ensure U.S. forces never have to return. The peace talks that began last fall between the Taliban and the Afghan government are seen as the best hope, but they have produced little so far.

Postponing the U.S. withdrawal carries the risk of the Taliban resuming attacks on U.S. and coalition forces, possibly escalating the war. In a February 2020 agreement with the administration of President Donald Trump, the Taliban agreed to halt such attacks and hold peace talks with the Afghan government, in exchange for a U.S. commitment to a complete withdrawal by May 2021.

When he entered the White House in January, Biden knew of the looming deadline and had time to meet it if he had chosen to do so. It became a steep logistical hurdle only because he put off a decision in favor of consulting at length inside his administration and with allies. Flying thousands of troops and their equipment out of Afghanistan in the next three weeks under the potential threat of Taliban resistance is not technically impossible, although it would appear to violate Biden's promise not to rush.

Biden undertook a review of the February 2020 agreement shortly after taking office, and as recently as Tuesday aides said he was still contemplating a way ahead in Afghanistan. White House press secretary Jen Psaki stressed that May 1 was a deadline set by the prior administration and that a decision was complicated.

"But it's also an important decision — one he needs to make in close consultation with our allies and also with our national security team here in this administration," Psaki said. "And we want to give him the time to do that."

In briefings on Afghanistan, Biden would have heard from military commanders such as Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, who have said publicly and repeatedly that the Taliban have not fully lived up to the commitments they made in the February 2020 agreement. McKenzie and others have said violence levels are too high for a durable political settlement to be made.

Congress has been cautious about reducing the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Last year it expressly forbade the Pentagon from using funds to reduce below 4,000 troops, but the Pentagon went ahead anyway after Trump ordered a reduction to 2,500 after he lost the election. Trump got around the legal prohibition by signing a waiver.

Holocaust survivors use social media to fight anti-Semitism

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Alarmed by a rise in online anti-Semitism during the pandemic, coupled with studies indicating younger generations lack even basic knowledge of the Nazi genocide, Holocaust survivors are taking to social media to share their experiences of how hate speech paved the way for mass murder.

With short video messages recounting their stories, participants in the #ItStartedWithWords campaign hope to educate people about how the Nazis embarked on an insidious campaign to dehumanize and marginalize Jews — years before death camps were established to carry out murder on an industrial scale.

Six individual videos and a compilation were being released Thursday over Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, followed by one video per week. The posts include a link to a webpage with more testimonies and teaching materials.

"There aren't too many of us going out and speaking anymore, we're few in numbers but our voices are heard," Sidney Zoltak, an 89-year-old survivor from Poland, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from Montreal.

"We are not there to tell them stories that we read or that we heard — we are telling facts, we are telling what happened to us and to our neighbors and to our communities. And I think that this is the strongest possible way."

Once the Nazi party came to power in Germany in 1933, its leaders immediately set about making good on their pledges to "Aryanize" the country, segregating and marginalizing the Jewish population.

The Nazi government encouraged the boycott of Jewish businesses, which were daubed with the Star of David or the word "Jude" — Jew. Propaganda posters and films suggested Jews were "vermin," comparing them to rats and insects, while new laws were passed to restrict all aspects of Jews' lives.

Charlotte Knobloch, who was born in Munich in 1932, recalls in her video message how her neighbors suddenly forbid their children from playing with her or other Jews.

"I was 4 years old," Knobloch remembered. "I didn't even know what Jews were."

The campaign, launched to coincide with Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, was organized by the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which negotiates compensation for victims. It is backed by many organizations, including the United Nations.

It comes as a study released this week by Israeli researchers found that coronavirus lockdowns last year shifted some anti-Semitic hatred online, where conspiracy theories blaming Jews for the pandemic's medical and economic devastation abounded.

Although the annual report by Tel Aviv University's researchers on anti-Semitism showed that the social isolation of the pandemic resulted in fewer acts of violence against Jews across 40 countries, Jewish leaders expressed concern that online vitriol could lead to physical attacks when the lockdowns end.

Supporting the new online campaign, the International Auschwitz Committee noted that one of the men who stormed the U.S. Capitol in January wore a sweatshirt with the slogan "Camp Auschwitz: Work Brings Freedom."

"The survivors of Auschwitz experienced first-hand what it is like when words become deeds," the organization wrote. "Their message to us: do not be indifferent!"

Recent surveys by the Claims Conference in several countries have also revealed a lack of knowledge about the Holocaust among young people, which the organization hopes the campaign will help address.

In a 50-state study of Millennials and Generation Z-age people in the U.S. last year, researchers found that 63% of respondents did not know that 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust and 48% could not name a single death camp or concentration camp.

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Claims Conference President Gideon Taylor told the AP that the surveys highlighted that “messages and concepts and ideas that were common and understood 20 years ago, maybe even 10 years ago” are not any more.

After the success of a social media campaign last year using the messages of survivors to pressure Facebook to ban posts that deny or distort the Holocaust, Taylor said it made sense to seek social media help again.

“The Holocaust didn’t come out of nowhere,” he said. “Before Jews were driven out of their schools, their jobs, their homes, before the synagogues, shops and businesses were destroyed. And before there were ghettos and camps and cattle cars, words were used to stoke the fires of hate.”

“And who can draw that line from dangerous words to horrific acts better than those who lived through the depths of human depravity?”

For Zoltak, the escalation from words to deeds came rapidly after the invading Nazi army occupied his town east of Warsaw in mid-1941. The Nazis rapidly implemented anti-Semitic laws that they had already instituted in the western part of Poland they occupied two years earlier and forced Zoltak’s parents into slave labor, he said.

A year later, the Germans forced all of the town’s Jews — about half the population of 15,000 — into a ghetto segregated from the rest of the town, subject to strict regulations and kept on restricted food rations.

Three months later, the Nazis liquidated the ghetto, transporting its residents to the Treblinka death camp or killing them along the way.

Zoltak was one of the few lucky ones, managing to escape with his parents into a nearby forest. They hid around the area until the next spring, when they were taken in by a Catholic family in a nearby farm and sheltered for the duration of the war.

After the war, he returned to his town and learned that all but 70 of its 7,000 Jews had been killed, including all of his classmates and his father’s entire family.

“It’s sometimes hard to understand,” he said. “We’re not actually dealing with numbers, they were humans who had a name, who had families.”

The Latest: UK cases drop 60% due to vaccines, lockdown

By The Associated Press undefined

LONDON — Britain’s COVID-19 vaccination program is beginning to break the link between infection and serious illness or death, according to the latest results from an ongoing study of the pandemic in England.

Researchers at Imperial College London found that COVID-19 infections dropped about 60% in March as national lockdown measures slowed the spread of the virus. People 65 and older were least likely to be infected as they benefited most from the vaccination program, which initially focused on older people.

The study also found that the relationship between infections and deaths is diverging, “suggesting that infections may have resulted in fewer hospitalizations and deaths since the start of widespread vaccination.”

But researchers also urged caution, saying that infection rates leveled off at the end of the study period as the government began to ease the national lockdown and children returned to school.

The next step in lifting England’s third national lockdown is scheduled for April 12, when nonessential shops will be allowed to reopen, along with hair salons, gyms and outdoor service at pubs and restaurants.

The Imperial College study conducts swab tests on a random sample of people across England each month. The latest round tested more than 140,000 people from March 11 to March 30.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- UK advises limiting AstraZeneca in under-30s amid clot worry
- Summoning seniors: Big new push to vaccinate older Americans
- Brazil’s Bolsonaro ignores calls for lockdown to slow virus
- French children, parents and teachers battle with internet connection problems after an abrupt na-

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tionwide switch back to online learning

— Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey says the state is shifting to personal responsibility in the fight against COVID-19.

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:

BERLIN — Germany's health minister says the European Union won't order Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine and his country will hold bilateral talks with Russia on whether an order makes sense.

Health Minister Jens Spahn told WDR public radio that the EU's executive Commission said Wednesday it won't place orders for Sputnik V on member countries' behalf, as it did with other manufacturers.

Spahn said Thursday he told his fellow EU health ministers that Germany "will talk bilaterally to Russia, first of all about when what quantities could come." He said "to really make a difference in our current situation, the deliveries would have to come in the next two to four or five months already."

Otherwise, he said, Germany would have "more than enough vaccine" already.

Spahn reiterated that, as far as Germany is concerned, Sputnik V must be cleared for use by the European Medicines Agency, and "for that, Russia must deliver data."

On Wednesday, Bavaria's governor said his administration was signing a preliminary contract to get 2.5 million doses of Sputnik V, probably in July, if the shot is cleared by the EMA.

KAMPALA, Uganda — The head of the Africa CDC says his group is opposed to the issuance of COVID-19 vaccine passports until there is equitable access to shots across the world.

John Nkengasong told a briefing Thursday that the idea is "inappropriate" while Africa lags behind in vaccine acquisition.

"Our position is very simple. That any imposition of a vaccination passport will create huge inequities and will further exacerbate them," he said. "We are already in a situation where we don't have vaccines, and it will be extremely unfortunate that countries impose travel requirement of immunization certificates whereas the rest of the world has not had the chance to have access to vaccines."

Vaccine passports are documentation showing travelers have been vaccinated against COVID-19 or recently tested negative for the virus. Technology companies and travel-related trade groups in some wealthy countries are developing and testing out such passports to encourage travel.

But only 2% of all vaccine doses administered globally have been in Africa, according to the World Health Organization.

The Africa CDC warned last week that the continent of 1.3 billion people is unlikely to meet its vaccination targets amid supply delays from a key manufacturer, the Serum Institute of India.

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates —The Gulf Arab kingdom of Bahrain has announced that starting next month, residents who can prove that they've been vaccinated against the coronavirus will be able to attend gyms, indoor restaurants, mass sporting events, conferences, spas and cinemas.

Bahrain's national COVID-19 medical team says those holding digital proof that two weeks have passed since their second vaccine dose or that they've recovered from the coronavirus will enjoy unfettered access to newly reopened indoor venues. Those under 18 are also allowed if accompanied by a vaccinated parent or guardian.

The new rules take effect at the start of Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, which begins this year on May 12. The COVID vaccinated and recovered present their status on a government health app.

The non-vaccinated will be banned from indoor spots but may go to outdoor, socially-distanced dining and recreational places.

Bahrain has seen a major surge in coronavirus infections in recent weeks despite its successful mass vaccination campaign.

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ISLAMABAD-- Thousands of young Pakistanis who are not eligible for free vaccinations are trying to get inoculated at private medical facilities, days after the first round of commercial sales of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine began in this impoverished Islamic nation.

The development comes after a Pakistani pharmaceutical firm imported more than 50,000 doses of the Russian vaccine.

Since February, Pakistan has been using Chinese vaccines to protect health workers and people over 50.

The latest development comes a day after Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said Islamabad will buy 5 million doses of Russia's COVID-19 Sputnik V vaccine and expressed a desire to eventually manufacture it in Pakistan.

Pakistan has reported 15,124 deaths due to the pandemic and is in the middle of a third surge of infections, which has forced authorities to impose a partial lockdown.

MANILA, Philippines — Philippine health officials have decided to temporarily suspend the use of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine for people below 60 following reports of rare blood clots.

The European Medicines Agency on Wednesday reported a possible link but did not recommend any age restrictions on using the drug in adults.

The Department of Health and the Food and Drug Administration said experts were reviewing information related to AstraZeneca's side effects to come up with a recommendation on the vaccine's use. AstraZeneca and the vaccine developed by China-based Sinovac Biotech have been the only COVID-19 vaccines received so far by the Philippines.

"We continue to underscore that the benefits of vaccination continue to outweigh the risks and we urge everyone to get vaccinated when it's their turn," FDA Director General Eric Domingo said.

More than 460,000 doses of AstraZeneca have been administered in the country so far and millions of doses more have been ordered by the government and private companies, Philippine officials said.

The country's vaccination campaign has faced supply problems, delivery delays and public hesitancy amid an alarming surge in coronavirus infections.

NEW DELHI — New coronavirus cases in India hit a record Thursday at 126,789, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi got his second shot and urged others to follow suit, saying "vaccination is among the few ways we have to defeat the virus."

India started its vaccination drive in January. So far, more than 90 million health workers and those over 45 have received at least one shot. Only 11 million have received both doses as India tries to build immunity to protect its nearly 1.4 billion people.

Dozens of cities and towns are imposing night curfews to try to contain the surge but the federal government has refused to impose a second nationwide lockdown for fear of hurting the economy.

Fatalities rose 685 in the past 24 hours, the highest since November. The western state of Maharashtra, the worst hit in the country, accounted for nearly 47% of new infections. Overall, India has recorded nearly 167,000 COVID-19 deaths.

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — A security guard at a New Zealand quarantine hotel has tested positive for the coronavirus, although there is no evidence the outbreak has spread any further.

New Zealand has managed to stamp out the spread of the virus, so whenever somebody who is not in quarantine tests positive it represents a significant concern. Health authorities said the person lives alone and carpools to work with a colleague, and that both workers are now in isolation.

Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield said the 24-year-old guard had not been vaccinated, and they're doing an urgent repeat test on the worker to get a better understanding of the nature of the infection.

New Zealand has been prioritizing border workers for vaccinations. The nation of 5 million people has

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reported 2,500 cases and 26 deaths since the pandemic began.

ATLANTA — Starting Thursday, Georgia restaurant tables can be a little closer, more people can get together and vulnerable residents are no longer supposed to stay home as Gov. Brian Kemp loosens COVID-19 restrictions.

The Republican governor said Wednesday that it's part of an effort to show that "Georgia is open for business."

Kemp announced March 31 that he was loosening restrictions that he had in place for nearly a year. For example, restaurant tables will now be required to be only 3.5 feet (1.07 meters) apart instead of the previous 6 feet (1.83 meters). People in movie theaters can sit closer, and there's no longer a 50-person limit on gatherings when people are closer than 6 feet, which could allow larger indoor concerts and conventions.

BEIJING — Chinese officials say 11 more people have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in a southwestern city bordering Myanmar that is the scene of China's current sole active outbreak.

Cases in the Yunnan province city of Ruili have topped 100, including those not showing symptoms.

However, large-scale transmission appears to have been curbed by a campaign to vaccinate all 300,000 residents of the city. People there have been told to stay home and 45 residential compounds are under complete lockdown.

China has virtually stamped out new local cases across the country through aggressive lockdowns, mask wearing, electronic monitoring and other measures. With most economic and social activity resuming, those measures are being gradually reduced, although mask wearing indoors and on public transport remains almost universal.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea has reported 700 more cases of the coronavirus as the speed of viral spread approaches levels seen during the worst of the country's outbreak in winter.

The numbers released by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Thursday brought the national caseload to 107,598, including 1,758 deaths.

The daily jump was the highest since Jan. 5 when 714 cases were reported.

Around 500 of the new cases are in the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area, which has emerged as the center of the country's epidemic.

Health authorities, who are also wrestling with a slow vaccine rollout, are expected to announce measures to strengthen social distancing following a meeting Friday.

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Puerto Rico's governor says officials will start vaccinating all those 16 years and older beginning Monday, prompting celebrations across a U.S. territory facing a spike in coronavirus cases.

Currently, only people 50 years and older as well as anyone 35 to 49 with chronic health conditions are authorized to receive a vaccine.

Gov. Pedro Pierluisi also announced Wednesday that he is implementing more stringent measures to fight a recent spike in coronavirus infections. A 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew will go into effect Friday, and businesses will be forced to close by 9 p.m. That is two hours earlier than has been allowed.

Puerto Rico has recorded more than 199,000 coronavirus cases and more than 2,000 deaths.

DETROIT — Michigan's state health director says the government is focusing on getting more people vaccinated rather than imposing new restrictions on the economy amid a wave of new coronavirus cases and the crowding of hospitals with COVID-19 patients.

Elizabeth Hertel said Wednesday: "Our focus right now continues on making sure we're getting as many people vaccinated as possible. We still do have a number of restrictions in place that limit gathering sizes."

Her comments came as federal statistics showed Michigan leads the U.S. in new coronavirus cases. The

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state recorded more than 46,000 cases, or 469 per 100,000 people, in the last seven days. That is far ahead of No. 2 New Jersey, at 321.

The state health department reported 8,000 new coronavirus cases Wednesday.

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho Gov. Brad Little has issued an executive order banning the state government from requiring or issuing COVID-19 “vaccine passports.”

The governor’s order issued Wednesday also prevents state agencies from providing information on anyone’s vaccine status to individuals, companies or government entities.

Little has gotten the vaccine and says he strongly encourages others to get vaccinated as well. But he says he has serious concerns that a vaccine passport requirement will violate medical privacy rights. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued a similar order Wednesday and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis did so Friday.

The White House has ruled out a national “vaccine passport,” saying it is leaving it to up the private sector if companies want to develop a system for people to show they have been vaccinated.

TORONTO — Canada’s most populous province plans to vaccinate those 18 and over in hot spot areas in and around Toronto and plans to vaccinate some teachers amid a third surge of coronavirus infections fueled by more-contagious virus variants.

Ontario declared another state of emergency and will now allow all adults in certain postal codes to get priority access to vaccines. Ontario will also close nonessential stores to in-person shopping and limit big box stores to essential items such as groceries and pharmacy supplies.

The province is calling its latest measures a stay-at-home order though schools in most of the province will remain open and golf courses remain open. Ontario has seen seeing more than 3,000 new infections a day in recent days and record intensive care numbers.

Biden making new moves on guns, including naming ATF boss

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, AAMER MADHANI and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden, in his first major gun control measures since taking office, is announcing executive actions Thursday aimed at addressing what the White House calls a “gun violence public health epidemic.”

Biden also is nominating David Chipman, a former federal agent and adviser at the gun control group Giffords, to be director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Biden has faced increasing pressure to act after a recent series of mass shootings, but the White House has repeatedly emphasized the need for legislative action. While the House passed a background-check bill last month, gun control measures face slim prospects in an evenly divided Senate, where Republicans remain near-unified against most proposals.

A White House fact sheet said those shootings “underscored the relentless” of the epidemic.

Biden is to be joined at the late morning Rose Garden event by Attorney General Merrick Garland. Most of the actions are coming from the Justice Department.

Biden is tightening regulations requiring buyers of “ghost guns” to undergo background checks. The homemade firearms — usually assembled from parts and milled with a metal-cutting machine — often lack serial numbers used to trace them. It’s legal to build a gun in a home or a workshop and there is no federal requirement for a background check.

The Justice Department will issue a proposed rule aimed at reining in ghost guns within 30 days, though details weren’t immediately issued.

A second proposed rule, expected within 60 days, will tighten regulations on pistol-stabilizing braces, like the one used by the Boulder, Colorado, shooter in a rampage last month that left 10 dead. The rule will designate pistols used with stabilizing braces as short-barreled rifles, which require a federal license to own and are subject to a more thorough application process and a \$200 tax.

The department also is publishing model legislation within 60 days that is intended to make it easier for

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states to adopt their own "red flag" laws. Such laws allow for individuals to petition a court to allow the police to confiscate weapons from a person deemed to be a danger to themselves or others.

The department also will begin to provide more data on firearms trafficking, starting with a new comprehensive report on the issue. The administration says that hasn't done in more than two decades.

Biden also is making investments in community violence intervention programs, which are aimed at reducing gun violence in urban communities, across five federal agencies.

Officials said the executive actions were "initial steps" completed during Garland's first weeks on the job and more may be coming.

The ATF is currently run by an acting director, Regina Lombardo. Gun-control advocates have emphasized the significance of this position in enforcing gun laws, and Chipman is certain to win praise from this group. During his time as a senior policy adviser with Giffords, he spent considerable effort pushing for greater regulation and enforcement on ghost guns, changes to the background check system and measures to reduce the trafficking of illegal firearms.

Chipman spent 25 years as an agent at the ATF, where he worked on stopping a trafficking ring that sent illegal firearms from Virginia to New York, and served on the ATF's SWAT team. Chipman is a gun owner.

He is an explosives expert and was among the team involved in investigating the Oklahoma City bombing and the first World Trade Center bombing. He also was involved in investigating a series of church bombings in Alabama in the 1990s. He retired from the ATF in 2012.

The White House fact sheet said Chipman has worked "to advance common-sense gun safety laws."

During his campaign, Biden promised to prioritize new gun control measures as president, including enacting universal background check legislation, banning online sales of firearms and the manufacture and sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. But gun-control advocates have said that while they were heartened by signs from the White House that they took the issue seriously, they've been disappointed by the lack of early action.

With the announcement of the new measures, however, advocates lauded Biden's first moves to combat gun violence.

"Each of these executive actions will start to address the epidemic of gun violence that has raged throughout the pandemic, and begin to make good on President Biden's promise to be the strongest gun safety president in history," said John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety.

Feinblatt in particular praised the move to regulate ghost guns, which he said "will undoubtedly save countless lives," and lauded Chipman as an "invaluable point person" in the fight against illegal gun trafficking. He also said the group is looking forward to continuing to work with the Biden administration on further gun control measures, but it's unclear what next moves the White House, or lawmakers on Capitol Hill, will be able to take.

Biden himself expressed uncertainty late last month when asked if he had the political capital to pass new gun control proposals, telling reporters, "I haven't done any counting yet."

For years, federal officials have been sounding the alarm about an increasing black market for homemade, military-style semi-automatic rifles and handguns. Ghost guns have increasingly turned up at crime scenes and in recent years have been turning up more and more when federal agents are purchasing guns in undercover operations from gang members and other criminals.

It is hard to say how many are circulating on the streets, in part because in many cases police departments don't even contact the federal government about the guns because they can't be traced.

Some states, like California, have enacted laws in recent years to require serial numbers be stamped on ghost guns.

The critical component in building an untraceable gun is what is known as the lower receiver, a part typically made of metal or polymer. An unfinished receiver — sometimes referred to as an "80-percent receiver" — can be legally bought online with no serial numbers or other markings on it, no license required.

A gunman who killed his wife and four others in Northern California in 2017 had been prohibited from owning firearms, but he built his own to skirt the court order before his rampage. And in 2019, a teenager used a homemade handgun to fatally shoot two classmates and wound three others at a school in

suburban Los Angeles.

Cambodia's Angkor site shut for 2 weeks to curb coronavirus

By SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodia is shutting its most popular tourist destination, the centuries-old Angkor temple complex, to visitors for two weeks to help curb the country's coronavirus outbreak.

The closing of the world-famous site is the latest in a slew of measures the country is taking after the number of coronavirus cases surged in February.

The Apsara Authority, the government agency that oversees the archaeological site, said that temporarily stopping local and foreign tourists from visiting the temples is important to help combat the virus. It said in a statement dated Wednesday that visitors are banned from April 7 through April 20.

The Angkor site, in the northwestern province of Siem Reap, attracted 2.2 million foreign tourists in 2019, but experienced a sharp falloff last year due to disruptions caused by the pandemic. Cambodia allows in tourists, but they must undergo a quarantine.

The Health Ministry on Thursday announced 113 new local cases of the coronavirus and two deaths. Cambodia has recorded a total of 3,028 cases, including 23 deaths.

The ministry has traced the latest outbreak to a foreign resident who broke quarantine in a hotel and went to a nightclub in early February. The government on Feb. 20 announced a planned two-week closure of all public schools, cinemas, bars and entertainment venues in the capital, Phnom Penh.

As the number of cases rose, the closures were extended throughout the country for schools, gyms, concert halls, museums and other gathering places.

A defunct luxury hotel in the capital has been converted into a 500-room coronavirus hospital, and the authorities are enforcing a new law imposing criminal punishment for violating health rules.

The use of face masks was made mandatory in Phnom Penh and four of the country's most densely populated provinces.

The government stepped up other restrictions at the start of this month, including a two-week, 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew in Phnom Penh.

It also broadened its coronavirus vaccination campaign, targeting 1 million doses a month beginning in April. Through the end of March, about 400,000 people — about one-third of them members of the armed forces — had received vaccinations.

By the end of March, Cambodia had acquired more than 3.1 million doses of vaccines from China and through the World Health Organization's COVAX initiative. Cambodia has a population of about 17 million.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said this week on his social media channels that vaccinations are voluntary, but that civil servants and members of the military would be at risk of being dismissed if they fail to be inoculated.

Are some COVID-19 vaccines more effective than others?

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Are some COVID-19 vaccines more effective than others?

It's hard to tell since they weren't directly compared in studies. But experts say the vaccines are alike on what matters most: preventing hospitalizations and deaths.

"Luckily, all these vaccines look like they're protecting us from severe disease," said Dr. Monica Gandhi of the University of California, San Francisco, citing study results for five vaccines used around the world and a sixth that's still in review.

And real-world evidence as millions of people receive the vaccines show they're all working very well.

Still, people might wonder if one is better than another since studies conducted before the vaccines were rolled out found varying levels of effectiveness. The problem is they don't offer apples-to-apples comparisons.

Consider the two-dose vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, found to be about 95% effective at preventing illness. Studies for those shots counted a COVID-19 case whether it was mild, moderate or severe — and were conducted before worrisome mutated versions of the virus began circulating.

Then Johnson & Johnson tested a single-dose vaccine and didn't count mild illnesses. J&J's shot was 66% protective against moderate to severe illness in a large international study. In just the U.S., where there's less spread of variants, it was 72% effective. More importantly, once the vaccine's effect kicked in it prevented hospitalization and death.

AstraZeneca's two-dose vaccine used in many countries has faced questions about the exact degree of its effectiveness indicated by studies. But experts agree those shots, too, protect against the worst outcomes.

Around the world, hospitalizations are dropping in countries where vaccines have been rolling out including Israel, England and Scotland — regardless of which shots are given. And the U.S. government's first look at real-world data among essential workers provided further evidence that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are highly protective -- 90% -- against infections whether there were symptoms or not.

Defrocked US priest revered in East Timor accused of abuse

By MARGIE MASON and ROBIN MCDOWELL Associated Press

It was the same every night. A list of names was posted on the Rev. Richard Daschbach's bedroom door. The child at the top of the roster knew it was her turn to share the lower bunk with the elderly priest and another elementary school-aged girl.

Daschbach was idolized in the remote enclave of East Timor where he lived, largely for his role in helping save lives during the tiny nation's bloody struggle for independence. So, the girls never spoke about the abuse they suffered. They said they were afraid they would be banished from the shelter the 84-year-old from Pennsylvania established decades ago for abused women, orphans, and other destitute children.

The horrors of what they said happened behind closed doors over a period of years is now being played out in court -- the first clergy sex case in a country that is more solidly Catholic than any other place aside from the Vatican. The trial was postponed last month due to a coronavirus lockdown, but is expected to resume in May.

At least 15 females have come forward, according to JU,S Jurídico Social, a group of human rights lawyers representing them. The Associated Press has spoken to a third of the accusers, each recalling their experiences in vivid detail. They are not being identified because of fears of retribution.

They told AP Daschbach would sit on a chair every night in the middle of a room holding a little girl, surrounded by a ring of children and staff members praying and singing hymns before bed.

"The way that you determine who sits on his lap is by the list that he'd have on his door," one accuser said. "And that meant that you were the little girl that was going to go with him."

Later in his room, they said Daschbach would strip down to white boxer shorts and a T-shirt and then undress the girls, giving them deodorant to put on before fondling them and quietly guiding their hands to touch him. Then, they said, there would often be oral sex. One accuser also alleged she was raped.

He would sometimes ask the children with him on the lower bunk to switch places with one or two others sleeping on the mattress above, they said, adding abuse also occasionally occurred during afternoon naps.

Daschbach faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty. He and his lawyer declined to be interviewed by the AP.

The church defrocked Daschbach in 2018, saying he had confessed to sexually abusing children. But he maintains strong political ties and is still treated like a rock star by many, especially at the Topu Honis shelter, which means "Guide to Life."

Former President Xanana Gusmao attended the trial's opening in February. A month earlier, the independence hero visited Daschbach on his birthday, hand-feeding cake to the former priest and lifting a glass of wine to his lips, as cameras flashed.

Daschbach's lawyers have not made their legal strategy public, and court proceedings are closed. But documents seen by AP indicate that they will argue he is the victim of a conspiracy.

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In January, however, the former priest appeared to be preparing his supporters for the worst. He told local reporters that his message to the children who remain in the orphanage is this: "Be patient. We won't meet again because I will be detained for life, but I will still remember you and you have to be happy there."

The son of a Pittsburgh steelworker, Daschbach began his religious studies as a teenager. In 1964, he was ordained by Divine Word Missionaries in Chicago, the Catholic church's largest missionary congregation, with around 6,000 priests and brothers serving in more than 80 countries.

When he arrived in Southeast Asia a few years later, the nation now known as East Timor was under Portuguese control. That colonial rule would last until 1975 when the country was almost immediately invaded by neighboring Indonesia. A bloody, 24-year independence struggle followed, leaving as many as 200,000 people dead — a quarter of the population — through fighting, famine, and starvation.

Daschbach started the shelter in 1992 and earned his reputation during the conflict. He often told visitors about defending the women and children living in Topu Honis and surrounding areas, sheltering them in a cave, and leading a ragtag group armed with spears to stave off attackers.

Stories about the charismatic priest who joined in traditional dances with bells on his ankles, spoke local languages fluently, and gave mass where he blended Catholicism with the area's customs and animist beliefs, spread far beyond East Timor.

Foreign donors, tourists, and aid workers who made the three-hour hike up the steep, narrow jungle path to Kutet village were met by the grandfatherly priest who was often surrounded by laughing kids playing hopscotch in matching uniforms. In many photographs of Topu Honis taken by visitors and posted online, young girls are seen by Daschbach's side, on his lap, or with his arm pulling their tiny shoulders against him.

Some visitors stayed on the mountain for weeks or even months, so impressed by what they saw that they sent tens of thousands of dollars to support the shelter or pay for college scholarships.

Jan McColl, who helped fund Topu Honis, said she was devastated after she and another longtime Australian donor, Tony Hamilton, flew to East Timor and asked Daschbach point-blank whether he was a pedophile.

"He said, 'Yes. That's who I am. And always have been,'" said McColl, adding he responded calmly while continuing to eat his lunch. "So, we just got up and left the table. We were just absolutely distraught."

Hamilton said the exchange was jarring and surreal, and he has struggled to make sense of it while continuing to support some of the children. He and McColl have given affidavits.

"I think in some crazy way, he recognizes that what he has done is a crime," he said. "But he reconciles it somehow with the good that he's done."

The global clergy sex abuse scandal that has rocked the Catholic Church for more than two decades, has led to billions of dollars in settlements and the establishment of new programs aimed at preventing further abuse. But experts have seen a growing number of victims coming forward in developing nations like Haiti, Kenya, and Bangladesh, where priests and missionaries deployed by religious orders often operate with little or no oversight. Even if they're caught, they rarely face consequences. For some, the idea of ever jailing a priest, no matter the crime, seems blasphemous.

Many supporters in East Timor insist the accusations against Daschbach are lies and part of a bigger plot to take over the shelter and other property, including a beachside boarding school. After the trial's opening, dozens of mostly women and children waited outside the courtroom, wailing as the ex-priest waved goodbye to them from a vehicle.

"Law enforcers must see which one is better: Omitting one person or eliminating the future of many?" said local resident Antonio Molo, one of the doubters, who worries that hundreds of children may lose a chance at a better life if Daschbach is gone.

Though the Vatican acted swiftly to investigate and remove the priest when accusations were leveled three years ago, the local archdiocese was more accommodating.

It agreed to lodge him under informal house arrest at a church residence in the town of Maliana. But Daschbach still moved around with relative ease, including taking an overnight ferry to Oecusse enclave

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where he returned to the children's home, infuriating accusers and their families. Despite being stripped of his priestly duties, local media reported he continued to perform mass while there.

Monsignor Marco Sprizzi, Vatican ambassador to East Timor, stressed that Daschbach should not be allowed to be among children, but said there's little the church can do now.

"Once he's defrocked ... he's no more a priest. He is no part of the clergy," he said. "And, of course, that house for children was not -- since the beginning -- was not belonging to his religious congregation. He did it by himself, and it was in his own name."

Zach Hiner, executive director of the U.S.-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, said the church had a moral responsibility to do more and should have recalled Daschbach to the U.S. before laicizing him.

"We fear for the vulnerable children that he may still have access to," he said.

But Daschbach still has strong support within factions of the church, locally.

Late last year, the Archbishop of Dili sacked the president of the church's "Justice and Peace Commission" and publicly apologized following the publication of a report naming the victims and implying prosecutors, police, and NGOs investigating the allegations had sexually abused the accusers, themselves, by carrying out forensic exams. The report also alleged human trafficking, referring to seven accusers who had been moved to a safe house.

Former donors and the accusers were outraged, saying the report put the lives of those who came forward in danger. Threats of violence have been made against anyone who speaks out against Daschbach.

The ex-priest faces 14 counts of child sexual abuse, one count of child pornography and one count of domestic violence. He also is wanted in the U.S. for three counts of wire fraud linked to one of his California-based donors, which accused him in a court case of violating an agreement to protect those under his care. An Interpol Red Notice has been issued internationally for his arrest.

The accusers who spoke to AP described systematic abuse and inappropriate behavior, including Daschbach regularly overseeing the girls' showers. They said all of the children removed their clothes and stood together around a large concrete water basin outside, with the nude priest going from girl to girl shampooing their hair and splashing water on their private parts. They said he also took photos of them naked as they played in the rain, and that some girls were told he didn't want them to wear underwear.

His accusers said they were filled with hope when they arrived at the shelter. For the first time, they, along with many others, had clean clothes, time to play, and an emphasis on school. Most importantly, they had food. The meals were basic but steady.

The adoration and respect for the white American missionary was so commanding, the accusers said they did whatever he wanted without question.

One recalled first arriving at the shelter still distraught after her father had died and said the priest raped her that same night. She said he continued to do so frequently the entire time she was there.

She said he would lock the door and pull the curtains, telling her they had to be careful and that no one could know. She said he typically chose young children, but for those like her who were nearing puberty, Daschbach exercised caution.

"He would pull out and say, 'I have to stop, otherwise you'll be pregnant,'" she said.

Now, accusers say they struggle to process how someone who appeared so kind and selfless could ask them to do things that felt so wrong.

"When I was getting abused, I was like, 'Is this sort of like the payment?'" one accuser said. "That's what I was computing in my head ... 'this must be the price that I have to pay to be a part of this.' You know, like those shiny little dresses that these girls are wearing to church. That's not free. This is the price tag."

Associated Press reporter Raimundos Oki contributed to this report from East Timor.

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org

Nepal's God of Sight eye doctor to expand work beyond border

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

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LUMBINI, Nepal (AP) — Just next to the Mayadevi temple where Buddha was born more than 2,600 years ago, hundreds of people lined up outside a makeshift hospital on a recent hazy day, hoping their fading eyesight could be restored.

A day later, these saffron-robed Buddhist monks, old farmers and housewives were able to see the world again because the nation's renowned eye surgeon Dr. Sanduk Ruit was there with his innovative and inexpensive cataract surgery that has earned him many awards.

At the visitor center turned into eye temporary hospital in Lumbini, located 288 kilometers (180 miles) south west of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, the assembly line surgery made it possible for the nearly 400 patients to get Ruit's surgery in just three days.

"The whole objective, aim and my passion and love is to see there remain no people with unnecessary blindness in this part of the world," Ruit said, also known as Nepal's "God of Sight." "It is important that the people do receive equitable service and not that have receive and have not receive it. I want to make sure that everybody receives it."

Many people in Nepal, most of them poor, have benefited from Ruit's work where he founded the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology in Kathmandu and regularly visits remote villages high in the mountains and low lands of the Himalayan nation, taking with him a team of experts and equipment bringing surgery to their villages.

Ruit has already performed some 130,000 cataract surgeries and is now aiming to expand his work, taking it to as many countries as possible through a foundation he has formed with a British philanthropist Tej Kohli which targets 500,000 surgeries in the next five years.

Ruit said the idea of the Tej Kohli Ruit Foundation is to make cataract surgeries in Nepal affordable and accessible to all.

"We will scale it up globally to other parts of the world where it is needed," he said.

Ruit began his work in 1984 when the surgery was done by removing the entire cloudy cataract and giving thick glasses. He found that most people would not wear these glasses and chances of complication were very high. So he pioneered a simple technique where he removes the cataract without stitches through small incisions and replaces them with a low-cost artificial lens.

Ruit's average surgery costs about \$100. The surgery is free for those who can't afford it. Patients rarely have to spend the night at the hospital.

Nepal has limited number of hospitals and health workers and services are out of reach of most people.

Cataracts, which form a white film that cloud the eye's natural lens, commonly occur in older people but also sometimes affect children or young adults. The condition first causes vision to blur or become foggy because the eye is unable to focus properly. As the cataract grows and matures, it can eventually block out all light. Exposure to harsh ultraviolet radiation, especially at high altitudes as in Nepal, is a major risk factor.

At the surgery camps in Lumbini, patients and family were all praise for the doctor.

Bhola Chai, a 58-year-old office worker, who had to retire because of his fading vision, was thrilled he could finally see again.

"This surgery has changed my life," Chai said.

Others who have already benefited from Ruit's cataract surgery likened him to a god.

"The doctor is just not god-sent but he is a god for me who has given me a new life," said Satindra Nath Tripathi, a farmer who benefited from the surgery. "My world was completely dark, but now I have new life and new sight."

With his fading eyesight restored, Tripathi is already looking forward to working on his farm, growing rice, wheat and vegetables.

Afghans work to stem polio rise amid violence, pandemic

By RAHIM FAIEZ undefined

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan is trying to inoculate millions of children against polio after

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pandemic lockdowns stalled the effort to eradicate the crippling disease. But the recent killing of three vaccinators points to the dangers facing the campaign as turmoil grows in the country.

The three women were gunned down in two separate attacks on March 30 as they carried out door-to-door vaccinations in the eastern city of Jalalabad.

It was the first time that vaccination workers have been killed in a decade of door-to-door inoculations against the children's disease in Afghanistan. Such attacks have been more common in neighboring Pakistan, where at least 70 vaccinators and security personnel connected to vaccination campaigns have been killed since 2011.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only two countries in the world where polio is still endemic, and both have seen a disturbing increase in cases in recent years. In Afghanistan, 56 new cases were reported in 2020, the highest number since 2011, when 80 cases were registered.

Adela Mohammadi, a 21-year-old vaccinator worker in Kabul, said her parents didn't want her to go out to do inoculations on the day after the three women were killed in Jalalabad.

"I went, but with a lot of worry," she told The Associated Press. "I was thinking what if someone was waiting for us and suddenly started shooting at us."

"But at the end of the day, I love my job — I serve my people, especially children," she said. "Such attacks can't stop us from what we are doing."

In Pakistan, officials have struggled to overcome deep public suspicion over vaccines particularly since the U.S. used a fake vaccination campaign to unearth the hideout of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Hard-line clerics and militants have stoked the fears by depicting polio vaccinations as a Western plot to sterilize Muslim children.

In Afghanistan, some have also been suspicious of vaccinations, but that rarely if ever translated into violence. The new killings appear to reflect the disturbing rise in chaos in the past year, when the country has seen increasing targeted killings, sometimes of professionals or civil society figures, sometimes just seemingly at random.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for some of the violence. But the perpetrators of many attacks remain unknown, including the killings of the vaccination workers.

The violence adds a new worry as Afghanistan struggles to stamp out a disease that has largely been eliminated around the world. In children, polio can cause partial paralysis. Since 2010, the country has been carrying out regular inoculation campaigns in which workers go door to door, giving the vaccine to children. Most of the workers are women, since they can get better access to mothers and children.

Last year, authorities had to call off four planned inoculation rounds because of lockdowns against the coronavirus pandemic, though they did manage to conduct two rounds.

Authorities say nearly 10 million children are now in need of vaccination against polio. Of those, authorities are unable to reach some 3 million children living in areas under the control of Taliban insurgents. One round of inoculations was carried out earlier this year, and a second was launched March 29 — and continued despite the killings the next day. During the four-day second round, more than 6 million children were vaccinated, according to Health Ministry spokesman Ghulam Dastagir Nazari.

In Afghanistan's deeply conservative society, traumatized by decades of war, some are suspicious, viewing inoculations as a Western trick.

Mohammadi has been participating in door-to-door campaigns the past three years. She works in somewhat better educated parts of the capital, and most families she approaches allow their children to be given a dose. Public worries over the coronavirus and eagerness for treatment have made some more open to polio vaccinations, she said.

Still, she regularly faces sometimes angry resistance from some families who claim vaccines are forbidden by religion or harm children. "There are families who don't even open their gates for us, they just shout, if we don't leave, they will come out and beat us," she said.

The continued impact of polio can be seen at the International Committee of the Red Cross' Orthopedic Program in Afghanistan. It mainly provides artificial legs to the many wounded in war or by roadside bombs

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or mines. But it also offers services to anyone with mobility issues — including people affected by polio. In 2020, nearly 5,000 polio patients received treatment at the program, including physiotherapy, medical equipment and orthopedic devices.

Maiwa Gul, 35, a polio patient from eastern Khost province, was at the center on a recent day getting repairs to the leg prostheses that he needs to walk. He urged that all children be vaccinated. "Otherwise, they will eventually be in my position, needing someone to help them," he said.

Merjan Rasekh, head of public awareness at the Health Ministry's Polio Eradication Program, said the killing of the three vaccinators was "painful."

"If this situation continues, it would definitely have a negative impact on the morale of our health workers," he said.

But the young women at the forefront of the vaccination drive said it must continue.

"If we are afraid and don't go out to vaccinate, our children and all of us will face problems," said 22-year-old Shabana Maani.

A city wrestled down an addiction crisis. Then came COVID-19

By CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer

HUNTINGTON, W. Va. (AP) — Larreca Cox steered past the used tire shop, where a young man had collapsed a few days before, the syringe he'd used to shoot heroin still clenched in his fist.

She wound toward his house in the hills outside of town. The man had been revived by paramedics, and Cox leads a team with a mission of finding every overdose survivor to save them from the next one.

The road narrowed, and the man's mother stood in pink slippers in the rain to meet her. People have been dying all around her. Her nephew. Her neighbors. Then, almost, her son.

"People I've known all my life since I was born, it takes both hands to count them," she said. "In the last six months, they're gone."

As the COVID-19 pandemic killed more than a half-million Americans, it also quietly inflamed what was before it one of the country's greatest public health crises: addiction. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 88,000 people died of drug overdoses in the 12 months ending in August 2020 — the latest figures available. That is the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a year.

The devastation is an indictment of the public health infrastructure, which failed to fight the dueling crises of COVID-19 and addiction, said Dr. Michael Kilkenny, who runs the health department in Cabell County, including Huntington.

The pandemic drove those already in the shadows further into isolation, economic fragility and fear while at the same time upending the treatment and support systems that might save them. Simultaneously, Kilkenny said, disruptions in health care exacerbated the collateral consequences of injection drug use — HIV, hepatitis C, deadly bacterial infections that chew flesh to the bone and cause people in their 20s to have amputations and open-heart surgeries. There were 38 HIV infections tied to injection drug use last year in this county of fewer than 100,000 people — more than in 2019 in New York City.

Huntington was once ground zero for the addiction epidemic, and several years ago they formed the Quick Response Team Cox leads. "Facing addiction? We can help," reads the decal plastered on the side of the Ford Explorer they use to crisscross all over the county.

It was a hard-fought battle, but it worked. The county's overdose rate plummeted. They wrestled down an HIV cluster. They finally felt hope.

Then the pandemic arrived and it undid much of their effort.

On this day, five overdose reports had arrived on Cox's desk — a daily tally similar to the height of their crisis. The one she held detailed how 33-year-old Steven Ash slumped among the piles of used tires behind the shop his family has owned for generations. His mother, pleading, crying, had thrown water on him because she couldn't think of anything else to do.

Ash was 19 when he took his first OxyContin pill and his life unraveled after that, cycling through jails,

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he said.

The last year has been particularly brutal. His cousin died from an overdose in somebody's backyard. He has a friend in the hospital in her 20s scheduled for open-heart surgery from shooting drugs with dirty needles, and the doctors aren't sure she'll make it. He had three agonizing surgeries himself from drug-related infections. He took more drugs to numb the pain, but it made things worse — a vicious cycle, he said.

He knows he's putting his mother through hell.

"I fight with myself every day. It's like I've got two devils on one shoulder and an angel on the other," he said. "Who is going to win today?"

Larrecsa Cox has a file cabinet back in her office, and the top three drawers are filled with thousands of reports on her neighbors trapped in this fight. She can recite what treatments they've tried, their stints in jail, the life story that led them here; their parents' names, their kids' names, their dogs' names.

The cabinet's bottom drawer is labeled "dead."

It's filling up fast.

The Quick Response Team was born amid a horrific crescendo of America's addiction epidemic: On the afternoon of August 15, 2016, 28 people overdosed in four hours in Huntington. Connie Priddy, a nurse with the county's Emergency Medical Services, describes that afternoon as a citywide rock bottom. "Our day of reckoning," she calls it.

Almost everyone who overdosed that afternoon was saved, but no one was offered help navigating the bewildering treatment system. One of them, a 21-year-old woman, overdosed again 41 days later. That time she died.

The crisis was raging not just in Huntington but across America, killing by the tens of thousands a year. Life expectancy began tumbling, year after year, for the first time in a century — driven largely by what researchers call "deaths of despair," from alcohol, suicide and drugs.

Huntington was once a thriving town of almost 100,000 people. It sits at the corner of West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio, and the railroad tracks through town used to rumble all day from trains packed with coal. Then the coal industry collapsed, and the city's population dwindled in half. Nearly a third of those left behind live in poverty.

By 2017, the county had an average of six overdoses a day. Paramedics grew weary of reviving the same people again and again. Some businesses changed out their bathroom light bulbs to blue — to make it harder for drug users to find a vein.

They couldn't ignore it anymore. The county got two grants and selected Cox, a paramedic, to lead a rotating crew of addiction specialists, faith leaders and police officers. They track down people who overdosed in abandoned houses and tent encampments on the river, in rural stretches outside of town, at half-million-dollar homes on the golf course.

If the people they find are ready for treatment, they get them there. If they aren't, they try to help them survive in the meantime.

Cox has a calm demeanor, with dreadlocks down to her waist, and she clips a gold knife in the back pocket of her skinny jeans, bought to match her gold hoop earrings. "You're not in trouble," she always says first, then offers them the overdose reversal medication naloxone.

She wants her clients to be straight with her so she's straight with them. "Everybody here is thinking that you're going to go get high and not come back," she'll say, their weeping families nodding their heads. People like her for it, and that makes it easier.

A white board in their office lists the names of clients they've ushered into formal treatment — about 30% of those they're able to track down. After two years, the county's overdose calls dropped by more than 50 percent.

This beleaguered city offered a glimmer of hope to a nation impotent to contain its decades-long addiction catastrophe. The federal government honored Huntington as a model city. They won awards. Other places came to study their success.

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The first couple months of the pandemic were quiet, said Priddy, who coordinates the team and tracks their data. Then came May. The 911 calls started and seemed like they wouldn't stop — 142 in a single month, nearly as many as in the worst of their crisis.

"It was almost like a horrible human experiment," Priddy said. "Take human contact and personal interaction away from an individual and see how much it affects them. You would never ever do that in real life. But COVID did it for us."

By the end of 2020, Cabell County's EMS calls for overdoses had increased 14% over the year before.

"That makes us sick," Priddy said, but she's heard from colleagues in other counties that their spikes were twice as high.

The CDC estimates that across the country overdose deaths increased nearly 27% in the 12-month span ending in August 2020. In West Virginia, long the state hit hardest, fatal overdoses increased by more than 38%.

The overdose tally captures just a fraction of the desperation, Priddy said. In Cabell County, ambulance calls for dead-on-arrival suicides increased five-fold in the first two months of the pandemic compared to the year before.

Report after report arrived on Cox's desk. After years working on an ambulance, she was used to death.

But in October, she saw a name and lost her breath: Kayla Carter.

Carter had overdosed dozens of times. She was sassy, with big bright eyes and a quick wit. In another life, maybe, they would have been friends.

"Dead on arrival," the report said.

Kayla Carter grew up in a tiny town 20 miles from Huntington, in a house with a swimming pool in the backyard. She had a brilliant mind for math and loved the stars. Her family always thought she'd grow up to work for NASA.

Instead, she was addicted to opioids by the time she turned 20.

"We went through living hell," said her mother, Lola.

By the end, Carter was sometimes living on the streets, in and out of jails and rehabs, sometimes staying in apartments with no electricity. Her family took her groceries and ordered her pizzas, but after years of chaos, they couldn't have her at home: She'd stolen checks from her grandmother. She'd taken the antique coin collection her father inherited from his dad. She'd cleaned out her mother's jewelry box and pawned it all for \$238.

Carter was 30 years old and already walked with a cane that she'd painted her favorite color, pink. Her joints were disintegrating, infection coursed through her body. She had Hepatitis C and HIV.

In early 2018, HIV started quietly spreading among injection drug users in Huntington. By the time they realized what was happening, dozens had been infected, said Kilkenny with the county health department. They ramped up testing, treatment and the needle exchange program that offers clean syringes to drug users, recommended by the CDC. Cases subsided.

But they've surged again.

As Huntington tries to beat back the damage the pandemic has done, Priddy said it feels like their own state is working against them. A bill advancing in the Republican-controlled state legislature would strictly limit needle exchange programs, with critics citing the dangers of discarded syringes and crime.

However, the CDC describes syringe programs as "safe, effective, and cost-saving," — they do not increase drug use or crime, studies have found, and they dramatically cut the spread of Hepatitis C and HIV. And an hour's drive from Huntington, the state's capital city of Charleston is experiencing an HIV outbreak that the CDC describes as "the most concerning in the United States." Priddy implored her legislator to block the bill, saying that otherwise Huntington's hard work will be wiped out and many more will die.

Kayla Carter was hospitalized last summer with endocarditis, a heart infection from using dirty needles. Her parents stood at her bedside and thought she looked 100 years old.

Her father, Jeff, a retired paramedic, bought her a teddy bear and she wouldn't let it go. It seemed like

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she was suddenly determined to live: "Please don't let them unplug me," she begged as they prepared to put her on a ventilator for open-heart surgery. They cried all the way home.

She stayed off drugs when she got out of the hospital. She gained 30 pounds. Her sister took her fishing. She got a cat and named it Luna, after her love of the night sky. She said she was sorry for all she'd missed: babies born, birthday parties, funerals. They thought they had her back.

Then she stopped answering calls. Her mother went to her apartment on a Friday morning in October and found her dead on her bathroom floor.

They are still waiting for the medical examiner's report, but her father would rather never see it. It brings him comfort to think she died from complications from her surgeries, and not that she relapsed and overdosed.

Either way, the drugs killed her, he said.

"The only thing about any of it gives me any relief at all," he says, "is knowing we're not the only ones."

Now the box of her ashes sits in their living room, and her mother talks to them every night, then cries herself to sleep.

Arreca Cox thumbed through the file folders in her bottom drawer, labeled with the names of their dead.

A 24-year-old who left a suicide note. A 26-year-old whose husband was so hysterical when he found her that he could barely speak. A 39-year-old who went into treatment and was healthy and hopeful for weeks, then relapsed last month and died in his kitchen.

The day before they'd gone to an apartment, hunting for a client who survived an overdose at the Greyhound station. On the door of another unit, someone had scrawled "RiP Debo" in red spray paint.

It had been the home of 41-year-old Debbie Barnette, a mother of three. When she was lying in a hospice bed in November, her sister Lesa had to tell her she was dying. Debbie asked her why.

"The drugs got you, babe," Lesa remembers saying. "They got you."

Barnette, bold and headstrong, had struggled with addiction all her life. She overdosed many times, and like Carter developed infections. By the time she sought treatment, the infection in her heart was too far gone.

Lesla held her hand as she died early one morning. The only peace Lesa has is that now she's finally free.

Cox moved Barnette's file to the bottom drawer.

At first, trying to save all these people was so consuming Cox often skipped dinner with her two daughters. She fostered a client's dog so he could go to rehab. She bought one a dress for a job interview. She's driven a woman six hours to treatment in Maryland.

She fears COVID-19 turned all this death and addiction around her into what seems like a national afterthought.

"I can't believe we've lost all these people," she said and shook her head. "Sometimes, you just have to focus on the living."

So she climbed into her SUV to start the day. In the passenger seat sat Sue Howland, Cox's sidekick. The 62-year-old peer recovery coach has been sober for 10 years. She and Cox have become like family.

Years ago, Howland nearly drank herself to death, so she can relate to the madness their clients are facing.

A woman had called that morning to say she needed help. They drove to her apartment and knocked on the door.

"I don't know if anything can help me, I'm too far gone," Betty Thompson said as she cracked the door open. "There's something inside me, like an animal."

Thompson is 65, soft spoken, and lives alone. She has struggled with alcohol since she was 12 and started pouring her dad's whisky into soda bottles. But this year has been her worst. She drank more than she ever has to drown out the terror of contracting coronavirus and dying.

"In a way I feel empty, there's nobody here to talk to," she said, and slumped down on the couch, rustling a grocery bag full of family photos. She fished one out of her granddaughters and marveled at their beauty. She doesn't get to see them anymore. "I drink to escape. I try to get away from feeling."

Howland crouched next to her.

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"We just need to get you back on the right path," she said.

It had been days since Thompson had eaten or taken her medications. Cox combed through her bottles of pills and sorted them into a pill organizer. They scheduled an appointment with her doctor the next day. They called to have a sandwich delivered. Cox packed up her trash to haul out to the dumpster.

They told her they'd be back the next day, and that they love her.

"Who could love me?"

Howland carried in her back pocket a token marking a bright spot amid all the day's misery: a coin celebrating a client's one-year anniversary in recovery. They drove to the call center where she works to deliver it.

After struggling with opioid addiction most of her life, 37-year-old Sarah Kelly white-knuckled her way through the pandemic. Then she navigated courts to get custody of her kids back after more than two years apart.

"I knew there was this version of me still in there somewhere, and I knew that if I woke up every day and really decided to stay sober, I could get to be her again," she said. "I could look in the mirror and be proud of who I was, and my children could be proud of me."

They live together now in a little house on the outskirts of town.

She worried that her history would humiliate them, but they tell her it's never made them feel inferior. Many of their classmates are being raised by grandparents or foster families. They call them Gen-Z, she said, but they should call them Gen-O: a generation of children born to opioid-addicted parents.

She leaves home before dawn each day to ride two buses to her job answering calls from people trying to find COVID-19 vaccines.

"People are so desperate," said Kelly. "We try to help them, and that feels really good."

"I'm so proud of you," Howland said. "You should be proud of you, too."

Cox and Howland drove away, toward the next person on their list.

Soon, Cox's phone buzzed with an alert of another overdose in progress a few blocks away.

A 39-year-old woman hadn't used drugs for months. Then she relapsed and collapsed on the bathroom floor, barely breathing. The 911 caller was screaming.

Summoning seniors: Big new push to vaccinate older Americans

By ZEKE MILLER and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

CLARKSDALE, Miss. (AP) — The first hurdle was getting on the bus. Seventy-four-year-old Linda Busby hesitated outside a community center where older people were loading up to go get the coronavirus vaccine.

"I was scared, I'm not afraid to say that," Busby said Wednesday after getting her shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine after encouragement from a staff member and her brother. "I thought I wasn't going to get it at first. Nobody likes getting shots."

Busby's hesitance is just what the Biden administration and its allies in the states are combating, one person at a time, as the White House steps up appeals to seniors to get inoculated. The vaccination rate for this top-priority group is reaching a plateau even as supplies have expanded.

About 76% of Americans aged 65 and older have received at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccines since authorization in December, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the rate of new vaccinations among the group most vulnerable to adverse virus outcomes has dramatically slowed.

It's a growing source of concern, not only because of the potential for preventable deaths and serious illness among seniors in coming months but also for what it could portend for America's broader population.

"I want to make a direct appeal to our seniors and everyone who cares about them," President Joe Biden said Tuesday, citing "incredible progress" but declaring it's still not enough.

"It's simple: Seniors, it's time for you to get vaccinated now. Get vaccinated now."

By government estimates, about 12.9 million American seniors have yet to receive their first shot. Even though they were the first age group prioritized for shots, more than 23% of those 75 and older have yet to be vaccinated.

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Supply constraints initially slowed the pace of senior vaccinations, but not for months for those in high-priority age groups. Instead, officials say, the slowdown is caused by a mix of issues, from people having difficulty finding and getting to inoculation sites to vaccine hesitancy.

Closing the gap will require taking into account all the obstacles for seniors, be they technological, transportation or personal hesitance, said Sandy Markwood, CEO of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, who acknowledged the vaccination rates "for older adults has somewhat plateaued."

It's a potential harbinger of the challenges to come with other demographic groups. All adult Americans will become eligible for vaccination in the next two weeks, although the process of administering enough shots to begin returning to "normal" will take months longer. Many states, even as they throw open the doors on eligibility, are still maintaining priority vaccination systems, or dedicated distribution channels, to keep seniors who want the vaccine at the front of the line.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, has predicted that between 75% and 85% of the population may need to be vaccinated to reach "herd immunity" and bring an end to the outbreak in the U.S.

That's one reason the White House and states have moved to step up assistance programs for seniors and public education campaigns.

Markwood credited the administration's \$1.9 trillion rescue plan for providing funding necessary "to go out there and do that more intensive, sometimes one-on-one outreach" with seniors, saying, "It's that last mile, the last group who need the extra support, that's going to take that extra outreach and time."

Even more help is on the way.

Beginning next week, the administration is launching a \$100 million effort to fund community organizations providing "high-intensity" support to at-risk seniors and those with disabilities through the Department of Health and Human Services. That includes assistance with booking appointments, traveling to vaccination sites and other support through the vaccination process.

Similar programs are already underway at the state level.

In Clarksdale, Mississippi, the state hosted its first-ever mobile vaccinations for homebound older adults on Wednesday. That's where a bus picked up Busby outside a senior daycare and community center located next door to a low-income housing complex for the elderly.

As Busby balked, a staff member encouraged her to join the group waiting to get on board. She said later a main motivating factor for her to get the shot was the support of her brother, who called her up to encourage her to get vaccinated.

"I'm going to call him as soon as I get home, and let him know I did it," she said, as she got back on the bus to return to the community center.

Older folks are actually less hesitant than many. According to an AP-NORC poll in late March, 11% of Americans aged 65 or older say they probably or definitely won't get vaccinated. That compares with 25% of all adults.

The White House has repeatedly pointed to family members and community leaders as the best validators to overcome hesitance. It is also moving to create more vaccination sites closer to homes, recognizing that access concerns span demographic groups. On Wednesday, the White House announced that all of the more than 1,400 federally qualified community health centers will be able to begin administering vaccines. It also is aiming to expand mobile vaccine clinics.

A disproportionate number of unvaccinated seniors are from Black or Latino communities, or from people without easy access to health care, said Kathleen Cameron, senior director of the National Council on Aging's Center for Healthy Aging, mirroring disparities in the broader population. And about 6% of seniors are homebound.

"Those are the hardest to reach people, and those are the ones we need to work hardest to get to, either to bring them to vaccination centers or to bring the vaccines to them," she said.

Aurelia Jones-Taylor, CEO of Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center Inc. in Clarksdale, said one of the major helps — but sometimes barriers — to getting older adults vaccinated is family members.

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Some encourage their relatives, helping them with rides to clinics and making sure they get their shots. But in many cases, younger family members are misinformed about the vaccine and discourage older relatives from getting it. Aside from that, older adults can be harder to reach because they aren't savvy on social media and live alone.

"They are stuck in the house, and they are fearful," Jones-Taylor said. "We have to overcome the fear."

According to the CDC, seniors, depending on their age, are between 1,300 and 8,700 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than those 5-17, and they make up more than 80% of the 559,000 U.S. fatalities due to the virus.

One major help in Mississippi — especially among older adults — is the encouragement of pastors and church communities, Jones-Taylor said.

"It's paramount," she said. "That's who they listen to."

Julia Ford, 71, spends most days at the Rev. S.L.A. Jones Activity Center. She said her faith was a major motivating factor for her getting the vaccine.

"I wasn't sure what I would do — 'Will I get it or will I not?' I talked to the Lord to give me understanding about it," said Ford, whose brother died of the virus. "I thought about the verse, 'Everything that was made was made by him.' There was nothing made that was not made by him. He made the virus and he made the antidote."

Interior secretary steps into Utah public lands tug-of-war

By SOPHIA EPPOLITO Associated Press/Report for America

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — For decades, a public lands tug-of-war has played out over a vast expanse of southern Utah where red rocks reveal petroglyphs and distinctive twin buttes bulge from a grassy valley.

A string of U.S. officials has heard from those who advocate for broadening national monuments to protect the area's many archaeological and cultural sites, considered sacred to surrounding tribes, and those who fiercely oppose what they see as federal overreach.

On Thursday, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland will be the latest cabinet official to visit Bears Ears National Monument — and the first Indigenous one.

Haaland, a member of Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, is scheduled to meet with tribes and elected officials at Bears Ears before submitting a review with recommendations on whether to reverse President Donald Trump's decision to downsize that site and Grand Staircase-Escalante, another Utah national monument.

The visit underscores her unique position as the first Native American to lead a department that has broad authority over tribal nations, as well as energy development and other uses for the country's sprawling federal lands.

"She brings something that no other cabinet secretary has brought, which is that her Indigenous communities are coming with her in that room," said Char Miller, a professor of environmental analysis at Pomona College.

Miller said the outcome of the negotiations will shed light on how the Biden administration plans to respond to other public lands disputes and will likely impact subsequent conversations with other states on natural resources.

Haaland faces competing interests: Tribes across the U.S. have hailed her confirmation as a chance to have their voices heard and their land and rights protected, while Republican leaders labeled her a "radical" who could, along with President Joe Biden, stunt oil and gas development and destroy thousands of jobs.

Pat Gonzales-Rogers, executive director of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, said he looks forward to Haaland seeking tribes' input, which he called a "far cry" from her predecessors in the Trump administration.

He noted Haaland is familiar with the landscape — Bears Ears contains many sites of spiritual importance to New Mexico's pueblos — but acknowledged she has a responsibility to hear from all sides.

"She is the interior secretary for all of us, and that also requires her to engage other groups."

The coalition wants the monument restored to its original size, or even enlarged, but Gonzales-Rogers said he hopes Haaland's visit will at least be a step toward a more certainty.

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"All parties would like to see some permanence, and they don't want it to vacillate between either administrations or political ideology," he said.

Prominent Utah Republicans, including U.S. Sen. Mitt Romney and new Gov. Spencer Cox, have expressed concern with the review under Biden's administration and demanded state leaders be involved. Haaland is expected to meet with them, along with Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson and U.S. Rep. Blake Moore during her visit.

Romney said the meeting will give Haaland a chance to receive valuable input from local officials and residents.

"I'm hopeful this visit will also highlight to the Secretary the importance of working with Congress toward a permanent legislative solution for the monuments' boundaries and management that reflects the input of Utah's state, local and tribal leaders, rather than unilateral action," he said.

Former President Barack Obama proclaimed Bears Ears a national monument in 2016. The site was the first to receive the designation at the specific request of tribes.

Its boundaries were downsized by 85% under the Trump administration, while Grand Staircase-Escalante was cut nearly in half. The reductions paved the way for potential coal mining, and oil and gas drilling on lands that were previously off-limits. Activity was limited because of market forces.

Environmental, tribal, paleontological and outdoor recreation organizations are suing to restore the monuments' original boundaries, arguing presidents don't have legal authority to change monuments their predecessors created. On the flip side, Republicans have argued Democratic presidents misused the Antiquities Act signed by President Theodore Roosevelt to designate monuments beyond what's necessary to protect archaeological and cultural resources.

Haaland will be a key player in deciding what comes next.

She has said she will follow Biden's agenda, not her own, on oil and gas drilling, and told reporters at a briefing last week that her report to the president will reflect conversations with people who know and understand the area.

"That starts with listening," she said, adding she has been to Bears Ears and knows "how special it is."

The Biden administration has said the decision to review the monuments is part of an expansive plan to tackle climate change and reverse the Trump administration's "harmful policies."

But Mike Noel, a former state representative and vocal critic of expanding the monuments, said it would be a mistake for the administration to "go back and rub salt in the wounds" by reversing Trump's decision.

He said he fears that not allowing local and state officials to make these decisions will only further divide those involved.

"It's never a good thing when decisions like this are made from Washington, D.C.," Noel said. "I just think it's being done wrong, and I hope that the new secretary recognizes that."

Wilfred Herrera Jr., chairman of the All Pueblo Council of Governors and a former governor of Laguna Pueblo, noted places like Bears Ears and Chaco Canyon in New Mexico connect tribal members to their ancestors. He said protecting them is the council's highest duty.

"Our current challenge — this threat to our cultural survival — is epitomized by these two examples and many other areas of equal importance," he said.

Inside secret Syria talks aimed at freeing American hostages

By BEN FOX, ERIC TUCKER and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

Last summer, two U.S. officials ventured into hostile territory for a secret high-stakes meeting with American adversaries.

The Syrian government officials they were scheduled to meet in Damascus seemed ready to discuss the fate of U.S. hostages believed held in their country, including Austin Tice, a journalist captured eight years earlier. The release of the Americans would be a boon to President Donald Trump months ahead of the election. And a breakthrough seemed possible.

Yet the trip was ultimately fruitless, with the Syrians raising a series of demands that would have funda-

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mentally reshaped Washington's policy toward Damascus, including the removal of sanctions, the withdrawal of troops from the country and the restoration of normal diplomatic ties. Equally as problematic for the American negotiators: Syrian officials offered no meaningful information on the fate and whereabouts of Tice and others.

"Success would have been bringing the Americans home and we never got there," Kash Patel, who attended the meeting as a senior White House aide, said in his first public comments about the effort.

The White House acknowledged the meeting in October, but said little about it. New details have emerged in interviews The Associated Press conducted in recent weeks with people familiar with the talks, some of whom spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

The AP has also learned about U.S. attempts to build goodwill with Syria well before the talks took place, with Patel describing how an unidentified U.S. ally in the region offered assistance with cancer treatment for the wife of President Bashar Assad.

The details shed light on the sensitive and often secretive efforts to free hostages held by U.S. adversaries, a process that yielded high-profile successes for Trump but also dead ends. It's unclear how aggressively the new Biden administration will advance the efforts to free Tice and other Americans held around the world, particularly when demands at a negotiating table clash with the White House's broader foreign policy goals.

The August meeting in Damascus represented the highest-level talks in years between the U.S. and the Assad government. It was extraordinary given the two countries' adversarial relationship and because the Syrian government has never acknowledged holding Tice or knowing anything about his whereabouts.

Yet the moment offered some promise. Trump had already shown a willingness to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East. And he had made hostage recovery a top foreign policy priority, celebrating releases by inviting freed detainees to the White House.

Months after the Damascus talks, as Tice's name resurfaced in the news, Trump sent a note to Tice's parents, who live in Houston, saying he "would never stop" working for their son's release, his mother, Debra, told the AP. But Tice's fate was unknown when Trump left office on Jan. 20 and remains so to this day. The former Marine had reported for The Washington Post, McClatchy newspapers, CBS and other outlets.

The Biden administration, too, has pledged to make hostage recovery a priority. But it has also called out the Syrian government for human rights abuses and seems unlikely to be more receptive to the conditions Damascus raised last summer in order to even continue the dialogue.

Tice has occupied a prominent spot in the public and political consciousness since disappearing in August 2012 at a checkpoint in a contested area west of Damascus. He had ventured deep into the country at a time when other reporters had decided it was too dangerous, disappearing soon before he was to leave.

A video released weeks later showed him blindfolded and held by armed men and saying, "Oh, Jesus." He has not been heard from since. U.S. authorities operate under the assumption he's alive. Syria has never acknowledged holding him.

Efforts to secure his release have been complicated by a lack of diplomatic relations and the conflict in Syria, where the U.S. maintains about 900 troops in the eastern part of the country in an effort to prevent the Islamic State group's resurgence.

"My assumption is he's alive and he's waiting for me to come and get him," said Roger Carstens, a former Army Special Forces officer who attended the meeting with Patel in his capacity as U.S. special presidential envoy for hostage affairs under Trump. He was kept in the position by Biden.

At the time of the meeting, Patel was senior counterterrorism adviser at the White House after serving as House Intelligence Committee aide, where he gained some notoriety for advancing Republican efforts to challenge the investigation into Russian interference into the 2016 election. He was previously a Justice Department prosecutor under President Barack Obama.

The meeting was more than a year in the making, Patel said, requiring him to seek help in Lebanon, which still has ties with Assad.

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At one point, a U.S. "ally in the region" also helped build goodwill with the Syrian government by providing assistance with cancer treatment for Assad's wife, he said, declining to provide further details. The Syrian government announced a year before the meeting that she had recovered from breast cancer.

The men arrived as part of an intentionally small delegation, driving through Damascus and seeing no obvious signs of the conflict that has killed around a half million people and displaced half of Syria's pre-war population of 23 million over 10 years.

Inside an office of Ali Mamlouk, the head of the Syrian intelligence agency, they asked for information about Tice as well as Majd Kamalmaz, a psychologist from Virginia who vanished in 2017, and several others.

Hostage talks are innately challenging, with negotiators facing demands that may seem unreasonable or at odds with U.S. foreign policy or that may produce nothing even if satisfied.

In this instance, the conditions floated by the Syrians, described by multiple people, would have required the U.S. to overhaul virtually its entire Syria policy.

The U.S. shuttered its embassy in Damascus in 2012 and withdrew its ambassador as Syria's civil war worsened. Though Trump in 2019 announced the withdrawal of troops from northern Syria, a military presence remains to help protect an opposition enclave in the northeast, an area that includes oil and natural gas.

With their demands unmet, the Syrians offered no meaningful information on Tice, including a proof of life, that could have generated significant momentum, Patel said. Though he said he was optimistic after a "legitimate diplomatic engagement," he looks back with regret.

"I would say it's probably one of my biggest failures under the Trump administration, not getting Austin back," Patel said.

The outcome of the diplomacy was deflating for Tice's parents, though they said it showed engagement with Damascus was possible.

"And it's possible to have that dialogue without the United States national security being threatened, without our Middle East policy being impacted, without all the horrible things we were told over the years might happen if the United States actually recognized that there was a government in Damascus," Tice's father, Marc, said in an interview.

In a statement, the State Department said bringing home hostages is one of the Biden administration's highest priorities and called on Syria to free them. But prospects for talks are uncertain, especially without a more substantial commitment from Damascus. It's unlikely that the administration sees the Syrians, called out in December by the global chemical watchdog for failing to declare a chemical weapons facility, as credible negotiating partners.

Biden has said little about Syria, though he included it among international problems that the U.N. Security Council should address. In February, he authorized airstrikes against Iran-backed militias in Syria. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last week the situation in Syria is as grave as ever.

Last November, after a journalist erroneously tweeted that Tice had been released, his mother wrote a note to be delivered to Trump saying she hoped he could one day make that news a reality.

Trump responded, photocopying her note and adding his own Sharpie-written message. "Debra," he wrote, she recalled. "Working so hard on this. Looking for the answer. We want Austin back. I will never stop."

But she said the family does not need letters from the president.

"The thing that is wanted here, the thing we are asking here, is to see Austin on the tarmac, and to have the president of the United States shake his hand," she said.

Expert: Chauvin never took knee off Floyd's neck area

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Officer Derek Chauvin had his knee on George Floyd's neck area — and was bearing down with most of his weight — the entire 9 1/2 minutes the Black man lay facedown with his hands cuffed behind his back, a use-of-force expert testified at Chauvin's murder trial.

Jody Stiger, a Los Angeles Police Department sergeant serving as a prosecution witness, said Wednesday

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that based on his review of video evidence, Chauvin applied pressure to Floyd's neck or neck area from the time officers began pinning Floyd to the ground until paramedics began to move him to a stretcher.

"That particular force did not change during the entire restraint period?" prosecutor Steve Schleicher asked as he showed the jury a composite of five still images.

"Correct," replied Stiger, who on Tuesday testified that the force used against Floyd was excessive.

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson countered by pointing out what he said were moments in the video footage when Chauvin's knee did not appear to be on Floyd's neck but on his shoulder blade area or the base of his neck. Stiger did not give much ground, saying the officer's knee in some of the contested images still seemed to be near Floyd's neck, though he agreed his weight might have shifted at times.

In other testimony, the lead Minnesota state investigator on the case, James Reyerson, initially agreed with Nelson that Floyd seemed to say in a police body-camera video of his arrest, "I ate too many drugs."

But when a prosecutor played a longer clip of the video, Reyerson said he believed what Floyd really said was "I ain't do no drugs."

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 struggled and claimed to be claustrophobic as police tried to put him in a squad car, and they pinned him to the pavement.

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

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 Floyd's drug use and his underlying health conditions are what killed him, not Chauvin's knee, as prosecutors contend. Fentanyl and methamphetamine were found in Floyd's system.

Breahna Giles, a state forensic scientist, testified Wednesday that pills found in the SUV Floyd was driving contained methamphetamine and fentanyl. Another witness, forensic chemist Susan Meith, testified that remnants of a pill found in the back of the police squad car also contained methamphetamine and fentanyl. Earlier testimony revealed that that pill contained DNA from Floyd's saliva.

Earlier, Nelson asked Stiger about uses of force that are commonly referred to by police as "lawful but awful." Stiger conceded that "you can have a situation where by law it looks horrible to the common eye, but based on the state law, it's lawful."

Nelson has argued, too, that the officers on the scene were distracted by what they perceived as an increasingly hostile crowd of onlookers.

But Stiger told the jury, "I did not perceive them as being a threat," even though some bystanders were name-calling and using foul language. He added that most of the yelling was due to "their concern for Mr. Floyd."

Nelson's voice rose as he asked Stiger how a reasonable officer would be trained to view a crowd while dealing with a suspect, "and somebody else is now pacing around and watching you and watching you and calling you names and saying (expletives)." Nelson said such a situation "could be viewed by a reasonable officer as a threat."

"As a potential threat, correct," Stiger said.

Chauvin's lawyer noted that dispatchers had described Floyd as between 6 feet and 6-foot-6 and possibly under the influence. Stiger agreed it was reasonable for Chauvin to come to the scene with a heightened sense of awareness.

Stiger further agreed with Nelson that an officer's actions must be judged from the point of view of a reasonable officer on the scene, not in hindsight. Among other things, Nelson said that given typical emergency medical response times, it was reasonable for Chauvin to believe that paramedics would be there soon.

In other testimony, Stiger said that as Floyd lay pinned to the ground, Chauvin squeezed Floyd's fingers and pulled one of his wrists toward his handcuffs, a technique that uses pain to get someone to comply,

but Chauvin did not appear to let up.

"Then at that point it's just pain," Stiger said.

Stiger was asked by prosecutors whether Chauvin had an obligation to take Floyd's distress into account as the officer considered how much force to use.

"Absolutely," Stiger replied. "As the time went on, clearly in the video, you could see that Mr. Floyd's ... health was deteriorating. His breath was getting lower. His tone of voice was getting lower. His movements were starting to cease."

"So at that point, as a officer on scene," he continued, "you have a responsibility to realize that, 'OK, something is not right. Something has changed drastically from what was occurring earlier.' So therefore you have a responsibility to take some type of action."

During the testimony of Reyerson, the state investigator, prosecutors stopped and started multiple videos and examined time stamps in an attempt to show the jury how long Chauvin held his position after Floyd stopped talking and moving. Reyerson testified that Chauvin's knee was on Floyd's neck for minutes after Floyd went silent.

Texas investigating abuse allegations at migrant facility

By PAUL J. WEBER and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas child welfare officials said Wednesday they received three reports alleging abuse and neglect at a San Antonio coliseum that is holding more than 1,600 immigrant teenagers who crossed the southern border.

It is the first time state officials announced they are investigating such allegations at one of the emergency facilities the U.S. government has quickly set up in Texas amid a sharp increase in crossings of unaccompanied youths. A county official who also volunteers at the San Antonio site, the Freeman Coliseum, said the nature of the allegations do not align with what she has seen in multiple visits to the facility.

Child welfare officials would not reveal details about who made the allegations, but Republican Gov. Greg Abbott said his understanding was that they came from someone who had been inside the facility. One of the allegations include sexual abuse, but no further details were provided.

Other allegations include insufficient staffing, children not eating and those who tested positive for COVID-19 not being separated, Abbott said at a news conference that he quickly arranged outside the facility Wednesday evening. For weeks, Abbott has joined Republicans in criticizing the Biden administration for the handling of the migration challenge at the U.S. southern border.

"This facility should shut down immediately. The children should be moved to better staffed and better secured locations," Abbott said.

Bexar County Commissioner Rebeca Clay-Flores, who has been inside the facility as both an elected official and volunteer, said the teenagers are offered three meals and two snacks a day and anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 is put in a separate area far from other children. She toured the facility with Abbott after his press conference and said he asked staff questions that included COVID-19 testing protocols.

"I wish the governor had done his tour before the press conference when he politicized children," said Clay-Flores, an elected Democrat.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement that it could not comment on specific cases but "has a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behavior."

The allegations were received by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Spokesman Patrick Crimmins said he did not immediately know if the state had received other abuse or neglect allegations at emergency sites for migrant youths in Texas.

HHS has rushed to open large sites to house migrant children across the Southwest amid a sharp increase in crossings of unaccompanied youths at the southern border. The agency's lack of capacity as border crossings were rising at the start of the Biden administration has led to children sometimes waiting for weeks in overcrowded and unsuitable Border Patrol facilities.

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Just in March and April, HHS has added more than 17,000 beds at convention centers, camps for oil field workers, and military bases — more than doubling the capacity of its longstanding system of permanent facilities that took years to open.

The U.S. government last month had stopped taking immigrant teenagers to one site in Midland as it faced questions about the safety of the emergency sites. Midland County District Attorney Laura Nodolf said Wednesday that they have been “faced with allegations that have resulted in an ongoing criminal investigation” but offered no further details. She said the allegations were also reported to federal officials.

To staff its emergency sites, HHS waived regulations that normally apply to its permanent facilities, including bypassing FBI fingerprint background checks for all caregivers. It has hired a mix of contractors and nonprofits to staff the sites, with job postings going up in several cities seeking people to start work immediately. There is no information to suggest any staff member is accused of assaulting a child.

Biden open to compromise on infrastructure, but not inaction

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

President Joe Biden drew a red line on his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan Wednesday, saying he is open to compromise on how to pay for the package but inaction is unacceptable.

The president turned fiery in an afternoon speech, saying that the United States is failing to build, invest and research for the future and adding that failure to do so amounts to giving up on “leading the world.”

“Compromise is inevitable,” Biden said. “We’ll be open to good ideas in good faith negotiations. But here’s what we won’t be open to: We will not be open to doing nothing. Inaction, simply, is not an option.”

Biden challenged the idea that low tax rates would do more for growth than investing in care workers, roads, bridges, clean water, broadband, school buildings, the power grid, electric vehicles and veterans hospitals.

The president has taken heat from Republican lawmakers and business groups for proposing that corporate tax increases should finance an infrastructure package that goes far beyond the traditional focus on roads and bridges.

“What the president proposed this week is not an infrastructure bill,” Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said on NBC’s “Meet the Press,” one of many quotes that Republican congressional aides emailed to reporters before Biden’s speech. “It’s a huge tax increase, for one thing. And it’s a tax increase on small businesses, on job creators in the United States of America.”

Biden last week proposed funding his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan largely through an increase in the corporate tax rate to 28% and an expanded global minimum tax set at 21%. But he said Wednesday he was willing to accept a rate below 28% so long as the projects are financed and taxes are not increased on people making less than \$400,000.

“I’m willing to listen to that,” Biden said. “But we gotta pay for this. We gotta pay for this. There’s many other ways we can do it. But I am willing to negotiate. I’ve come forward with the best, most rational way, in my view the fairest way, to pay for it, but there are many other ways as well. And I’m open.”

He stressed that he had been open to compromise on his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan, but Republicans never budged beyond their \$600 billion counteroffer.

“If they’d come forward with a plan that did the bulk of it and it was \$1.3 billion or four ... that allowed me to have pieces of all that was in there, I would have been prepared to compromise,” Biden said. “But they didn’t. They didn’t move an inch. Not an inch.”

The president added that America’s position in the world was incumbent on taking aggressive action on modern infrastructure that serves a computerized age. Otherwise, the country would lose out to China in what he believes is a fundamental test of democracy. Republican lawmakers counter that higher taxes would make the country less competitive globally.

“You think China is waiting around to invest in this digital infrastructure or on research and development? I promise you. They are not waiting. But they’re counting on American democracy, to be too slow, too limited and too divided to keep pace.”

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His administration on Wednesday was pressing the case for tax increases. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said it was "self-defeating" for then-President Donald Trump to assume that cutting the corporate tax rate to 21% from 35% in 2017 would make the economy more competitive and unleash growth. Yellen said that competing on tax rates came at the expense of investing in workers.

"Tax reform is not a zero-sum game," she told reporters on a call. "Win-win is an overused phrase, but we have a win-win in front of us now."

Yellen said the tax increases would produce roughly \$2.5 trillion in revenues over 15 years, enough to cover the eight years' worth of infrastructure investments being proposed.

The roughly \$200 billion gap between how much the taxes would raise and how much the administration wants to spend suggests there is space to address critics, such as West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a key Democratic vote, who would prefer a 25% rate.

Manchin also came out Wednesday against the budget reconciliation process that would allow Democrats to push the bill through the Senate with just a 51-vote majority, rather than the 60 votes that would be required to overcome a GOP filibuster.

"Senate Democrats must avoid the temptation to abandon our Republican colleagues on important national issues," Manchin wrote in a Washington Post op-ed essay. "Republicans, however, have a responsibility to stop saying no, and participate in finding real compromise with Democrats."

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said businesses and lawmakers should come to the bargaining table, noting that there could be room to negotiate on the rate and timeline.

"There is room for compromise," Raimondo said at a White House briefing. "What we cannot do, and what I am imploring the business community not to do, is to say, 'We don't like 28. We're walking away. We're not discussing.'"

Key to the Biden administration's pitch is bringing corporate tax revenues closer to their historic levels, rather than raising them to new highs that could make U.S. businesses less competitive globally.

Trump's 2017 tax cuts halved corporate tax revenues to 1% of gross domestic product, which is a measure of the total income in the economy. Revenues had previously equaled 2% of GDP. That higher figure is still below the 3% average of peer nations in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Treasury Department said in its summary of the plan.

Still, some say the administration's claim is misleading.

"The administration should use statistics that directly measure the burden on the corporate sector," said Kyle Pomerleau, a fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "In fact, many measures of effective tax rates show that the U.S.'s burden is pretty close to middle of the road. Biden's plan would certainly push up to the high end among our major trading partners."

Business groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable argue that higher taxes would hurt U.S. companies operating worldwide and the wider economy.

The Penn-Wharton Budget Model issued a report Wednesday saying the combined spending and taxes would cause government debt to rise by 2031 and then decrease by 2050. But following the plan, GDP would be lower by 0.8% in 2050.

EXPLAINER: What to know about the Amazon union vote count

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

Amazon is known for quick delivery. But finding out whether Amazon warehouse workers voted for or against unionizing is going to take some more time.

The final day for the nearly 6,000 workers in Bessemer, Alabama, to cast their ballots was more than a week ago. But it could still take a few more days — or longer — to tally all the votes before the outcome is known.

The vote itself has garnered national attention because of the potentially wide-reaching implications. Labor organizers hope a win in Bessemer will inspire thousands of workers nationwide — and not just at Amazon — to consider unionizing. For Amazon, it would mean a big blow to its profits and could alter its

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business operations.

Here's what we know about the vote:

WHAT DO ORGANIZERS WANT?

Besides higher pay, they want Amazon to give warehouse workers more break time and to be treated with respect. Many complain about their back-breaking 10-hour workdays with only two 30-minute breaks. Workers are on their feet for most of that time, packing boxes, shelving products or unpacking goods that arrive in trucks.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING NOW?

Labor historians point to two reasons, the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Workers feel betrayed by employers who didn't do enough to protect them from the virus. At the start of the pandemic, for example, Amazon workers held walkouts because they said they weren't given protective gear or told when coworkers tested positive for the virus.

The Black Lives Matter movement, meanwhile, has inspired people to demand to be treated with respect and dignity. Most of the workers in the Bessemer warehouse are Black, according to organizers.

The last time Amazon workers tried to unionize was in 2014, when a small group of mechanics working at a warehouse in Delaware tried to organize. But that effort was ultimately voted down.

WHAT'S AMAZON'S RESPONSE?

Amazon argues the Bessemer warehouse, which opened about a year ago, created thousands of jobs with an average pay of \$15.30 per hour — more than twice the minimum wage in Alabama. Workers also get benefits including health care, vision and dental insurance without paying union dues, the company said.

HOW ARE THE VOTES BEING TALLIED?

Since March 30, the National Labor Relations Board, which is overseeing the process, went through the votes with representatives from Amazon and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. Names and signatures were reviewed, but not how those workers voted, which will be done afterwards in an anonymous tally. Voters put their ballots in two envelopes to keep the vote secret.

Amazon or the retail union could contest those votes for various reasons, such as the person no longer works at the warehouse or has a job title that disqualifies them.

Any contested votes will be set aside and remain unopened. Starting on Thursday or Friday, the other "yes" or "no" votes will be counted. Members of the media will be able to watch that count through a livestream. Which side wins is determined by a majority of the votes cast.

WHEN WILL WE KNOW THE RESULTS?

That's still unclear. A lot depends on how many people voted. The retail union said Wednesday that more than 3,200 votes were sent in and that there were hundreds of contested votes, but didn't give a specific number. The labor board did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday night. If the number of contested votes are enough to change the final outcome, hearings may be held to have those votes counted.

Part of the reason why the process is taking longer than usual is because of the coronavirus. Union elections are typically done in-person at the workplace, said Andrew MacDonald, a partner at law firm Fox Rothschild.

But the labor board ruled it would be unsafe to have in-person voting and instead asked workers to vote by mail. In-person elections are typically speedier, because labor board agents can check if a worker is eligible to vote when they show up, instead of reviewing each envelope with votes are mailed in, MacDonald said.

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WHAT HAPPENS IF THE UNION WINS?

Typically, Amazon would need to start negotiating a contract with the New York-based RWDSU, which is leading the organizing efforts for Bessemer warehouse employees and represents 100,000 workers at poultry plants, soda bottling facilities and retailers such as Macy's and H&M. But the company could file objections against the union, delaying the contract negotiations by weeks or months.

In the past, labor experts said employers have done all kinds of things to not recognize a union, including closing stores or warehouses. In 2005, for example, Walmart closed a store in Canada where some 200 workers were close to winning a union contract. At the time, Walmart said demands from union negotiators made it impossible for the store to sustain itself.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE UNION LOSES?

The retail union could file unfair labor practice charges against Amazon based on the Seattle-based company's conduct during the election to influence the outcome. Under that scenario, the union says the NLRB would schedule a hearing and determine if the election results should be set aside because the employer "created an atmosphere of confusion or fear of reprisals" for workers. If that happens, another election may take place.

In cases where the labor board finds that the employer did something extremely egregious to violate labor laws, it may overturn the elections results, said MacDonald.

Virginia becomes first Southern state to legalize marijuana

By SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Virginia became the first Southern state to legalize marijuana Wednesday, as lawmakers voted to approve Gov. Ralph Northam's proposed changes to a bill that will allow adults to possess and cultivate small amounts of the drug starting in July.

Northam sent the bill back to lawmakers substantially changed from the version that squeaked out of the General Assembly in February. The amendments lawmakers agreed to Wednesday would accelerate the timeline of legalization by about three years, well before retail sales would begin, a move that's been cheered by racial justice advocates.

"The time has come for our state to legalize marijuana. The amendments ensure that while we're doing the complicated work of standing up a commercial market, we aren't delaying immediate reforms that will make our Commonwealth more equitable for all Virginians," House Majority Leader Charniele Herring said in urging her colleagues to approve the governor's changes.

Democrats said the bill was a matter of urgency, a necessary step to end what state figures show is a disparate treatment of people of color under current marijuana laws.

Northam's amendments cleared the House 53-44 with two abstentions during a one-day session held for the purpose of putting the finishing touches on the year's legislation. In the Senate, lawmakers deadlocked 20-20 and Democratic Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax broke the tie, voting to approve the changes.

The final version of the legislation would allow adults 21 and up to legally possess up to one ounce (28.3 grams) of cannabis without the intent to distribute beginning July 1. It also would allow the home cultivation of up to four plants per household beginning July 1. Public use of the drug will be prohibited.

"This is not going to generate some ganjafest at Jiffy Lube pavilion out in the parking lot, because that is smoking in public. Just like you can't drink in public, you can't smoke in public under this," Democratic Sen. Scott Surovell said.

It will be years before legal retail sales follow legalized possession. The bill lays out the complex process of creating a new state agency to oversee the marijuana marketplace, with sales beginning and regulations taking effect on Jan. 1, 2024.

Many parts of the bill dealing with the regulatory framework will have to be reapproved by lawmakers next year. The possession and cultivation pieces will not.

Republicans, who overwhelmingly opposed the bill when it initially went through the General Assembly,

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railed against the latest version, citing several reasons.

GOP Del. Chris Head called the bill "a train wreck."

"The hard-fought compromise that barely made it out of this chamber and over to the Senate has just been discarded. And why is that? It's because some activists want marijuana legalized and they want it legalized now, consequences be damned," he said.

Some Republicans took issue with labor provisions in the new version of the bill, in particular a change that says the government can revoke or suspend licenses issued under the new law in cases where an employer has refused to "remain neutral regarding any union organizing efforts by employees."

During the legislative session, the Senate sought to legalize simple possession beginning in July, but House Democrats argued that legalization without a legal market for marijuana could promote the growth of the black market. The bill as passed in February would not have legalized simple possession until 2024.

Herring said Wednesday that home cultivation would give Virginians a way to legally acquire cannabis while the retail market is being put in place.

Many of the other amendments lawmakers dealt with Wednesday were minor or technical in nature and dispensed with more easily. Both chambers quickly signed off on a tweak to a sweeping voting rights measure that supporters say will protect and expand access to the ballot box. And they approved minor changes to a measure intended to improve the beleaguered unemployment system.

They also approved amendments that will allow both a gun ban on Capitol Square as well as one of the most restrictive bans in the country on the use of facial recognition technology to go into effect.

Both chambers signed off on a budget amendment from Northam that will fund an outside investigation into a small component of a larger controversy over the state parole board. Republicans blasted the governor's proposal as far less substantive than necessary and said it would allow the administration to keep quiet any unflattering findings.

Lawmakers also rejected a handful of the governor's proposed amendments. Those measures now go back to Northam, who can either sign the bills as they passed or veto them.

The General Assembly had no veto overrides to consider this year.

Northam said in a statement that this year's legislative session would be regarded as "one of the most consequential policy-reforming periods in modern Virginia history."

"As this historic session comes to an end, I am heartened by all that we have done together to advance our priorities and make Virginia stronger, fairer, and more equitable," he said.

Biden to unveil actions on guns, including new ATF boss

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, AAMER MADHANI and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will unveil a series of executive actions aimed at addressing gun violence on Thursday, delivering his first major action on gun control since taking office.

He'll also nominate David Chipman, a former federal agent and adviser at the gun control group Giffords, to be director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, according to senior Biden administration officials.

Biden has faced increasing pressure to act on gun control after a spate of mass shootings across the U.S. in recent weeks, but the White House has repeatedly emphasized the need for legislative action on guns. While the House passed a background-check bill last month, gun control measures face slim prospects in an evenly-divided Senate, where Republicans remain near-unified against most proposals.

Biden will be joined by Attorney General Merrick Garland at the event, and most of the actions will come from the Justice Department.

Biden is expected to announce tighter regulations requiring buyers of so-called "ghost guns" to undergo background checks. The homemade firearms — often assembled from parts and milled with a metal-cutting machine — often lack serial numbers used to trace them. It's legal to build a gun in a home or a workshop and there is no federal requirement for a background check.

The president's plans were previewed by a person familiar with the expected actions who was not authorized to publicly discuss them.

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Senior administration officials confirmed that the Justice Department would issue a new proposed rule aimed at reining in ghost guns within 30 days, but offered no details on the content of the rule.

The Justice Department will also issue a proposed rule within 60 days tightening regulations on pistol-stabilizing braces, like the one used by the Boulder, Colorado, shooter in a massacre last month that left 10 dead. The rule would designate pistols used with stabilizing braces as short-barreled rifles, which, under the National Firearms Act, require a federal license to own and are subject to a more thorough application process and a \$200 tax.

The Justice Department will also publish model red flag legislation within 60 days, which the administration says will make it easier for states to adopt their own red flag laws. Such laws allow for individuals to petition a court to allow the police to confiscate weapons from a person deemed to be a danger to themselves or others.

And it will begin to provide more data on firearms trafficking, starting with a new comprehensive report on the issue, which the Biden administration says it hasn't done in over two decades.

The president will also announce investments in community violence intervention programs, which are aimed at reducing gun violence in urban communities, across five federal agencies.

Administration officials hinted there may be more to come from the administration on guns, calling the round of executive actions "initial steps" that were completed under Garland's purview within the first few weeks of his tenure.

The ATF is currently run by Acting Director Regina Lombardo. Gun-control advocates have emphasized the significance of the ATF director in enforcing the nation's gun laws, and Chipman is certain to win praise from them. During his time as a senior policy adviser with Giffords, he spent considerable effort pushing for greater regulation and enforcement on ghost guns, reforms of the background check system and measures to reduce the trafficking of illegal firearms.

Prior to that, Chipman spent 25 years as an agent at the ATF, where he worked on stopping a trafficking ring that sent illegal firearms from Virginia to New York, and served on the ATF's SWAT team. Chipman is a gun owner himself.

He also is an explosives expert and was among the team involved in investigating the Oklahoma City Bombing and the first World Trade Center bombing. He also was involved in investigating a series of church bombings in Alabama in the 1990s. He retired from the ATF in 2012.

Chipman and a White House spokesman both declined to comment.

During his campaign, Biden promised to prioritize new gun control measures as president, including enacting universal background check legislation, banning online sales of firearms and the manufacture and sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. But gun-control advocates have said that while they were heartened by signs from the White House that they took the issue seriously, they've been disappointed by the lack of early action.

With the announcement of the new measures, however, advocates lauded Biden's first moves to combat gun violence.

"Each of these executive actions will start to address the epidemic of gun violence that has raged throughout the pandemic, and begin to make good on President Biden's promise to be the strongest gun safety president in history," said John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety.

Feinblatt in particular praised the move to regulate ghost guns, which he said "will undoubtedly save countless lives," and lauded Chipman as an "invaluable point person" in the fight against illegal gun trafficking. He also said the group is looking forward to continuing to work with the Biden administration on further gun control measures, but it's unclear what next moves the White House, or lawmakers on Capitol Hill, will be able to take.

Biden himself expressed uncertainty late last month when asked if he had the political capital to pass new gun control proposals, telling reporters, "I haven't done any counting yet."

For years, federal officials have been sounding the alarm about an increasing black market for home-made, military-style semi-automatic rifles and handguns. Ghost guns have increasingly turned up at crime

scenes and in recent years have been turning up more and more when federal agents are purchasing guns in undercover operations from gang members and other criminals.

It is hard to say how many are circulating on the streets, in part because in many cases police departments don't even contact the federal government about the guns because they can't be traced.

Some states, like California, have enacted laws in recent years to require serial numbers be stamped on ghost guns.

The critical component in building an untraceable gun is what is known as the lower receiver, a part typically made of metal or polymer. An unfinished receiver — sometimes referred to as an "80-percent receiver" — can be legally bought online with no serial numbers or other markings on it, no license required.

A gunman who killed his wife and four others in Northern California in 2017 had been prohibited from owning firearms, but he built his own to skirt the court order before his rampage. And in 2019, a teenager used a homemade handgun to fatally shoot two classmates and wound three others at a school in suburban Los Angeles.

Plans for Biden's announcement Thursday were first reported by Politico.

Expert: Chauvin never took knee off Floyd's neck area

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Officer Derek Chauvin had his knee on George Floyd's neck area — and was bearing down with most of his weight — the entire 9 1/2 minutes the Black man lay facedown with his hands cuffed behind his back, a use-of-force expert testified Wednesday at Chauvin's murder trial.

Jody Stiger, a Los Angeles Police Department sergeant serving as a prosecution witness, said that based on his review of video evidence, Chauvin applied pressure to Floyd's neck or neck area from the time officers began pinning Floyd to the ground until paramedics began to move him to a stretcher.

"That particular force did not change during the entire restraint period?" prosecutor Steve Schleicher asked as he showed the jury a composite of five still images.

"Correct," replied Stiger, who on Tuesday testified that the force used against Floyd was excessive.

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson countered by pointing out what he said were moments in the video footage when Chauvin's knee did not appear to be on Floyd's neck but on his shoulder blade area or the base of his neck. Stiger did not give much ground, saying the officer's knee in some of the contested images still seemed to be near Floyd's neck, though he agreed his weight might have shifted at times.

In other testimony, the lead Minnesota state investigator on the case, James Reyerson, initially agreed with Nelson that Floyd seemed to say in a police body-camera video of his arrest, "I ate too many drugs."

But when a prosecutor played a longer clip of the video, Reyerson said he believed what Floyd really said was "I ain't do no drugs."

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 struggled and claimed to be claustrophobic as police tried to put him in a squad car, and they pinned him to the pavement.

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

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 Floyd's drug use and his underlying health conditions are what killed him, not Chauvin's knee, as prosecutors contend. Fentanyl and methamphetamine were found in Floyd's system.

Breahna Giles, a state forensic scientist, testified Wednesday that pills found in the SUV Floyd was driving contained methamphetamine and fentanyl. Another witness, forensic chemist Susan Meith, testified that remnants of a pill found in the back of the police squad car also contained methamphetamine and fentanyl. Earlier testimony revealed that this pill contained DNA from Floyd's saliva.

Earlier, Nelson asked Stiger about uses of force that are commonly referred to by police as "lawful but

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awful." Stiger conceded that "you can have a situation where by law it looks horrible to the common eye, but based on the state law, it's lawful."

Nelson has argued, too, that the officers on the scene were distracted by what they perceived as an increasingly hostile crowd of onlookers.

But Stiger told the jury, "I did not perceive them as being a threat," even though some bystanders were name-calling and using foul language. He added that most of the yelling was due to "their concern for Mr. Floyd."

Nelson's voice rose as he asked Stiger how a reasonable officer would be trained to view a crowd while dealing with a suspect, "and somebody else is now pacing around and watching you and watching you and calling you names and saying (expletives)." Nelson said such a situation "could be viewed by a reasonable officer as a threat."

"As a potential threat, correct," Stiger said.

Chauvin's lawyer noted that dispatchers had described Floyd as between 6 feet and 6-foot-6 and possibly under the influence. Stiger agreed it was reasonable for Chauvin to come to the scene with a heightened sense of awareness.

Stiger further agreed with Nelson that an officer's actions must be judged from the point of view of a reasonable officer on the scene, not in hindsight. Among other things, Nelson said that given typical emergency medical response times, it was reasonable for Chauvin to believe that paramedics would be there soon.

In other testimony, Stiger said that as Floyd lay pinned to the ground, Chauvin squeezed Floyd's fingers and pulled one of his wrists toward his handcuffs, a technique that uses pain to get someone to comply, but Chauvin did not appear to let up.

"Then at that point it's just pain," Stiger said.

Stiger was asked by prosecutors whether Chauvin had an obligation to take Floyd's distress into account as the officer considered how much force to use.

"Absolutely," Stiger replied. "As the time went on, clearly in the video, you could see that Mr. Floyd's ... health was deteriorating. His breath was getting lower. His tone of voice was getting lower. His movements were starting to cease."

"So at that point, as a officer on scene," he continued, "you have a responsibility to realize that, 'OK, something is not right. Something has changed drastically from what was occurring earlier.' So therefore you have a responsibility to take some type of action."

During the testimony of Reyerson, the state investigator, prosecutors stopped and started multiple videos and examined time stamps in an attempt to show the jury how long Chauvin held his position after Floyd stopped talking and moving. Reyerson testified that Chauvin's knee was on Floyd's neck for minutes after Floyd went silent.

EXPLAINER: Did Floyd really yell, 'I ate too many drugs?'

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The defense attorney for the former Minneapolis police officer on trial in the death of George Floyd tried Wednesday to show that Floyd yelled "I ate too many drugs" as three officers pinned him to the ground.

Attorney Eric Nelson didn't get the clear confirmation he was seeking, but he may have planted a seed in jurors' minds anyway as he seeks to sow reasonable doubt about the prosecution's case against Derek Chauvin.

Part of his strategy for defending Chauvin against murder and manslaughter charges has been to deflect responsibility for Floyd's death last May 25 away from Chauvin — a white officer who prosecutors say knelt on the Black man's neck for 9 1/2 minutes — and onto Floyd himself for using illegal drugs. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Nelson first played a short clip with the disputed quote, which came from another officer's body camera

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video, during the testimony of Jody Stiger, a Los Angeles Police Department sergeant who served as a prosecution use-of-force expert. The video shows a chaotic and noisy scene as Floyd, handcuffed and laying on his stomach, yelled and moaned in distress.

"Does it sound like he says, 'I ate too many drugs?'" Nelson asked.

"I can't make that out," Stiger replied. Nelson let the subject drop with Stiger, but replayed the clip and posed the question again for the lead investigator from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Senior Special Agent James Reyerson.

The agent agreed with Nelson that that's what Floyd appeared to say — a win for the defense.

But prosecutor Matthew Frank wasn't going to let that stand. He got Reyerson to say he had not closely listened to that passage before. After a break to regroup, Frank replayed a longer clip from the same body cam video,

"Having heard it in context, you're able to tell what Mr. Floyd is saying there?" Frank asked.

"I believe Mr. Floyd was saying, 'I ain't do no drugs,'" Reyerson replied.

"So that's a little different than what you were asked about when you only saw a portion of the video, correct?" Frank asked.

"Yes, sir," the agent said.

Summoning seniors: Big new push to vaccinate older Americans

By ZEKE MILLER and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

CLARKSDALE, Miss. (AP) — The first hurdle was getting on the bus. Seventy-four year old Linda Busby hesitated outside a community center where older people were loading up to go get the coronavirus vaccine.

"I was scared, I'm not afraid to say that," she said Wednesday after getting her shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine after encouragement from a staff member and her brother. "I thought I wasn't going to get it at first. Nobody likes getting shots."

Busby's hesitance is just what the Biden administration and its allies in the states are combating, one person at a time, as the White House steps up appeals to seniors to get inoculated. The vaccination rate for this top-priority group is reaching a plateau even as supplies have expanded.

About 76% of Americans aged 65 and older have received at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccines since authorization in December, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the rate of new vaccinations among the group most vulnerable to adverse virus outcomes has dramatically slowed.

It's a growing source of concern, not only because of the potential for preventable deaths and serious illness among seniors in coming months but also for what it could portend for America's broader population.

"I want to make a direct appeal to our seniors and everyone who cares about them," President Joe Biden said Tuesday, citing "incredible progress" but declaring it's still not enough.

"It's simple: Seniors, it's time for you to get vaccinated now. Get vaccinated now."

By government estimates, about 12.9 million American seniors have yet to receive their first shot. Even though they were the first age group prioritized for shots, more than 23% of those 75 and older have yet to be vaccinated.

Supply constraints initially slowed the pace of senior vaccinations, but not for months for those in high-priority age groups. Instead, officials say, the slowdown is caused by a mix of issues, from people having difficulty finding and getting to inoculation sites to vaccine hesitancy.

Closing the gap will require taking into account all the obstacles for seniors, be they technological, transportation or personal hesitance, said Sandy Markwood, CEO of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, who acknowledged the vaccination rates "for older adults has somewhat plateaued."

It's a potential harbinger of the challenges to come with other demographic groups. All adult Americans will become eligible for vaccination in the next two weeks, although the process of administering enough shots to begin returning to "normal" will take months longer. Many states, even as they throw open the doors on eligibility, are still maintaining priority vaccination systems, or dedicated distribution channels, to keep seniors who want the vaccine at the front of the line.

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Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, has predicted that between 75% and 85% of the population may need to be vaccinated to reach "herd immunity" and bring an end to the outbreak in the U.S.

That's one reason the White House and states have moved to step up assistance programs for seniors and public education campaigns.

Markwood credited the administration's \$1.9 trillion rescue plan for providing funding necessary "to go out there and do that more intensive, sometimes one-on-one outreach" with seniors, saying, "It's that last mile, the last group who need the extra support, that's going to take that extra outreach and time."

Even more help is on the way.

Beginning next week, the administration is launching a \$100 million effort to fund community organizations providing "high-intensity" support to at-risk seniors and those with disabilities through the Department of Health and Human Services. That includes assistance with booking appointments, traveling to vaccination sites and other support through the vaccination process.

Similar programs are already underway at the state level.

In Clarksdale, Mississippi, the state hosted its first-ever mobile vaccinations for homebound older adults on Wednesday. That's where a bus picked up Busby outside a senior daycare and community center located next door to a low-income housing complex for the elderly.

As Busby balked, a staff member encouraged her to join the group waiting to get on board. She said later a main motivating factor for her to get the shot was the support of her brother, who called her up to encourage her to get vaccinated.

"I'm going to call him as soon as I get home, and let him know I did it," she said, as she got back on the bus to return to the community center.

Older folks are actually less hesitant than many. According to an AP-NORC poll in late March, 11% of Americans aged 65 or older say they probably or definitely won't get vaccinated. That compares with 25% of all adults.

The White House has repeatedly pointed to family members and community leaders as the best validators to overcome hesitance. It is also moving to create more vaccination sites closer to homes, recognizing that access concerns span demographic groups. On Wednesday, the White House announced that all of the more than 1,400 federally qualified community health centers will be able to begin administering vaccines. It also is aiming to expand mobile vaccine clinics.

A disproportionate number of unvaccinated seniors are from Black or Latino communities, or from people without easy access to health care, said Kathleen Cameron, senior director of the National Council on Aging's Center for Healthy Aging, mirroring disparities in the broader population. And about 6% of seniors are homebound.

"Those are the hardest to reach people, and those are the ones we need to work hardest to get to, either to bring them to vaccination centers or to bring the vaccines to them," she said.

Aurelia Jones-Taylor, CEO of Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center, Inc. in Clarksdale, said one of the major helps — but sometimes barriers — to getting older adults vaccinated is family members. Some encourage their relatives, helping them with rides to clinics and making sure they get their shots.

But in many cases, younger family members are misinformed about the vaccine and discourage older relatives from getting it. Aside from that, older adults can be harder to reach because they aren't savvy on social media and live alone.

"They are stuck in the house, and they are fearful," Jones-Taylor said. "We have to overcome the fear."

According to the CDC, seniors, depending on their age, are between 1,300 and 8,700 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than 5-17 year-olds, and they make up more than 80% of the 559,000 U.S. fatalities due to the virus.

One major help in Mississippi — especially among older adults — is the encouragement of pastors and church communities, Jones-Taylor said.

"It's paramount," she said. "That's who they listen to."

Julia Ford, 71, spends most days at the Rev. S.L.A Jones Activity Center. She said her faith was a major

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motivating factor for her getting the vaccine.

"I wasn't sure what I would do – 'Will I get it or will I not?' I talked to the Lord to give me understanding about it," said Ford, whose brother died of the virus. "I thought about the verse, 'Everything that was made was made by him.' There was nothing made that was not made by him. He made the virus and he made the antidote."

Augusta National plays through debate over Ga voting law

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — While a tempest brews outside Magnolia Lane over Georgia's voting rights law, Augusta National would prefer to keep the focus on blooming azaleas, pimento cheese sandwiches and tricky greens.

That strategy has served the home of the Masters well in previous debates over efforts to keep out Black and female members.

So, it was no surprise when Chairman Fred Ridley played through any attempt Wednesday to ensnare his club in another contentious issue.

"We realize that views and opinions on this law differ, and there have been calls for boycotts and other punitive measures," Ridley said during his annual State of the Masters news conference on the eve of the opening round. "Unfortunately, those actions often impose the greatest burdens on the most vulnerable in our society."

There was never any doubt Augusta National would take a different path than Major League Baseball, which yanked this summer's All-Star Game from Atlanta to show its displeasure with new voting restrictions that were signed into law two weeks ago by Republican Gov. Brian Kemp.

Opponents say the law is designed to reduce the electoral power of people of color after a record turnout last November, fueled by absentee and early voting, led to Joe Biden becoming the first Democratic presidential candidate since 1992 to carry the Peach State. Then, in a January runoff election, Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff unseated a pair of GOP incumbents in Georgia to effectively swing the balance of power in the U.S. Senate.

Supporters of the law, including Kemp, have said it's nothing more than an attempt to preserve electoral integrity on the heels of baseless claims by Donald Trump that the presidency was stolen from him by fraudulent votes.

"I believe, as does everyone in our organization, that the right to vote is fundamental in our democratic society," Ridley said. "No one should be disadvantaged in exercising that right, and it is critical that all citizens have confidence in the electoral process."

When asked bluntly if he supported or opposed the new law, Ridley laid up.

"I don't think that my opinion on this legislation should shape the discussion," he said. "I know you would like for us to make a proclamation on this. I just don't think that is going to be helpful to ultimately reaching a resolution."

Ridley's stance was very much in keeping with the club's history on other racial and social matters.

For decades, Augusta National had no black members. It was only in 1975 that Lee Elder became the first Black player to be invited to the Masters. Finally, after protests erupted over the 1990 PGA Championship being held at all-white Shoal Creek Country Club in Birmingham, the home of the Masters quietly admitted its first black member, television executive Ron Townsend.

More recently, the club steadfastly rebuffed calls to allow female members. Former chairman Hootie Johnson said the club would make such a decision on its terms, "not at the point of bayonet." A decade later, Augusta National let in its first female members, including one-time Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Again, there was little fanfare about the decision.

Now, it's voting rights.

MLB's decision last week to strip the All-Star Game from Atlanta's Truist Park turned the focus to the

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Masters, the first of three prominent golf tournaments that will be held in Georgia this year.

The Women's PGA Championship is set for the Atlanta Athletic Club in June, while the PGA Tour's season-ending Tour Championship will be staged in September at East Lake in Atlanta, which took over as the event's permanent home in 2004.

The National Black Justice Coalition called for the Masters to be moved out of Georgia, but that was never a serious consideration. Augusta National controls every aspect of the tournament and would never think of it being played anywhere but its historic layout along Washington Road, one of the most famous golf courses in the world.

For that matter, the PGA Tour also said the Tour Championship will remain at East Lake, citing the tens of millions of dollars in economic development that the tournament has spurred in the once-downtrodden neighborhood surrounding the club. There's no indication, either, that the Women's PGA will be moving to another state.

Similar to East Lake, Ridley announced in November a \$10 million donation to help with the redevelopment of what he said were once-thriving communities that have gone through decades of poverty, crime and unemployment.

But even if moving the Masters was never on the table, anyone with a knowledge of golf's checkered racial history would have suspected it was never going to be a leading voice on voting rights. The PGA had a Caucasian-only policy until 1961, 14 years after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier.

Cameron Champ is one of the few players on color on the PGA Tour (he has a Black father and white mother). Last year, as protests roiled the country after the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, as well as the shooting of Jacob Blake, Champ was the lone golfer to take a prominent stand.

At the BMW Championship, he wore one black shoe and one white shoe. He also wrote the names of Taylor and Blake on his footwear.

"I remember walking onto the range, and I had Breonna Taylor and Jacob Blake on my shoes, and I got asked by three different people, 'Who are they?'" Taylor said this week. "That proves the point of why I'm doing it."

So far, no golfers have followed his lead.

"There's not many people who are willing to talk about it, so you're never going to hear it," Champ said. "It just kind of gets pushed to the back burner like it does always."

Everyone at Augusta National says they support equal voting rights, but Champ was the only one who stated his opposition to the Georgia law, which imposes new restrictions on absentee and early voting, grants sweeping new powers to the GOP-controlled State Elections Board to take over local elections, and limits the handing out of food and water to voters standing in long lines.

"As you can tell, it really targets certain black communities and makes it harder to vote, which to me it's everyone's right to vote," Champ said. "For me to see that, it's very shocking."

In a sport where Trump enjoyed widespread support, four-time major champion Rory McIlroy has been one of the few players to take an opposing political stand. The Northern Irishman criticized the former president's leadership last year during the coronavirus pandemic and said he wouldn't play golf with him again.

When asked for his opinion of the Georgia voting law, McIlroy picked his words carefully.

"I'm not a citizen of this country, but I certainly think all great countries and democracies are built on equal voting rights and everyone being able to get to the ballot boxes as easily as possible," he said.

But now, it's time to tee it up.

In something of a nod to the uglier parts of its history, the club in November said it would invite the 86-year-old Elder to take part in the ceremonial first tee shot with Masters greats Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player.

After that, there likely will be no more discussion about Georgia's voting law at the home of the Masters.

UK advises limiting AstraZeneca in under-30s amid clot worry

By MARIA CHENG, DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British authorities recommended Wednesday that the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine not be given to adults under 30 where possible because of strengthening evidence that the shot may be linked to rare blood clots.

The recommendation came as regulators in the United Kingdom and the European Union emphasized that the benefits of receiving the vaccine continue to outweigh the risks for most people — even though the European Medicines Agency said it had found a “possible link” between the shot and the rare clots. British authorities recommended that people under 30 be offered alternatives to AstraZeneca. But the EMA advised no such age restrictions, leaving it up to its member-countries to decide whether to limit its use.

Several countries have already imposed limits on who can receive the vaccine, and any restrictions are closely watched since the vaccine, which is cheaper and easier to store than many others, is critical to global immunization campaigns and is a pillar of the U.N.-backed program known as COVAX that aims to get vaccines to some of the world’s poorest countries.

“This is a course correction, there’s no question about that,” Jonathan Van-Tam, England’s deputy chief medical officer, said during a news briefing.

Van-Tam said the effect on Britain’s vaccination timetable — one of the speediest in the world — should be “zero or negligible,” assuming the National Health Service receives expected deliveries of other vaccines, including those produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

EU and U.K. regulators held simultaneous news conferences Wednesday to announce the results of investigations into reports of blood clots that sparked concern about the rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The EU agency described the clots as “very rare” side effects. Dr Sabine Straus, chair of its Safety Committee, said the best data was from Germany, where there was one report of the clots for every 100,000 doses given, although she noted far fewer reports in the U.K. Still, that’s less than the clot risk that healthy women face from birth control pills, noted another expert, Dr. Peter Arlett.

The agency said most of the cases reported were in women under 60 within two weeks of vaccination, though it was unable to identify specific risk factors based on current information. Experts reviewed several dozen cases that came mainly from Europe and the U.K., where around 25 million people have received the AstraZeneca vaccine.

“The risk of mortality from COVID is much greater than the risk of mortality from these side effects,” said Emer Cooke, the EMA’s executive director.

Arlett said there is no information suggesting an increased risk from the other major COVID-19 vaccines.

In a statement, AstraZeneca said both UK and EU regulators had requested their vaccine labels be updated to warn of these “extremely rare potential side effect(s).”

“Both of these reviews reaffirmed the vaccine offers a high-level of protection against all severities of COVID-19 and that these benefits continue to far outweigh the risks,” it said.

The EMA’s investigation focused on unusual types of blood clots that have occurred along with low blood platelets. One rare clot type appears in multiple blood vessels and the other in veins that drain blood from the brain.

“We are not advising a stop to any vaccination for any individual in any age group,” said Wei Shen Lim, who chairs Britain’s Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization. “We are advising a preference for one vaccine over another vaccine for a particular age group ... out of the utmost caution rather than because we have any serious safety concerns.”

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 vaccine.

Britain, which relies heavily on AstraZeneca, however, continued to use it.

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

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take the vaccine, raising worries that AstraZeneca's credibility could be permanently damaged, spurring more vaccine hesitancy and prolonging the pandemic.

Dr. Peter English, who formerly chaired the British Medical Association's Public Health Medicine Committee, said the back-and-forth over the AstraZeneca vaccine could have serious consequences.

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

In some countries, authorities have already noted hesitancy toward the AstraZeneca shot.

"People come and they are reluctant to take the AstraZeneca vaccine, they ask us if we also use anything else," said Florentina Nastase, a doctor and coordinator at a vaccination center in Bucharest, Romania. "There were cases in which people didn't show up, there were cases when people came to the center and saw that we use only AstraZeneca and refused (to be inoculated)."

After the EMA announcement Wednesday, officials in Spain said AstraZeneca would be limited to people over 60 years of age, and Italy issued a similar recommendation.

Belgium's health minister, Frank Vandenbroucke, declared a four-week ban on administering the AstraZeneca vaccine to people under 56, but said that would have little impact on the vaccination campaign, since few from that age group are in line to get the shots this month.

Earlier Wednesday, South Korea had said it would temporarily suspend the use of AstraZeneca's vaccine in people 60 and younger. In that age group, the country is only currently vaccinating health workers and people in long-term care settings.

"For the vast majority of people the benefits of the Oxford AZ vaccine far outweigh any extremely small risk," said Dr. Anthony Harnden, the deputy chair of Britain's vaccination committee. "And the Oxford AZ vaccine will continue to save many from suffering the devastating effects that can result from a COVID infection."

Mexico president justifies release of kingpin targeted by US

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Wednesday defended the 2013 ruling that freed one of the drug lords most wanted by U.S. authorities, even though Mexico's Supreme Court later ruled it was a mistake.

Rafael Caro Quintero walked free while serving a 40-year sentence for the torture-murder of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena in 1985, and has since apparently resumed his role as violent drug trafficker.

Caro Quintero is at the top of the DEA's Most Wanted list, with a \$20 million reward for his capture.

López Obrador said Wednesday the legal appeal that led to Caro Quintero's release was "justified" because supposedly no verdict had been handed down against the drug lord after 27 years in jail. López Obrador also depicted a later warrant for his re-arrest as an example of U.S. pressure.

"Once he was out, they had to look for him again, because the United States demanded he shouldn't have been released, but legally the appeal was justified," López Obrador said.

Presidential spokesman Jesús Ramírez said "the president was just saying that it was a legal aberration that the judge had not issued a verdict on Mr. Caro Quintero after 27 years ... but he was not defending his release."

There was a verdict — but a Mexican appeals court initially decided it had come from the wrong judge.

In August 2013, the appeals court overturned Caro Quintero's 40-year sentence in the killing of Camarena and a Mexican government pilot. The panel argued a state court should have overseen the case, not a federal one, and ordered his immediate release from a maximum-security prison.

Mexico's Supreme Court annulled the order releasing him months later, saying Camarena was a registered U.S. government agent and therefore his killing was a federal crime and had been properly tried. An arrest warrant was issued for Caro Quintero, who has been in hiding since his release.

His late-night release angered the U.S. government and surprised Mexican prosecutors, who weren't notified until hours after it took place.

The issue is a thorny one for López Obrador, who has publicly stated that the Mexican government is no

longer interested in detaining drug lords. In 2019, López Obrador ordered the release of Ovidio Guzman, a son of imprisoned drug lord Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzman, to avoid bloodshed.

Even if the president was misinformed about why Caro Quintero was released in 2013, more than five years before he took office, it seems to illustrate how little importance the case — or the search for the drug lord — apparently has for the Mexican government, even while it remains a top priority for the United States.

Since his release, Caro Quintero has reportedly established alliances with other cartels and has established an operation in the northern state of Sonora, reputedly to wrest territory from Guzman’s sons and the Sinaloa cartel.

Tiger Woods was driving more than 80 mph when he crashed SUV

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Tiger Woods was driving more than 80 mph — nearly twice the posted speed limit — on a downhill stretch of road when he lost control of an SUV and crashed in a wreck that seriously injured the golf superstar, authorities said Wednesday.

Sheriff Alex Villanueva blamed the Feb. 23 crash outside Los Angeles solely on excessive speed and Woods’ loss of control behind the wheel. The athlete will not face any citations for his third high-profile collision in 11 years.

“The primary causal factor for this traffic collision was driving at a speed unsafe for the road conditions and the inability to negotiate the curve of the roadway,” the sheriff told a news conference.

Woods was driving 84 to 87 mph (135 to 140 kph) in an area with a speed limit of 45 mph (72 kph), Villanueva said. No one else was hurt, and no other vehicles were involved.

The stretch of road is known for wrecks and drivers who frequently hit high speeds. Due to the steepness of the terrain, a runaway truck escape lane is available just beyond where Woods crashed.

There was no evidence that the golfer tried to brake, and investigators believe Woods may have inadvertently stepped on the accelerator instead of the brake pedal in a panic, said sheriff’s Capt. James Powers, who oversees the sheriff’s station closest to the crash site.

Woods was wearing a seat belt at the time, and the vehicle’s airbags deployed. He told deputies that he had not taken medication or consumed alcohol before the crash, sheriff’s officials said.

Detectives did not seek search warrants for Woods’ blood samples, which could have been screened for drugs or alcohol, or his cellphone. Authorities said there was no evidence of impairment or of distracted driving, so they did not have probable cause to get warrants. Investigators did search the SUV’s data recorder, known as a black box, which revealed the vehicle’s speed.

On Twitter, Woods thanked first responders, as well as the people who called 911.

“I will continue to focus on my recovery and family, and thank everyone for the overwhelming support and encouragement I’ve received throughout this very difficult time,” Woods wrote.

Documents show that Woods told deputies he did not know how the crash occurred and did not remember driving. At the time of the wreck, Woods was recovering from a fifth back surgery, which took place two months earlier.

Woods, who is originally from the Los Angeles area, had been back home to host his PGA tournament, the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club, when the crash happened.

He was driving an SUV loaned to him by the tournament when he struck a raised median in Rolling Hills Estates, just outside Los Angeles. The SUV crossed through two oncoming lanes and uprooted a tree, striking it at 75 mph (120 kph).

Jonathan Cherney, an accident reconstruction expert and retired Irvine, California, police detective, said the sheriff did not explain a fundamental part of the case: Why was Woods driving so fast?

“To just blanket it with an unsafe speed violation is the easy way out,” said Cherney, who walked the crash site. “We still are missing the key factors that kind of explain why or how this whole sequence of events began.”

Cherney questioned whether Woods may have fallen unconscious at some point, citing the lack of evidence

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of braking, steering or anything else to suggest the driver was "aware of what's going on or attempting to avoid the crash." He also said investigators had enough probable cause to seek blood samples.

Woods is in Florida recovering from multiple surgeries, including procedures to repair two broken bones in his lower right leg with a rod in his shinbone. He also has screws and pins in his foot and ankle.

The 45-year-old athlete has never gone an entire year without playing, dating back to his first PGA Tour event as a 16-year-old in high school. He had hoped to play this year in the Masters tournament, which begins Thursday.

Rory McIlroy, a four-time major golf champion who lives near Woods in Florida, said he visited Woods last month and found him to be "in decent spirits."

"When you hear of these things and you look at the car and you see the crash, you think he's going to be in a hospital bed for six months. But he was actually doing better than that," McIlroy said Tuesday from the Masters.

In the days after the crash, the sheriff called it "purely an accident" and said there was no evidence of impairment. Villanueva faced criticism for labeling the crash an accident before the investigation had concluded and pushed back Wednesday against allegations of special treatment for the golf star.

"That is absolutely false," he said.

Last week, Villanueva said investigators had determined the cause of the crash but would not reveal it. He claimed he needed permission from Woods to do so. The sheriff said Wednesday that Woods — who has a yacht named Privacy — had approved the release of the investigation's findings.

Villanueva also declined to release footage from deputies' body cameras, citing the athlete's privacy.

This is the third time Woods has been involved in a vehicle investigation.

The most notorious example dates back to 2009, when his SUV ran over a fire hydrant and hit a tree early on the morning after Thanksgiving. While Woods was cited for careless driving and fined \$164, the crash was the start of revelations that he had been cheating on his wife with multiple women.

Woods also lost major corporate sponsorships in the backlash and went to a rehabilitation clinic. He did not return to golf for five months.

In 2017, Florida police found him asleep behind the wheel of a car parked awkwardly on the side of the road. He was arrested on a DUI charge and said later he had an unexpected reaction to prescription medicine for his back pain.

Woods pleaded guilty to reckless driving and checked into a clinic to get help with prescription medication and a sleep disorder.

6 charged in NH youth detention center sex abuse probe

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Six former staffers at New Hampshire's state-run youth detention center were arrested Wednesday in connection with the abuse of 11 children over the course of a decade, including one who continued working with children for nearly 20 years after he is accused of holding a boy down while colleagues raped him.

The Sununu Youth Services Center, formerly known as the Youth Development Center, has been under investigation since July 2019, when two former counselors were charged with raping a teenage boy 82 times in the 1990s.

Those charges were dropped last year in order to strengthen the expanded investigation, but both men were arrested again Wednesday and charged with rape, the attorney general's office said. Two others also were charged with rape, while other two were charged with being accomplices to rape. The allegations span from 1994 to 2005.

The attorney general's office didn't comment on the possibility of further arrests, but said the latest developments were "merely a step forward" and that the investigation will continue.

"Today's arrests make clear that this administration is committed to holding these perpetrators accountable for their detestable actions," said Gov. Chris Sununu. "This is not over, and we will continue to

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investigate these horrific allegations.”

The center is named for former Gov. John H. Sununu, father of the current governor.

Several of those arrested Wednesday were previously named in a civil lawsuit filed last year in which more than 200 men and women allege they were physically or sexually abused as children by 150 staffers at the Manchester facility from 1963 to 2018. According to their attorney, children were gang raped by counselors, beaten while raped, forced to compete for food in “fight clubs” set up by counselors and locked in solitary confinement for weeks or months.

“My clients are thrilled that the state has taken the important next step in holding these men criminally responsible for the unspeakable crimes they have committed,” attorney Rus Rilee said. “We have faith that this is just the beginning of the arrests and indictments of not only all of the perpetrators, but also all of those that allowed it to happen.”

The new arrestees include Lucien Poulette, 65, of Auburn, who is charged with 33 counts — including rape and sexual assault — involving seven victims between 1994 and 2005. Bradley Asbury, 66, of Dunbarton, is charged with being an accomplice to the rape of a former resident between 1997 and 1998. And Frank Davis, 79, of Hopkinton, is charged with one count of rape and five counts of sexual assault involving two victims between 1996 and 1997.

Instead of the dozens of charges they previously faced, Jeffrey Buskey, 54, of Quincy, Massachusetts, is now charged with five counts of rape involving four children between 1996 and 1999, while Stephen Murphy, 51, of Danvers, Massachusetts, is charged with five counts of rape involving three children between 1997 and 1999.

James Woodlock, 56, of Manchester, was charged with three counts of being an accomplice to rape between 1997 and 1998. David Meehan, the lead plaintiff in the civil lawsuit, alleges that Woodlock repeatedly beat him, held him down while Buskey raped him and told him he had “simply misunderstood events” when he spoke up during a group counseling session.

Woodlock later left the Youth Development Center job and became a juvenile probation and parole officer, a position he held until he went out on leave in 2017. He declined to comment on Meehan’s allegations when a reporter visited his home in early 2020, and his employment was terminated Wednesday, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

“The alleged actions that occurred several decades ago at the former Youth Development Center are horrific,” said Jake Leon, spokesperson for the department. “The Department continues to cooperate with the ongoing investigation and prosecution of these charges.”

The New Hampshire men are expected to appear in court Thursday, while authorities seek extradition from Massachusetts for Buskey and Murphy. Messages were left for their lawyers Wednesday; it was unclear whether the others are represented by attorneys.

In 2000 and 2001, the state Division of Children, Youth and Families spent seven months investigating 25 complaints of physical abuse and neglect at the center, including a boy who said he lost the tip of his finger when staff members slammed a door on it and others who accused staff members of wrapping boys’ heads in towels and slamming them against pool tables. It concluded teens had been abused in five of the cases.

A newspaper article published during that investigation quoted Brad Asbury, then head of the state employees union chapter at the youth center, as saying the allegations were offensive.

“We take them personally,” Asbury said. “That stuff does not take place. It’s not tolerated. We don’t have time to abuse them.”

EXPLAINER: Could mask hamper ex-officer’s image with jurors?

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

The face mask that former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin has been required to wear during his trial in George Floyd’s death has hidden his reaction to testimony, including any sympathy or remorse that legal experts say can make a difference to jurors.

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Because coronavirus concerns have forced Chauvin and other participants to wear masks except when they're addressing the court, the enduring image of the defendant throughout the trial has been his impassive expression from last May as he gazed at the teenager filming his knee pinning Floyd's neck. The girl, who captured the encounter on her cellphone, called Chauvin's stare "cold" and "heartless."

Prosecutors have repeatedly displayed the image in the courtroom, and Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo alluded to the white former officer's facial expression as he explained why he violated department policy by kneeling on the Black man's neck for an extended period.

Legal experts say the image — and the challenge of replacing it in jurors' minds with Chauvin's reactions during trial — could hamper the defense.

"Every trial has a hero and a villain," said Ryan Pacyga, a defense attorney who has been following the trial. "He looks like a villain."

Trial lawyers, who have long practiced the art of courtroom dramaturgy, send subtle hints to jurors about a defendant through their looks and body language. They say it's important because it humanizes the defendant.

"You've got to find a way for the jury to care for them," Pacyga said.

But the pandemic has changed how the trial works.

HOW DO JURORS SEE CHAUVIN?

The question was important to Chauvin's defense before the trial even began. His defense attorneys attempted to weed out potential jurors who had already formed strong opinions about the former officer. But jurors have watched video of Floyd's arrest and heard from witnesses who expressed strong feelings about Chauvin.

"He didn't care. It seemed as if he didn't care what we were saying," said 18-year-old Darnella Frazier, one of several witnesses who testified through tears.

Chauvin didn't appear to show any emotion during the videos or testimony as he scribbled notes on a notepad. But it also would be difficult to see if he was affected because the bottom half of his face is hidden behind a face mask.

"I wonder if watching these videos causes him some pain and agony? I don't know," said Joseph Daly, emeritus professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul, Minnesota.

WHY IS A DEFENDANT'S REMORSE IMPORTANT?

Research by legal scholars has shown that defendants who appear to show remorse may have an advantage with juries.

"People who look more angry are more likely to be viewed as being a criminal," said Kim MacLin, a professor at the University of Northern Iowa who specializes in psychology and law.

She conducted an experiment that found jurors in a mock trial were more likely to acquit if they saw an image of the defendant that seemed remorseful. Other research has shown that juries deciding whether to sentence someone to death are more lenient when a defendant seems to show remorse.

"It is something that juries, by human nature, think about. What sort of person are we dealing with here?" said Susan Bandes, an emeritus professor at DePaul University College of Law.

She noted that Chauvin already has a "remorse deficit" due to his actions during Floyd's arrest, adding, "That look on his face as captured in the video is so powerful."

Defense attorneys often try to cast defendants in a positive way by making sure they are wearing a suit that fits, getting them to smile at breaks in proceedings or asking their family or friends to appear in the courtroom.

Chauvin's defense attorney touched him on the shoulder while he was introduced during jury selection, when Chauvin was allowed to briefly take his mask off.

Daly said it is a way for the attorney to send a subtle message to jurors: "I'm not afraid of this guy."

WILL CHAUVIN TESTIFY?

Legal experts say that Chauvin's defense attorney has a lot to weigh in deciding whether to put Chauvin on the stand, but one factor could be showing a different side to the former officer. Witnesses are allowed to take their masks off while they testify.

Pacyga, the defense attorney, said as he thinks the defense's strategy could be headed towards having Chauvin testify, especially if they feel there is a chance of getting him acquitted of the charges.

"You've got to get this jury in Chauvin's shoes in some way, shape or form," he said. "Otherwise he looks like the most callous person in the world."

Medic who shot 2 was assigned to medical research center

By ROBERT BURNS and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Navy medic who shot and wounded two U.S. sailors before he was killed by police on a nearby Army base was a laboratory technician assigned to a Naval medical research center on the base, according to his service record and a military official.

Fantahun Girma Woldesenbet, 38, and the two men he shot Tuesday at a government-leased military warehouse were all assigned to Fort Detrick in Frederick, authorities have said.

Employees at Nicolock Paving Stones, a business located in the same office park as the warehouse, assisted one of the wounded sailors, Navy Hospitalman Casey Nutt, 26, of Germantown, Maryland, after he fled the scene of the initial shooting. Nutt was released from a hospital on Tuesday evening, authorities said in a news release.

Garrett Wagner, operations manager at Nicolock Paving Stones, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Nutt was covered in blood and holding his chest. Nutt also said the shooter was following him, recalled Wagner, who said he told the sailor to run to a bathroom and shut the door.

Wagner recalled that Nutt was terrified. "His eyes were so wide open," he said. "It was overwhelming."

Police officers found the other wounded sailor — Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Carlos Portugal, 36, of Frederick — in the warehouse. He remained in critical condition on Wednesday at the same Baltimore trauma center where Nutt was treated, according to the joint news release from police, military officials and the FBI.

Authorities haven't disclosed a possible motive for the shooting.

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

Wagner said the gunman clearly "wanted this young man dead" based on what he saw on surveillance video that captured the wounded sailor ducking and trying to hide before he entered the building. He said the gunman's vehicle stopped outside Nicolock Paving Stones for about a minute before peeling out and leaving.

"That wasn't random. He was being hunted down. And that guy wanted to finish the job," Wagner said.

Woldesenbet worked as a lab technician in the Naval Medical Research Center's Biological Defense Research Directorate at Fort Detrick, Navy Cmdr. Denver Applehans, a spokesman for the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, said Wednesday. The Naval Medical Research Center's headquarters are in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Woldesenbet's service record says he enlisted in September 2012 and reported to his most recent position in August 2019. In between, he served at military facilities in San Antonio, Texas; Camp Lejeune in North Carolina; Corpus Christi, Texas; Bremerton, Washington; and Portsmouth, Virginia.

Woldesenbet was awarded a Good Conduct Medal, a National Defense Service Medal and a Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, his record shows. It lists his rank as Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class.

Portugal enlisted in 2006 and has been assigned to the Navy Medical Research Center in Frederick since September 2020; Nutt enlisted in 2018 and has had the same assignment since October 2019, according to their Navy service records.

The shooting took place at a warehouse rented by the research directorate to store supplies and equipment. The warehouse is located in the Riverside Tech Park, an office park several miles from the Army base. The warehouse is not staffed on a regular basis and is leased by a military contractor, Applehans said.

Woldesenbet shot the sailors with a rifle, police and military officials said. He then drove to the base, where gate guards who had been given advance notice told him to pull over for a search. But Woldesenbet

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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, Fort Detrick's Brig. Gen. Michael J. Talley said.

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.

Woldesenbet lived at an apartment building in Frederick, a few miles from the site of the shooting. Police cordoned off the apartment on Tuesday afternoon and a neighbor reported seeing officials escorting his wife and children from the building.

The Navy says it is sending a "Special Psychiatric Rapid Intervention Team" to Fort Detrick to offer mental health services to people on the base.

"The Fort Detrick community is here to offer support as our brave sailors heal from this tragic incident," Talley said in a statement Wednesday.

Lt. Col. Gregory Jackson, the Army base's chaplain, said in a Facebook post that the shootings leave a lasting mark on the Fort Detrick community "with a lot of questions, and the biggest will be why?"

"Why did this person choose to do what he did?" he asked. "I wish we had answers to these questions, but, we don't always know the reason."

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press journalist Stacey Plaisance in New Orleans contributed to this report.

Brazil's Bolsonaro ignores calls for lockdown to slow virus

By DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said on Wednesday there would be "no national lockdown," ignoring growing calls from health experts a day after the nation saw its highest number of COVID-19 deaths in 24 hours since the pandemic began.

Brazil's Health Ministry registered 4,195 deaths on Tuesday, becoming the third country to go above that threshold as Bolsonaro's political opponents demanded stricter measures to slow down the spread of the virus.

"We're not going to accept this politics of stay home and shut everything down," Bolsonaro said, resisting the pressure in a speech in the city of Chapeco in Santa Catarina state. "There will be no national lockdown."

Brazil's conservative president also defended the use of so-called early treatment protocols, which include anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine. No scientific studies have found the drug effective to prevent or treat COVID-19.

"There is not enough vaccine today in the world. We need to find alternatives," he said.

The number of deaths in Chapeco linked to the virus has finally come down after some very difficult weeks. Intensive care units had surpassed capacity, forcing authorities to transfer infected patients to hospitals in other states.

Last month, the city implemented some restrictions on the economy for two weeks, but Bolsonaro attributed Chapeco's recent success to the use of early treatment protocols, newspaper Estadão reported.

In an open letter published Tuesday in newspaper O Globo, the Brazilian Association of Collective Health, which counts nearly 20,000 members, called for a three-week nationwide lockdown.

"The serious epidemiological situation that is leading to the collapse of the health system in several states requires the immediate adoption, without hesitation, of strict restrictive measures," the statement said.

Intensive care units in most Brazilian states have an occupation rate above 90%, though figures have been stable since the past week.

The Supreme Court is ruling today on the reopening of religious buildings nationwide. Many local authorities decided to ban large religious gatherings in spite of a federal government decision to label them as part of essential services.

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"There is no Christianity without community life," argued Brazil's solicitor general André Mendonça, an evangelical pastor, before the Supreme Court on Wednesday. "True Christians are never willing to kill for their faith, but they are always willing to die to guarantee freedom of religion and worship."

The preliminary results of an ongoing study involving 67,700 healthcare workers in Manaus, where a more contagious variant of COVID-19 was detected this year, seemed to confirm earlier findings that China's Sinovac vaccine is effective against the virus. The press release published Wednesday mentioned a 50% efficacy rate after the administration of just one of the vaccine's two doses.

The study has not yet been published or peer reviewed. Several health experts consulted by The Associated Press said it was not possible to properly evaluate the preliminary findings without access to the study's methodology and full results, but all agreed to say that it was promising.

The study involves researchers from Stanford University School of Medicine, the Yale School of Public Health and Brazil's state-run Fiocruz Institute, among other institutions.

In its own preliminary study, Sao Paulo's Butantan institute had also found in March that the vaccine was effective against the P1 variant.

No timetable for withdrawal of troops after US, Iraq talks

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — The mission of U.S. forces in Iraq has shifted to training and advisory roles, allowing for redeployment of combat forces remaining in the country, U.S. and Iraq delegates said Wednesday, after a third round of strategic U.S.-Iraq talks.

Statements issued by both sides, however, said the timing of such a redeployment would be determined in upcoming technical talks, without specifying when they would take place. They also stressed the need for continued security cooperation.

The talks — held virtually because of the pandemic — began in June under the Trump administration. Wednesday's round, the first under President Joe Biden, centered on an array of issues, including the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Iraq had requested the latest round, partly in response to pressure from Shiite political factions and militias loyal to Iran that have lobbied for the remaining U.S. troops to leave Iraq. Participants included U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale, and Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hassan.

A State Department statement following the talks said that with increasing capacity of Iraqi security forces, the mission of U.S. and coalition forces "has now transitioned to one focused on training and advisory tasks, thereby allowing for the redeployment of any remaining combat forces from Iraq."

The Pentagon press secretary, John Kirby, said Wednesday's statement does not represent an agreement to begin a further withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Iraqi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool said later that Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has ordered the formation of a committee that would hold technical talks with the American side to approve "mechanisms and timings" related to the redeployment.

Al-Kadhimi has walked a tightrope as he negotiates with the Americans while coming under growing pressure from local militias loyal to Tehran.

Last week, a convoy of heavily armed Shiite militiamen drove openly through Baghdad, denouncing the U.S. presence and threatening to cut off al-Kadhimi's ear, a display that clearly sought to undermine the premier.

Angered, al-Kadhimi asked Iran's leaders to rein in Iran-backed militias in Iraq and suggested he would confront the factions, two Iraqi officials said Wednesday. In the note, al-Kadhimi threatened to "announce clearly who backs these groups," the officials said.

It was not immediately clear who the message was given to. The timing suggested al-Kadhimi, who has appeared powerless in confronting the militias, was looking to appease the Americans ahead of Wednesday's talks.

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The message led to a two-day visit this week by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force chief Ismail Qaani to Baghdad, where he met with militia and Shiite political leaders and called for calm, according to a senior Iraqi Shiite politician.

The two Iraqi officials and the Shiite politician all spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters.

U.S.-Iraq ties plummeted after a Washington-directed airstrike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad last year. At the time, outraged Shiite lawmakers passed a non-binding resolution to end U.S. troop presence in Iraq.

Iraqi and U.S. officials have said they support a scheduled withdrawal from Iraq but questions remain over timings and the scope of the threat posed by the Islamic State group. According to the Pentagon, the number of U.S. troops in Iraq has dropped to about 2,500 over the past months.

Iraq's Foreign Minister Fuad Hassan said in a statement during Wednesday's talks that Iraq still needs U.S. support related to training, arming and advising its military.

Iraqis, particularly under former President Donald Trump, have often felt squeezed and pressured by both their allies, the U.S. and Iran. Tehran, for instance, seeks billions of dollars in payment for crucial gas and electricity supplies to Iraq. Iraqi officials say the money is sitting idle in an account at the Trade Bank of Iraq because of U.S. restrictions and fears of sanctions.

In a positive sign, the Biden administration last month permitted a 120-day sanctions waiver for Iraq to continue importing energy from Iran, the maximum time frame allowed. Waiver renewals under Trump were often for shorter periods and laden with conditions.

However, Iraqi officials say they require U.S. leniency to repay Tehran directly for the crucial energy imports, forgoing a complex payment system designed to evade U.S. sanctions over trading with Iran.

Iraq relies on Iranian supplies for a third of power needs, especially during peak summer months. Electricity cuts over payment issues resulted in violent protests in the southern province of Basra in the summer of 2018. As Iraq plans for nationwide parliamentary elections in October, the need to avoid unrest is high.

Currently, Iraq can pay Iran indirectly for the supplies in several ways. It can pay in humanitarian goods or medicines, cancel Iran's foreign debt, and foot bills such as Iranian Embassy expenses, the costs of Iranian companies operating in Iraq and those of Iranian pilgrimages to Shiite holy sites in Iraq.

But doling out these payments has been difficult, partly because U.S. conditions are so strict.

___ Kullab reported from Istanbul. Associated Press writers Mathew Lee and Robert Burns in Washington contributed to this report.

'Tantalizing' results of 2 experiments defy physics rulebook

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Preliminary results from two experiments suggest something could be wrong with the basic way physicists think the universe works, a prospect that has the field of particle physics both baffled and thrilled.

Tiny particles called muons aren't quite doing what is expected of them in two different long-running experiments in the United States and Europe. The confounding results — if proven right — reveal major problems with the rulebook physicists use to describe and understand how the universe works at the subatomic level.

"We think we might be swimming in a sea of background particles all the time that just haven't been directly discovered," Fermilab experiment co-chief scientist Chris Polly said in a press conference. "There might be monsters we haven't yet imagined that are emerging from the vacuum interacting with our muons and this gives us a window into seeing them."

The rulebook, called the Standard Model, was developed about 50 years ago. Experiments performed over decades affirmed over and over again that its descriptions of the particles and the forces that make up and govern the universe were pretty much on the mark. Until now.

"New particles, new physics might be just beyond our research," said Wayne State University particle physicist Alexey Petrov. "It's tantalizing."

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The United States Energy Department's Fermilab announced results Wednesday of 8.2 billion races along a track outside Chicago that while ho-hum to most people have physicists astir: The muons' magnetic fields don't seem to be what the Standard Model says they should be. This follows new results published last month from the European Center for Nuclear Research's Large Hadron Collider that found a surprising proportion of particles in the aftermath of high-speed collisions.

If confirmed, the U.S. results would be the biggest finding in the bizarre world of subatomic particles in nearly 10 years, since the discovery of the Higgs boson, often called the "God particle," said Aida El-Khadra of the University of Illinois, who works on theoretical physics for the Fermilab experiment.

The point of the experiments, explains Johns Hopkins University theoretical physicist David Kaplan, is to pull apart particles and find out if there's "something funny going on" with both the particles and the seemingly empty space between them.

"The secrets don't just live in matter. They live in something that seems to fill in all of space and time. These are quantum fields," Kaplan said. "We're putting energy into the vacuum and seeing what comes out."

Both sets of results involve the strange, fleeting particle called the muon. The muon is the heavier cousin to the electron that orbits an atom's center. But the muon is not part of the atom, it is unstable and normally exists for only two microseconds. After it was discovered in cosmic rays in 1936 it so confounded scientists that a famous physicist asked "Who ordered that?"

"Since the very beginning it was making physicists scratch their heads," said Graziano Venanzoni, an experimental physicist at an Italian national lab, who is one of the top scientists on the U.S. Fermilab experiment, called Muon g-2.

The experiment sends muons around a magnetized track that keeps the particles in existence long enough for researchers to get a closer look at them. Preliminary results suggest that the magnetic "spin" of the muons is 0.1% off what the Standard Model predicts. That may not sound like much, but to particle physicists it is huge — more than enough to upend current understanding.

Researchers need another year or two to finish analyzing the results of all of the laps around the 50-foot (14-meter) track. If the results don't change, it will count as a major discovery, Venanzoni said.

Separately, at the world's largest atom smasher at CERN, physicists have been crashing protons against each other there to see what happens after. One of the particle colliders' several separate experiments measures what happens when particles called beauty or bottom quarks collide.

The Standard Model predicts that these beauty quark crashes should result in equal numbers of electrons and muons. It's sort of like flipping a coin 1,000 times and getting about equal numbers of heads and tails, said Large Hadron Collider beauty experiment chief Chris Parkes.

But that's not what happened.

Researchers pored over the data from several years and a few thousand crashes and found a 15% difference, with significantly more electrons than muons, said experiment researcher Sheldon Stone of Syracuse University.

Neither experiment is being called an official discovery yet because there is still a tiny chance that the results are statistical quirks. Running the experiments more times — planned in both cases — could, in a year or two, reach the incredibly stringent statistical requirements for physics to hail it as a discovery, researchers said.

If the results do hold, they would upend "every other calculation made" in the world of particle physics, Kaplan said.

"This is not a fudge factor. This is something wrong," Kaplan said. That something could be explained by a new particle or force.

Or these results may be mistakes. In 2011, a strange finding that a particle called a neutrino seemed to be traveling faster than light threatened the model, but it turned out to be the result of a loose electrical connection problem in the experiment.

"We checked all our cable connections and we've done what we can to check our data," Stone said. "We're kind of confident, but you never know."

Celebrity zookeeper Jack Hanna diagnosed with dementia

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Celebrity zookeeper and animal TV show host Jack Hanna has been diagnosed with dementia and will retire from public life, his family said.

In a news release Wednesday, his family added that it's believed he now has Alzheimer's disease that has quickly progressed in the last few months.

The 74-year-old Hanna was director of the Columbus Zoo from 1978 to 1992 and still serves as its director emeritus.

"Dad advocated for improved wildlife habitats and focused on connecting the community with animals," the statement signed by his three daughters said. Hanna continued to be a spokesperson for the Ohio zoo until he retired in 2020.

Hanna is also well-known for his live animal demonstrations on talk shows hosted by Johnny Carson, David Letterman and James Corden, increasing the profile of the Columbus Zoo and leading to massive attendance increases over the years.

Hanna, who always wore khakis on every television appearance and in photos, hosted the popular syndicated TV show "Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures" from 1993 to 2008. He also hosted "Jack Hanna's Into the Wild," which started in 2007, and "Jack Hanna's Wild Countdown" until last year.

"While Dad's health has deteriorated quickly, we can assure you that his great sense of humor continues to shine through," the statement said. "And yes, he still wears his khakis at home."

His family asked for privacy in light of COVID-19 restrictions.

"He has spent his life connecting people and wildlife because he has always believed that having people see and experience animals is key to engaging them in more impactful conversations," his family said. "Even though Dad is no longer able to travel and work in the same way, we know that his infectious enthusiasm has touched many hearts and will continue to be his legacy."

Jordan king doubles down on sedition claims against brother

By SARAH EL DEEB and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Jordan's King Abdullah II addressed the unprecedented public rift within the royal family for the first time Wednesday, portraying it as an attempted sedition involving his half-brother that had been "nipped in the bud," but caused him anger, pain and shock.

The monarch appeared to be doubling down on the allegations against Prince Hamzah, a former crown prince, while at the same time trying to reassure Jordanians that the nation was returning to business as usual. But even if the current crisis is eventually defused, major challenges loom for the Western-allied monarchy as it confronts growing internal dissent.

Wednesday's statement, presented by a newsreader on Jordan TV, dealt with the internal crisis that erupted over the weekend when Hamzah was confined to his home and accused of being part of a plot to destabilize the kingdom.

Hamzah has denied the allegations, saying he was simply calling out long-running corruption and mismanagement in the kingdom.

The king said Wednesday that he was hurt by the recent events.

"The challenge over the past few days was not the most difficult or dangerous to the stability of our nation, but to me, it was the most painful," he said. "Sedition came from within and without our one house, and nothing compares to my shock, pain, and anger as a brother and as the head of the Hashemite family, and as a leader of this proud people."

Abdullah also suggested that there was continued control over Hamzah's movements. The prince, who has not been seen or heard from in days, was "with his family at his palace, under my care," the statement said.

There was no sign that authorities have released up to 18 other detainees, including members of one

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of the powerful tribes on which the monarchy has historically relied.

Authorities have imposed a sweeping gag order on any coverage of the royal dispute in a sign of how sensitive they are to how it is perceived. The gag order and the king's willingness to sanction his own brother also reaffirmed what Jordanians understand as their "red line" — an absolute ban on criticizing the monarch or the royal family.

Bessma Momani, a professor of international relations at Ontario's Waterloo University, said the crisis strengthened Hamzah's popularity, making critics of the government and new followers rally behind him.

She said the king's doubling-down on vague plot allegations could also create problems in the future. Prosecuting those detained, including members of a powerful tribe, could stir protests. If they are let go, more questions could arise about whether there was ever a plot.

Even before the palace drama, Jordan was grappling with an economic crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, with one in four people out of work. Longstanding complaints about corruption and misrule have fueled scattered protests in recent months.

At the same time, the region's strategic landscape is shifting as powerful Gulf states pursue closer ties with Israel, potentially undermining Jordan's role in the Middle East peace process.

The White House, in a statement issued Wednesday, said President Joe Biden had spoken with Abdullah to express strong U.S. support for Jordan and underscore the importance of the king's leadership to the United States, the region and the peace process.

Asked by reporters if he was concerned about the situation in Jordan, Biden said: "No, I'm not. I just called to tell him that he has a friend in America. Stay strong."

The crisis in the royal family erupted Saturday when Jordan's military chief of staff visited Hamzah and warned him to stop attending meetings with critics of the government. Things quickly escalated, with Hamzah accusing the security establishment of threatening him and ordering the general to leave his home.

Authorities placed the former crown prince under a form of house arrest and detained up to 18 people, including former senior officials. On Sunday, the government said Hamzah and others were involved in a "malicious plot" against the kingdom's security with foreign support.

Abdullah and Hamzah are both sons of King Hussein, who ruled Jordan for nearly a half-century before his death in 1999. Abdullah had appointed Hamzah as crown prince upon his succession but stripped him of the title in 2004.

The government imposed the gag order on coverage of the dispute after an audio recording of the meeting between Hamzah and the chief of staff, Gen. Yousef Huneiti, raised questions about its allegations of a foreign conspiracy. Neither mentioned any such plot in the recording, which was recorded surreptitiously and circulated online.

Family members of those who were arrested in connection with the alleged plot, meanwhile, said they've had no communication with authorities or the detainees.

Those arrested include Yasser al-Majali, Hamzah's chief of staff, and Samir al-Majali, both prominent members of the Majali tribe.

"We don't know where he is," said Yasser al-Majali's brother, Abdullah. He said they have been unable to reach any officials and have not been informed of any charges.

"If there is anything against them, take them to court for a fair trial," he said. "We don't want any trouble. We care about stability and we want our people to be released."

The Majali tribe issued an angry statement immediately after the arrests, calling it a "black day" in which the tribe's dignity had been insulted.

The tribe denied the men had plotted against Jordan and warned against involving them in "any internal or family dispute." On Wednesday, video surfaced of the tribesmen holding a small rally demanding the release of their relatives and chanting: "Where is Hamzah?"

Jordan has a large Palestinian population, including more than 2 million refugees from past wars with Israel and their descendants. The monarchy has granted most of them full citizenship but has historically viewed them with suspicion. Its main base of support is powerful tribes from east of the Jordan River,

who dominate the security forces.

For decades, the monarchy has cultivated close ties with the U.S. and other Western nations, which it has used to press for the creation of a Palestinian state including the West Bank and east Jerusalem, which Israel captured from Jordan in the 1967 war.

That strategy has hit a wall in recent years as the peace process has ground to a halt. Israel and Jordan made peace in 1994 and maintain close security ties, but relations have soured amid a series of recent diplomatic spats.

At the same time, Gulf countries have been cultivating closer ties with Israel over their shared antipathy toward Iran, relations made public last year when the United Arab Emirates agreed to normalize relations with Israel in a U.S.-brokered deal. Saudi Arabia has at times appeared to be weighing a similar move.

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 learning 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.

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. School offerings were nearly identical to what was reported a month before. But among eighth grade students, there was a slight shift from fully remote to hybrid learning.

Speaking at a coronavirus briefing on Wednesday, White House COVID-19 adviser Andy Slavitt described the findings as a step forward.

"This is encouraging early data covering the month of February that shows progress toward the president's goal to have K-8 schools open five days a week," Slavitt said.

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 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.

Since then, schools have continued to reopen as more teachers get vaccines and as some states loosen social distancing requirements. More recent estimates from the data service Burbio found that, as of Sunday, more than 55% of K-12 students were back in the classroom full time.

As in January, the new federal data 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

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graders were back at school full time, along with just 15% of Asian students.

The results do not indicate whether students are learning remotely by choice or because their schools do not offer an in-person option. The mismatch between what schools are offering and what students are getting is at least partly explained by big urban districts that have been slow to offer in-person options. But it's clear that at least some students are opting to stay remote even after their schools reopen classrooms.

In New Mexico, where all school districts were expected to be open for in-person learning this week, some students stayed back. Among them was 14-year-old Jonathan Chilton, a freshman in Santa Fe, who watched class from his laptop on Tuesday while around half of his district attended in-person. He was reconsidering his choice, though, after dealing with internet issues and a teacher who was split between two audiences.

"Before it was like — she was just sitting down and talking to everyone," Jonathan said. "We try to understand what she's saying sometimes because, like, it lags when she's in the classroom."

The survey's findings around race align with 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 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 child care 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.

More than a half million Americans gain coverage under Biden

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than a half million Americans have taken advantage of the Biden administration's special health insurance sign-up window keyed to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government announced Wednesday in anticipation that even more consumers will gain coverage in the coming months.

The reason officials expect sign-ups to keep growing is that millions of people became eligible effective Apr. 1 for pumped-up subsidies toward their premiums under President Joe Biden's coronavirus relief legislation. The special sign-up opportunity for Affordable Care Act plans will be available until Aug. 15.

Biden campaigned on a strategy of building on the Obama-era health law to push the United States toward coverage for all. As president, he's wasted no time.

With the number of uninsured Americans rising during the pandemic, Biden reopened the law's health insurance markets as a backstop. Then, the virus aid package essentially delivered a health insurance price cut by making taxpayer subsidies more generous, while also allowing more people to qualify for financial assistance.

Those sweeteners are available the rest of this year and through the end of 2022. Consumers who were already covered by the health law at the beginning of this year are also entitled to the increased financial aid, but will have to go online or call to update their plan. People on average could save \$50 a month, the government says.

The numbers released Wednesday by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services show that 528,005 people newly signed up for government-sponsored private plans from Feb. 15 to Mar. 31.

But those figures are incomplete because they cover only the 36 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov insurance market. National enrollment will be higher when totals are factored in later on from states such as California and New York that run their own insurance websites.

The new report also showed that more than 870,000 people who went to the HealthCare.gov website or reached out to the call center were found to be eligible for Medicaid, the federal-state health program for low-income people.

Although President Donald Trump spared no effort to overturn the Obama-era law, more than 20 million people remained covered under it at the end of Trump's term. That number combines those with HealthCare.gov plans as well as low-income adults covered through expanded Medicaid. But with the economy shedding jobs because of coronavirus shutdowns, the number of uninsured Americans has been on the rise. Biden sought to stop the erosion, and hopes to ultimately reverse it.

Among the states showing strong gains in enrollment are several big ones that went for Trump in last November's election, including Florida, Texas, and North Carolina. Florida recorded the biggest gain, with more than 146,000 sign-ups.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that about 33 million Americans are uninsured. That's still less than when President Barack Obama's health care law was passed, but it is a reversal from prior years in which the uninsured rate steadily declined.

The CBO estimates about 3 million people lost coverage as a result of the pandemic. Some private experts estimate higher numbers, in the range of 5 million to 10 million.

Republicans say expanding the health law is the wrong way to go, but they have been unable to coalesce around a health care vision of their own. That's left the political field to Biden, who is maneuvering with narrow Democratic margins in Congress to try to execute an ambitious health agenda, including a new "public option" plan as an alternative to private insurance, and granting Medicare the power to directly negotiate prescription drug prices.

Will the Oscars be a 'who cares' moment as ratings dive?

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — George Bradley used to love watching the Academy Awards. The 28-year-old Brit now living in San Diego would stay up late back home just to tune in.

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Though he's now in the right time zone, he's just not interested, and that's due primarily to the pandemic. "The rising dominance of the streaming services has taken the gloss off the Oscars for me," he said. "You just don't get the same warm fuzzy feeling from when you recognize a movie from the silver screen."

Whether you watch out of love, because you love to hate or have given up like Bradley, awards shows have suffered since the coronavirus shuttered theaters and shut down live performances. But the ratings slide for awards nights began well before Covid-19 took over.

For much of this century, the Oscars drew 35 million to 45 million viewers, often just behind the Super Bowl. Last year, just before the pandemic was declared, the hostless telecast on ABC was seen by its smallest audience ever, 23.6 million viewers, down 20 percent from the year before.

The pandemic-era Golden Globes a little more than a year later plummeted to 6.9 million viewers, down 64% from last year and barely besting 2008, the year a writer's strike forced NBC to air a news conference announcing winners. Last year, pre-lockdown, the show had 18.4 million viewers, according to the Nielsen company.

In March, Grammy producers avoided the Zoom awkwardness of other awards shows and staged performances by some of the industry's biggest stars — to no avail. The CBS telecast reached 9.2 million viewers, both television and streaming, the lowest number on record and a 51% drop from 2020, Nielsen said.

John Bennardo, 52, in Boca Raton, Florida, is a film buff, film school graduate and screenwriter, and runs a videography business for mostly corporate clients. This year is a no-go for the Oscars.

"I love the movies and aspire to be on that very Oscars stage receiving my own award some day," he said. "I watch each year and take it in, enter contests where I try to pick winners and try to see all the films. But something has changed for this year."

For starters, he hasn't seen a single film nominated in any category.

"Maybe I'll watch 'Zach Snyder's Justice League' instead. It might be shorter," Bennardo joked about the Oscars show.

Like other awards shows, the Oscars telecast was pushed back due to pandemic restrictions and safety concerns. The show had been postponed three times before in history, but never so far in advance. Organizers last June scheduled it for April 25, as opposed to its usual slot in February or early March.

Count that among other driving forces behind Oscars fatigue. Another, according to former fans of the show, is having to watch nominated movies on small screens and keeping up with when and where they are available on streaming and on-demand services. It's been one big blur to some.

Priscilla Visintine, 62, in St. Louis, Missouri, used to live for watching the Academy Awards. She attended watch parties every year, usually dressed all the way up for the occasion.

"Definitely the shuttering of the theaters created my lack of interest this year," she said. "I didn't get any sense of Oscar buzz."

Not all diehards have given up their favorite awards show.

In Knoxville, Tennessee, 50-year-old Jennifer Rice and her 22-year-old son, Jordan, have for years raced to watch as many nominated films as possible. In years past, it was their "February Madness," she said, and they kept charts to document their predictions. She even got to attend the Oscars in 2019 through her work for a beauty company at the time.

"My other two children, ages 25 and 19, have no interest in the Oscars. It's just something special for Jordan and I," Rice said. "The Oscars actually push us to watch movies that we may have never picked. I'm not as excited this year, but we're still trying to watch everything before the awards ceremony."

As real-life hardship has intensified for many viewers, from food insecurity and job disruption to the isolation of lockdowns and parenting struggles, awards shows offer less escapism and razzle-dazzle than in the past, often relying on pre-taped performances and Zoom boxes for nominees. In addition, data shows little interest among younger generations for appointment television in general.

Lifelong lover of movies and a filmmaker himself, 22-year-old Pierre Subeh of Orlando, Florida, stopped watching the Oscars in 2019.

"We can barely stay put for a 15-second TikTok. How are we expected to sit through a dragged out,

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four-hour awards ceremony filled with ads and outdated offensive jokes? We're living in the time of content curation. We need algorithms to figure out what we want to watch and to show us the best of the best," he said.

As a Muslim, Middle Eastern immigrant, Subeh also sees little inclusion of his culture in mainstream film, let alone on the Oscars stage.

"We're only mentioned when Aladdin is brought up. I don't feel motivated to gather up my family on a Sunday to sit through a four-hour award ceremony that never has any sort of mention about our culture and religion. Yet as Muslims, we make up roughly 25% of the world population," he said.

Jon Niccum, 55, in Lawrence, Kansas, teaches screenwriting at the University of Kansas. He's a filmmaker, went to film school and has worked as a film critic. He and his wife host an annual Oscar party, with 30 guests at its heyday, including a betting pool on winners for money and prizes. It will be family-only this year due to the pandemic, but the betting is on.

And watching all the top films at home? For the most part, he said, "It was less satisfying." Less satisfying enough to dump the Oscars telecast?

"I haven't missed an Oscars since 45 years ago. I'll watch every single minute of it," Niccum said.

In Medford, New Jersey, 65-year-old Deb Madison will also be watching, as she has since she was a kid and her mom first took her to the movies.

In 2018, while on an RV road trip with her husband, she made him bike into town with her in Carlsbad, New Mexico, to find a spot to watch. The ride back was in pitch darkness. Another year, when she was working reception at a huge party in Philadelphia on Oscars night, the coordinators laid cable and provided her with a tiny TV hidden under the welcome desk so she could tune in.

This year, trying to keep up with nominees from home has stifled her excitement, Madison said.

"I'm a sucker for the red carpet and the gowns and, 'Oh my god, I can't believe she wore that.' Another thing is, I don't particularly need to see these actors in their home environments," she said with a laugh. "This year, if I missed it, it wouldn't be tragic. Nobody would need to lay cable this year. But I still love the movies."

'Grim reaper' Berlin artist protests Brazil's virus stance

BERLIN (AP) — 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. I dress myself as ... death," 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.

"I wanted to create a clear image of what's going on in Brazil," said Puetter, who wore a black hood and cape with the words "SOS Brasil" on the back, a skull mask and a sash in Brazil's green-and-yellow colors.

Brazil has confirmed more than 13.1 million coronavirus cases since the pandemic began and nearly 337,000 deaths, according to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins University. In both cases, that is the second-highest total behind the United States.

Merkel backs 'short, uniform lockdown' across Germany

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday threw her weight behind a “short, uniform lockdown” as the country grapples with a high level of coronavirus cases fueled by the spread of a more contagious variant first detected in Britain.

German state governors, who are responsible for imposing and lifting virus restrictions, have taken differing approaches lately. Some have continued to back limited reopening steps while others advocate a stricter shutdown.

Armin Laschet, a governor who also leads Merkel’s conservative party, called this week for a vaguely defined 2-3 week “bridge lockdown” to control infections while Germany steps up a so-far slow vaccination campaign.

Laschet also called for a meeting between Merkel and governors to coordinate restrictions to be moved up from next Monday, but hit resistance from his colleagues. Merkel spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said Wednesday there is “no majority” for that.

But Demmer said “every call for a short, uniform lockdown is right.” She said figures on new cases aren’t particularly good at the moment, because of lower testing and reporting over Easter, but a rapid rise in the number of occupied intensive care beds “speaks a very clear language.”

“Joint action would be desirable,” she stressed. “The diversity of the rules that have been agreed on isn’t contributing at the moment to safety and acceptance.”

Merkel and the 16 state governors confer every few weeks on coronavirus measures. Those sometimes sprawling and ill-tempered get-togethers have drawn increasing criticism, particularly as governors have frequently taken different approaches to implementing what they agree upon.

Last month, Merkel and the governors sparred for hours before announcing unexpected plans for a five-day Easter shutdown. Merkel then dumped the plans less than 36 hours later after concluding they were unworkable and apologized to Germans.

Meanwhile, Germany’s Sept. 26 general election is casting a shadow. Many have viewed the lockdown proposal from Laschet, the governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, as a result of speculation over whether he or Bavarian governor Markus Soeder will become the center-right candidate to succeed Merkel.

Laschet has often advocated allowing more businesses to open, and Merkel recently criticized his state for failing to keep to the rules that had been agreed upon. Soeder has consistently advocated tougher restrictions. At present, polls suggest that voters are considerably more impressed by Soeder. A decision on the candidate is expected by late May.

Soeder told ZDF television Tuesday that he and Merkel had always backed Laschet’s latest position, “and everyone who joins in, I think that’s great.”

Germany’s infection rate is currently lower than that of several neighboring countries, but it is still more than twice the maximum 50 new cases per 100,000 residents the government would like to see.

The country has recorded 2.9 million cases and 77,401 deaths from or with COVID-19 since the pandemic began. It has given a first vaccine dose to 13% of its total population of 83 million, while 5.6% have received two doses. Officials hope vaccinations will accelerate this month.

In addition to vaccines already ordered, Soeder said the Bavarian government plans to sign a preliminary contract Wednesday with a company in the town of Illertissen that would allow it to get 2.5 million doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine, probably in July — if the shot is approved by the European Medicines Agency.

A Russian company, R-Pharm, plans to start producing the Sputnik V vaccine in Illertissen.

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

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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.

"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

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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."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 8, the 98th day of 2021. There are 267 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 8, 1864, the United States Senate passed, 38-6, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery. (The House of Representatives passed it in January 1865; the amendment was ratified and adopted in December 1865.)

On this date:

In 1513, explorer Juan Ponce de Leon and his expedition began exploring the Florida coastline.

In 1820, the Venus de Milo statue was discovered by a farmer on the Greek island of Milos.

In 1911, an explosion at the Banner Coal Mine in Littleton, Alabama, claimed the lives of 128 men, most of them convicts loaned out from prisons.

In 1913, the 17th Amendment to the Constitution, providing for popular election of U.S. senators (as opposed to appointment by state legislatures), was ratified. President Woodrow Wilson became the first chief executive since John Adams to address Congress in person as he asked lawmakers to enact tariff reform.

In 1952, President Harry S. Truman seized the American steel industry to avert a nationwide strike. (The Supreme Court later ruled that Truman had overstepped his authority, opening the way for a seven-week strike by steelworkers.)

In 1963, "Lawrence of Arabia" won the Oscar for best picture at the Academy Awards; Gregory Peck won best actor for "To Kill a Mockingbird" while Anne Bancroft received best actress honors for "The Miracle Worker."

In 1974, Hank Aaron of the Atlanta Braves hit his 715th career home run in a game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, breaking Babe Ruth's record.

In 1987, Al Campanis, vice president of player personnel for the Los Angeles Dodgers, resigned after saying on ABC's "Nightline" that Blacks might lack some of the "necessities" for becoming baseball managers.

In 1990, Ryan White, the teenage AIDS patient whose battle for acceptance had gained national attention, died in Indianapolis at age 18.

In 1993, singer Marian Anderson died in Portland, Oregon, at age 96.

In 1994, Kurt Cobain, singer and guitarist for the grunge band Nirvana, was found dead in Seattle from an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound; he was 27.

In 2009, Somali pirates hijacked the U.S.-flagged Maersk Alabama; although the crew was able to retake

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the cargo ship, the captain, Richard Phillips, was taken captive by the raiders and held aboard a lifeboat. (Phillips was rescued four days later by Navy SEAL snipers who shot three of the pirates dead.)

Ten years ago: Congressional and White House negotiators struck a last-minute budget deal ahead of a midnight deadline, averting an embarrassing federal shutdown and cutting billions in spending.

Five years ago: In a sweeping document on family life that opened a door to divorced and civilly remarried Catholics, Pope Francis insisted that church doctrine could not be the final word in answering tricky moral questions and that Catholics had to be guided by their own informed consciences. Bruce Springsteen canceled a scheduled concert in Greensboro, North Carolina, citing the state's new law blocking anti-discrimination rules covering the LGBT community. N.W.A. entered the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame during a ceremony at Brooklyn's Barclays Center with 1970s-era rock acts Cheap Trick, Chicago, Deep Purple and Steve Miller.

One year ago: A 76-day lockdown was lifted in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the global pandemic began; residents would have to use a smartphone app showing that they had not been in recent contact with anyone confirmed to have the virus. Sen. Bernie Sanders ended his presidential bid, making Joe Biden the presumptive Democratic nominee to challenge President Donald Trump.

Today's Birthdays: Comedian Shecky Greene is 95. Author and Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Seymour Hersh is 84. "Mouseketeer" Darlene Gillespie is 80. Singer Peggy Lennon (The Lennon Sisters) is 80. Songwriter-producer Leon Huff is 79. Actor Stuart Pankin is 75. Rock musician Steve Howe is 74. Former House Republican leader Tom DeLay is 74. Movie director John Madden is 72. Rock musician Mel Schacher (Grand Funk Railroad) is 70. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., is 66. Actor John Schneider is 61. "Survivor" winner Richard Hatch is 60. Rock musician Izzy Stradlin is 59. Singer Julian Lennon is 58. Actor Dean Norris is 58. Rock singer-musician Donita Sparks is 58. Rapper Biz Markie is 57. Actor Robin Wright is 55. Actor Patricia Arquette is 53. Actor JR Bourne is 51. Rock singer Craig Honeycutt (Everything) is 51. Rock musician Darren Jessee is 50. Actor Emma Caulfield is 48. Actor Katee Sackhoff is 41. Actor Taylor Kitsch is 40. Rock singer-musician Ezra Koenig (Vampire Weekend) is 37. Actor Taran Noah Smith is 37. Actor Kirsten Storms is 37. Actor Sadie Calvano is 24.