

# Groton Daily Independent

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**NOW HIRING**

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



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

**FREE DATE CHANGES ON 2021 TOURS\***

 <p>FROM <del>\$1,449</del> \$1,199</p>	 <p>FROM <del>\$2,599</del> \$2,349</p>
<b>ALASKA NORTHERN LIGHTS</b> 7 days, departs Feb - Mar 2022 <b>Anchorage • Talkeetna • Healy (Denali) • Fairbanks</b> — Travel deep into the rugged Alaskan wilderness in pursuit of nature's most spectacular nighttime display. Chase after the vibrant lights of the aurora borealis while you enjoy Alaska's culture, nature, and wildlife.	<b>BEST OF HAWAII FOUR-ISLAND TOUR</b> 12 days, departs year-round <b>Oahu • Hawaii Island • Kauai • Maui</b> — Enjoy a fully guided 4-island Hawaiian vacation with centrally located lodging in Waikiki on Oahu, and beachfront lodging on the "Big Island" of Hawaii, Kauai, and Maui. Guided throughout by our friendly Tour Directors—your local experts. Includes 3 inter-island flights.
 <b>promo code N7017</b>	<b>CALL 1-844-962-4142</b>

\* Free date changes anytime up to 45 days prior to departure for land tours, up to 95 days prior to departure for cruise tours. Deposits and final payments remain non-refundable. Prices are per person based on double occupancy plus \$29 in taxes & fees. Single supplement and seasonal surcharges may apply. Add-on airfare available. Offers apply to new bookings only, made by 6/30/21. Other terms & conditions may apply. Ask your Travel Consultant for details.

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## Groton 7th Grade Poppy winners from Groton Unit 39

Pictured left to right are London Bahr 2nd place, Talli Wright 3rd place, and De Eh Tha Say 1st place. De Eh Tha Say will go on to the next level of competition.

(Courtesy Photo)



*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**



## Badger Clark: Cowboy Poet and Jailbird

Badger Clark probably hoped to find adventure, money and romance in Cuba. What awaited him instead was a prison cell.

South Dakota's first poet laureate (a title not yet bestowed upon him at the time) was among a group of people who left the country in December 1903 to colonize Cuba.

Colonizing plans fell through, and the 21-year-old Clark was the only would-be colonizer who remained in Cuba after April 1904. He went to work for plantation owner Augustin Rodriguez.

Clark's sense of humor was evident when, in 1906, he wrote about his experiences in Cuba. They were published in the Summer 1977 volume of "South Dakota History," the quarterly journal of the South Dakota State Historical Society.

Rodriguez often quarreled with two of his neighbors, father and son Emilio and Enrique Barretto. The feud escalated one morning when Enrique threatened Rodriguez with a machete. Rodriguez fired his gun at Enrique and wounded him. Rodriguez and Clark soon found themselves in a six-by-10 foot jail cell.

Brought before the court, Clark was informed that he had deliberately, feloniously, and with malice aforethought fired at Enrique at a distance of 10 feet and missed.

"I immediately put in an indignant plea of not guilty," Clark wrote.

Clark and Rodriguez were told that they could get "libertad provisional" if they would put up the sum of \$300 apiece for bail.

After three days in jail, the two men were transferred to the provincial penitentiary, where they were separated and forbidden to communicate.

"I reached the low water mark of despondency that afternoon when the steel doors of the big prison closed behind us," Clark wrote.

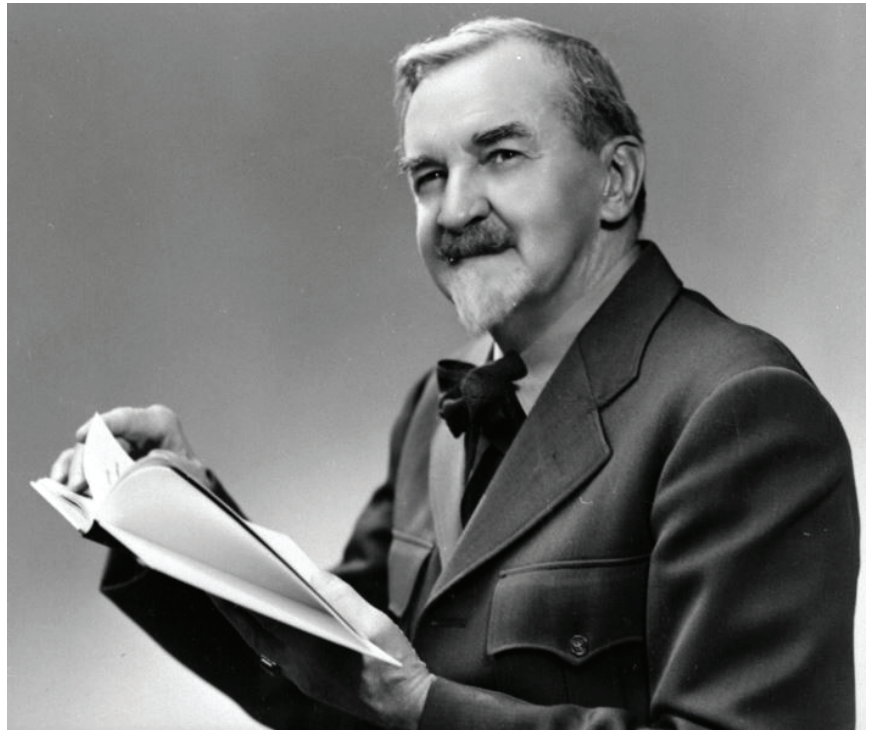
"I was thrust into a large cell with seventeen convicts. When I sized up these fellow sufferers of mine, I was if possible sicker than before ... Not one of them spoke English and most of them spoke a very poor dialect of Spanish ...."

His cell had an informal government with a prisoner called the "Presidente" in charge.

"The daily program at the prison was so simple and easy to learn that after a few days it became almost monotonous. We arose at six in the morning. At six thirty a man came to the door of the cell carrying a five-gallon kerosene can full of coffee. Under the supervision of the Presidente we filed out and one at a time filled our tin cups with the thick brown mixture. This coffee was all we were given for our breakfast, but we generally eked it out with a piece of bread saved from dinner the day before. This bread kept us busy because it had to be eaten slowly on account of the number of ants it contained.

"After breakfast we were left to our

SOUTH DAKOTA  
  
HISTORY & HERITAGE



**Badger Clark**

(South Dakota State Historical Society – State Archives photo)

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own devices for awhile ... As for me I lay in my bed and smoked innumerable cigarettes while I read stories from some old American magazines. Had it not been for these magazines, I might have gone crazy for want of something to take my mind off my troubles.

"At ten o'clock in the morning we ate our 'almuerzo' the first real meal of the day. Almuerzo consisted principally of soup. It was a thick soup and was probably highly nourishing, if grease and nourishment are synonymous.

"At four o'clock in the afternoon the comida or heavy meal of the day was served. The principal dish at this meal was the soup of the morning, only the strictly soup part had been drained off leaving the solids in the form of a kind of 'boiled dinner.' This was rather (more) palatable than the soup and the fact that they gave us a small allowance of bread, fruit, and coffee made it quite a feast."

The interval between comida and bedtime was generally the noisiest of the day, as this was the time the prisoners did most of their singing.

"At nine o'clock the guards would extinguish the lamps and the Presidente would command silence ... This was the hardest time of day for me. I could not sleep before midnight, and so I would lie and think unpleasant thoughts and listen to the prison bell as it struck the halves and quarters.

"Two weeks dragged on before I procured my release. Despite my troubles I thrived rather than pined, and the only possible damage my health suffered during my confinement was from smoking too much."

Rodriguez put up bail for Clark. Clark felt he had to stay in Cuba to keep Rodriguez from losing the \$300. Clark was acquitted at his trial on Jan. 31, 1905.

Clark returned to the United States, where he became known as a cowboy poet. He was named South Dakota's poet laureate on Dec. 24, 1937, a title he held until his death in 1957.

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](http://www.sdhsf.org). Contact us at [info@sdhsf.org](mailto:info@sdhsf.org) to submit a story idea.



**Weber  
Landscaping  
Greenhouse  
opening this  
Spring!**



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

**Opening First Week of May!**

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

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

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## #410 in a series

### Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Another big day for cases—bigger than yesterday. This is starting to feel pretty real; I don't think it's a data glitch from the weekend. We reported 73,900 new cases today, which did bring us over 31 million cases. We're at 31,010,900, which is 0.2% more than yesterday. Here's the history:

April 28 – 1 million – 98 days  
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days  
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days  
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days  
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days  
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days  
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days  
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days  
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days  
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days  
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days  
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days  
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days  
December 3 – 14 million – 6 days  
December 7 – 15 million – 4 days  
December 12 – 16 million – 5 days  
December 17 – 17 million – 5 days  
December 21 – 18 million – 4 days  
December 26 – 19 million – 5 days  
December 31 – 20 million – 5 days  
January 5 – 21 million – 5 days  
January 9 – 22 million – 4 days  
January 13 – 23 million – 4 days  
January 18 – 24 million – 5 days  
January 23 – 25 million – 5 days  
January 30 – 26 million – 7 days  
February 7 – 27 million – 8 days  
February 19 – 28 million – 12 days  
March 7 – 29 million – 16 days  
March 24 – 30 million – 17 days  
April 8 – 31 million – 15 days

You will note the intervals between millions have stopped getting longer. Hospitalizations are up to 43,780. The only bright spot is we backed off that terrible one-day deaths number from yesterday; we're back under 1000 at 935. That brings us to 559,450, which is 0.2% higher than yesterday.

On April 8, 2020, one year ago today, I had really begun to stew about rising cases around the country that were just being submerged in what looked like (and was) a good-news story from the Northeast as cases declined there. We had 10 states with over 10,000 cases when less than three weeks earlier the entire country had just passed the 10,000 mark; think of that: We went from just over 12,000 to well over 400,000 in about two and a half weeks. Smaller-population states like Louisiana and Georgia had begun their surges, but because their raw numbers were miniscule in comparison to New York and New Jersey, it was difficult to notice them unless you were on the ground in these places watching what was happening.

Even though our numbers had begun to level off, they were still pretty horrifying: 427,966 cases and 14,747 deaths. On the day before, we had passed the total deaths from the last pandemic, H1N1 influenza, which lasted a year and killed over 12,000 Americans. We'd begun to get a line on how this pandemic was

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going to discriminate as developmentally disabled folks in group homes, elderly frail in nursing homes, and poor people and people of color were getting sick and dying in disproportionate numbers. I find myself hoping a lesson we take with us when we're on the other side of this thing is that we need to do better by the folks we haven't traditionally done well by. Not OK to just walk away when this is over.

Jails and prisons were becoming hotbeds of infections. With little ability to make choices to protect themselves, people therein got sick and some died. States were still struggling to acquire needed supplies. The conspiracy theories had begun to circulate about how doctors and hospitals were fraudulently reporting all kinds of non-Covid-19 deaths as Covid-19 deaths to bump up the numbers—and their Medicare reimbursements. These claims seem to have arisen due to a combination of ignorance about how death certificates work and studied malevolence. The fake cures were making their appearance too; the FDA sent a rather stern warning to the purveyors of the "Miracle Mineral Solution," which contained a substance that, according to the FDA, "poses a significant risk to health."

A second vaccine candidate began phase 1 testing in the US, expecting to conclude the phase over the summer. This one from Inovio was a DNA candidate, unlike Moderna's RNA candidate which was already in early phase testing. (For the record, this plasmid-vectored DNA candidate had some delays related to its delivery device—not a needle, interestingly—and is expecting readout from phase 2 testing this month and commencing phase 3 within another month or so after that.)

Worldwide, we were up to over a million and a half cases and over 87,000 deaths in 184 countries. As the earlier-hit countries in Europe, Italy and Spain, were coming off their peaks, the UK was still heading toward its peak and setting records for deaths. Iran was also coming off peaks, but still with a rising death toll.

Colorado's tonight's state in the spotlight. I've been doing some reading, trying to figure out what's happening there. All the metrics in the state are up in the last week to 10 days: cases, variants of concern, hospitalized, deaths, outbreaks. Most of these are increasing at an accelerating rate, which is a very bad sign. New outbreaks had been steady for some time, then jumped substantially from high-70s to 93. Test positivity was hanging below five percent since the new year began, but is now over six percent and rising, a sign there's not enough testing to get ahead of outbreaks. I haven't gotten a line on just what's driving this, but the new variants and the recent relaxation of restrictions would account for much of it. I hope they pull it together before things go completely out of control.

Brazil's over 4000 daily deaths, a place we were just a couple of months ago. Thing is, they have maybe two-thirds our population, so this is more awful than anything we've seen yet. Doesn't look as though things are tapering off anytime soon either; their vaccination program isn't really in full swing yet; they received their first vaccines just a couple of weeks ago.

Better news: Tests done with variant B.1.429, one of the two which emerged in California, indicate that, while Moderna's vaccine and Novavax's candidate have somewhat diminished effectiveness, they do still protect against it. It looks likely to pose less of a risk of immune escape than B.1.351, which first emerged in South Africa, or P.1, which first emerged in Brazil. Important to note here that neither of these is classified as an immune escape: It appears the vaccines are still managing them.

Meanwhile, B.1.1.7. the variant that first emerged in the UK, is now the dominant variant in the US. We knew we were getting there—discussed whether we were already there last week. CDC director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, confirmed yesterday at the White House Covid-19 Response Team briefing that "B.1.1.7 variant is now the most common lineage circulating in the United States." We are seeing it most prevalent in Michigan, Florida, Colorado, California, Minnesota, and Massachusetts, all states on the upswing. If you need evidence of the shifting demographic now turning up infected, look no farther than the NHL's Vancouver Canucks, prototype for young, healthy individuals in today's society. They now have 25 cases, 21 of them players. There are only four team members who are not on the Covid-19 protocol list. If they're this susceptible, you are more so. Now we're really up against it; since we apparently have no intention to tighten up with the public health measures we know slow the transmission of this infection, we'd better rush to get folks vaccinated. That's all we have left. This will prolong the pandemic and the economic pain and the sickness and the dying. Fact.

I had a question yesterday, and while it is specific to the questioner's situation in some respects, I think



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it addresses many of the kinds of issues folks are wrestling with as they try to make good decisions about what's safe and unsafe, responsible and irresponsible, to do right now. Because I applaud those who are trying to do the right thing, I spend some time working out my responses to these questions, and so I thought I'd make this one do double duty and share it here too. One word: I'm not the public health expert. This advice is my best attempt to distill what I'm hearing from the folks who know things and apply it to particular situations. Any epidemiologists/public health people here who see a flaw in my reasoning, please weigh in. My pride is far less important than getting it right.

So here's the question, shared with permission: "Some of my friends and family are fully vaccinated or close to being fully vaccinated with one injection under their belt. I hear discussions about being out and doing more social things such as going out to restaurants, gathering in church, traveling. Just last night, I was invited back to my Bible study group gathering (wearing face masks) in a room in our church, but I declined as I think it's too soon and I'm not vaccinated. Also, my siblings and I are talking about gathering together [near our home town] (staying in a motel) in May for our formerly regular tradition to see each other, dine out, visit, and place flowers on our parents' and grandparents' graves. When fully vaccinated, what other precautions are there to consider beyond wearing masks, keeping physical distance, and hand-washing?"

Solid, thoughtful questions deserve solid, thoughtful answers. Here's mine:

Less than fully-vaccinated, I would not attend the Bible study. Or church services, honestly. I think sharing air indoors with other people for an hour or more is foolhardy for the unprotected at this time if you can avoid it. Even with masks. And if you're in the same space for a long period of time, distancing is not sufficient; the viruses will waft a long distance in the air if you give them enough time—like the length of a church service.

I also vote no on restaurants until you're fully vaccinated. If being indoors with others masked is foolhardy, being indoors with others unmasked is crazy—and no way you can eat and drink in a mask. Ditto for travel unless it was to see a dying loved one or some such—and I'd think hard about it then. (Don't want to be dying too, you know.) As long as I was unvaccinated, I would continue to limit my indoor time with people who are not members of my household to the unavoidable—work, grocery shopping, school, etc. That should be enough risk for anybody; it's been too much for many.

Fully vaccinated, I'd loosen up. Church and Bible study, fine. Eating out too. Travel is low-risk for the fully-vaccinated, but we've been asked to avoid nonessential travel for just a few more weeks to avoid giving a hitchhiking variant a free ride to a new destination before we can get more vaccines into arms. I figure I've waited this long, I can wait a bit longer. All of these activities should be accompanied by the usual precautions—masks, distancing, etc., although, of course, you'll drop the mask to eat in the restaurant.

If in May you and your siblings are all fully vaccinated, then knock yourselves out. I'm not sure about gathering in a public place—depends on what the community context looks like at that time and how crowded the venue is, but I'm sure it will be safe to gather in a private setting—perhaps a party room in a hotel or—if you'll all fit—in a hotel room. Even outdoors: By May, it should be warm enough to meet in a park or some such. Maybe dining out, depending. (I'm thinking it will be safe by then, but my confidence in my prognostications has taken something of a beating during this pandemic, so I can't say for sure until closer to time.) And if everyone's fully vaccinated, you can ditch the masks and the distancing when you're together. Go ahead: Hug!

If within your family group, a person(s) from just one household is not fully vaccinated, but has no risk factors for severe disease, then same rules apply as above except no dining out or public places. Order take-out and eat it in the park or the hotel. The unvaccinated person(s) should consider carefully the risks of travel since this gathering, as much as you all probably feel as though you need it, probably classifies as nonessential travel. And if persons from more than one household are not fully vaccinated or even one has risk factors for severe disease, then the whole gathering starts to look like a very bad plan. Depending, of course, on what the community picture is at that time—but my inclination is that unvaccinated people will be at risk for a few months yet.

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That said, this is true today. Guidance could change as the science catches up on just what the situation is with vaccinated people and what this virus does in the next several weeks. I'll add once again, just so we're clear, I'm working above my pay grade here, so what you have is my best interpretation of current guidance supplemented with my view of risk. I hope you find that helpful.

I never heard of Dr. Kati Kariko until today. I should have. Here's why.

She was born in Hungary and finished her Ph.D. at the University of Szeged, working as a postdoc fellow at the Biological Research Center until the research grants dried up. That's when she, her husband, and her daughter moved to the US where she had a chance to continue her postdoc work at Temple University in Philadelphia and later moved to the University of Pennsylvania. Kariko had a problem though. The problem was that her interest throughout her career has been in RNA: Can you make it? Can you get it into cells? Can you use that to get cells to make products you want them to make? Turns out no one wants to fund that sort of research—at least that's the way it was way back in 1985. Also in 1995. And in 2005 and 2015 too.

Her first boss at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Elliot Branathan, was as interested as she was in the stuff. They planned to put mRNA into cells in order to get them to make new proteins. The idea was a sort of a designer result where we could program cells to produce proteins on command. They figured out you can make RNA and you can insert it into a cell and the cell will then produce whatever protein you direct it to produce. Kariko remembered the day that worked for the first time in cell culture, telling the New York Times, "I felt like a god." They had all kinds of ideas for how to proceed from there.

Then her boss left for private industry, and she didn't have a lab to work in any more or financial support. The way it works for low-level academics in the sciences is that they either find a lab to which they can attach themselves, helping with whatever research is going on there, or they find enough grant money on their own to support their salary and fund the costs of their work. Thing is she still had that same problem: She wasn't very good at writing grants, and no one wanted to pay for RNA research anyhow. It just wasn't interesting; I mean, what are you ever going to do with it?

Then a guy who'd worked with her in her first lab while still in his residency, neurosurgeon David Langer, talked his department into taking her on. He wanted to use mRNA to treat people who got blood clots after brain surgery. He figured if he could get a certain gene into blood cells, he could direct the synthesis of nitric oxide, a vasodilator (makes blood vessels wider) to reduce the risk those clots could cause—a stroke. That work wasn't successful; then her sponsor left the university. So did the department chair—and Kariko was in limbo again. No lab. No funds. If she had to leave the university, chances are her career would end: No one hires a random researcher who can't get grants, even if they do know a lot about a subject no one is interested in. In fact, no one wants them because they know a lot about a subject no one is interested in.

And then she bumped into Dr. Drew Weissman at the photocopier one day. He wanted to make a vaccine against HIV, and she told him, "I can make anything with mRNA." Which was almost true. She could build whatever RNA molecule was required. She could put it into the cells of a mouse. But then the mouse would get sick instead of making the protein the RNA coded for. The big breakthrough happened when she figured out why that was happening and how to make it stop—just insert something called pseudouridine in her mRNA; that allows the RNA to function as intended. Suddenly, she could get a cell to pump out protein like a champion.

The problem was no one was interested in mRNA. They couldn't get grants. They couldn't get published. No one in the pharmaceutical industry wanted to talk to them. Dead in the water. Until a couple of biotech companies took an interest: Moderna in the US and BioNTech in Germany. They handed over money, and the team went to work on an mRNA flu vaccine. They were also working on vaccines for cytomegalovirus and Zika. Which brings us to late 2019, early 2020. We all know what happened then.

Chinese scientists published the genome of SARS-CoV-2 in January. Moderna designed an mRNA vaccine over a weekend. BioNTech designed theirs even faster—in a few hours, according to reports. And those vaccine designs—both of them—rested unequivocally on Kariko and Weissman's work with mRNA. There were, of course, contributions from many other scientists who figured out how to isolate the spike protein

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from the genome and how to protect the fragile mRNA in a lipid bubble. The testing and clinical trials were the result of a collaboration with the National Institutes of Health and lots of work by both companies. But the RNA was the product of Dr. Kariko's life work, this woman who has never made more than \$60,000 in a year and most of the time wasn't sure how long her current job would last.

She and Weissman received their first vaccinations on December 18 at the University of Pennsylvania. I'm going to let the Times describe the scene: "Their inoculations turned into a press event, and as the cameras flashed, she began to feel uncharacteristically overwhelmed. A senior administrator told the doctors and nurses rolling up their sleeves for shots that the scientists whose research made the vaccine possible were present, and they all clapped. Dr. Kariko wept."

And now you know how fragile the thread by which hung our salvation.

Be well. I'll be back.



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**A couple of rainbow photos taken yesterday. The above panoramic photo was taken by Julianna Kosel. The below photo was taken by Karyn Babcock.**

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	461	440	907	15	Minimal	9.5%
Beadle	2885	2803	6215	40	Substantial	8.5%
Bennett	387	378	1215	9	Minimal	11.8%
Bon Homme	1516	1480	2189	26	Moderate	3.1%
Brookings	3930	3739	12865	37	Substantial	8.3%
Brown	5366	5180	13426	91	Substantial	9.4%
Brule	699	688	1951	9	Minimal	2.0%
Buffalo	423	408	910	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	1014	985	3373	20	Minimal	6.6%
Campbell	130	126	270	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1355	1303	4166	21	Substantial	5.8%
Clark	429	400	987	5	Substantial	19.2%
Clay	1878	1839	5716	15	Substantial	3.9%
Codington	4264	4106	10168	80	Substantial	8.8%
Corson	476	464	1033	12	Minimal	6.7%
Custer	800	766	2831	12	Moderate	14.8%
Davison	3139	3004	6960	66	Substantial	13.2%
Day	682	646	1891	29	Minimal	5.4%
Deuel	498	484	1201	8	Moderate	19.4%
Dewey	1443	1411	3964	26	Minimal	5.0%
Douglas	450	433	967	9	Moderate	11.8%
Edmunds	497	475	1110	13	Minimal	5.6%
Fall River	570	546	2774	15	Moderate	3.5%
Faulk	365	351	722	13	Minimal	0.0%
Grant	1016	959	2390	42	Moderate	5.7%
Gregory	573	536	1354	30	Moderate	6.9%
Haakon	261	250	565	10	None	0.0%
Hamlin	759	701	1888	39	Moderate	16.7%
Hand	355	348	869	6	None	0.0%
Hanson	381	373	778	4	Minimal	10.5%
Harding	92	91	189	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2399	2317	6921	37	Substantial	5.1%
Hutchinson	862	792	2523	26	Substantial	13.8%

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Hyde	140	138	439	1	Minimal	7.1%
Jackson	285	270	944	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	273	257	586	16	None	0.0%
Jones	93	92	244	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	767	698	1778	14	Substantial	25.8%
Lake	1327	1260	3620	18	Substantial	3.7%
Lawrence	2909	2835	8853	45	Moderate	5.9%
Lincoln	8358	8061	21447	77	Substantial	10.1%
Lyman	628	611	1959	11	Moderate	3.8%
Marshall	364	357	1274	6	Minimal	0.0%
McCook	797	759	1757	24	Substantial	17.5%
McPherson	243	236	594	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2712	2647	8059	31	Moderate	7.0%
Mellette	255	252	775	2	Minimal	3.3%
Miner	293	280	613	9	Moderate	18.8%
Minnehaha	30292	29007	83040	344	Substantial	12.2%
Moody	628	606	1834	17	Minimal	1.3%
Oglala Lakota	2091	2031	6862	49	Moderate	3.6%
Pennington	13328	13008	41087	191	Moderate	6.1%
Perkins	353	337	849	14	Minimal	0.0%
Potter	387	382	878	4	Minimal	3.3%
Roberts	1328	1260	4380	38	Substantial	8.4%
Sanborn	340	333	724	3	Minimal	9.5%
Spink	826	795	2224	26	Minimal	4.5%
Stanley	339	337	991	2	Minimal	0.0%
Sully	138	133	332	3	Minimal	20.0%
Todd	1219	1189	4283	29	Minimal	0.7%
Tripp	746	712	1551	17	Moderate	23.8%
Turner	1142	1069	2866	54	Substantial	12.2%
Union	2174	2073	6696	41	Substantial	14.3%
Walworth	757	729	1892	15	Moderate	9.1%
Yankton	2969	2867	9820	28	Substantial	7.0%
Ziebach	341	331	892	9	Minimal	3.2%
Unassigned	0	0	1907	0		



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New Confirmed Cases

172

New Probable Cases

50

Active Cases

2,484

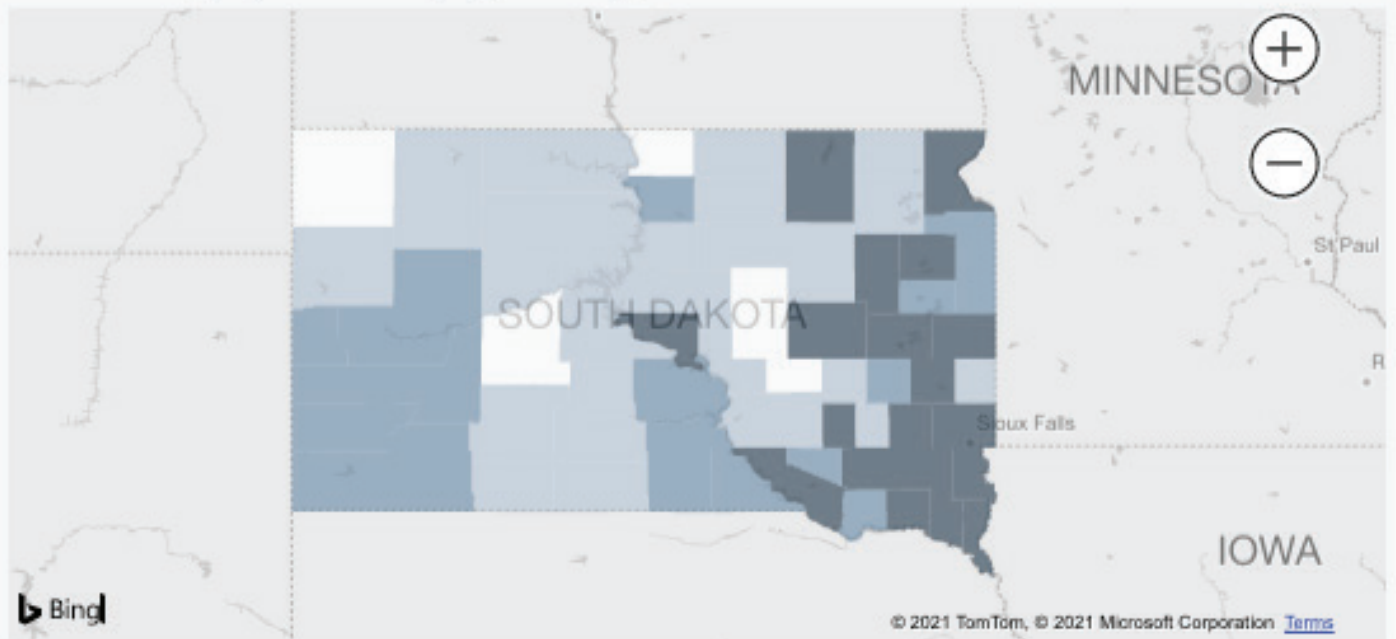
Recovered Cases

114,774

Currently Hospitalized

100

## 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

105,026

Total Probable Cases

14,171

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

10.8%

Total Persons Tested

450,535

Total Tests

1,092,898

Ever Hospitalized

7,099

Deaths Among Cases

1,939

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

215%

% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)

226%

% Progress (April Goal: 44233 Tests)

46%

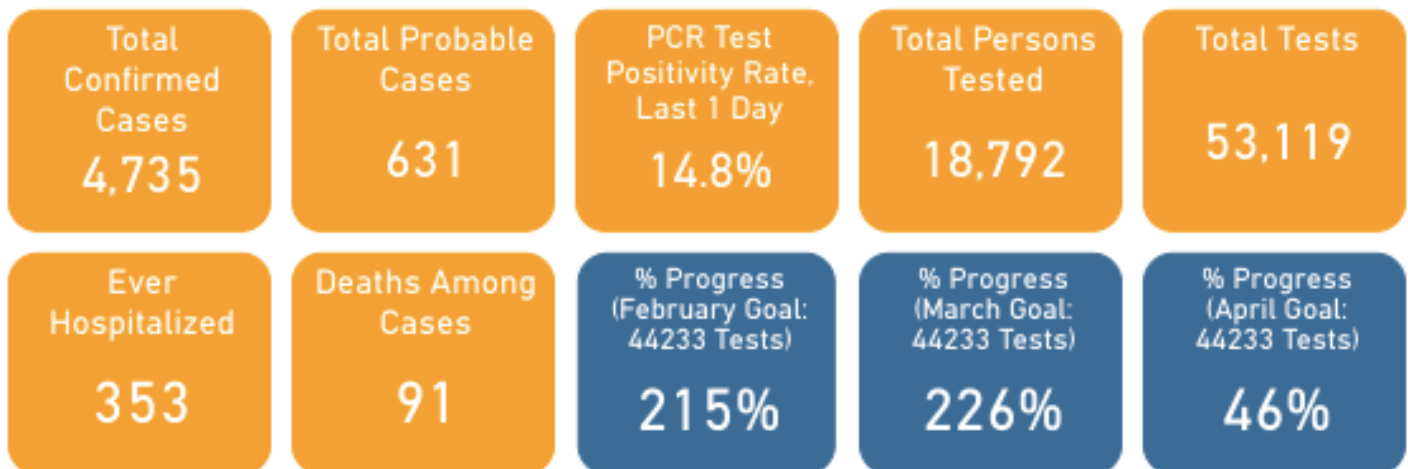
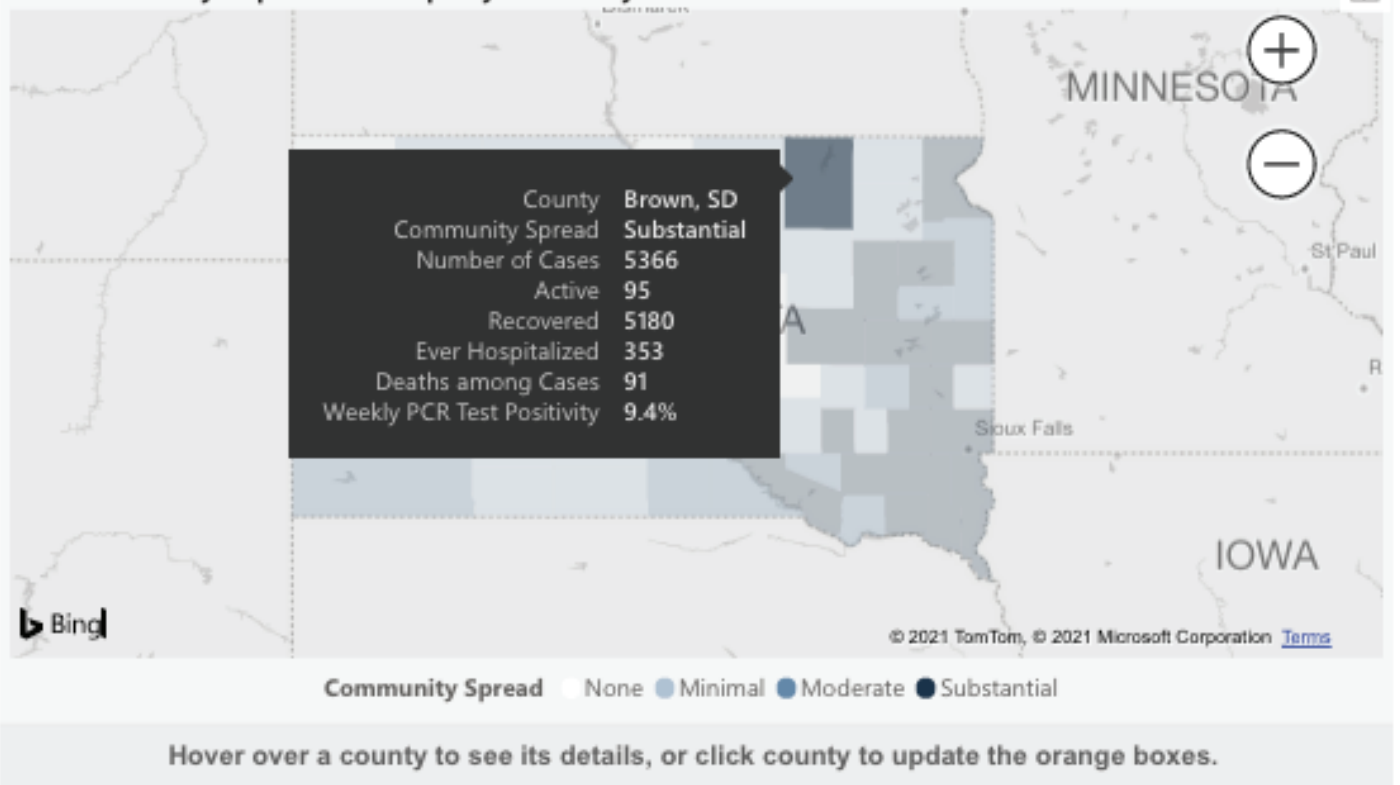
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## Brown County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



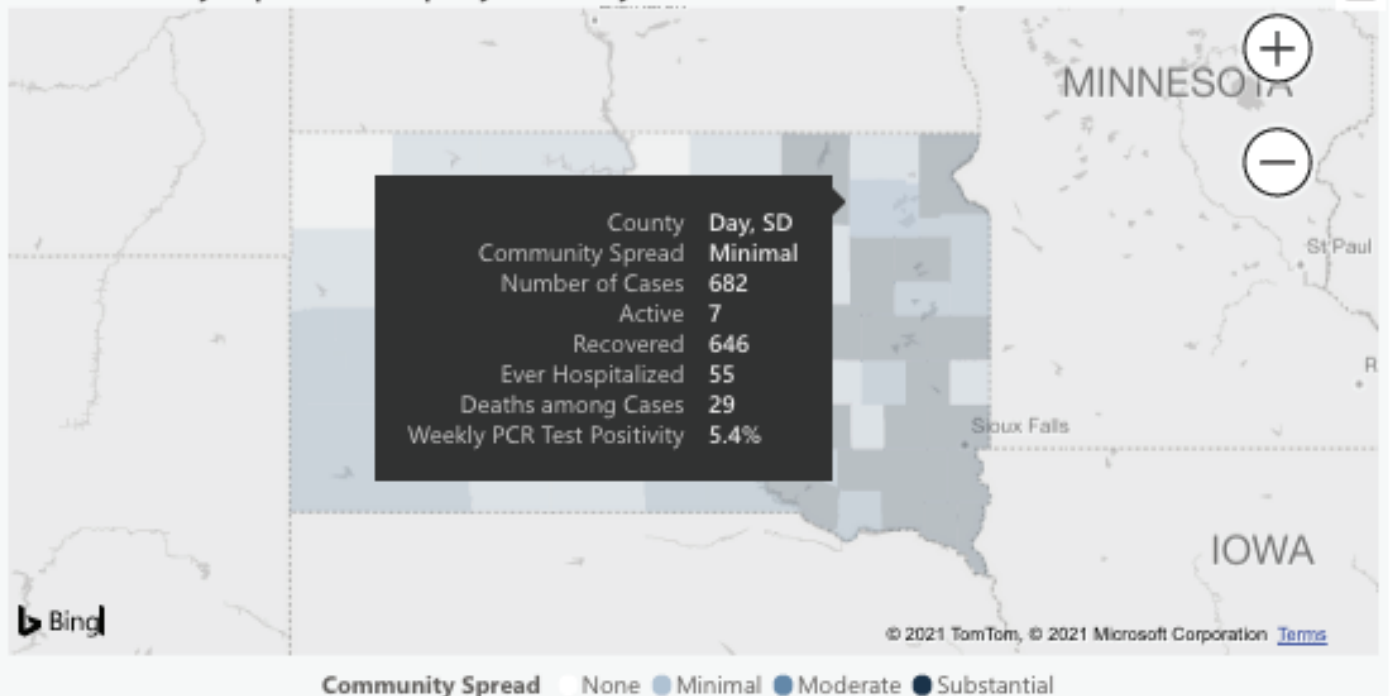
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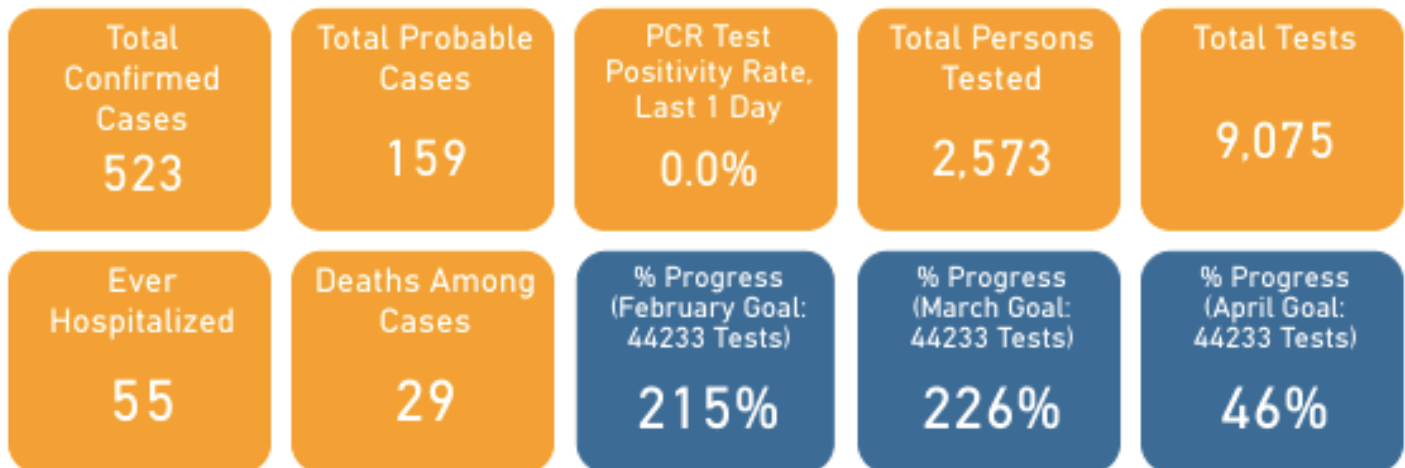
## Day County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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





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Total Doses Administered\*

472,352

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine\*

287,609

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

48%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	11,593
Moderna	217,126
Pfizer	243,633

Doses	# of Recipients
Janssen - Series Complete	11,593
Moderna - 1 dose	42,998
Moderna - Series Complete	87,064
Pfizer - 1 dose	48,291
Pfizer - Series Complete	97,671

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	48.13%
Series Complete	33.15%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	1,425	399	513	912
Beadle	10,048	2,399	3,824	6,223
Bennett*	652	124	264	388
Bon Homme*	4,875	659	2,108	2,767
Brookings	15,932	5,750	5,091	10,841
Brown	22,694	4,610	9,042	13,652
Brule*	2,456	436	1,010	1,446
Buffalo*	159	79	40	119
Butte	3,416	818	1,299	2,117
Campbell	1,369	169	600	769
Charles Mix*	4,358	1,024	1,667	2,691
Clark	1,876	546	665	1,211
Clay	8,257	2,181	3,038	5,219
Codington*	14,866	4,048	5,409	9,457
Corson*	408	40	184	224
Custer*	4,166	712	1,727	2,439
Davison	12,019	3,095	4,462	7,557
Day*	3,687	793	1,447	2,240

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Deuel	2,231	529	851	<b>1,380</b>
Dewey*	463	73	195	<b>268</b>
Douglas*	1,724	358	683	<b>1,041</b>
Edmunds	2,084	390	847	<b>1,237</b>
Fall River*	3,448	576	1,436	<b>2,012</b>
Faulk	1,561	315	623	<b>938</b>
Grant*	4,277	609	1,834	<b>2,443</b>
Gregory*	2,459	395	1,032	<b>1,427</b>
Haakon*	726	96	315	<b>411</b>
Hamlin	2,601	745	928	<b>1,673</b>
Hand	2,158	428	865	<b>1,293</b>
Hanson	839	253	293	<b>546</b>
Harding	186	44	71	<b>115</b>
Hughes*	11,640	2,398	4,621	<b>7,019</b>
Hutchinson*	5,168	1,049	2,059	<b>3,108</b>
Hyde*	747	119	314	<b>433</b>
Jackson*	544	96	224	<b>320</b>
Jerauld	1,309	251	529	<b>780</b>
Jones*	865	129	368	<b>497</b>
Kingsbury	3,717	947	1,385	<b>2,332</b>
Lake	6,615	1,777	2,419	<b>4,196</b>
Lawrence	12,861	3,135	4,863	<b>7,998</b>
Lincoln	37,932	7,809	15,061	<b>22,870</b>
Lyman*	1,130	234	448	<b>682</b>
Marshall*	2,741	845	948	<b>1,793</b>
McCook	3,251	815	1,218	<b>2,033</b>
McPherson	379	75	152	<b>227</b>

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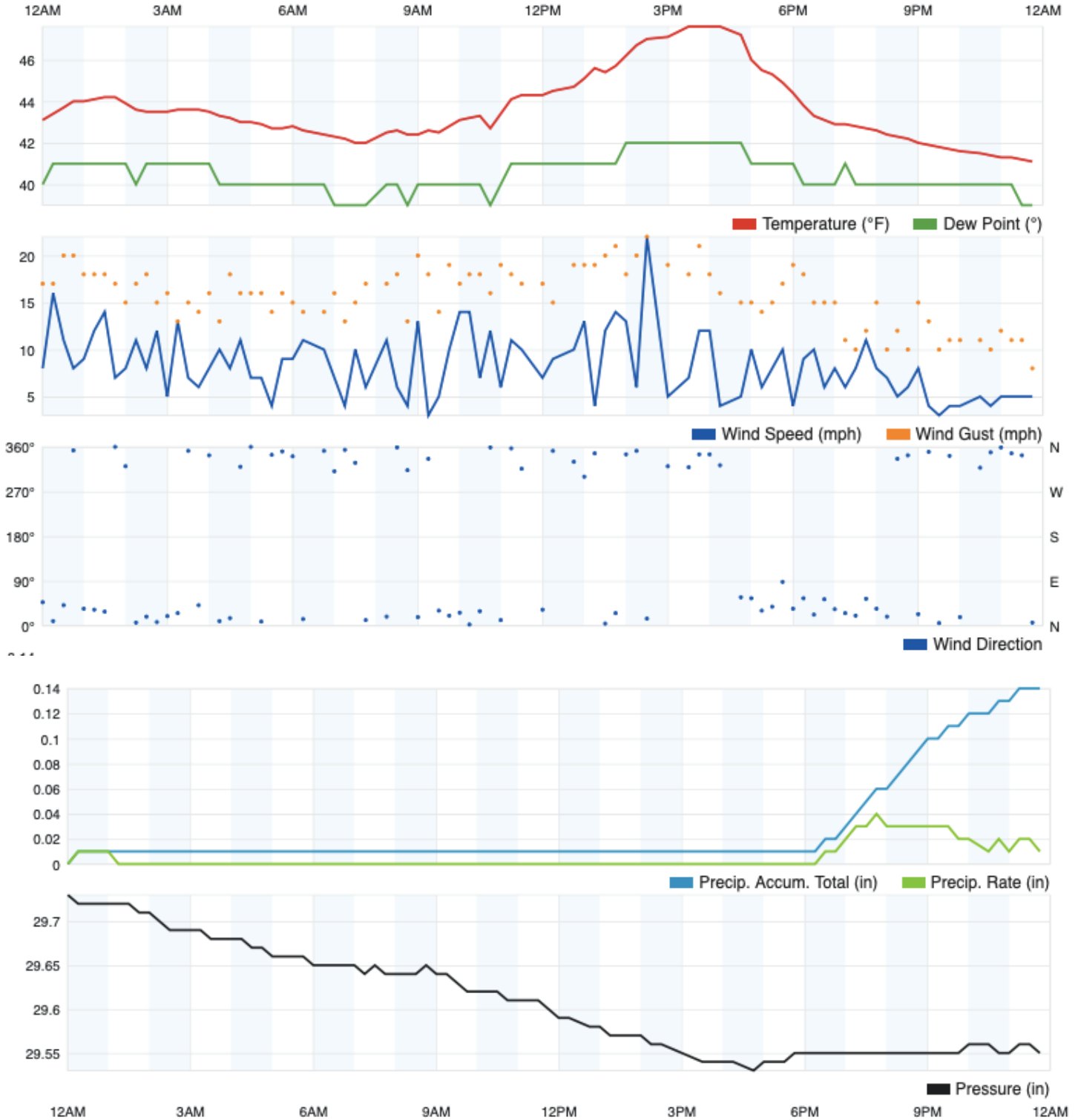
Meade*	9,373	1,779	3,797	5,576
Mellette*	66	8	29	37
Miner	1,291	313	489	802
Minnehaha*	122,884	26,955	47,962	74,917
Moody*	2,744	588	1,078	1,666
Oglala Lakota*	239	47	96	143
Pennington*	53,310	8,978	22,166	31,144
Perkins*	1,031	97	467	564
Potter	1,383	291	546	837
Roberts*	5,828	868	2,480	3,348
Sanborn	1,531	375	578	953
Spink	4,326	746	1,790	2,536
Stanley*	1,744	314	715	1,029
Sully	567	125	221	346
Todd*	227	47	90	137
Tripp*	2,704	474	1,115	1,589
Turner	4,973	1,013	1,980	2,993
Union	5,249	1,505	1,872	3,377
Walworth*	2,524	396	1,064	1,460
Yankton	14,665	2,769	5,948	8,717
Ziebach*	76	16	30	46
Other	9,298	2,798	3,250	6,048



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Mostly Cloudy and Breezy

Tonight



Partly Cloudy and Breezy then Mostly Clear

Saturday



Sunny

Saturday Night



Clear

Sunday



Sunny then Slight Chance Showers

## 🔥 Today: Windy with Critical Fire Weather 🔥

### Forecast

- Gusty northwesterly winds
- Sustained 20-30 mph gust to 45 mph
- Low relative humidity in north central SD
- Light Rain ending in far eastern SD.

### Red Flag Warning

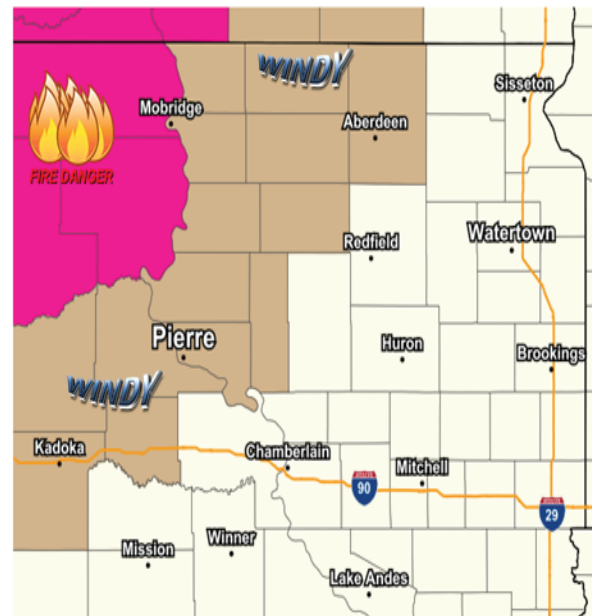
### Impacts

- Fires have the potential to ignite easily from any spark, cigarette, flying ember (including from burning barrels/pits), etc.
- Any fires that form will spread easily



Current Watches, Warnings, and Advisories

- Red Flag Warning
- Wind Advisory



Graphic Created  
April 9th, 2021  
5:13 AM CDT



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 4/9/2021 5:22 AM Central

Gusty northwesterly winds can be expected today, especially across north-central South Dakota. Significantly drier air will move into north-central SD this afternoon, which will cause very high to extreme grassland fire danger when combined with the strong winds. Light showers in far eastern South Dakota will slowly diminish and push east this afternoon.

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## Today in Weather History

April 9, 1997: A late season storm produced snow from the Black Hills through South Central South Dakota. The greatest amounts occurred in a 40-mile wide swath along and south of Interstate 90. Snowfall amounts included 9 inches at Rapid City, 12 inches at Deerfield, 10 inches at Custer, 11 inches at Mission, and 12 inches at Winner. Outside this swath, snowfall ranged from 3 to 6 inches.

April 9, 2007: Arctic air moved into central and northeast South Dakota and remained for nearly a week. High temperatures from April 3rd to April 9th were mostly in the 20s to around 30 degrees with lows in the single digits and teens. The high temperatures were from 20 to 30 degrees below average, and the lows were from 10 to 25 degrees below normal across all of the area. Some record lows and many record low maximum temperatures were set throughout the period. The first ten days of April were the coldest on record for Aberdeen. The early spring cold period affected many of the residents, especially farmers and ranchers, of central and northeast South Dakota. Also, many robins died from the cold and lack of food.

1889: The Norfolk Landmark reported that damage was more substantial than the August 1879 hurricane because it lasted for a much longer duration- the water was 18 inches higher. Rain, snow, and sleet fell, totaling 3.2 inches. Drummonds Bridge was swept away (later replaced by the Ghent Bridge). Trees were uprooted, and roofs were torn off.

1947: An estimated F5 tornado struck Woodward, Oklahoma during the late evening killing 95 persons and causing six million dollars damage. The tornado, one to two miles in width, and traveling at a speed of 50 mph, killed a total of 167 persons along its 221-mile path from Texas into Kansas, injured 980 others, and caused nearly ten million dollars damage.

1953: The first radar image of a tornado was detected by radar equipment at the University of Illinois Airport at Champaign, IL. Studies of the radar pictures from that day showed that a tornado of significant size and intensity could be detected.

1877 - Oregon Inlet, NC, was widened three quarters of a mile by a nor'easter. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1947 - A tornado struck Woodward, OK, during the late evening killing 95 persons and causing six million dollars damage. The tornado, one to two miles in width, and traveling at a speed of 68 mph, killed a total of 167 persons along its 221 mile path from Texas into Kansas, injured 980 others, and caused nearly ten million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) A man looking out his front door was swept by a tornado from his home near Higgins TX and carried two hundred feet over trees. The bodies of two people, thought to be together at Glazier TX, were found three miles apart. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1977 - A storm brought 15.5 inches of rain to Jolo, WV, in thirty hours. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - International Falls, MN, reported their sixth straight record high for the date, with a reading of 77 degrees. A cold front ushering sharply colder weather into the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 60 mph at Glasgow MT. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Residents of Sioux City, IA, awoke to find two inches of snow on the ground following a record high temperature of 88 degrees the previous afternoon. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Eighteen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 80 degrees at Eureka CA established a record for the month of April. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from the Central High Plains to Arkansas and northern Texas. Severe thunderstorms spawned five tornadoes, and there were seventy reports of large hail and damaging winds. A tornado injured four persons at Ardmore OK, and thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Kellyville OK, and hail three inches in diameter at Halmstead KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 - An EF-3 tornado hits Mapleton, IA. Officials estimate more than half the town is damaged or destroyed but none of the 1200 residents were killed. 31 tornadoes were confirmed across Iowa, Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina on this day.



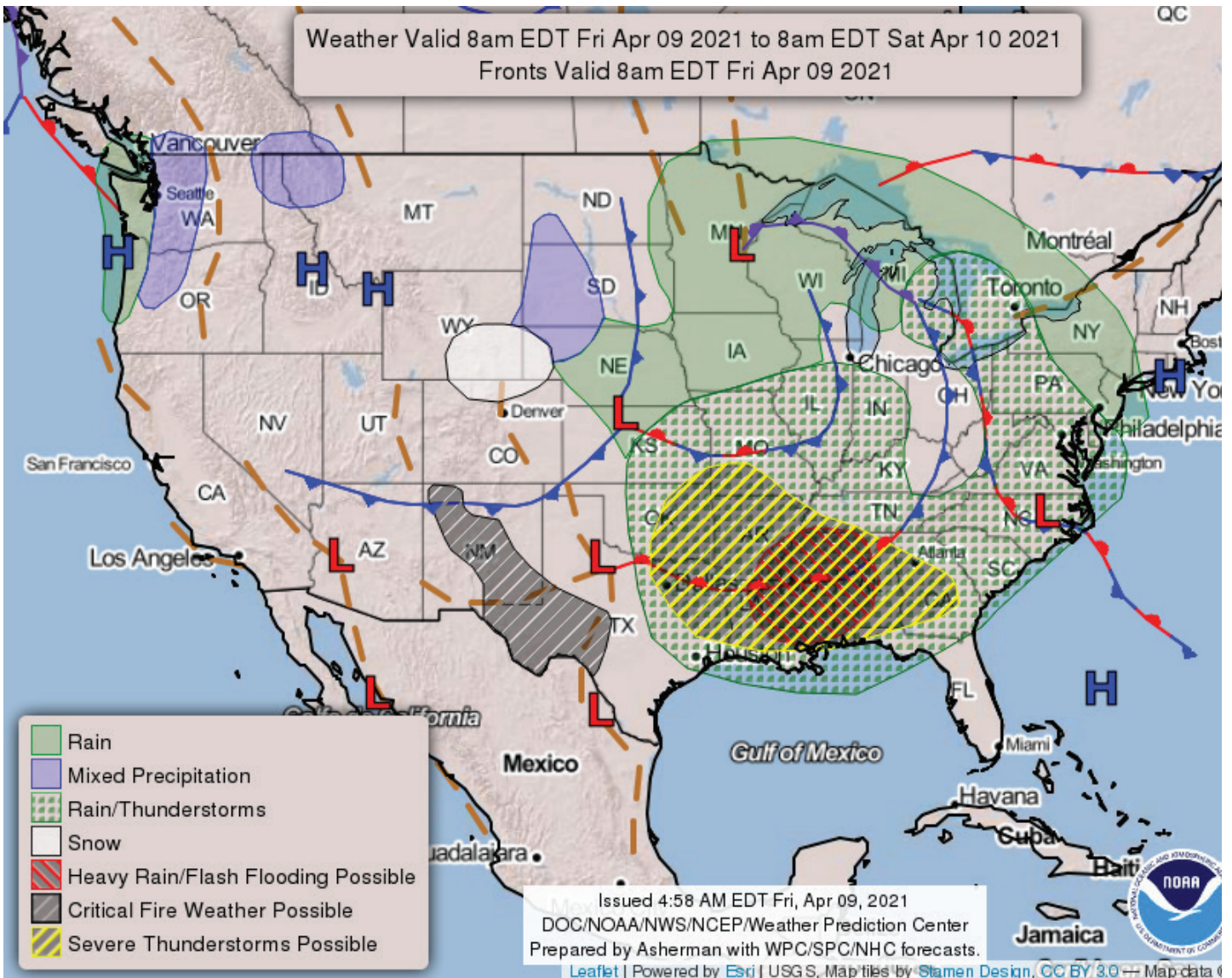
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 48 °F at 3:49 PM**  
**Low Temp: 41 °F at 11:26 PM**  
**Wind: 23 mph at 2:30 PM**  
**Precip: 0.14 (Total: 1.74)**

**Record High: 88°**  
**Record Low: 16°**  
**Average High: 54°F**  
**Average Low: 30°F**  
**Average Precip in Mar.: 1.48**  
**Precip to date in Mar.: 2.10**  
**Average Precip to date: 2.50**  
**Precip Year to Date: 2.28**  
**Sunset Tonight: 8:12 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:58 a.m.**



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## HOW TO LIVE LIFE WITH CONFIDENCE

The sale of self-help books has soared since the year 2006 when sales reached nine billion dollars. The 11 billion dollar industry in 2006 is expected to grow by 5.5% every year. The endless pages offering advice on "how to improve one's life," however, do not seem to be making a dent in solving man's most basic problem: a sinful nature.

David offered an alternative to "self-help." He wisely encouraged us to seek "God-help."

"Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this; He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noon day sun!" Confident living, for the Christian, has a very simple focus and formula: first, commit, and then trust.

Commit, on the one hand, means that we are "to completely and unreservedly rely in and on God." He is not only to be our Savior but the Lord of our lives. Trust, on the other hand, means that we live life with a vibrant expectation that He alone is capable of leading, guiding, guarding, and directing each step in our lives. We are to look into His Word to find His path for our lives. Committing and trusting in Him and through Him for His will for our lives will empower and enable us to move from self-help to God-help.

And the result will be obvious to us and others. We will radiate the righteousness of God by living a life that reflects His grace and goodness, justice and righteousness, beauty and holiness. We must also be aware of the "integrity" element in our lives. Whatever we do will be done through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and pleasing to God.

Prayer: Give us courage, Father, to look to You to become our "Helper" – to live life according to Your "God-Help" book. It will work if we let it! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun. Psalm 37:5-6

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## 2021 Community Events

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



## News from the Associated Press

### **Noem names attorney as new chief of staff**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Krisiti Noem has picked her new chief of staff.

Noem announced Thursday that attorney Aaron Scheibe will leave his private practice to serve as her top aide beginning May 1.

He replaces Tony Venhuizen. The governor announced Tuesday that she has appointed Venhuizen to the Board of Regents. Venhuizen is Noem's second chief of staff to leave the position. Maggie Seidel left Noem's office in March.

Scheibe previously served in Noem's administration in 2019 as a senior policy advisor, working on public safety, transportation, tribal relations and energy issues. He served from 2014-19 as deputy commissioner of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, and from 2002-13 as a diplomat with the U.S. Department of State.

### **Federal officials close SD cave after elevator quits**

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The National Park Service has closed a South Dakota cave after an elevator stopped working.

Wind Cave National Park in Custer County suspended tours Thursday morning after one of two elevators that drop into the cave won't move, the Rapid City Journal reported. A technician discovered the elevator had stopped working during a routine morning check.

Repair crews were scheduled to arrive at the cave sometime on Thursday.

The National Park Service resumed tours of the cave on March 20 after a 20-month hiatus. The tours ended in June 2019 due to another safety problem with the elevators. They were repaired in December 2020 but tours didn't resume immediately due to COVID-19 protocols.

### **Plans move forward for Indigenous-led school in Rapid City**

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Grassroots organizers are planning to open the first Indigenous-led community school in Rapid City which will be focused on building educational equity for Native American students.

After two years of attempting to pass legislation that would establish and fund such schools in South Dakota, the NDN Collective organization is taking steps to open the school in the fall of 2022 with 40 kindergarten students.

NDN Collective, an Indigenous team of grassroots organizers, says the school will help close the "opportunity gap" between American Indian students and those of other races.

The curriculum will connect students with Indigenous culture, languages, ancestral knowledge, history and traditional ways of life. The school will be open to children of all races, organizers said.

"Our school will allow Indigenous youth to be unapologetically themselves, which is critical during years when we are figuring out who we are and where we fit into the world," said Sarah Pierce, Director of Education Equity at NDN Collective. "Education is a way to begin to undo the systems of oppression and white supremacy that Indigenous people have been subjected to for generations. It's a way for Indigenous people to reclaim our power."

South Dakota's Indigenous students have disproportionately lower rates of graduation and achievement and are more harshly disciplined in schools, according to organizers. For years these issues have largely gone unrecognized and unaddressed, said Amy Sazue, education equity organizer at NDN Collective.

"When students can access culturally relevant education, they become strong leaders, develop a solid sense of self, and feel connected to the world around them," Sazue said.

### **Supreme Court to hear recreational marijuana case this month**

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PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court is expected to decide the fate of a voter-approved constitutional amendment legalizing recreational marijuana this spring.

The justices will hear oral arguments in a challenge to the amendment on April 28 at the state Capitol, the Argus Leader reported. Attorneys representing the organization South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws appealed a lower court ruling striking down the amendment.

The ballot measure garnered 54% support in the Nov. 3 election.

Two law enforcement officers, Highway Patrol Superintendent Col. Rick Miller and Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom, sued to block marijuana legalization by challenging its constitutionality.

Miller was effectively acting on behalf of South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, who had opposed the effort to legalize pot. His legal expenses are being covered by the state, authorized by Gov. Kristi Noem through an executive order.

The attorneys, representing South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws and several other marijuana advocates, argued that their opponents should face a high burden to prove that the state's constitution was violated by the amendment.

In February, a Hughes County judge ruled the measure was unconstitutional because it violated a requirement that constitutional amendments be limited to a single topic. Judge Christina Klinger also said the amendment gave sole governing authority around marijuana to the South Dakota Department of Revenue, not the Legislature.

A separate ballot measure legalizing medical marijuana only is set to take effect July 1.

## **4 years in prison for man in bank fraud, stolen cattle case**

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A Mandan man will serve four years in federal prison for bank fraud and transporting stolen livestock across state lines.

Kelly Glatt took out a \$1.5 million loan to purchase cattle and supplies, but took steps to hide collateral and assets from the bank involved, according to prosecutors. Glatt, 39, was also convicted of stealing cattle from other ranchers and transporting the stolen livestock from North Dakota to South Dakota.

A federal jury found Glatt guilty last October of the crimes committed from February 2014 to July 2017. "The defendant took advantage of and defrauded both hardworking ranchers and a North Dakota financial institution," said Acting U.S. Attorney Nick Chase.

U.S. District Judge Daniel Traynor on Wednesday sentenced Glatt to four years in prison on bank fraud and three years for the transportation conviction. The sentences will run concurrently.

Traynor also ordered Glatt to serve three years of supervised release and pay restitution of \$1.8 million.

The North Dakota Stockmen's Association, the FBI and the Morton County Sheriff's Office investigated the case.

## **Green Bay pastor appointed to serve the Diocese of Duluth**

DULUTH, Minn. (AP) — The Roman Catholic Diocese of Duluth could finally have a new bishop in place next month following the 2019 death of its longtime leader and the resignation of his chosen replacement.

The Very Rev. Daniel Felton, a longtime pastor in the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, has been appointed by Pope Francis to serve the 10-county northeastern Minnesota diocese.

The 66-year-old Felton has served as vicar general and moderator of the curia in Green Bay since 2014. He was ordained a priest in the Green Bay diocese in 1981.

Felton succeeds the late Bishop Paul Sirba, who died suddenly in December 2019.

The Rev. Michel Mulloy was to be installed as the new bishop in Duluth in October, but resigned following an accusation of sexual abuse of a minor in the Diocese of Rapid City, South Dakota.

The Duluth diocese includes more than 44,000 Catholics and 71 parishes. Felton's installation service will be May 20.

## Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth II, dies aged 99

By JILL LAWLESS and GREGORY KATZ Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Philip, the irascible and tough-minded husband of Queen Elizabeth II who spent more than seven decades supporting his wife in a role that both defined and constricted his life, has died, Buckingham Palace said Friday. He was 99.

His life spanned nearly a century of European history, starting with his birth as a member of the Greek royal family and ending as Britain's longest serving consort during a turbulent reign in which the thousand-year-old monarchy was forced to reinvent itself for the 21st century.

He was known for his occasionally racist and sexist remarks — and for gamely fulfilling more than 20,000 royal engagements to boost British interests at home and abroad. He headed hundreds of charities, founded programs that helped British schoolchildren participate in challenging outdoor adventures, and played a prominent part in raising his four children, including his eldest son, Prince Charles, the heir to the throne.

Philip spent a month in hospital earlier this year before being released on March 16 to return to Windsor Castle.

"It is with deep sorrow that Her Majesty The Queen has announced the death of her beloved husband, His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh," the palace said. "His Royal Highness passed away peacefully this morning at Windsor Castle."

Philip, who was given the title Duke of Edinburgh on his wedding day, saw his sole role as providing support for his wife, who began her reign as Britain retreated from empire and steered the monarchy through decades of declining social deference and U.K. power into a modern world where people demand intimacy from their icons.

In the 1970s, Michael Parker, an old navy friend and former private secretary of the prince, said of him: "He told me the first day he offered me my job, that his job — first, second and last — was never to let her down."

The queen, a very private person not given to extravagant displays of affection, once called him "her rock" in public.

In private, Philip called his wife Lilibet; but he referred to her in conversation with others as "The Queen."

Over the decades, Philip's image changed from that of handsome, dashing athlete to arrogant and insensitive curmudgeon. In his later years, the image finally settled into that of droll and philosophical observer of the times, an elderly, craggy-faced man who maintained his military bearing despite ailments.

The popular Netflix series "The Crown" gave Philip a central role, with a slightly racy, swashbuckling image. He never commented on it in public, but the portrayal struck a chord with many Britons, including younger viewers who had only known him as an elderly man.

Philip's position was a challenging one — there is no official role for the husband of a sovereign queen — and his life was marked by extraordinary contradictions between his public and private duties. He always walked three paces behind his wife in public, in a show of deference to the monarch, but he was the head of the family in private. Still, his son Charles, as heir to the throne, had a larger income, as well as access to the high-level government papers Philip was not permitted to see.

Philip often took a wry approach to his unusual place at the royal table.

"Constitutionally, I don't exist," said Philip, who in 2009 became the longest-serving consort in British history, surpassing Queen Charlotte, who married King George III in the 18th century.

He frequently struggled to find his place — a friction that would later be echoed in his grandson Prince Harry's decision to give up royal duties.

"There was no precedent," he said in a rare interview with the BBC to mark his 90th birthday. "If I asked somebody, 'What do you expect me to do?' they all looked blank."

But having given up a promising naval career to become consort when Elizabeth became queen at age 25, Philip was not content to stay on the sidelines and enjoy a life of ease and wealth. He promoted British industry and science, espoused environmental preservation long before it became fashionable, and traveled widely and frequently in support of his many charities.

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In those frequent public appearances, Philip developed a reputation for being impatient and demanding and was sometimes blunt to the point of rudeness.

Many Britons appreciated what they saw as his propensity to speak his mind, while others criticized behavior they labeled offensive and out of touch.

In 1995, for example, he asked a Scottish driving instructor, "How do you keep the natives off the booze long enough to pass the test?" Seven years later in Australia, when visiting Aboriginal people with the queen, he asked: "Do you still throw spears at each other?"

Many believe his propensity to speak his mind meant he provided needed, unvarnished advice to the queen.

"The way that he survived in the British monarchy system was to be his own man, and that was a source of support to the queen," said royal historian Robert Lacey. "All her life she was surrounded by men who said, 'yes ma'am' and he was one man who always told her how it really was, or at least how he saw it."

Lacey said at the time of the royal family's difficult relations with Princess Diana after her marriage to Charles broke down, Philip spoke for the family with authority, showing that he did not automatically defer to the queen.

Philip's relationship with Diana became complicated as her separation from Charles and their eventual divorce played out in a series of public battles that damaged the monarchy's standing.

It was widely assumed that he was critical of Diana's use of broadcast interviews, including one in which she accused Charles of infidelity. But letters between Philip and Diana released after her death showed that the older man was at times supportive of his daughter-in-law.

After Diana's death in a car crash in Paris in 1997, Philip had to endure allegations by former Harrods owner Mohamed Al Fayed that he had plotted the princess's death. Al Fayed's son, Dodi, also died in the crash.

During a lengthy inquest into their deaths, a senior judge acting as coroner instructed the jury that there was no evidence to support the allegations against Philip, who did not publicly respond to Al Fayed's charges.

Philip's final years were clouded by controversy and fissures in the royal family.

His third child, Prince Andrew, was embroiled in scandal over his friendship with Jeffrey Epstein, an American financier who died in a New York prison in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

U.S. authorities accused Andrew of rebuffing their request to interview him as a witness, and Andrew faced accusations from a woman who said that she had several sexual encounters with the prince at Epstein's behest. He denied the claim but withdrew from public royal duties amid the scandal.

At the start of 2020, Philip's grandson Harry and his wife, the American former actress Meghan Markle, announced they were quitting royal duties and moving to North America to escape intense media scrutiny that they found unbearable.

Born June 10, 1921, on the dining room table at his parents' home on the Greek island of Corfu, Philip was the fifth child and only son of Prince Andrew, younger brother of the king of Greece. His grandfather had come from Denmark during the 1860s to be adopted by Greece as the country's monarch.

Philip's mother was Princess Alice of Battenberg, a descendent of German princes. Like his future wife, Elizabeth, Philip was also a great-grandchild of Queen Victoria.

When Philip was 18 months old, his parents fled to France. His father, an army commander, had been tried after a devastating military defeat by the Turks. After British intervention, the Greek junta agreed not to sentence Andrew to death if he left the country.

The family was not exactly poor but, Philip said: "We weren't well off" — and they got by with help from relatives. He later brought only his navy pay to a marriage with one of the world's richest women.

Philip's parents drifted apart when he was a child, and Andrew died in Monte Carlo in 1944. Alice founded a religious order that did not succeed and spent her old age at Buckingham Palace. A reclusive figure, often dressed in a nun's habit, she was little seen by the British public. She died in 1969 and was posthumously honored by Britain and Israel for sheltering a Jewish family in Nazi-occupied Athens during the war.

Philip went to school in Britain and entered Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth as a cadet in 1939. He got his first posting in 1940 but was not allowed near the main war zone because he was a foreign



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prince of a neutral nation. When the Italian invasion of Greece ended that neutrality, he joined the war, serving on battleships in the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean and the Pacific.

On leave in Britain, he visited his royal cousins, and, by the end of war, it was clear he was courting Princess Elizabeth, eldest child and heir of King George VI. Their engagement was announced July 10, 1947, and they were married on Nov. 20.

After an initial flurry of disapproval that Elizabeth was marrying a foreigner, Philip's athletic skills, good looks and straight talk lent a distinct glamour to the royal family.

Elizabeth beamed in his presence, and they had a son and daughter while she was still free of the obligations of serving as monarch.

But King George VI died of cancer in 1952 at age 56.

Philip had to give up his naval career, and his subservient status was formally sealed at the coronation, when he knelt before his wife and pledged to become "her liege man of life and limb, and of earthly worship."

The change in Philip's life was dramatic.

"Within the house, and whatever we did, it was together," Philip told biographer Basil Boothroyd of the years before Elizabeth became queen. "People used to come to me and ask me what to do. In 1952, the whole thing changed, very, very considerably."

Said Boothroyd: "He had a choice between just tagging along, the second handshake in the receiving line, or finding other outlets for his bursting energies."

So Philip took over management of the royal estates and expanded his travels to all corners of the world, building a role for himself.

From 1956, he was Patron and Chairman of Trustees for the largest youth activity program in Britain, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, a program of practical, cultural and adventurous activities for young people that exists in over 100 countries. Millions of British children have had some contact with the award and its famous camping expeditions.

He painted, collected modern art, was interested in industrial design and planned a garden at Windsor Castle. But, he once said, "the arts world thinks of me as an uncultured, polo-playing clot."

In time, the famous blond hair thinned and the long, fine-boned face acquired a few lines. He gave up polo but remained trim and vigorous.

To a friend's suggestion that he ease up a bit, the prince is said to have replied, "Well, what would I do? Sit around and knit?"

But when he turned 90 in 2011, Philip told the BBC he was "winding down" his workload and he reckoned he had "done my bit."

The next few years saw occasional hospital stays as Philip's health flagged.

He announced in May 2017 that he planned to step back from royal duties, and he stopped scheduling new commitments — after roughly 22,000 royal engagements since his wife's coronation. In 2019, he gave up his driver's license after a serious car crash.

Philip is survived by the queen and their four children — Prince Charles, Princess Anne, Prince Andrew and Prince Edward — as well as eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

The grandchildren are Charles' sons, Prince William and Prince Harry; Anne's children, Peter and Zara Phillips; Andrew's daughters, Princess Beatrice and Princess Eugenie; and Edward's children, Lady Louise and Viscount Severn.

The great-grandchildren are William and Kate's children, Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis; Harry and Meghan's son, Archie; Savannah and Isla, the daughters of Peter Phillips and his wife, Autumn; Mia and Lena, the daughters of Zara Phillips and her husband, Mike Tindall; and Eugenie's son, August, with her husband, Jack Brooksbank.

## 'New strategy': Politicians in crisis refuse calls to resign

By WILL WEISSERT and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The mere whiff of a scandal once unraveled political careers with stunning speed. Not anymore.

Suddenly embroiled in a federal sex trafficking investigation, Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida has denied the allegations, rebuffed suggestions that he resign and sent fundraising appeals that portray him as a victim of a “smear campaign.” He’s expected to make a high-profile appearance Friday at former President Donald Trump’s Doral golf club in Miami.

The congressman joins a growing list of politicians from both parties — almost exclusively men — who are defying the traditional response to controversy. Rather than humbly step back from public life, they barrel ahead, insisting they did nothing wrong and betting that voters will forget alleged misdeeds once the news cycle eventually shifts.

“Clearly this is a new strategy people are employing in crisis response,” said Brent Colburn, a Democratic strategist and veteran of President Barack Obama’s administration. “It is a new chapter in the playbook.”

Gaetz’s political future remains in question and could fully disintegrate, depending on how the federal probe unfolds. But after spending the past several years as one of Trump’s fiercest public defenders, Gaetz’s game plan strongly mirrors the former president’s approach.

After a video emerged in the final weeks of the 2016 campaign of him boasting of grabbing women by the genitals, Trump apologized “if anyone was offended” and dismissed the episode as “locker room talk.” He refused calls by some in his own party to leave the presidential ticket and won the election just weeks later.

As president, Trump would respond to one burgeoning scandal after another by constantly moving ahead, making it harder for the public to linger on one issue for too long, even if that meant stirring up fresh controversy on another topic.

The pressure on Gaetz is mounting. A hearing Thursday revealed that one of his political allies, Joel Greenberg, is working toward a plea deal with federal investigators, which could add to Gaetz’s legal jeopardy.

For now, though, the congressman appears to be emulating the former president’s approach and appealing to his most loyal supporters. The group sponsoring the Friday event at which he’ll speak also organized the Jan. 6 “March for Trump” rally in Washington that ended with a mob storming the U.S. Capitol in a deadly insurrection.

“Trump sees in Matt Gaetz what he wanted in everyone else,” said Republican strategist Rick Wilson, adding that, in many ways, the congressman is “the son he never had.”

Gaetz isn’t alone in refusing to bend in the face of a political storm.

Democratic New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has steadfastly refused to resign despite several sexual misconduct allegations that spurred calls from some of the most powerful members of his own party for him to step aside.

Democratic Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam balked at resigning in 2019, when a picture surfaced from a 1984 medical school yearbook showing one man in blackface and another wearing a Ku Klux Klan robe. Northam apologized while acknowledging he was the one in the robe. But days later, he denied it was him.

The political fallout eventually calmed and staying put allowed Northam to win praise for handling Virginia’s response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Male politicians seem more likely to employ the tactic. California Rep. Katie Hill resigned in 2019 after admitting to inappropriate relationships with two staffers.

“Men in both parties will do this. They double down, they deny and they hope that it will just sort of pass them by,” said Democratic strategist Nicole Brener-Schmitz. “Women are damned if they do, damned if they don’t.”

Meredith Conroy, a political science professor at California State University at San Bernardino and author of several books, including “Masculinity, Media, and the American Presidency,” said women tend to be more damaged than their male counterparts by scandal.

“Women in general, but in politics too, are perceived as more honest and moral and trustworthy,” Conroy said. “So, when women don’t fit that image, it definitely becomes a point of criticism.”

An exception is Republican Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who is also on Friday night’s Doral

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program and has pursued a push-forward-at-all-costs strategy. Greene was stripped of her committee assignments and forced to apologize on the House floor for her past support of QAnon and other conspiracy theories and for spreading racist tropes.

But she refused to resign, and saw her fundraising spike and her star only brighten in certain conservative circles.

Gaetz is expected to return to Washington next week when Congress resumes, and he is not expected to shy away from potential fights. He remains popular in his heavily pro-Trump district, meaning that calls for him to resign that resonate in places like Washington are unlikely to hurt him back home.

Wilson warned skeptics not to underestimate Gaetz's skill as "facile" debater, taking on the establishment to the delight of Trump supporters across the nation.

"It's a real test case," Wilson said of the Trump-styled strategy. Wilson said that days before the initial reports emerged, he was hearing from people inside and outside the Florida government that Gaetz was "test-driving" his defense.

Gaetz also approached White House officials seeking a preemptive pardon for himself near the end of Trump's term, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The request was for a broad preemptive pardon for Gaetz and other congressional Republicans, the person said. It came as the Justice Department was actively investigating Gaetz's conduct to determine if he violated federal sex trafficking laws and questioning associates about his behavior. It wasn't clear if he brought up the specific investigation during the discussion.

Trump has said Gaetz never asked him for a pardon.

Even if pushing forward helps politicians weather immediate crises, meanwhile, it doesn't always leave them with much political standing. Trump, of course, lost last year's election to Biden and Cuomo finds himself increasingly politically isolated. Northam is term-limited and won't have to face reelection.

Top Republicans have been conspicuous in failing to speak out in Gaetz's defense. The Floridian's attention-grabbing style has often antagonized both parties, further suggesting that, though his congressional seat is likely safe, he's unlikely to accomplish much, even within his own party, outside of Trump's shadow.

President Bill Clinton used a different strategy to survive being impeached during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, opting for contrition and watching much of the political blame for the proceedings ultimately fall on the GOP-controlled House, allowing him to finish his term in a stronger position. Newt Gingrich resigned the House Speakership amid scandal in 1999, but recovered enough to run for president in 2012, winning the South Carolina Republican primary.

"If your goal is simply to maintain your position, it might be an effective strategy. If your goal is to have an impact, it's probably not the way to go," Colburn said. "Just because it works doesn't mean it's the right thing to do."

## US sanctions on Myanmar gems target key junta funding source

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — The latest U.S. sanctions on Myanmar target an army-controlled gems business rife with corruption and abuses that is one of the junta's key sources of revenue.

It's unclear if the sanctions will do much to close the taps of income and royalties from gems sales. Some estimates say more than half of such transactions are not declared, even though they are the country's second biggest export after natural gas and oil.

The rights group Justice for Myanmar on Friday urged the U.S. government to expand penalties to include the Myanmar Oil & Gas Enterprise, which handles the country's largest share of exports.

"It is imperative that other countries follow suit in sanctioning the key businesses enabling the Myanmar military's criminal conduct," said the group's spokesperson, Yadanar Maung.

The most recent report from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative for 2016-17 found that gems, pearls and jade accounted for 13% of Myanmar's natural resource revenues, with oil and gas accounting for 87%.

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The sanctions announced Thursday freeze any assets held by the Myanmar Gems Enterprise in the U.S. or in U.S. jurisdictions and bar American citizens from doing business with it.

The company oversees all gemstone activities in Myanmar, also known as Burma, the Treasury Department said in announcing the latest sanctions against the military leaders who seized power in a Feb. 1 coup.

That includes control of permits for mines, collecting royalties and overseas marketing and sales.

The gems trade is important enough that coup leader Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing and Myanmar's central bank governor were among the dignitaries who visited the opening of a gems, pearls and jade emporium earlier this month in the capital, Naypyitaw.

The U.S. and other governments have been ramping up sanctions in response to the coup and a deadly crackdown on mass pro-democracy protests. At least 598 protesters and bystanders have been killed by security forces since the coup and violence has spread from major cities to provincial towns.

Earlier, the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden sanctioned Myanmar Ruby Enterprise, Myanmar Imperial Jade Co., and Cancri (Gems and Jewellery) Co. — other military-controlled traders of gems and other precious stones. U.S. sanctions have also targeted two major military-controlled conglomerates that also have stakes in mining and gems businesses.

The Treasury announcement noted that the sanctions were not intended to penalize Myanmar citizens, in particular artisanal miners who depend on gem sales to survive.

The state-controlled newspaper Global New Light of Myanmar reported that 405 out of 450 lots of jade had been sold by April 7 at the gems emporium for 3.5 billion kyats (\$2.4 million).

Separately, it said 317 lots of pearls worth 1.43 billion kyats (\$1 million) were sold during the first three days of the emporium, which runs from April 1 to 10.

Official statistics on the gems trade in Myanmar, one of the top sources of jade and rubies, are scarce but previous emporiums netted hundreds of millions of dollars in sales. The sales are usually held three times a year.

The U.S. banned imports of jade and other precious stones from 2008 to 2016 following a previous crackdown on pro-democracy protests. The sanctions were relaxed after military leaders began a transition to a quasi-civilian, popularly elected government in 2011.

Some retailers, such as Tiffany & Co. of the U.S., have shied away from sourcing gems in Myanmar. But many others have not.

Thailand and China, both countries that have not imposed sanctions on Myanmar's junta, are the main markets for its rubies and jade. But gems often pass through many hands before reaching markets in Europe and the U.S., making tracing their provenance difficult, according to a report by the Natural Resource Governance Institute, an independent research and advocacy institute that monitors resource-rich countries like Myanmar.

The best rubies, known as pigeon's blood for their deep crimson color, are often sourced in Mogok, a mining region in northern Myanmar. The report said the military controls the mining in both Mogok and in Mong Hsu, another importance source of gems, but an unknown share of the gems is smuggled into China, especially through the border town of Ruili, which has a big jade and gems market.

The trade involves perils, especially for those working on the fringes of the big mines. Jade, especially, is mined with heavy equipment that leaves small pieces in tailings that are piled into huge mounds. Such slopes often collapse, burying people who settle near the mounds to scavenge for the scraps.

## Kim compares North Korea's economic woes to 1990s famine

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called for waging another "arduous march" to fight severe economic difficulties, for the first time comparing them to a 1990s famine that killed hundreds of thousands.

Kim had previously said his country faces the "worst-ever" situation due to several factors, including the coronavirus pandemic, U.S.-led sanctions and heavy flooding last summer. But it's the first time he publicly



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drew parallel with the deadly famine.

North Korea monitoring groups haven't detected any signs of mass starvation or a humanitarian disaster. But Kim's comments still suggest how seriously he views the current difficulties — which foreign observers say are the biggest test of his nine-year rule.

"There are many obstacles and difficulties ahead of us, and so our struggle for carrying out the decisions of the Eighth Party Congress would not be all plain sailing," Kim told lower-level ruling party members on Thursday, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

"I made up my mind to ask the WPK (Workers' Party of Korea) organizations at all levels, including its Central Committee and the cell secretaries of the entire party, to wage another more difficult 'arduous march' in order to relieve our people of the difficulty, even a little," Kim said.

The term "arduous march" is a euphemism that North Koreans use to describe the struggles during the 1990s famine, which was precipitated by the loss of Soviet assistance, decades of mismanagement and natural disasters. The exact death toll isn't clear, varying from hundreds of thousands to 2 million to 3 million, and North Korea depended on international aid for years to feed its people.

Kim's speech came at the closing ceremony of a party meeting with thousands of grassroots members, called cell secretaries. During his opening day speech Tuesday, Kim said improving public livelihoods in the face of the "worst-ever situation" would depend on the party cells.

During the party congress in January, Kim ordered officials to build stronger self-supporting economy, reduce reliance on imports and make more consumer goods. But analysts are skeptical about Kim's push, saying the North's problems are the result of poor management, self-imposed isolation and sanctions over his nuclear program.

Chinese data show North Korea's trade with China, its biggest trading partner and aid benefactor, shrank by about 80% last year following North Korea's border closure as part of stringent pandemic measures.

Experts say North Korea has no other option because a major coronavirus outbreak could have dire consequences on its broken health care system.

Cha Deok-cheol, deputy spokesman at South Korea's Unification Ministry, told reporters Friday that there are multiple signs that North Korea is taking steps to ease control on its border with China, including the North's own reports that it established new anti-virus facilities on the border and passed new laws on the disinfection of imported goods.

Some experts say North Korea's ongoing difficulties will not lead to famine because China won't let that happen. They say China worries about North Korean refugees flooding over the border or the establishment of a pro-U.S., unified Korea on its doorstep.

When Kim last month exchanged messages with Chinese President Xi Jinping, North Korea's state media said Xi expressed a commitment to "provide the peoples of the two countries with better life." Some analysts saw it as an indication that China would soon provide North Korea with badly needed food, fertilizer and other supplies that had been significantly reduced amid the pandemic border closures.

## Loud debates, fun banter: Mideast finds outlet in Clubhouse

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — They are boisterous, argumentative and at times downright hilarious.

Hundreds of thousands of people in the Arab world are turning to Clubhouse, the fast-growing audio chat app, to mock and vent against longtime rulers, debate sensitive issues from abortion to sexual harassment, or argue where to find the best and cheapest shawarma sandwich during an economic crisis.

The discussions are endless as they are breathless.

More than 970,000 people from the Middle East have downloaded the new platform since it launched outside the U.S. in January. It has offered space for in-person conversations in an age where direct contact is at the mercy of the pandemic and it's brought together those at home and the many in exile or abroad.

But mostly, it has offered a release for bottled-up frustration in a region where violent conflicts and

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autocrats have taken hold and where few, if any, avenues for change — or even for speaking out — seem tenable.

“It is an open coffeehouse that pierces through what is forbidden by the political regimes in the region,” said Diana Moukalled, a Lebanese journalist who closely follows social platforms. “Clubhouse has made people go back to debating one another.”

The Middle East accounts for 6.1% of the 15.9 million global downloads of Clubhouse, which launched in the United States a year ago. Saudi Arabia ranks no. 7 globally for the invitation-only downloads, with over 660,000, just after Thailand and before Italy, according to San Francisco-based mobile app analytics firm Sensor Tower.

One reason for its popularity seems to be the no-holds-barred atmosphere, fueled by the liveliness of group conversation.

Saudis organized rooms to discuss who could replace their aging king instead of his ambitious son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They argued with Egyptians over what they considered democracy and with Lebanese and Jordanians over their kingdom’s perceived meddling in their affairs.

Other rooms tackle taboo topics ranging from atheism to homosexuality. A Saudi woman discussed whether abortions should be allowed in the kingdom, prompting a heated back and forth.

The platform also became a place to exchange information, challenging the region’s largely state-dominated media.

Minutes after reports of an attempted coup in Jordan last week, Jordanians inside and outside the country congregated in a room to share information on the confusing reports released and controlled by the government. Families of those arrested in the ensuing sweep shared their news. Some users defended King Abdullah while backers of the brother prince accused of the coup vowed to rally behind him.

Previously unimaginable debates took place among parts of society who would otherwise shun or block each other on other social media.

Opponents debated supporters of Lebanon’s powerful Hezbollah group. Elsewhere, Lebanese railed against private banks they blame for their country’s economic meltdown — with bankers in the room.

In another room, Iraqis — mainly exiles — criticized how their country’s many religious militias impacted their lives. The moderator, a woman from the southern Shiite city of Najaf now living in Europe, told how her conservative family tried to mold her into “being like them” and opposed sending her to universities where men and women mingle. She fended off one man who suggested she was exaggerating, telling him he hadn’t experienced what she did.

The moderator went on and named figures from powerful Shiite militias and religious leaders, saying she’d seen how they flout the rules they set for others. In the free-flowing conversation, militia supporters frequently interrupted, sparking a torrent of expletives from the moderator and others until they were forced to leave.

“They controlled the ground with their muscles,” the moderator said of the militias. “But social media need brains. This (space) is ours.”

Among the hundreds of rooms discussing the war in Syria, some users decided to lighten the mood. Opposition activists organized a spoof interview with someone posing as President Bashar Assad.

It drew laughs but also poignant reminders of how the 10-year conflict devastated the country. “I ran away from you and still you follow me to Clubhouse,” one exiled Syrian told the fake “Assad.”

But concerns are mounting that the open space could quickly come under the same government surveillance or censorship as other social media.

A decade ago, activists in the Arab Spring protests flocked to Twitter and Facebook, which offered a similar free space. Since then, authorities have come to use the sites to target and arrest critics and spread their own propaganda.

Oman has already blocked the Clubhouse app. In Jordan, it is obstructed on certain mobile networks, while in the United Arab Emirates, users have described unexplainable glitches.

Pro-government commentators have railed against Clubhouse in TV shows and newspapers, accusing it of helping terrorists plan attacks, spreading pornography or undermining religious and state figures.

First, Clubhouse drew rights defenders and political activists. Then came the government backers. "This room has grown because Salman's people are here to defend him," shouted a participant in a room featuring opponents of the Saudi crown prince.

A discussion of the release of imprisoned Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul's devolved into panicked mayhem when a few participants threatened to expose attendees and report them to authorities. The chat soon cut off.

Recordings surfaced online from Clubhouse conversations deemed offensive, such as about homosexuality becoming acceptable, fueling fears that pro-government Saudi users were keeping tabs on critics. One participant asked to leave a chat among Lebanese when it was discovered she was Israeli, in part because some users feared they could be prosecuted under Lebanese laws banning mixing with Israelis.

Some fear security agents are secretly in the rooms.

Most participants in the app, which remains exclusive to iPhone users, use real names and sometimes put detailed bios. But growing numbers use fake names.

Without anonymity, Clubhouse disagreements could turn into violence in real life, said Ali Sibai, a consultant with Beirut-based digital rights group Social Media Exchange, SMEX.

Clubhouse's "vague" policies also raise concerns, he said. The company says it temporarily stores conversations for investigating abuses. But it doesn't say for how long or who reviews the Arabic content, raising questions whether unknown third parties may be involved, endangering participants' security, he said.

Moukalled, editor of Daraj, an independent online media, said it would be no surprise if authorities impose surveillance on Clubhouse.

But, she said, something else would come along.

"So long as people don't feel they are part of the decision-making process, they will find these platforms."

## Rioters ignore pleas for calm as violence flares in Belfast

BELFAST (AP) — Gangs of youths threw stones and fireworks at police in Belfast who hit back with water cannons as violence flared again on the streets of Northern Ireland.

Unrest has erupted over the past week amid tensions over post-Brexit trade rules and worsening relations between the parties in the Protestant-Catholic power-sharing Belfast government.

The latest violence Thursday night came despite appeals by U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Irish Premier Micheal Martin and U.S. President Joe Biden for a calming of tensions.

Police holding riot shields were pelted with missiles before officers charged at the rioters with dogs. Police also used water cannons to disperse the crowds.

Earlier in the day, the Northern Ireland Assembly unanimously passed a motion calling for an end to the disorder, and the region's power-sharing government condemned the violence.

"While our political positions are very different on many issues, we are all united in our support for law and order and we collectively state our support for policing and for the police officers who have been putting themselves in harm's way to protect others," leaders of the five-party government said in a joint statement.

"We, and our departments, will continue to work together to maximize the support we can give to communities and the (Police Service of Northern Ireland) to prevent further violence and unrest."

Northern Ireland has seen sporadic outbreaks of street violence since the 1998 Good Friday peace accord ended "the Troubles" — decades of Catholic-Protestant bloodshed over the status of the region in which more than 3,000 people died.

Britain's split from the EU has highlighted the contested status of 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, an EU member.

**Ready to buy a home? The trick is finding or affording one**

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By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Nathan Long and Lili Chin have struck out so far in their four-month search to find an affordable home in the Los Angeles area — a cold streak that threatens to mess up their anniversary plans.

The housing market has been a pillar of economic strength during the pandemic, but many would-be homeowners, particularly first-timer buyers such as Long and his wife, have met with frustration because of a low number of homes for sale and consistently rising prices.

The couple made a major concession to the virus pandemic in August when they got married via Zoom. They planned to make up for the lack of in-person nuptials by hosting a wedding party at a new home on their one-year anniversary. But so far, the market won't cooperate.

"We go out and we don't find many places at all," said Long, a video-game writer who rents an apartment in the L.A. suburb of Glendale. "I'm not hopeful that we will find anything for a while."

Homebuyers are facing the most competitive U.S. housing market in decades this spring. To put that in perspective, the inventory of homes for sale nationally fell to a record-low 1.03 million units by the end of February, or about 30% below what it was a year earlier, according to the National Association of Realtors. That amounts to a two-month supply, well short of the six-month supply economists say is needed for a balanced market. Homes in February typically sold within just 20 days of hitting the market.

Meanwhile, the national median sale price of a single-family home climbed nearly 15% to \$315,900 in the last three months of 2020, according to the NAR. That works out to about four times the U.S. median family income of \$77,774, according to data from the Realtors group. The gap can become a chasm in cities like Los Angeles or Boulder, Colorado, where home prices can be double the national levels.

So, from Los Angeles to Boston, those homes on the market are selling in a heartbeat, often fetching multiple offers well above what the owner is asking. A surge in millennials eager to become homeowners, plus a growing number of people who work remotely and are able to move to more affordable areas, are expected to keep the market running hot.

Homebuyers still have low mortgage rates on their side, providing them with a measure of financial flexibility, though rates have been creeping higher. The average rate on the benchmark 30-year loan moved above the 3% mark early last month for the first time since July 2020. It stood at 3.13% this week, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac, though that's still down from 3.33% a year ago.

"We expect homebuyer demand to remain strong this spring, but it will be tested by higher mortgage rates," said Danielle Hale, chief economist at Realtor.com.

The ultra-competitive housing market trends are prompting many aspiring homeowners to flee pricey coastal markets for the Midwest and South. For millions of Americans, the pandemic normalized working remotely and that trend helped power U.S. home sales last year to the highest level since 2006, the height of the last housing boom.

John Badalamenti and his wife, Brittany, moved out of their San Francisco apartment last year and spent several months, their baby daughter in tow, checking out San Diego, Miami, Austin, and other cities, as they considered where to settle down and where they could get the most home for the money.

The couple ended up in Charleston, South Carolina, where a few weeks ago they landed a five-bedroom, five-bathroom house with a pool that was listed for just over \$1.8 million.

John Badalamenti, who led a design team for a ride-hailing company that allowed remote work and now has co-founded a video chatting company, said the couple didn't want to risk losing out to a rival buyer. So, they made an all-cash offer that matched what the seller was asking.

Finding a similar property in the San Francisco area could have cost as much as double what the couple paid in Charleston, said Badalamenti, 33. "That was a big factor in making this decision."

Glenn Kelman, CEO of real estate brokerage Redfin, says the influx of relocating buyers has contributed to soaring home prices in markets such as Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Buffalo, New York.

The percentage of Redfin customers who are moving across the country now is 31%, up from 26% a year ago, Kelman said, noting that the trend is stronger in metropolitan areas. Among the cities that come



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up in Redfin home searches by people living elsewhere are Las Vegas, Dallas, Phoenix, Atlanta, Miami, and Sacramento, California.

Mark Wolfe, a broker-owner with Re/Max in the Dallas area, jokes that one in 10 homebuyers there now is from California.

"Dallas is about as Southern as Minneapolis anymore," he said, noting that the price increases that have resulted from the influx of buyers from other states makes it tougher on local buyers. His advice to them: Make your search area much wider.

Among the winners in the current market are homeowners like Fiona Walsh in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who is cashing in on the increased equity in her home and buying a new one.

The health consultant recently accepted one of several offers she got for her two-bedroom, one-bath condo, which she owned for nine years and listed for \$635,000. At the same time, she also had her offer accepted on a two-bedroom, one-bath house not far away that was listed for \$845,000.

"It's nice to now be able to take the next step, which is not a huge step in terms of size and space, but gives me an opportunity to kind of leverage this condo to find something that's a little bit bigger," said Walsh, 43.

The hurdles to homeownership remain highest for first-time buyers who don't have profits from a prior home sale to compete in bidding wars. Their inability to find an affordable home is likely to widen the financial gulf between perennial renters and homeowners, who have reaped a windfall in equity gains over the past decade.

"For first-time buyers, it's kind of a nightmare," said Redfin agent Kristin Lopez, quipping that a buyer is "basically giving your first-born child away to make this work."

Some buyers in Boise, for example, are agreeing to pay \$100,000 over the asking price and waiving their right to an appraisal and home inspection, said Lopez, who represents mainly out-of-state buyers.

The nation's shortage of homes for sale has been worsening for years. Rising home values and low mortgage rates have motivated many homeowners to stay put and remodel their homes, rather than put their homes up for sale and move. New construction, a small fraction of the overall housing market, has been increasing, but not significantly enough to balance the supply-demand equation in much of the country.

The pandemic has made the low supply of homes for sale worse, real estate agents say, because some sellers don't want to allow prospective buyers in their homes. Plus, many homeowners are staying put after refinancing to a lower mortgage rate and cashing out equity to spruce up their homes.

But in areas where builders are putting up more homes, buyers like Kevin Muglach are at least able to sidestep the bidding wars of the resale market.

The 23-year-old tile installer, who had been living with his parents and saving up for about a year for a down payment, landed a three-bedroom, three-bath new-construction home in Orange City, Florida, near Orlando, after bumping up his price range to \$230,000 from around \$200,000.

Muglach said a number of homes he looked at sold in a day. He might have given up, save for some motherly persuasion.

"I can't tell you how many times I've been just like, 'screw it, I'm going to go rent,'" he said. "Then my mom tells me: 'No.' She definitely kept me in the game."

## Iran frees South Korean ship it held amid dispute over funds

By ISABEL DEBRE and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A South Korean oil tanker held for months by Iran amid a dispute over billions of dollars seized by Seoul was freed and sailed away early Friday, just hours ahead of further talks between Tehran and world powers over its tattered nuclear deal.

MarineTraffic.com data showed the MT Hankuk Chemi leaving Bandar Abbas in the early morning hours.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said Iran released the tanker and its captain after seizing the vessel in January. The ministry says the Hankuk Chemi left an Iranian port at around 6 a.m. local time after completing an administrative process.

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Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Saeed Khatibzadeh, later confirmed that Iran had released the vessel. "At the request of the owner and the Korean government, the order to release the ship was issued by the prosecutor," Khatibzadeh was quoted as saying by the state-run IRNA news agency.

The ship's owner, DM Shipping Co. Ltd. of Busan, South Korea, could not be immediately reached for comment.

The Hankuk Chemi had been traveling from a petrochemicals facility in Jubail, Saudi Arabia, to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates when armed Revolutionary Guard troops stormed the vessel in January and forced the ship to change course and travel to Iran.

Iran had accused the MT Hankuk Chemi of polluting the waters in the crucial Strait of Hormuz. But the seizure was widely seen as an attempt to pressure Seoul to release billions of dollars in Iranian assets tied up in South Korean banks amid heavy American sanctions on Iran. Iran released the 20-member crew in February, but continued to detain the ship and its captain while demanding that South Korea unlock frozen Iranian assets.

Iran's Foreign Ministry did not acknowledge the fund dispute when announcing the ship's release, with Khatibzadeh saying only that the captain and tanker had a clean record in the region.

But an official from South Korea's Foreign Ministry, speaking on condition of anonymity under regulations, said Seoul's willingness to resolve the issue of Iranian assets tied up in South Korea "possibly had a positive influence" in Iran's decision to release the vessel.

The official said Iran had acknowledged South Korea's attempts to resolve the dispute as it became clear the issue was "not just about South Korea's ability and efforts alone" and was "intertwined" with negotiations over the return to Tehran's foundering nuclear deal.

Unfreezing the funds involves the consent of various countries including the U.S., which in 2018 imposed sweeping sanctions on Iran's oil and banking sectors. The official said South Korea has been closely communicating with other countries over the frozen Iranian assets.

In January, the U.N. said Iran topped a list of countries owing money to the world body with a minimum bill of over \$16 million. If unpaid, Iran could lose its voting rights as required under the U.N. Charter.

"We're expecting to make a considerable progress in terms of paying the U.N. dues," an unnamed South Korean Foreign Ministry official was quoted by the country's Yonhap news agency. "We have also exported some \$30 million worth of medical equipment since we resumed the humanitarian trade with Iran last April."

The development came as Iran and world powers were set to resume negotiations in Vienna on Friday to break the standoff over U.S. sanctions against Iran and Iranian breaches of the nuclear agreement. The 2015 nuclear accord, which then-President Donald Trump abandoned three years later, offered Iran sanctions relief in exchange for restrictions on its nuclear program.

## **A year after COVID-19 superspreader, family finds closure**

By MANUEL VALDES Associated Press

SEDRO-WOOLLEY, Wash. (AP) — With dish soap, brushes and plastic water jugs in hand, Carole Rae Woodmansee's four children cleaned the gravestone their mother shares with their father, Jim. Each scrub shined engraved letters spelling out their mother's name and the days of her birth and death: March 27, 1939, and March 27, 2020.

Carole passed away on her 81st birthday.

That morning marked a year since she died of complications of COVID-19 after contracting it during a choir practice that sickened 53 people and killed two — a superspreader event that would become one of the most pivotal transmission episodes in understanding the virus.

For the siblings, the somber anniversary offered a chance at closure after the pandemic stunted their mourning. They were finally holding a memorial befitting of their mother's footprint in the community.

"The hardest thing is that there was no goodbye. It was like she just disappeared," said Carole's youngest child, Wendy Jensen.

After cleaning, the siblings reminisce. They say their father must be happy to be back with his wife of

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46 years. They thank them for being good parents and recall how their mother used to say "my" before calling their names and those of other loved ones.

"I was always 'My Bonnie,'" Bonnie Dawson tells her siblings. "I miss being 'My Bonnie.'"

"She had been missing Dad for a long time," eldest sibling Linda Holeman adds. Their father, Jim, passed away in 2003.

Of the more than 550,000 people who have died of the virus in the United States, Carole was among the first. Her death came just weeks after the first reported outbreak at a nursing home in Kirkland, about an hour south of Mount Vernon. Carole, who survived heart surgery and cancer, had fallen ill at her home. Bonnie took care of her until they called the paramedics.

"You're trying to say goodbye to your mom, and they're telling you to get back. It was a very hard, emotional ... to have to yell, 'I love you, Mom,' as she's being wheeled out the door with men standing in our yard 10 feet out because they didn't want to be near our house," Bonnie said.

The rehearsal of the Skagit Valley Chorale, a community choir made up mostly of retirees and not associated with the church where they practiced, happened two weeks before Gov. Jay Inslee shut down the state. The choir had taken the precautions known at the time, such as distancing themselves and sanitizing. But someone had the virus.

"The choir themselves called us directly, and they left a voicemail. The voicemail said a positive person in the choir, 24 people now sick," said Lea Hamner, communicable disease and epidemiology lead for Skagit County Public Health. "It was immediately evident that we had a big problem."

Hamner and her team went to work interviewing choir members, often repeatedly, and those with whom they came in contact after the practice, a total of 122 people. They meticulously pieced together the evening, tracking things like where people sat and who ate cookies or stacked chairs.

That level of access and detail is rare among outbreak investigations, Hamner said, so when cases waned in the county a few weeks later, she sat down to write a report.

"There was a lot of resistance to calling it an airborne disease," Hamner said. "But we found this middle ground of this disease that can both be droplet and airborne. So that was a big shift. After the paper, the CDC started to acknowledge airborne transmission."

The outbreak had gained notoriety after a Los Angeles Times article, prompting other researchers to study the event, further cementing the conclusion that the virus traveled through the air at the rehearsal.

"I think this outbreak in the choir is viewed ... as the one event that really woke people up to the idea that the virus could be spreading through the air," said Linsey Marr, a Virginia Tech professor and expert in airborne transmission. Marr was among 239 experts who successfully lobbied the World Health Organization to change its guidelines on transmission.

The other person who died from the choir practice was 83-year-old Nancy "Nicki" Hamilton. Originally from New York, Hamilton settled north of Seattle in the 1990s. She put out a personal ad in the Everett Herald, and that's how she met her husband.

"We went down to the bowling alley in Everett," said 85-year-old Victor Hamilton. "We picked it up from there."

Hamilton hasn't been able to hold a memorial for her. Their families are spread throughout the country, and he'd like to have it in New York City if possible. He's eyeing June 21 — her birthday.

In nearby Mount Vernon, family and friends stream into Radius Church, gazing at an installation of a few dozen photos of Carole that the siblings put together. Wendy also displays a quilt her daughter made using Carole's music camp T-shirts.

Pastor Ken Hubbard tells attendees the service isn't really a funeral, but a memorial, a chance to share stories about Carole.

"I'm pretty sure her prayers saved my life a time or two," grandson David Woodmansee says.

Loved ones recall Carole's devotion to her family, faith and music. Others remember how she welcomed them into her family, gave piano lessons and did volunteer work for her church.

They sing "Blessed Assurance," her favorite hymn. Its lyrics were among her last words to her children

from the hospital.

After the service, the family returns to the cemetery to lay flowers. They sing again too, closing the day with a spontaneous, smile-filled rendition of "Happy Birthday."

Later, Wendy reflects on the choir practice where her mother contracted the virus, noting the knowledge gained from it that helped advance preventative measures.

"As far as we know, that was God's plan, for her to be a help in that."

"I think my mom would be willing to give up her life in order to save lives," Bonnie said. "That was the kind of person she was."

## Australia to buy extra 20 million doses of Pfizer vaccine

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia said Friday that it has finalized a deal to buy an extra 20 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine as it rapidly pivots away from its earlier plan to rely mainly on the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced the deal just hours after saying Australia would stop using the AstraZeneca vaccine for people aged under 50.

He said the deal means Australia will get a total of 40 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine by the end of the year, enough to inoculate 20 million people in the nation of 26 million.

Australia's pivot came after the European Medicines Agency said this week it had found a "possible link" between the AstraZeneca vaccine and rare blood clots, though 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.

After the European agency's declaration, Australian drug regulators held a series of urgent meetings Thursday and recommended the Pfizer vaccine become the preferred vaccine for people under 50.

Morrison said there was no prohibition on the AstraZeneca vaccine and the risk of side effects was remote. He said the change was being made out of an abundance of caution.

The pivot represents a significant shift in Australia's overall approach and is likely to delay plans to have everybody inoculated by October.

A major part of Australia's strategy had been the ability to make its own vaccines at home and not rely on shipments from abroad. It had planned to manufacture some 50 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, enough for 25 million people. Australia had made no plans to make any other vaccines at home.

Even before the change, the government was facing criticism for a rollout program that's lagging behind those in most other developed nations. So far, Australia has administered just over 1 million vaccine doses.

Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese said the rollout was a debacle and Australians needed certainty about when they would be vaccinated.

"This government has failed. This government couldn't run a choko vine up a back fence," Albanese told reporters, referring to a plant that produces pear-shaped fruit and grows easily in the Australian climate.

Health Minister Greg Hunt said there would be some adjustments but everybody would be kept safe and would get vaccinated.

Australia has managed to stamp out community spread of the virus, allowing life to continue much as before the pandemic.

AstraZeneca noted Australia's decision to restrict the vaccine's use was based on it having no community transmission.

"Overall, regulatory agencies have 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," the company said in a statement.

## Slain South Carolina doctor wrote of faith, life's fragility

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press



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COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Robert Lesslie, the South Carolina physician and author who authorities say was killed along with three family members and a repairman by former NFL player Phillip Adams, frequently wrote of the fragility of life and a deep-seated Christian faith that guided him personally and professionally.

"I know without a doubt that life is fragile," the 70-year-old doctor wrote in one of his books, a collection of missives he termed "inspiring true stories" from his medical work. "I have come to understand that humility may be the greatest virtue. And I am convinced we need to take the time to say the things we deeply feel to the people we deeply care about."

"Life is uncertain. Things happen. Lives are unexpectedly changed or ended. And it happens suddenly," he wrote in post on his blog.

Lesslie's lessons on faith were passed down to his children, as was evident in a statement from his family that law enforcement shared at a news conference on Thursday, a day after the attack. Even in their grief, the family said their "hearts are bent toward forgiveness and peace," York County Sheriff Kevin Tolson told reporters. He said they were also praying for the family of Adams, a former NFL journeyman who authorities say shot and killed himself early Thursday after officers surrounded his parents' home.

According to police, Adams went to the home of Robert and Barbara Lesslie on Wednesday and shot and killed them, two of their grandchildren, 9-year-old Adah Lesslie and 5-year-old Noah Lesslie, and James Lewis, a 38-year-old air conditioning technician from Gaston who was doing work there. He also shot Lewis' colleague, 38-year-old Robert Shook, of Cherryville, North Carolina, who was flown to a Charlotte hospital, where he was in critical condition "fighting hard for his life," said a cousin, Heather Smith Thompson.

Tolson said investigators hadn't figured out why Adams carried out the attack: "There's nothing right now that makes sense to any of us."

A person briefed on the investigation who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak publicly said Robert Lesslie had treated Adams, who lived with his parents not far from the Lesslies' home.

Tolson would not confirm that Adams had been the doctor's patient.

Barbara Lesslie had been heavily involved in fine arts, including theater in Rock Hill, said Gary Simrill, the Republican leader of the South Carolina House and a longtime Rock Hill resident. Having practiced medicine in Rock Hill for more than three decades, her husband had indeed treated many of its citizens. Simrill said that after years in emergency medicine, Robert Lesslie founded two urgent care centers that were the opposite of what many might expect from a quick-service medical practice.

"People developed a great relationship with him because he wasn't just the doctor that saw you," Simrill said. "He was the doctor that got to know you."

Among his patients were Trent Faris, the spokesman for the York County Sheriff's Office, and Adams' father, Alonzo Adams.

Tolson said evidence left at the shooting scene led investigators to Adams as a suspect. He said they went to Adams' parents' home, evacuated them and then persuade Adams to come out. Eventually, they found him dead of a single gunshot wound to the head in a bedroom, he said.

Adams, 32, played in 78 NFL games over six seasons for six teams. He joined the 49ers in 2010 as a seventh-round draft pick out of South Carolina State, and though he rarely started, he went on to play for New England, Seattle, Oakland and the New York Jets before finishing his career with the Atlanta Falcons in 2015.

As a rookie late in the 2010 season, Adams suffered a severe ankle injury that required surgery that included several screws being inserted into his leg. He never played for the 49ers again, getting released just before the 2011 season began. Later, with the Raiders, he had two concussions over three games in 2012.

Whether he suffered long-lasting concussion-related injuries wasn't immediately clear. Adams would not have been eligible for testing as part of a broad settlement between the league and its former players over such injuries, because he hadn't retired by 2014.

Adams' father told a Charlotte television station that he blamed football for problems his son had, and which might have led him to commit Wednesday's violence.

"I can say he's a good kid — he was a good kid, and I think the football messed him up," Alonzo Adams

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told WCNC-TV. "He didn't talk much and he didn't bother nobody."

Robert Lesslie reveled in writing about his faith and his work as a physician, penning more than half a dozen books that were collections of what he termed "inspiring true stories" from his work.

In a 2014 interview, he spoke of how he came to write one, "Angels in the ER," saying he saw value in the stories he had collected through his decades in medicine, focusing on "people who had impacted me through their faith, and the way they had dealt with things that life had sent their way."

"When I talk about angels, I do believe that God ministers to us in a lot of different ways," Lesslie said. "I don't write about wings and halos and that kind of thing, but I do believe that God does speak to us through his spirit - and through other people."

In a Thursday message to congregants, pastors from the Lesslies' church, First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Rock Hill, wrote that all four of the Lesslies "are in the presence of Jesus and worshipping Him face to face. One day we will see them again. Therefore, we can grieve as those who have hope."

The church planned to keep its sanctuary open until 8 p.m. Thursday, for anyone wishing to pray. According to church officials, no funeral arrangements had been finalized.

As he wrote on his blog recently, Lesslie felt comfortable in his faith, imagining Heaven as a place filled with joy, and where he would be reunited with family and his cherished dog, Dox.

"We have no idea what Heaven will look like, only that it will be perfect," Lesslie wrote. "And because of that I know that one day, when I've experienced the presence and joy of that surrounding host of saints, I will find myself walking with Barbara in a field of lush, green grass. ... The words of Jesus will echo through that glade — 'Behold, I make all things new.'"

## Private sales emerge as obstacle to Senate action on guns

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats in Congress are trying to pass the first major gun control legislation in more than two decades with the support of President Joe Biden, who said Thursday that it is "long past time" to do so. But they are confronting a potentially insurmountable question over what rules should govern private sales and transfers, including those between friends and extended family, as they seek Republican votes.

A bipartisan Senate compromise that was narrowly defeated eight years ago was focused on expanding checks to sales at gun shows and on the internet. But many Democrats and gun control advocates now want almost all sales and transfers to face a mandatory review, alienating Republicans who say extending the requirements would trample Second Amendment rights.

The dispute has been one of several hurdles in the renewed push for gun-control legislation, despite wide support for extending the checks. A small group of senators have engaged in tentative talks in the wake of recent mass shootings in Atlanta and Colorado, hoping to build on bipartisan proposals from the past. But support from at least 10 Republicans will be needed to get a bill through the Senate, and most are intractably opposed.

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, the lead Democratic negotiator on guns, said he's been on the phone with Republican colleagues every day "making the case, cajoling, asking my friends to keep an open mind." In an interview with The Associated Press, he said he'd discussed the negotiations personally with Biden on Thursday and that "he's ready and willing to get more involved" in the talks.

"I think it's important to keep the pressure on Congress," Murphy said.

While pushing lawmakers to do more, Biden announced several executive actions to address gun violence, including new regulations for buyers of "ghost guns" — homemade firearms that usually are assembled from parts and often lack traceable serial numbers. Biden said Congress should act further to expand background checks because "the vast majority of the American people, including gun owners, believe there should be background checks before you purchase a gun."

Still, the gulf between the two parties on private gun transactions, and a host of other related issues, has only grown since 2013, when Senate Democrats fell five votes short of passing legislation to expand

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background checks after a gunman killed 20 students and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut. That defeat was a crushing blow to advocates who had hoped for some change, however modest, after the horrific attack.

The compromise legislation, written by Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, flamed out again in 2016, after a mass shooting in Orlando.

Starting anew with Biden in the White House, Democrats are focused on legislation passed by the House that would expand background checks to most sales and increase the number of days a buyer has to wait if a background check is not finished. Murphy said there may not be an appetite to pass those House bills without changes, but after talking to most Republicans over the last several weeks he says he has "reason to believe there is a path forward."

Under current law, background checks are required only when guns are purchased from federally licensed dealers. While there is agreement among some Republican lawmakers, and certainly among many GOP voters, for expanding the background checks, the issue becomes murkier when the sales are informal. Examples include if a hunter wants to sell one of his guns to a friend, for example, or to his neighbor or cousin — or if a criminal wants to sell a gun to another criminal.

Democrats say private sales can lead to gun trafficking.

"What a lot of people don't know is that people engage in private sales but they do it constantly," said California Rep. Mike Thompson, the lead sponsor of the House bill. "They could sell hundreds of guns a year, quote-unquote, privately."

Republicans say that requiring a background check for a sale or transfer between people who know each other would be a bridge too far. Toomey says Democrats won't get 60 votes if they insist upon it.

"Between the sales that already occur at licensed firearms dealers, all of which require a background check, and what we consider commercial sales — advertised sales, gun shows and on the internet — that covers a vast, vast majority of all transactions," Toomey said. "And it would be progress if we have background checks for those categories."

Manchin also opposes the House bill requiring the universal background checks. "I come from a gun culture," Manchin said in March. "And a law-abiding gun owner would do the right thing, you have to assume they will do the right thing."

Murphy hinted that Democrats might be willing to compromise somewhat on the scope, saying he is committed to universal background checks, but he won't "let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

The House bill would apply background checks to almost all sales, with certain exceptions — including an inheritance or a "loan or bona fide gift" between close family members. Other exemptions include temporary transfers to people who need a firearm to prevent "imminent death" or are hunting.

The Manchin-Toomey compromise in 2013 included additional measures to lure support from Republicans and the National Rifle Association, which eventually opposed the bill. Those included an expansion of some interstate gun sales and a shorter period for background checks that weren't completed — a deal-breaker for Democrats and gun control groups today.

Christian Heyne, vice president of policy at Brady Campaign, said the advocacy groups "will not allow allow for gun industry carveouts to be part of the next piece of legislation that the Senate votes on." The bill should be "fundamentally different" than eight years ago, he said, since their movement has "only grown in momentum and strength."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has said he will bring gun legislation to the floor with or without 60 votes, but he has tasked Murphy with trying to reach a deal first. Murphy says that if they could win enough votes on the background checks bill, it could pave the way for even tougher measures like the assault weapons ban Biden has backed.

But most Republicans are unlikely to budge. And the NRA, while weakened by some infighting and financial disputes, is still a powerful force in GOP campaigns.

In a statement, the NRA said the House bills would restrict gun owners' rights and "our membership has already sent hundreds of thousands of messages to their senators urging them to vote against these bills."

## **Bowing to Trump? GOP brings leaders, donors to his backyard**

By STEVE PEOPLES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

There will be no reckoning at the Republican National Committee.

Three months after former President Donald Trump helped incite a violent attack against Congress, the GOP is bringing hundreds of donors and several future presidential prospects to the former president's doorstep in south Florida. While a handful of Republican leaders hope to move past Trump's divisive leadership, the location of the invitation-only gathering suggests that the party, at least for now, is not ready to replace Trump as its undisputed leader and chief fundraiser.

Trump himself will headline the closed-door donor retreat, which is designed to raise millions of dollars for the GOP's political arm while giving donors exclusive access to the party's evolving group of 2024 prospects and congressional leaders. The weekend event will play out in an oceanfront luxury hotel just four miles from Trump's Florida estate, where allies of the former president will simultaneously be holding their own fundraising events.

"The venue for the quarterly meeting along with Trump's keynote speech at CPAC shows that the party is still very much in Trump's grip," said one of the invitees, GOP donor Dan Eberhart, referring to Trump's February address at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Florida. "The party doesn't seem to have the ability to hit escape velocity from its former standard bearer."

Trump's continued hold on Republican donors and elected officials ensures that Trumpism will remain the driving force in GOP politics indefinitely, even as Trump repeats the falsehood that fueled the Jan. 6 insurrection. In several public statements and appearance since leaving office, as recently as last weekend, Trump has declared that the 2020 election was "stolen" from him.

There is no evidence of significant voter fraud. In fact, several Republican governors and leading Trump administration officials have vouched for the integrity of President Joe Biden's victory. Trump's legal claims were roundly rejected by the courts, including by Trump-appointed justices at the Supreme Court.

But absent a consistent party message following Trump's loss, a clear policy agenda or a coherent strategy to expand the GOP's appeal, leading Republican elected officials and the RNC have increasingly embraced election fraud as a chief policy priority.

The lineup at the weekend gathering notably excludes any leading Republicans who have pushed back against Trump's claims or supported his impeachment. Those who aren't expected to appear include Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, No. 3 House Republican Liz Cheney, Utah Sen. Mitt Romney or Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan.

The gathering will instead feature Trump himself and a slew of candidates already positioning themselves for a 2024 presidential bid, assuming Trump himself does not run again. The potential White House contenders include Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton. Also scheduled to speak are House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Sens. Rick Scott and Marco Rubio of Florida and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

The weekend's agenda will focus on party unity and how to expand the GOP, with sessions planned on the topics.

RNC member Henry Barbour, who helps lead the committee's small-dollar fundraising apparatus, suggested the retreat was not set in Palm Beach to cater to Trump. He noted that such events are typically held in states such as Florida, New York, California and Texas.

With COVID restrictions, Barbour said, "The RNC has limited options."

"We're not in Florida so we can bow down to Donald Trump. No one needs to bow down to Donald Trump," Barbour said in an interview. "He's certainly an important part of Republican fundraising, but the party has to be bigger and broader than any one candidate."

The RNC has booked the entire Four Seasons Resort on Palm Beach for the weekend gathering, and there will be donor events at Trump's nearby Mar-a-Lago estate to raise money for groups focused on Trump's political future and policy priorities.



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At the same time, a handful of leading Trump allies — including embattled Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and embattled Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz — will appear at a weekend conference of their own at Trump's Doral golf resort 70 miles to the south in Miami. The host organization, Women for America First, helped organize the Jan. 6 rally that preceded the deadly attack on the Capitol.

Former RNC staffer Tim Miller, who has emerged as a leading Trump critic in recent years, lamented the GOP's continued coziness with the former president even after his role in the insurrection.

"There was a real opportunity in this three-month window, from Jan. 6 to now, for the party to make a concerted effort to say, 'It's time to move on,'" Miller said. "But they didn't choose to do that. This is who the party is."

And while the GOP is embracing Trump, it's not clear that Trump is embracing the GOP.

Just a month ago, Trump's political action committee sent letters to the RNC and others asking them to "immediately cease and desist the unauthorized use of President Donald J. Trump's name, image, and/or likeness in all fundraising, persuasion, and/or issue speech."

GOP officials have repeatedly tried to downplay the fundraising tensions and see Trump's participation as a sign that he is willing to lend his name to the party. At the same time, Trump continues to aggressively accumulate campaign cash — cash that the RNC, or the party's next presidential nominee, does not control — including this week's relaunch of his online merchandise store.

Former Trump aide Hogan Gidley suggested Trump is as powerful as ever.

"People in D.C., inside the Beltway, think Donald Trump is radioactive," Gidley said. "The Republican Party has grown, and it's because of Donald Trump's successes. To ignore that, you do so at your own peril."

## 'How many of us will be left?' Catholic nuns face loss, pain

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

GREENSBURG, Pa. (AP) — The nuns' daily email update was overtaken by news of infections. Ambulances blared into the driveways of their convents. Prayers for the sick went unanswered, prayers for the dead grew monotonous and, their cloistered world suddenly caving in, some of the sisters' thoughts were halting.

"How many of us," Sister Mary Jeanine Morozowich wondered, "will be left?"

These were women who held the hands of the dying and who raised the unwanted, who pushed chalk to slate to teach science and grammar and, through their own example, faith. And when the worst year was over, the toll on the Felician Sisters was almost too much to bear: 21 of their own, in four U.S. convents, who collectively served 1,413 years, all felled by the virus.

The pierce of syringes is bringing the darkest days to an end. Quarantines are being lifted. And as sisters emerge, there is a wrenching grief over their losses and a nagging need to know what it all means.

"There's got to be a reason," Morozowich says of her survival. "What is God asking me to do?"

Before lives turned inward and smiles were hidden by masks, before an always-climbing count of the dead and a constantly changing forecast of when this all will be over, there were things you could count on.

And at the St. Anne Home in Greensburg, it was Sister Mary Evelyn Labik.

At the front desk, she met a panoply of visitors with the sort of genuine warmth that made it impossible to say no when she came selling calendars or candy for a fundraiser. When the sun sliced through the stained glass and streaked the chapel's walls with pastels, she was there along the aisle, sixth pew on the left. When it was warm, she'd stare with contented fascination as a hummingbird whirred toward a feeder on the porch, and when the nights grew long, she'd be in her tan recliner when "NCIS" lit the TV like a strobe.

As a child, she was taught by Felicians, growing in admiration for the friendliness they showed her.

"Now I desire to be one of them," she wrote as she entered the convent in 1960.

She thrived in roles that capitalized on her compassion, as a kindergarten teacher and nurse's aide, as a caregiver to profoundly disabled children and as a helper at a high school. Students were so drawn to her they took to calling her "Mom E" — the E for Evelyn — and some would write her for decades after.

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She'd arrived 26 years earlier in Greensburg, where the convent is tucked in a complex with a nursing home and the seven sisters occupy tiny rooms on a spartan hallway with a communal bathroom in the center. For swaths of time, she served as local minister, a house mother of sorts who both helps direct the logistics of community life and gently guides a family of sisters in their spirituality.

At Christmas, she'd fill cloth sacks with simple gifts like towels and shampoo, and when a new sister arrived, she scurried to make them feel at home. When Sister Amala Jose, who is 44, came from her native India, Labik excitedly welcomed her and added mangoes, ginger paste and habaneros to the shopping list.

"Something she knows we like," said Jose, who is a part of the Daughters of Mary community, but lives with the Felicians. "Just like a parent bringing things for the kids."

As the pandemic unfurled its brutality, Labik sounded motherly notes of caution, reminding sisters to wash their hands and buy more sanitizing wipes, even when they'd barely put a dent in their supply.

And when sisters at the convent in Livonia, Michigan, began being rushed to the hospital last March, she couldn't hide her alarm, scurrying to share the troubling news.

On Good Friday, Sister Mary Luiza Wawrzyniak became the sisters' first casualty in Livonia, a blow that landed with stunning intensity for the women who'd known her for decades.

"My heart just leaped," said Sister Nancy Marie Jamroz, 79, who had known Wawrzyniak since entering the convent and was one of her closest friends. "She was my little buddy."

Wawrzyniak's teaching days were ended by multiple sclerosis, but she continued contributing any way she could, shuffling behind a wheelchair to work in the laundry room and remembering every birthday with a card.

Jamroz called her "Sunshine." Wawrzyniak called her "Moonshine."

On Easter Sunday, it was Sister Celine Marie Lesinski, a teacher, organist and librarian, and Sister Mary Estelle Printz, who put aside an early life working at Chrysler to take her vows. Then, Sister Thomas Marie Wadowski, who relished a game of canasta and telling of her second-grade class that won a contest to create a Campbell's Soup commercial, and Sister Mary Patricia Pyszynski, who taught in 13 schools across Michigan in six decades as an educator. Others were clinging to life.

"How could this be?" asked Morozowich, who was on a brief sabbatical from Greensburg as it unfolded. "What's happening? What is going on? Is there a purification taking place? Why are so many sisters dying?"

Among hundreds of communities of Catholic sisters, the Felicians have neither the ubiquity of bigger ones like the Salesians, nor the singular focus of those like the School Sisters of Notre Dame, nor the repute of women following in Mother Teresa's footsteps in the Missionaries of Charity. But they are scattered like mustard seeds across the continent and beyond, from a clinic in Jacmel, Haiti, to a preschool south of the Arctic Circle in Tulita, Canada, running affordable housing, ministering to inmates, teaching in schools and, time and again, focusing their work on the poor, disabled and sick.

Wherever they were, what was happening at the convent in Livonia was gripping.

Confined to their rooms as they desperately tried to stop the spread, the sisters cracked their doors in the morning to collect breakfast trays. They peered down the hallway to see if a new sign appeared bearing the news, in dark marker on plain printer paper, that the night had taken another.

When it did, they absorbed it alone, pinching rosaries and mouthing the same words again and again.

"May our sister," they asked, "enter the kingdom of peace and light."

After the first week of the crisis claimed five sisters, the second week took five more.

Sister Mary Clarence Borkoski, whose long ministry included work in a food pantry. Sister Rose Mary Wolak, whose two stints working in the Vatican brought brushes with St. John Paul II. Sister Mary Janice Zolkowski, who wrote a definitive 586-page history of the Felicians. Sister Mary Alice Ann Gradowski, who as a principal could be seen cheering, with fierce loyalty, in the bleachers at basketball games. And Sister Victoria Marie Indyk, who led mission trips to Haiti where she insisted students fill their luggage with clothes and medicine and toys going to the hemisphere's neediest.

Each passing reverberated. Some sisters lost someone they'd known since they were teenagers, or with whom they had shared a home for decades. Others had felt a distant kinship from a shared calling, or had

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been graced with passing kindnesses when they fell ill or lonely or had reached out for help.

Morozowich heard of Zolkowski's death and remembered how when she was a student in need of the historian's expertise, she received eager support from a woman she had not yet met.

"When Janice died," 74-year-old Morozowich said, "it was like I was stabbed in the heart."

The anguish persisted.

The deaths came with speed and magnitude. As painful as they were, they were delivered on an aging community in which the end is spoken about with comfort borne in their belief that eternal salvation awaits. For women whose lives are steeped in tradition and faith, the losses themselves were dwarfed by the agony of not being able to make good on their long-held promise: No one dies alone.

As the end neared again and again, they couldn't surround their sister, grasping her as they recited the Hail Mary, its final words pregnant in the weight of the moment: "Now and at the hour of our death."

Sister Mary Martinez Rozek, who taught English to immigrants. Sister Mary Madeleine Dolan, stirred by two disabled siblings to become a special education teacher. Sister Mary Danatha Suchyta, the brilliant student who entered the convent as a seventh-grader and rose to become a university president.

And then finally, it seemed, after 13 were killed in Livonia, maybe the worst was past.

As some convents remained locked down, the Greensburg sisters were able to maintain a semblance of normalcy in their small convent, walled off from most visitors but finding joy in their rhythms of gathering for meals and for the daily bookends of religious life — morning and evening prayers.

For all the darkness that had entered the sisters' world, summer brought glimpses of light.

On the porch, Labik hung a basket overflowing with purple flowers, and filled planters with daisies, impatiens and begonias, and when July 4 came, she twirled sparklers. In the living room, she came to relish the game shows other sisters introduced her to, and in the kitchen, her voice would drip with tongue-in-cheek judgment in an ongoing debate on hazelnut coffee vs. traditional roast.

"Lot of nuts around here," Labik would say.

When a new video arrived of her niece's young children, she'd eagerly show it off, and when she made her bed with a blue blanket her mother left behind, she'd remark how it felt like a familiar embrace.

"Mom will be hugging me today," she said.

As fall came, there was even room for a party. Labik was pinned with a corsage of white roses to mark her 60th anniversary in the convent, and after Mass, there was a dinner in her honor. Glasses were full, smiles were wide, and Labik ordered chicken romano, her favorite, surrounded by her sisters.

It was the last time they'd all celebrate together.

The second wave haunted and taunted with erratic efficiency, and by the middle of November had robbed the Felicians of sisters in Buffalo, New York; Enfield, Connecticut; and here in Greensburg.

Sister Mary Christinette Lojewski, the educator with a disarming smile. Sister Mary Seraphine Liskiewicz, whose faith persevered even as her health waned. Sister Mary Michele Mazur, the keen-eyed artist who gave succor to orphans. Sister Christine Marie Nizialek, who'd bounced back from losing an eye and receiving a new kidney but could not come back from this.

"It was happening so fast," said Sister Mary Elizabeth Mackowiak, 76, who watched from her window in Buffalo when an ambulance approached. "It really was an awful, helpless feeling."

Mackowiak started studying grief eight years ago, when she buried her mother, and has run bereavement groups ever since. Now, little prayer cards with the faces of her dead sisters were beginning to crowd a shelf of her bookcase, and her mind was seared with the repeated scene of a hearse in front of the convent, where quarantined sisters watched as the casket was pulled out.

There's a numbness Mackowiak knows won't disappear fast, and a search for meaning that goes with it.

"There's something very big going on," she says. "Are we brave enough to look a little beyond the graves and the shields and the masks and ask ourselves what is this all about?"

Jamroz saw the "dark days" of the spring returning. She tried to blunt the pain by nudging herself to

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remember that her lost sisters had achieved eternal happiness, but the human loss was hard to forget.

"Some of them, you grow closer to than even your own blood siblings," she said.

No women took final vows with the Felicians in 2020; they ended the year with 455 sisters across the continent. Fifteen sisters died of varied causes, in addition to the 21 who died of COVID-19.

Sister Mary Bronisia Muzalewski, who relished preparing children for First Communion, and for whom invitations had been printed to mark her 75th anniversary of sisterhood with a celebration that would never happen. Sister Mary Felicia Golembiewski-Dove, who molded butter into elaborate Easter lambs. Sister Mary DeAngelis Nowak, who when not in prayer, always seemed to be found behind a book.

And Labik, the smiling face who had become the heart of her home.

At first, it seemed like nothing more than a cold. But soon, 78-year-old Labik was on the floor of her room, cradled by Jose. When the paramedics came, she smiled at her sisters and made the sign of the cross as she was led to the ambulance. From the hospital, when they spoke by phone, she was lighthearted and laughing.

They made plans for when she would return before, suddenly, she took a turn for the worse.

"It's this disease," the doctor told the sisters, his voice weary with emotion.

When word of Labik's death reached the convent, her six sisters there went to the chapel, where they prayed and cried. She was later placed in her casket barefoot, in the Franciscan tradition, and buried in her brown habit and black veil, a wood crucifix on string around her neck and the simple silver band she was given when she professed her final vows on her left hand's ring finger.

"Deus meus et omnia," was inscribed inside. "My God and my all."

The sisters boxed up Labik's few possessions, and the men who carried them away to donate them did it with such rhythm and reverence that they looked like pallbearers at a funeral.

She was the only sister to die in Greensburg, a shadow of the loss elsewhere and yet no less profound.

Jose finds herself thinking of Labik when she passes the front desk and doesn't see her beaming face and neatly styled hair, or when she enters the chapel and she's not there to wave.

"Everywhere we go," Jose says, "we remember her and we miss her."

Morozowich sometimes slips for a moment, thinking Labik is simply on vacation. The way she feels — dazed, disbelieving, wanting to shoo her emotions away — reminds her of when her mother died.

Outside, purple and white crocuses and yellow daffodils have pushed through the soil in a little courtyard garden that Labik would plant. And inside, in the room that was once hers, a new sister has arrived.

## Policy changes help drive US migrant crossings to new highs

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

BROWNSVILLE, Texas (AP) — Paying a smuggler, Edgar Mejia could afford to take only one child with him to the United States. He chose his 3-year-old "warrior" son, leaving his 7- and 12-year-olds with their mother in Honduras.

"Pitifully, I had use him like a passport to get here," Mejia said last week after picking up milk from volunteers at a Brownsville, Texas, bus station for the last leg of their journey to join relatives in Atlanta. "I am here because of him."

Mejia, 32, and his son, who paid a smuggler \$6,000 for a "new dream" that Honduras couldn't provide, are among the Border Patrol's nearly 170,000 encounters with migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border in March, a 20-year high. The total, announced Thursday, includes nearly 19,000 children traveling alone, the highest monthly number on record.

About four in 10 border encounters last month were with families and unaccompanied children — many from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — at a time when policies in the U.S. and Mexico favor them staying in the United States while they seek asylum. It marks the third sharp jump in Central American asylum-seekers in seven years.

For decades, predominantly Mexican men crossed the border illegally, with many returning for visits until heightened border security made going back and forth more difficult. Migration rose and fell but was



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fairly steady and predictable.

Over the last decade, a complex mix of factors has produced periodic, dramatic spikes, especially among families and children, who get more legal protections and require more care. The Government Accountability Office identified 10 potential causes for a spike in the number of unaccompanied children at the border in 2014, including poverty, violence and perceptions of U.S. immigration policy.

A large increase in family arrivals in 2019 followed an end to the Trump administration's practice of generally separating parents from their children at the border. The latest jump follows ferocious storms in Central America and President Joe Biden ending his predecessor's hardline immigration policies, though many changes attributed to Biden are rumors or have been fabricated by smugglers to generate business.

The "root causes" prompting Central Americans to leave haven't changed, said Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, whose temporary shelter has been hosting 400 to 500 people nightly, compared with a peak of about 1,000 in 2019.

"I think that it's simply that the traffickers use whatever is happening in the United States to extort the families, to lure them, to create a narrative that says, 'Come right now. The president is going to let you in,'" she said.

Migrants, in dozens of interviews over the last two weeks, generally said circumstances in Central America led them to the U.S. When asked about Biden, nearly all said his relatively pro-immigration positions influenced their thinking.

Smuggling fees vary widely, with some paying up to \$10,000 a person in the Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. There is often a discount for additional relatives. The trip can take weeks in cars, buses and trucks, ending when an inflatable raft reaches the banks of the Rio Grande and families and children turn themselves in to Border Patrol agents.

Mejia said he and his son were in a group of 18 Hondurans on a trip divided into four parts, including one leg traveling in a trailer from Mexico City to Monterrey and a final stretch in an open-top boxcar to the border city of Reynosa. Children were told to be quiet when the trailer came to military checkpoints.

"(Smugglers) tell you it's going to go well, but the reality is different," Mejia said, turning to his 3-year-old son at the bus station in Brownsville, a border city of about 200,000 people on the Rio Grande. "I have a warrior here. We suffered greatly."

Douglas Perez, 24, said he stood with 10 people in a covered pickup truck, including his wife and two children, ages 4 and 1. He held the baby, planting his palm on the roof to avoid falling over. They were released in the U.S. with notices to report to a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office.

Perez, who paid a smuggler \$27,000 to bring his family to the U.S., said he left the western highlands of Guatemala because his job picking corn no longer provided enough food to eat.

Carlos Enrique Linga, who was released from custody with his 5-year-old daughter, said he could no longer afford new clothes for his family in Guatemala after rains destroyed their house. That prompted him to try to join a friend in Tennessee to earn money. His wife, 2-year-old twins and newborn stayed in Guatemala because they couldn't pay a smuggler.

"Our houses got carried away by the current, the water," Linga said after breakfast in a migrant shelter in Mission, Texas. "Our ranch is no more. We are without a house."

The Border Patrol had 168,195 encounters with migrants last month, the highest since March 2001. The numbers aren't directly comparable because more than half of those stopped last month had been quickly expelled from the country under federal pandemic-related powers that deny people the right to seek asylum. Being expelled carries no legal consequences, so many people make multiple attempts.

Biden has exempted unaccompanied children from expulsion, allowing them to stay in the U.S. while pursuing asylum claims and live with "sponsors," usually parents or close relatives.

Mexico has been reluctant to take back Central American families with young children, especially in Tamaulipas state bordering the Rio Grande Valley, so many of them are being released in the U.S. while their claims are considered by immigration authorities.

Migrants who enter the Rio Grande Valley as single adults or in families with children 7 and older are expelled to Reynosa, an organized-crime stronghold. Unfounded rumors are rampant in a plaza there where

migrants plan their next move. Last week, rumors spread that the U.S. would open its borders April 5 or that the borders would be open for Biden's first 100 days in office.

Hermelindo Ak, a corn grower, heard in Guatemala that chances were better for families but didn't know how a child's age was considered. Information seemed to change "day to day," he said.

He was expelled with his 17-year-old son, then sent his son alone for a second attempt after learning unaccompanied children can stay in the U.S. Ak, 40, planned to return home to his wife and other children, who stayed in Guatemala because they couldn't afford to pay a smuggler.

## Expert: Lack of oxygen killed George Floyd, not drugs

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — George Floyd died of a lack of oxygen from being pinned to the pavement with a knee on his neck, medical experts testified at former Officer Derek Chauvin's murder trial, emphatically rejecting the defense theory that Floyd's drug use and underlying health problems killed him.

"A healthy person subjected to what Mr. Floyd was subjected to would have died," prosecution witness Dr. Martin Tobin, a lung and critical care specialist at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital and Loyola University's medical school in Illinois, testified Thursday.

Using easy-to-understand language to explain medical concepts and even loosening his necktie to illustrate a point, Tobin told the jury that Floyd's breathing was severely constricted while Chauvin and two other Minneapolis officers held the 46-year-old Black man down on his stomach last May with his hands cuffed behind him and his face jammed against the ground.

The lack of oxygen resulted in brain damage and caused his heart to stop, the witness said.

Tobin, analyzing images of the three officers restraining Floyd for what prosecutors say was almost 9 1/2 minutes, testified that Chauvin's knee was "virtually on the neck" more than 90% of the time.

He said several other factors also made it difficult for Floyd to breathe: officers lifting up on the suspect's handcuffs, the hard pavement, his prone position, his turned head and a knee on his back.

Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd's neck for 3 minutes, 2 seconds, after Floyd took his last breath, Tobin said. After that last breath, Floyd's oxygen levels went down to zero and Floyd "reached the point where there was not one ounce of oxygen left in the body," he said.

As prosecutors repeatedly played a video clip of Floyd on the ground, Tobin pinpointed what he said was a change in the man's face that told him Floyd was dead. That moment happened around five minutes after police began holding Floyd down.

"At the beginning, you can see he's conscious, you can see slight flickering, and then it disappears," Tobin said. He explained: "That's the moment the life goes out of his body."

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death May 25. Floyd was arrested outside a neighborhood market after being accused of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill. Bystander video of Floyd crying that he couldn't breathe as onlookers yelled at the white officer to get off him sparked protests and scattered violence around the U.S.

Tobin also testified that just because Floyd was talking and can be seen moving on video doesn't mean he was breathing adequately. He said a leg movement seen in the footage was an involuntary sign of a fatal brain injury, and that a person can continue to speak until the airway narrows to 15%, after which "you are in deep trouble."

Officers can be heard on video telling Floyd that if he can talk, he can breathe.

During cross-examination, Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson pressed Tobin on that common misconception, pointing to earlier testimony that Minneapolis officers are trained that if people can speak, they can breathe.

Nelson has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do and that Floyd's death was caused by illegal drugs and underlying medical problems, including high blood pressure and heart disease. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Tobin said he analyzed Floyd's respiration as seen on body-camera video and explained that while fentanyl typically cuts the rate of respiration 40%, Floyd's breathing was "right around normal" just before

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he lost consciousness.

Tobin also said the high blood level of carbon dioxide measured in the emergency room can be explained by Floyd not breathing for nearly 10 minutes before paramedics began artificial respiration, as opposed to his breathing being suppressed by fentanyl.

Another prosecution witness, Dr. Bill Smock, an expert on deaths from asphyxia, backed up Tobin's assessment. Smock said Floyd did not have symptoms of a fentanyl overdose such as constricted pupils and decreased breathing. He said Floyd's actions were the opposite, because he was pleading for air.

"That is not a fentanyl overdose. That is somebody begging to breathe," said Smock, the police surgeon for the Louisville, Kentucky, department and a former emergency room doctor. He said Floyd died of "positional asphyxia," a lack of oxygen because of the position of the body.

On cross-examination, Nelson questioned Smock about Floyd's history of heart disease, getting Smock to agree that a struggle with police could put stress on the heart and that shortness of breath could be a sign of a heart attack.

But when questioned again by the prosecution, Smock said there was no evidence that Floyd had a heart attack or sudden death from arrhythmia, saying his death was caused by a gradual decrease of oxygen over several minutes "because of the pressure being applied to his back and neck."

Also Thursday, a forensic toxicologist said that he tested blood drawn from Floyd at the hospital, as well as urine from his autopsy, and found a "very low" amount of methamphetamine. Daniel Isenschmid said fentanyl and a byproduct of its breakdown also were in Floyd's system.

Isenschmid put the level of fentanyl in Floyd's blood at 11 nanograms per milliliter. For perspective, he said that testing of more than 2,000 people arrested for driving under the influence of fentanyl revealed an average concentration of 9.59, and dozens of them had levels higher than Floyd's — and survived.

On cross-examination, Nelson suggested there was no way to know how much fentanyl Floyd had ingested, and Isenschmid agreed. The defense attorney also said it's impossible to know the concentration of fentanyl in street drugs: "Every single pill you take, it becomes a unique experience for the person, right?" Isenschmid agreed.

In his own turn on the stand, Tobin used simple language, explaining that when the airway narrows, breathing becomes far more difficult, like "breathing through a drinking straw."

At one point, the doctor loosened his tie and placed his hands on his own neck and the back of his head to demonstrate how the airway works, inviting the jurors to examine their own necks. Most of them did so, though the judge later told them they didn't have to.

The expert calculated that at times when Chauvin was in a near-vertical position, with his toes off the ground, half of Chauvin's body weight with his gear included — or 91.5 pounds (41.5 kilograms) — was directly on Floyd's neck.

He said it appeared that Floyd was getting enough oxygen to keep his brain alive for about the first five minutes, because he was still speaking. Tobin said that where Chauvin had his knee after the five-minute mark was not that important, because at that point Floyd had already suffered brain damage.

Chauvin's attorney has repeatedly shown the jury still images from the video that he said depicted Chauvin's knee on Floyd's shoulder blade, not his neck. But nearly all of those images were captured after the five-minute mark, according to the time stamps.

## Police: Employee kills 1, wounds 5 at Texas cabinet business

BRYAN, Texas (AP) — A man opened fire Thursday at a Texas cabinet-making company where he worked, killing one person and wounding five others before shooting and wounding a state trooper prior to his arrest, authorities said.

Larry Winston Bollin, 27, of Iola, Texas, was booked into the Brazos County Detention Center in Bryan late Thursday, according to a Bryan Police Department statement. Jail records showed Bollin was charged with murder and being held on a \$1 million bond. No attorney was listed for Bollin in the jail record.

Bryan Police Chief Eric Buske told reporters he believes the suspect is an employee at the Kent Moore

Cabinets location where the shooting happened. He said investigators believe the man was solely responsible for the attack, which happened around 2:30 p.m., and that he was gone by the time officers arrived.

Two of the five people who were wounded at the business were hospitalized in critical condition, while three others were in serious but stable condition, according to a hospital statement. During the manhunt for the suspect, he shot and wounded a state trooper, who was hospitalized in serious but stable condition, the Texas Department of Public Safety said on Twitter.

Grimes County Sheriff Don Sowell said about two hours after the attack, the suspect was arrested in Bédias, a tiny community about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northeast of Bryan.

Investigators were still trying to determine the motive for the attack, authorities said.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives sent agents and dogs to the shooting scene, said spokesman Deon Washington. Police asked people to stay away from the business during the investigation.

Bryan is about 100 miles (160 kilometers) northwest of Houston and is near Texas A&M University. With more than 86,000 residents, it is the seat of Brazos County.

A person who answered the phone at Kent Moore Cabinets' headquarters in Bryan said she couldn't provide any information on the shooting. The company, which makes custom cabinets, has design centers in nearly a dozen Texas cities and employs more than 600 people, according to its website.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott offered prayers for shooting victims and their families.

"I have been working closely with the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Texas Rangers as they assist local law enforcement on a swift response to this criminal act. Their efforts led to the arrest of the shooting suspect."

## **Authorities: NFL player Phillip Adams killed 5, then himself**

By MICHELLE LIU and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

ROCK HILL, S.C. (AP) — Former NFL player Phillip Adams fatally shot five people, including a prominent doctor, his wife and their two grandchildren before killing himself early Thursday.

York County Sheriff Kevin Tolson told a news conference that investigators had not yet determined a motive for Wednesday's mass shooting.

"There's nothing right now that makes sense to any of us," Tolson said.

Dr. Robert Lesslie, 70, and his wife, Barbara, 69, were pronounced dead in their home in Rock Hill along with grandchildren Adah Lesslie, 9, and Noah Lesslie, 5, the York County coroner's office said.

A man who had been working at the Lesslie home, James Lewis, 38, from Gaston, was found shot to death outside. A sixth victim, Robert Shook, 38, of Cherryville, North Carolina, was flown to a Charlotte hospital, where he was in critical condition "fighting hard for his life," said a cousin, Heather Smith Thompson.

At Thursday's news conference, Tolson played audio of two 911 calls, the first from an HVAC company that employed Lewis and Shook. One of the men, the caller said, had called him "screaming" and saying that he had been shot, and that his coworker was shot and "unresponsive."

"I think there's been a bad shooting," a different man said in a second 911 call, saying he was outside cutting his grass and heard "about 20" shots fired at the Lesslie home before seeing someone leave the house.

Tolson said evidence at the scene led authorities to Adams as a suspect. He said they went to Adams' parents' home, evacuated them and then tried to talk Adams out of the house. Eventually, they found him dead of a gunshot wound to the head.

Tolson said both a .45-caliber and 9mm weapon were used in Wednesday's shooting.

A person briefed on the investigation told The Associated Press earlier Thursday that Adams had been treated by Lesslie, who lived near his parents' home. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak publicly.

However, Tolson would not confirm that Adams had been the doctor's patient.

Lesslie worked for decades as an emergency room doctor, board-certified in both emergency medicine and occupational medicine and serving as emergency department medical director for nearly 15 years at



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Rock Hill General Hospital, according to his website.

He and his wife had four children and nine grandchildren, and were actively involved with their church, as well as with Camp Joy, which works with children with disabilities and where Lesslie served as camp physician for a week each summer. On Thursday, Tolson said the family had asked that any memorials be made to the camp.

Adams, 32, played in 78 NFL games over six seasons for six teams. He joined the 49ers in 2010 as a seventh-round draft pick out of South Carolina State, and though he rarely started, he went on to play for New England, Seattle, Oakland and the New York Jets before finishing his career with the Atlanta Falcons in 2015.

As a rookie, Adams suffered a severe ankle injury and never played for the 49ers again. Later, with the Raiders, he had two concussions over three games in 2012.

Whether he suffered long-lasting concussion-related injuries wasn't immediately clear. Adams would not have been eligible for testing as part of a broad settlement between the league and former players over such injuries, because he hadn't retired by 2014.

Adams' father told a Charlotte television station he blamed football for his son's problems, which might have led him to commit Wednesday's violence.

"I can say he's a good kid — he was a good kid, and I think the football messed him up," Alonzo Adams told WCNC-TV.

Deputies were called around 4:45 p.m. Wednesday to the Lesslies' home, and evacuated the neighbors as they searched for hours for a suspect.

Allison Hope, who lives across from Adams' parents' home, about a mile from the Lesslies, said police allowed her to return home around 9 p.m. Wednesday. Moments later, a vehicle pulled into the Adams' driveway and law enforcement quickly surrounded the property.

She said they spent hours negotiating with Phillip Adams, using a loudspeaker and sending in a robot to scan the house. She said authorities repeatedly asked Adams to come out, and promised to get his disabled mother out safely, before Adams shot himself.

"This is something I can't grasp yet. I can't put it all together and I'm trying to," Hope said.

Adams often isolated himself, even as a player, his agent, Scott Casterline, told the AP. Casterline said he spoke regularly with Adams' father, who left him a voicemail Wednesday morning.

"This is so unlike him. He had to not be in his right mind, obviously," Casterline said, adding that Adams struggled away from the game.

"He had an injury his rookie year. Some teams wrote him off and he had that stigma of a guy who was hurt," Casterline said. "It was hard for him to walk away from the game, especially a guy as dedicated as he was."

"We encouraged him to explore all of his disability options and he wouldn't do it," Casterline added. "I knew he was hurting and missing football but he wouldn't take health tips offered to him. He said he would but he wouldn't."

"I felt he was lost without football, somewhat depressed."

Cowboys cornerback Kevin Smith, who trained Adams, said the former NFL player had opened a shop selling smoothies before COVID-19 hit. Both he and Casterline emphasized Adams didn't drink or do drugs.

Lesslie founded two urgent care centers and had traveled the country giving lectures to an emergency nurses' group, his website said. He wrote a weekly medical column for The Charlotte Observer and became a prolific author, writing several volumes with advice on how to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and lose weight.

The physician also penned a number of collections of what he termed "inspiring true stories" from his work.

"I know without a doubt that life is fragile," Lesslie wrote in one of those books, "Angels in the ER."

"I am convinced we need to take the time to say the things we deeply feel to the people we deeply care about."

A statement from the Lesslie family said they were "in the midst of the unimaginable" but felt assured by faith that their "hearts are bent toward forgiveness and peace."

## **GLAAD Media Awards presenters support transgender athletes**

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Schitt's Creek" and "The Boys in the Band" were winners at the GLAAD Media Awards, which included soccer's Ashlyn Harris and Ali Krieger calling for transgender students to be accepted as "part of the team" in sports.

Harris and Krieger, spouses who play for the Orlando Pride and were on the 2019 World Cup-winning U.S. women's national team, presented an award in Thursday's virtual ceremony to the film "Happiest Season," about a lesbian romance.

The couple drew attention to transgender athletes amid widespread efforts to restrict their participation, including a recently signed Mississippi bill that bans them from competing on girls or women's sports teams. It becomes law July 1.

"Trans students want the opportunity to play sports for the same reason other kids do: to be a part of a team where they feel like they belong," Krieger said.

Added Harris: "We shouldn't discriminate against kids and ban them from playing because they're transgender."

"Star Trek: Discovery," "I May Destroy You" and "A Little Late with Lilly Singh" were among the other projects honored in the pre-taped ceremony hosted by Niecy Nash. It's available on Hulu through June.

The GLAAD awards, in their 32nd year, recognize what the media advocacy organization calls "fair, accurate, and inclusive" depictions of LGBTQ people and issues. Presenters and winners in this year's event highlighted priorities including the importance of solidarity and self-respect.

"Friends, I'm so proud to stand with the LGBTQ community tonight, just as the LGBTQ community stands with Black and diverse communities," said Sterling K. Brown, who presented the outstanding documentary award to "Disclosure."

The "This Is Us" star, citing the Black Lives Matter and Black Trans Lives Matter movements, said that "we're going to keep spreading that message of unity and justice until every one of us is safe to live the lives we love."

JoJo Siwa, the teenage YouTube personality and performer, presented the award for outstanding children's programming to "The Not-Too-Late Show with Elmo." She said in January that she's part of the LGBTQ community.

"I have the best, most amazing, wonderful girlfriend in the entire world who makes me so, so, so happy and that's all that matters," Siwa said. "It's really cool that kids all around the world who look up to me can now see that loving who you want to love is totally awesome" and should be celebrated.

Other awards went to Sam Smith, who was honored as outstanding music artist for the album "Love Goes"; Chika, named breakthrough music artist for "Industry Games," and "We're Here" won outstanding reality program.

Cast members from "Glee," including Chris Colfer, Amber Riley and Jane Lynch, paid tribute to Naya Rivera and her character in the series, gay cheerleader Santana Lopez. Rivera, 33, died in an accidental drowning in July 2020.

## **Biden orders gun control actions — but they show his limits**

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, AAMER MADHANI and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden put on a modest White House ceremony Thursday to announce a half-dozen executive actions to combat what he called an "epidemic and an international embarrassment" of gun violence in America.

But he said much more is needed. And while Biden had proposed the most ambitious gun-control agenda of any modern presidential candidate, his moves underscored his limited power to act alone on guns with

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difficult politics impeding legislative action on Capitol Hill.

Biden's new steps include a move to crack down on "ghost guns," homemade firearms that lack serial numbers used to trace them and are often purchased without a background check. He's also moving to tighten regulations on pistol-stabilizing braces like the one used in Boulder, Colorado, in a shooting last month that left 10 dead.

The president's actions delivered on a pledge he made last month to take what he termed immediate "common-sense steps" to address gun violence, after a series of mass shootings drew renewed attention to the issue. His announcement came the day after yet another episode, this one in South Carolina, where five people were killed.

But his orders stop well short of some of his biggest campaign-trail proposals, including his promise to ban the importation of assault weapons, his embrace of a voluntary gun buyback program and a pledge to provide resources for the Justice Department and FBI to better enforce the nation's current gun laws and track firearms.

And while gun control advocates lauded Thursday's moves as a strong first step in combating gun violence, they, too, acknowledged that action from lawmakers on Capitol Hill is needed to make lasting change.

"Some of the other big-ticket items are legislative," said Josh Horowitz, executive director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. "And that's going to be very difficult."

Biden mentioned a formidable list of priorities he'd like to see Congress tackle, including passing the Violence Against Women Act, eliminating lawsuit exemptions for gun manufacturers and banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. He also called on the Senate to take up House-passed measures to close background check loopholes.

But with an evenly-divided Senate — and any gun control legislation requiring 60 votes to pass — Democrats would have to keep every member of their narrow majority on board while somehow adding 10 Republicans.

Horowitz said "it's hard to think" who those Republicans would be, and though that doesn't mean it's impossible to move on gun control "we're going to have to change some of the people who are in the Senate."

Gun control advocates say the National Rifle Association's legal and financial issues have greatly weakened the once mighty pro-gun lobby and helped turn the public tide in favor of some restrictions on gun ownership. They say a shift in public perception will eventually trickle down to Republicans on Capitol Hill.

But so far that hasn't materialized in votes. The House passed two bills in March largely along party lines that would expand and strengthen background checks for gun sales and transfers, a move that has broad public support. But most Republicans argue that strengthened checks could take guns away from law-abiding gun owners.

A small, bipartisan group of senators is trying to find compromise based on a 2013 deal that would have expanded background checks to gun shows and internet sales but was rejected then by five votes. Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut said at a rally in his state last week that he is talking to his colleagues every day to come a deal, and that he believes the public is more supportive than ever of changes.

Murphy acknowledged last weekend on NBC's "Meet the Press" that the background check bill that passed the House isn't likely to succeed in the Senate, but he suggested a more narrowly tailored bill might, and said he was working to build on that legislation to win over Republican support.

"You are going to have to make some reasonable accommodations if you want 10 Republican votes. And I am already talking to Republicans who are not unwilling to sit down at the table," he said.

Even some of the limited moves Biden took Thursday had already been making their way through the bureaucracy.

The federal government has been working on a proposed rule that would change the definition of a firearm to include lower receivers, the essential piece of a semiautomatic rifle, in an effort to combat the proliferation of "ghost guns" and stave off losing court battles on the issue.

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The process started in the waning months of the Trump administration, according to four people familiar with the matter. Justice Department leaders and officials at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives had been working on language for a proposed rule since at least summer 2020, they said.

The proposal had gone through several layers of review by agency attorneys by last fall, and ATF officials have met with gun manufacturers and others to discuss the possibility of expanding the definition of a firearm, the people said.

They could not publicly discuss the details of the process and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

While Biden said the moves he took Thursday were just the beginning of his administration's actions on guns, it's not known what further steps he'll be willing — or able — to take.

With Biden already focused on passing his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package, after delivering a massive COVID-19 relief bill, it's unclear how much political capital he has to spend to get any gun-control bills across the finish line. Asked last month if he felt he had the political sway to pass new gun laws, Biden told reporters: "I don't know. I haven't done any counting yet."

Some activists, while they praised Biden for his executive actions Thursday, said they wanted to see him more actively involved in the fight on Capitol Hill.

"I think he needs to engage directly and I think he needs to be counting the votes. I'm not sure what he's waiting for," said Igor Volsky, executive director of Guns Down America.

Volsky said his group would like to see Biden lay out a comprehensive package of reforms focused on gun violence, similar to what the administration has done on immigration. And he said Biden "could do more in using the presidential bully pulpit" to communicate with the public about the need for gun control measures and to pressure Congress to act.

"As he pointed out on the campaign trail, repeatedly, there's no time to wait to act on this issue. So my view is that this should be a priority for him," Volsky said.

## Grim view of global future offered in intelligence report

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. intelligence officials are painting a dark picture of the world's future, writing in a report released Thursday that the coronavirus pandemic has deepened economic inequality, strained government resources and fanned nationalist sentiments.

Those assessments are included in a Global Trends report by the government's National Intelligence Council, a document produced every four years. This year's report is designed to help policymakers and citizens anticipate the economic, environmental, technological and demographic forces likely to shape the world through the next 20 years.

The document focuses heavily on the impact of the pandemic, calling it the "most significant, singular global disruption since World War II, with health, economic, political, and security implications that will ripple for years to come."

Nations in different parts of the world set new records Thursday for COVID-19 deaths and new infections, underscoring the lingering global toll of the virus.

"COVID-19 has shaken long-held assumptions about resilience and adaptation and created new uncertainties about the economy, governance, geopolitics, and technology," the report says.

The document finds cause for concern in virtually all aspects of life.

It warns, for instance, that the effects of climate change are likely to worsen the problem of food and water insecurity in poor countries and hasten global migration. Though health, education and household prosperity have made historic improvements in recent decades, continued progress will be hard to sustain because of "headwinds" not only from the effects of the pandemic but also aging populations and "potentially slower global economic growth."

Advances in technology have the potential to address problems including climate change and disease, but can also provoke new tensions, the report says.



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"State and nonstate rivals will vie for leadership and dominance in science and technology with potentially cascading risks and implications for economic, military, and societal security," the report says.

The report also warns of eroding trust in government and institutions and of a "trust gap" between the general public and the better informed and educated parts of the population.

## Rose torches tough Augusta for 65 and 4-shot Masters lead

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Seven holes into the Masters, Justin Rose was 2-over par and in no position to panic.

He knew Augusta National in April was no picnic compared with the last one in November. He figured if he could get back to around even par by the end of the day he would be fine.

Rose never expected his best score in his 59 rounds at Augusta National.

No one could have seen it coming, either.

Rose made seven birdies and an eagle during a torrid 10-hole stretch for an opening 7-under 65, giving him a four-shot lead Thursday in conditions that might only get tougher the rest of the way.

"It's incredible," Rose said. "It's a good reminder that you just never know what can happen out there."

It started with a nice hop off the mounds left of the green on the par-5 eighth that set up a 10-foot eagle. Only two of his birdie putts were outside 8 feet. He holed a 12-foot par putt on the one green he missed. Not bad for a 40-year-old from England playing for the first time in a month while resting an ailing back.

Twice a runner-up, including a playoff loss to Sergio Garcia four years ago, Rose tied a Masters record by taking at least a share of first-round lead for the fourth time. The other to do that was Jack Nicklaus. The difference? Nicklaus went on to win two of his six green jackets from that position.

Brian Harman, the last player to get into the 88-man field, and Hideki Matsuyama were wrapping up their rounds of 69 about the time Rose began on a course that was dry and crusty, on greens that were so fast there were splotches of brown.

Among those at 70 were former Masters champion Patrick Reed and Masters newcomer Will Zalatoris. Jordan Spieth overcame a triple bogey from the trees on No. 9 and got a huge break when his chip on the 15th banged into the pin for eagle instead of running down into the water. He shot 71.

Missing were a slew of red numbers on the leaderboard in conditions so difficult that Garcia said after a 76, "I feel like I just came out of the ring with Evander Holyfield."

Five months ago, in the first Masters held in November because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the turf was so soft that 53 players were under par after the opening round.

Rose shot 65 on a day so tough only 12 players broke par, and the average score was 74.5.

British Open champion Shane Lowry chipped from the back of the 15th green into the water in front of the green. He escaped with bogey and managed a 71. U.S. Amateur champion Tyler Strafaci hit a 60-foot putt from behind the ninth green that wound up 75 feet away on the other side.

Defending champion Dustin Johnson, who set the record last year at 20-under 268, failed to break par for the first time since the opening round in 2018. He three-putted for double bogey on the 18th for a 74.

"I feel sorry for the guys' first Masters in November, and then they're walking out there today wondering what the hell is going on," Kevin Kisner said after a hard-earned 72.

This was no surprise. Augusta National has not had rain in more than a week, and players could not recall the last time greens were this fast during practice rounds, much less with a scorecard in hand on Thursday.

"It's my 10th year, but I've never seen the greens so firm and fast," Matsuyama said. "So it was like a new course for me playing today, and I was fortunate to get it around well."

And what to say of Rose? Even in more forgiving conditions, he had never done better than 67.

"I didn't feel like today was the day for a 65, if I'm honest," Rose said.

No one needed convincing, least of all Bryson DeChambeau and Rory McIlroy, among top players who struggled with the wind and had just as many problems when the ball was on the ground.

DeChambeau, the U.S. Open champion who has been licking his chops about bringing his super-sized

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game to Augusta National, didn't make a birdie until the 15th hole and shot 76, his highest score as a pro at the Masters. Patrick Cantlay hit into the water on both par 3s on the back nine and shot 79.

"Guys are going to shoot themselves out of the golf tournament on day one," Webb Simpson said after a late double bogey forced him to settle for a 70.

McIlroy, needing a green jacket to complete the career Grand Slam, hit his father with a shot on the seventh hole. That was about the most interesting moment in his round of 76. Lee Westwood, who had a pair of runner-up finishes in the Florida Swing, had a 78.

Rose looked as though he might be headed that direction. He made a soft bogey on No. 1. He three-putted across the green on No. 7. He was 2 over, though not ready to panic. He knew it was tough. He also knew he was headed in the wrong direction.

"You can't win the golf tournament today. Even with a 65 you can't win it today," Rose said. "You can only probably lose it today, obviously. I reset just prior to that and thought if I can get myself back around even par, that would be a good day's work."

He hit 5-wood into 10 feet for eagle and a 9-iron to the dangerous left pin on No. 9 to 4 feet for birdie. He holed a 25-foot putt on the 10th and his 8-iron to 6 feet on No. 12. It never stopped. Even from the first cut of rough on the 17th, his wedge settled 4 feet from the hole.

He finished going over the details of that incredible stretch, smiled and said, "Sounds easy."

It looked that way. But only for him.

## **EXPLAINER: Courtroom technology on display in Chauvin trial**

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The foundation of the case against the former Minneapolis police officer charged with killing George Floyd is a mountain of video evidence, but presenting that to jurors isn't as easy as pushing play.

Over and over, prosecutors have shown video from surveillance cameras, bystanders' cellphones and police body and dash cameras, and have asked witnesses to annotate footage or photographs and narrate the action on screen.

Large screens or projectors are fixtures of modern courtrooms, alongside software similar to PowerPoint designed for courtroom presentation of videos, photos and other evidence. But the quality of that technology and attorneys' use of it varies.

### **WHAT'S IN THE COURTROOM?**

The courtroom being used for Derek Chauvin's trial is the largest and only one in the Hennepin County courthouse equipped with the tools to present and annotate video and other visual evidence.

Jurors are able to see evidence on three monitors.

A touchscreen monitor is positioned at the witness stand. Prosecutors have been asking witnesses to circle themselves or point out details using a stylus.

Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill has a monitor at his bench, and he's able to control when a witness' annotations are visible to the courtroom.

Prosecutors have played dozens of video clips from bystanders' cellphones, the cameras Chauvin and other officers wore, and surveillance cameras on the street and inside the neighborhood store where Floyd was suspected of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill.

They have used a picture-in-picture feature to play cellphone videos of Floyd and the officers beside an uninterrupted feed of the street from a surveillance camera, giving jurors a view from multiple perspectives and clarifying the context of the bystander videos.

The defense has yet to begin presenting its case but Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, has indicated he will also rely on video evidence to show his client is not guilty.

Cahill and the attorneys also use a system of headphones and microphones that allows them to speak privately and remain socially distanced, instead of approaching the judge's bench.

### **IS SUCH COURTROOM TECHNOLOGY TYPICAL?**

The pandemic has forced many courts to quickly embrace technology, and some hope those positive experiences will inspire more attorneys to use tech tools as they return to courtrooms.

But many attorneys don't have the time and resources to prepare a presentation to the level of detail seen in the Chauvin case, said Jessica Silbey, a professor at the Boston University School of Law.

Michael Moore, the Beadle County State's Attorney in eastern South Dakota, said cost is the top deterrent for many attorneys, followed by discomfort.

Moore said he frequently uses software to create timelines, display documents and other visual evidence in cases. He believes it's easier for jurors to follow his arguments and it saves time at trial compared to old-school handouts of photos or documents.

But more often than not, Moore said, courtrooms are not "wired" for lawyers who embrace such tools. Moore brings his own flat screen monitor to some trials to ensure jurors have a good view.

It's difficult to know how many courthouses in the U.S. can accommodate such technology.

Fred Lederer, director of the Center for Legal & Court Technology at William & Mary Law School, said decisions about purchasing the equipment — which has been around since the early 1990s — often involve judges and court administrators, local elected officials and IT staff, and can be "immensely complicated."

#### WHY DO THESE TOOLS MATTER?

Prosecutors made no secret of their strategy to keep jurors' focus on video evidence capturing Chauvin's actions. During opening statements, prosecutors played the full video of the encounter and emphasized that the officer pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds.

Lawyers arguing a case involving critical video evidence cannot assume that everyone views it through the same lens. Silbey said. They have to focus jurors' attention by slowing footage down, circling or highlighting an event, and narrating what is happening.

"Lawyers make a mistake if they assume people see what they see and that the video speaks for itself," Silbey said.

People understand and remember information more easily when it's accompanied by a visual aid, Lederer said.

"Presenting information visually enables judges and jurors to better understand what's happening," he said. "And from a lawyer's standpoint, if you have good evidence, you can persuade better."

Attorneys have to walk a rigid line, though. One memorable misstep triggered a New Jersey Supreme Court review and led justices to overturn a bank robbery conviction in January.

The prosecutor improperly used an image of Jack Nicholson in "The Shining" in a slide displayed during her closing argument, the court found.

"Visual aids such as PowerPoint presentations must adhere to the same standards as counsels' spoken words," the opinion read.

## Amazon takes early lead as union vote count gets underway

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

Vote counting in the union push at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, is underway but a winner may not be determined until Friday.

By Thursday evening, the count was tilting heavily against the union, with 1,100 workers rejecting it and 463 voting in favor. The count will resume Friday morning.

The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which is organizing the Bessemer workers, said that 3,215 votes were sent in — about 55% of the nearly 6,000 workers who were eligible to vote. The union said hundreds of those votes were contested, mostly by Amazon, for various reasons such as the voter didn't work there or doesn't qualify to vote. The union would not specify how many votes were being contested.

The National Labor Relations Board is conducting the vote count in Birmingham, Alabama. In order to determine a winner, the margin of victory must be more than the number of contested votes, otherwise a hearing would be held on whether or not to open the contested votes and count them toward the final tally.

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RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum struck a grim tone Thursday in a statement ahead of the results: "Our system is broken, Amazon took full advantage of that, and we will be calling on the labor board to hold Amazon accountable for its illegal and egregious behavior during the campaign. But make no mistake about it; this still represents an important moment for working people and their voices will be heard."

Amazon could not be reached for immediate comment.

The vote itself has garnered national attention, with professional athletes, Hollywood stars and even President Joe Biden weighing in on the side of the union.

If the union wins, it would be the first in Amazon's 26-year history. But the vote also has wide-reaching implications beyond Amazon, which is now the second-largest private employer in the U.S. after retailer Walmart.

Whatever the outcome, labor organizers hope Bessemer will inspire thousands of workers nationwide — and not just at Amazon — to consider unionizing. For Amazon, which has more than 950,000 workers in the U.S. and has fought hard against organizing attempts, a union loss could chill similar efforts around the company.

The labor board has already reviewed each vote, reading names and signatures on the envelopes with representatives from Amazon and the retail union, both of which had a chance to contest those votes. Contested votes were put to the side and not opened.

Now the board is opening the uncontested votes from their envelopes and counting "yes" or "no" votes.

Even if there's a clear winner, the battle may be far from over. If workers vote against forming a union, the retail union could file objections accusing Amazon of tainting the election in some way, which could lead to a redo of the election if the labor board agrees. Amazon could file its own objections if the workers vote to form a union.

## 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 cliff dwellings 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 was the latest cabinet official to visit Bears Ears National Monument — and the first Indigenous one.

Haaland, a member of Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, met with tribes and elected officials at Bears Ears as she prepares to submit recommendations on whether to reverse President Donald Trump's decision to downsize that site and Grand Staircase-Escalante, another Utah national monument.

"I know that decisions about public lands are incredibly impactful to the people who live nearby. But not just to us, not to just the folks who are here today, but people for generations to come," Haaland told reporters during a news conference in the town of Blanding. "It's our obligation to make sure that we protect lands for future generations so they can have the same experiences that the governor and I experienced today."

The visit underscores Haaland's 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



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natural resources.

Haaland faces competing interests: Tribes across the U.S. hailed her confirmation as a chance to have their voices heard and their land and rights protected, while Republican leaders have 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 looked 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 had 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 hoped Haaland's visit would at least be a step toward a more certainty.

"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 met with them, along with Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson and U.S. Rep. Blake Moore during her visit.

The Utah delegation called on Biden to work with Congress and others toward a permanent legislative fix regarding the monuments' borders and management, The Salt Lake Tribune reported.

"Can we find the solutions? I think there is an opportunity for that, to provide the resources that are needed," Cox told reporters Thursday. "But all of those things can only be done through legislation. It can't be done through an executive order."

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.

Since Trump downsized the monuments, more visitors have come to the sites and put natural and cultural resources at risk, said Phil Francis, chair of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks.

"Every day that goes by leaves the irreplaceable resources at Bears Ears and Grand Staircase vulnerable to damage or destruction from looting, vandalism or other threats as a result of lack of protective management," Francis said ahead of Haaland's visit.

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.

The 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 Biden's administration to "go back and rub salt in the wounds" by reversing Trump's action.

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."

**Expert: Lack of oxygen killed George Floyd, not drugs**

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By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — George Floyd died of a lack of oxygen from being pinned to the pavement with a knee on his neck, medical experts testified at former Officer Derek Chauvin's murder trial Thursday, emphatically rejecting the defense theory that Floyd's drug use and underlying health problems killed him.

"A healthy person subjected to what Mr. Floyd was subjected to would have died," said prosecution witness Dr. Martin Tobin, a lung and critical care specialist at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital and Loyola University's medical school in Illinois.

Using easy-to-understand language to explain medical concepts and even loosening his necktie to illustrate a point, Tobin told the jury that Floyd's breathing was severely constricted while Chauvin and two other Minneapolis officers held the 46-year-old Black man down on his stomach last May with his hands cuffed behind him and his face jammed against the ground.

The lack of oxygen resulted in brain damage and caused his heart to stop, the witness said.

Tobin, analyzing images of the three officers restraining Floyd for what prosecutors say was almost 9 1/2 minutes, testified that Chauvin's knee was "virtually on the neck" more than 90% of the time.

He said several other factors also made it difficult for Floyd to breathe: officers lifting up on the suspect's handcuffs, the hard pavement, his prone position, his turned head and a knee on his back.

Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd's neck for 3 minutes, 2 seconds, after Floyd took his last breath, Tobin said. After that last breath, Floyd's oxygen levels went down to zero and Floyd "reached the point where there was not one ounce of oxygen left in the body," he said.

As prosecutors repeatedly played a video clip of Floyd on the ground, Tobin pinpointed what he said was a change in the man's face that told him Floyd was dead. That moment happened around five minutes after police began holding Floyd down.

"At the beginning, you can see he's conscious, you can see slight flickering, and then it disappears," Tobin said. He explained: "That's the moment the life goes out of his body."

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death May 25. Floyd was arrested outside a neighborhood market after being accused of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill. Bystander video of Floyd crying that he couldn't breathe as onlookers yelled at the white officer to get off him sparked protests and scattered violence around the U.S.

Tobin also testified that just because Floyd was talking and can be seen moving on video doesn't mean he was breathing adequately. He said a leg movement seen in the footage was an involuntary sign of a fatal brain injury, and that a person can continue to speak until the airway narrows to 15%, after which "you are in deep trouble."

Officers can be heard on video telling Floyd that if he can talk, he can breathe.

During cross-examination, Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson pressed Tobin on that common misconception, pointing to earlier testimony that Minneapolis officers are trained that if people can speak, they can breathe.

Nelson has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do and that Floyd's death was caused by illegal drugs and underlying medical problems, including high blood pressure and heart disease. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Tobin said he analyzed Floyd's respiration as seen on body-camera video and explained that while fentanyl typically cuts the rate of respiration 40%, Floyd's breathing was "right around normal" just before he lost consciousness.

Tobin also said the high blood level of carbon dioxide measured in the emergency room can be explained by Floyd not breathing for nearly 10 minutes before paramedics began artificial respiration, as opposed to his breathing being suppressed by fentanyl.

Another prosecution witness, Dr. Bill Smock, an expert on deaths from asphyxia, backed up Tobin's assessment. Smock said Floyd did not have symptoms of a fentanyl overdose such as constricted pupils and decreased breathing. He said Floyd's actions were the opposite, because he was pleading for air.

"That is not a fentanyl overdose. That is somebody begging to breathe," said Smock, the police surgeon for the Louisville, Kentucky, department and a former emergency room doctor. He said Floyd died of "po-

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sitional asphyxia," a lack of oxygen because of the position of the body.

On cross-examination, Nelson questioned Smock about Floyd's history of heart disease, getting Smock to agree that a struggle with police could put stress on the heart and that shortness of breath could be a sign of a heart attack.

But when questioned again by the prosecution, Smock said there was no evidence that Floyd had a heart attack or sudden death from arrhythmia, saying his death was caused by a gradual decrease of oxygen over several minutes "because of the pressure being applied to his back and neck."

Also Thursday, a forensic toxicologist said that he tested blood drawn from Floyd at the hospital, as well as urine from his autopsy, and found a "very low" amount of methamphetamine. Daniel Isenschmid said fentanyl and a byproduct of its breakdown also were in Floyd's system.

Isenschmid put the level of fentanyl in Floyd's blood at 11 nanograms per milliliter. For perspective, he said that testing of more than 2,000 people arrested for driving under the influence of fentanyl revealed an average concentration of 9.59, and dozens of them had levels higher than Floyd's — and survived.

On cross-examination, Nelson suggested there was no way to know how much fentanyl Floyd had ingested, and Isenschmid agreed. The defense attorney also said it's impossible to know the concentration of fentanyl in street drugs.

"Every single pill you take, it becomes a unique experience for the person, right?" Isenschmid agreed.

In his own turn on the stand, Tobin used simple language, explaining that when the airway narrows, breathing becomes far more difficult, like "breathing through a drinking straw."

At one point, the doctor loosened his tie and placed his hands on his own neck and the back of his head to demonstrate how the airway works, inviting the jurors to examine their own necks. Most of them did so, though the judge later told them they didn't have to.

The expert calculated that at times when Chauvin was in a near-vertical position, with his toes off the ground, half of Chauvin's body weight with his gear included — or 91.5 pounds (41.5 kilograms) — was directly on Floyd's neck.

He said it appeared that Floyd was getting enough oxygen to keep his brain alive for about the first five minutes, because he was still speaking. Tobin said that where Chauvin had his knee after the five-minute mark was not that important, because at that point Floyd had already suffered brain damage.

Chauvin's attorney has repeatedly shown the jury still images from the video that he said depicted Chauvin's knee on Floyd's shoulder blade, not his neck. But nearly all of those images were captured after the five-minute mark, according to the time stamps.

## Northern Ireland leaders seek calm after violence escalates

By PETER MORRISON and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Authorities in Northern Ireland sought to restore calm Thursday after Protestant and Catholic youths in Belfast hurled bricks, fireworks and gasoline bombs at police and each other. It was the worst mayhem in a week of street violence in the region, where Britain's exit from the European Union has unsettled an uneasy political balance.

Crowds including children as young as 12 or 13 clashed across a concrete "peace wall" in west Belfast that separates a British loyalist Protestant neighborhood from an Irish nationalist Catholic area. Police fired rubber bullets at the crowd, and nearby a city bus was hijacked and set on fire.

Northern Ireland has seen sporadic outbreaks of street violence since the 1998 Good Friday peace accord ended "the Troubles" — decades of Catholic-Protestant bloodshed over the status of the region in which more than 3,000 people died.

But Police Service of Northern Ireland Assistant Chief Constable Jonathan Roberts said Wednesday's mayhem "was at a scale we have not seen in recent years." He said 55 police officers had been injured over several nights of disorder and it was lucky no one had been seriously hurt or killed.

There was a further outbreak of violence Thursday night in the nationalist Springfield Road area of Belfast, where youths threw stones at police, who responded with a water cannon blast.

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Britain's split from the EU has highlighted the contested status of 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, an EU member.

Unrest has erupted over the past week — largely in loyalist, Protestant areas — amid rising tensions over post-Brexit trade rules and worsening relations between the parties in the Protestant-Catholic power-sharing Belfast government.

U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned the unrest, saying “the way to resolve differences is through dialogue, not violence or criminality.” He sent Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis to Belfast for talks with the region's political leaders.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the Biden administration was concerned by the violence, “and we join the British, Irish and Northern Irish leaders in their calls for calm.”

Meanwhile, Northern Ireland's Belfast-based assembly and government held emergency meetings Thursday and called for an end to the violence.

First Minister Arlene Foster, of the pro-British Democratic Unionist Party, warned that “when politics are perceived to fail, those who fill the vacuum cause despair.” Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, of Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein, called the violence “utterly deplorable.”

Despite the united message, Northern Ireland's politicians are deeply divided, and events on the street are in many cases beyond their control.

As many predicted it would, the situation has been destabilized by Britain's departure from the EU — after almost 50 years of membership — that became final on Dec. 31.

A post-Brexit 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.

But unionists says the new checks amount to the creation of a border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K. — something they fear undermines the region's place in the United Kingdom.

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

Some politicians and police have accused outlawed paramilitary groups — which remain a force in working class communities — of inciting young people to cause mayhem. They expressed outrage that a new generation was being exposed to, and pulled into, violence.

Northern Ireland Justice Minister Naomi Long, from the centrist Alliance Party, said she was horrified to watch video of adults “standing by cheering and goading and encouraging young people on as they wreaked havoc in their own community.”

“This is nothing short of child abuse,” she said.

Both Britain and the EU have expressed concerns about how the Brexit agreement is working, and the Democratic Unionist Party wants it scrapped. But any long-term solution will require political commitment that appears in short supply. Britain and the EU are squabbling over the new trade arrangements and show little of the goodwill needed to make their new relationship work. Sinn Fein and the DUP have blamed one another for the deteriorating situation.

Katy Hayward, a politics professor at Queen's University Belfast and senior fellow of the U.K. in a Changing Europe think tank, said unionists felt 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. “It's really easy to see how it could get worse.”



## US suicides dropped last year, defying pandemic expectations

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The number of U.S. suicides fell nearly 6% last year amid the coronavirus pandemic — the largest annual decline in at least four decades, according to preliminary government data.

Death certificates are still coming in and the count could rise. But officials expect a substantial decline will endure, despite worries that COVID-19 could lead to more suicides.

It is hard to say exactly why suicide deaths dropped so much, but one factor may be a phenomenon seen in the early stages of wars and national disasters, some experts suggested.

"There's a heroism phase in every disaster period, where we're banding together and expressing lots of messages of support that we're in this together," said Dr. Christine Moutier, chief medical officer of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. "You saw that, at least in the early months of the pandemic."

An increase in the availability of telehealth services and other efforts to turn around the nation's suicide problem may have also contributed, she said.

U.S. suicides steadily rose from the early 2000s until 2018, when the national suicide rate hit its highest level since 1941. The rate finally fell slightly in 2019. Experts credited increased mental health screenings and other suicide prevention efforts.

The number fell further last year, to below 45,000, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a recent report. It was the lowest number of U.S. suicide deaths since 2015.

Many worried that such progress might end when COVID-19 arrived.

The pandemic sparked a wave of business closures. Millions of people were forced to stay at home, many of them alone. In surveys, more Americans reported depression, anxiety and drug and alcohol use. Adding to that dangerous mix, firearm purchases rose 85% in March 2020.

But the spring of last year actually saw the year's most dramatic decline in suicide numbers, said the CDC's Farida Ahmad, the lead author of a recent report in the Journal of the American Medical Association that detailed the decline.

Suicide had been the nation's 10th leading cause of death, but dropped to 11th in 2020. That was mainly due to the arrival of COVID-19, which killed at least 345,000 Americans and became the nation's No. 3 killer. But the decline in suicide deaths also contributed to the ranking fall.

The CDC has not yet reported national suicide rates for 2020, nor has it provided a breakdown of suicides by state, age or race and ethnicity.

Moutier is anxious to see more data. For example, while overall suicides decreased last year, it's possible that suicides by youths and young adults did not, she said.

She's optimistic the recent declines will mark the beginning of a lasting trend. But she also worries there may be a delayed effect on the mental health of many people, as they get past the pandemic's initial threats but sink into grieving the people and things they lost.

"There's sort of an evolution of mental health distress," she said. "It's possible we will see the whole mental health ramifications of this pandemic" later.

## EXPLAINER: Why would an expert witness go without pay?

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Experts in medicine can command thousands of dollars when they testify in American courtrooms, but prosecutors made a point of letting jurors know that Dr. Martin Tobin was not being paid for his appearance Thursday at former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin's murder trial.

Tobin, a lung and critical care specialist at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital and Loyola University's medical school in Illinois, testified that George Floyd died due to a lack of oxygen from being pinned to the pavement with Chauvin's knee on his neck.

After establishing Tobin had more than 40 years of experience, prosecutor Jerry Blackwell asked about

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his work as an expert witness. Tobin estimated that he has testified at about 50 court proceedings, particularly in medical malpractice lawsuits, but never in a criminal case.

That's why, Tobin explained, he was not charging a fee this time.

"Well, when I was asked to do the case, uh, I thought I might have some knowledge that would be helpful to explain how Mr. Floyd died," he said. "And since I'd never done this type of work in this nature before, I decided I didn't wish to be paid for it."

The point immediately struck Rachel Moran, a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minnesota, as an unusual arrangement that could benefit the prosecution team.

She said Blackwell's decision to raise it as he introduced Tobin to the jurors seemed to be clear strategy.

"I think the state is very much getting out in front," she said. "This is a renowned medical expert who's not a hired gun. He's someone who is simply so concerned about this issue, that he's here to share his expertise for free. I think that's exactly how they want to paint him."

Experts will sometimes offer a discounted rate when criminal defendants are struggling financially or because their area of expertise is narrow, Moran said.

She and other experts struggled to name another expert witness for the government who declined payment.

The Chauvin case is unusual in many ways. Some of the prosecuting attorneys also are working for free, and two of the attorneys in the courtroom each day are assistant attorneys general.

Even though paid expert witnesses are the norm in courtrooms, attorneys frequently try to exploit those arrangements. The defense will ask prosecution witnesses how much they were paid and prosecutors do the same to experts presented by the defense.

Disclosing it early during testimony can minimize potential damage to his or her standing with jurors, experts said.

Prosecutors asked other witnesses to tell jurors the fee they received for reviewing case materials and testifying.

Jody Stiger, a Los Angeles Police Department sergeant acting as an expert on police use of force, said he received a flat fee of \$10,000 and another \$2,950 for appearing at trial. Dr. Bill Smock, police surgeon at the Louisville Metro Police Department in Kentucky, also testified Thursday that he charged a \$300 hourly rate.

Laurie Levenson, a professor at Loyola Law School, said the state's decision could have risked another attack from the defense: Arguing that Tobin was so personally invested in the case that he testified for free.

Eric Nelson, Chauvin's defense attorney, did ask Tobin to tell jurors his usual rate as an expert witness — \$500 per hour.

"But you agreed to waive your hourly rate for this time?" Nelson asked. "You felt it was an important case, right?"

"Yes," Tobin said.

Nelson then moved on, using much of his cross-examination to question whether illegal drugs and underlying medical problems caused Floyd's death.

That was a strategic decision too, said John Hollway, associate dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

Trying to suggest an expert witness is biased could be effective or "it could look like you're desperate," Hollway said. "This is why being a trial lawyer is difficult."

## Gaetz associate working toward plea deal with prosecutors

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — An associate of Rep. Matt Gaetz's is working toward a plea deal with federal prosecutors investigating a sex trafficking operation, potentially escalating the legal and political jeopardy facing the Florida congressman.

The revelation that a political ally of Gaetz's, Joel Greenberg, is seeking to strike a plea deal with investigators came during a hearing Thursday at federal court in Orlando. It's a significant step in the case and

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signals that Greenberg could potentially serve as a witness in the Justice Department's investigation into Gaetz.

"I am sure Matt Gaetz is not feeling very comfortable today," Fritz Scheller, a lawyer for Greenberg, said after the hearing.

Federal prosecutors are examining whether Gaetz and Greenberg paid underage girls or offered them gifts in exchange for sex, according to two people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity because they could not discuss details publicly. Gaetz has denied the allegations and insists he will not resign his seat in Congress.

A call to the congressman's cellphone on Thursday yielded a message that he was not accepting calls at this time. He also did not respond to a text message.

When asked directly if Greenberg, a former local tax collector outside Orlando, was cooperating with prosecutors on the Gaetz case, Scheller cited attorney-client privilege. But he said Greenberg's cooperation would likely be contingent on whether it was required by prosecutors to get a plea deal.

"If someone signs a cooperation agreement, they are required to cooperate," Scheller told reporters outside the federal courthouse in Orlando.

Scheller also refused to answer when asked if Greenberg had any incriminating evidence against Gaetz.

"I think if Mr. Greenberg accepts a plea agreement, he will want to show his sense of remorse, which he does have, and his sense of acceptance of responsibility," Scheller said. "He's uniquely situated."

Greenberg's legal problems began last summer when he was arrested on charges of stalking a political opponent. Greenberg mailed fake letters to his opponent's school signed by a nonexistent "very concerned student" who alleged the opponent had engaged in sexual misconduct with another student, according to an indictment from last June.

Last August, Greenberg was charged with sex trafficking a girl between ages 14 and 17 and using a state database to look up information about the girl and other people with whom he was engaged in "sugar daddy" relationships, according to an indictment.

He has pleaded not guilty to the charges. Additional charges accusing Greenberg of embezzling \$400,000 from the Seminole County Tax Collector's office were added last month, according to the indictment.

Greenberg had been scheduled to go to trial in Orlando in June.

U.S. District Judge Gregory Presnell said Thursday that the trial would be pushed back to July if Greenberg is unable to reach a deal with prosecutors by the middle of next month.

Even before his arrest, Greenberg, 36, was a lightning rod for controversy.

He was elected Seminole County's tax collector in 2016, promising to be a breath of fresh air against an incumbent who had been in office for almost three decades.

Months after taking office in 2017, he started allowing employees to carry guns. In late 2017, he pulled over a driver for speeding while wearing a tax collector badge that resembled a police shield. Local prosecutors declined to file charges of impersonating an officer. Not long after that, Greenberg was pulled over for speeding and asked not to be issued a ticket out of "professional courtesy." The officer declined.

In 2018, Greenberg was widely criticized for posting an anti-Muslim tweet. A year later, the Orlando Sentinel revealed that Greenberg had spent \$3.5 million in consultant contracts and salaries to friends and associates, including giving a combined \$644,000 to three of his groomsmen and another \$677,000 to a campaign adviser.

## 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

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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 JUS 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.

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."

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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



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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 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](mailto:Investigative@ap.org)

## Countries worldwide hit new records for virus cases, deaths

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

Ambulances filled with breathless patients lined up in Brazil as nations around the world set new records Thursday for COVID-19 deaths and new coronavirus infections. The disease surged even in some countries that have kept the virus in check.

In the United States, Detroit leaders began making a plan to knock on every door to persuade people to get vaccine shots.

Brazil this week became just the third country, after the U.S. and Peru, to report a 24-hour tally of COVID-19 deaths that exceeded 4,000. India hit a peak of almost 127,000 new cases in 24 hours, and Iran set a new coronavirus infection record for the third straight day, reporting nearly 22,600 new cases.

In the state of Rio de Janeiro, emergency services are under their biggest strain since the pandemic began, with ambulances carrying patients of all ages to overcrowded hospitals struggling to care for everyone. Authorities say over 90% of the state's intensive-care unit beds are taken by COVID-19 patients, and many cities are reporting people dying at home due to lack of available medical treatment.

"We're already living the third wave. We have three times more calls," in comparison with previous waves, said Adriano Pereira, director of the mobile emergency care service in Duque de Caxias, an impoverished city outside Rio.

Brazil's death toll has risen past 340,000, the second-highest total in the world behind the U.S., where nearly 560,000 people have been confirmed killed.

Rio state's 14-day moving average of COVID-19 daily deaths climbed from 112 to 207 between March 1 and April 7, with some health analysts expecting even worse days in the next couple of weeks. Many hospitals warn about the risk of shortages of oxygen and sedatives for intubation.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged people to get vaccinated, writing in a tweet: "Vaccination is among the few ways we have to defeat the virus. If you are eligible for the vaccine, get your shot soon."

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The U.S. has now fully vaccinated nearly 20% of its adult population, and New Mexico became the first state to get shots in the arms of 25% of its residents — milestones that are still far off for many hard-hit countries.

In India, home to 1.4 billion people, only 11 million are fully vaccinated. In Brazil, less than 3% of the country's 210 million people have received both doses, according to Our World in Data, an online research site.

South Korea reported 700 more cases, the highest daily jump since Jan. 5. Health authorities were expected to announce measures to strengthen social distancing following a meeting Friday.

In Thailand, which has reported only 95 deaths during the pandemic, health officials reported the country's first local cases of the coronavirus variant first detected in Britain. The news comes at a time when only 1% of the population has been vaccinated and as Thais prepare to celebrate the traditional Songkran New Year's holiday next week, typically a time of widespread travel.

That variant is more contagious, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said this week that it is now the most common variant in the United States, raising concerns it will drive infections and cause more people to get sick.

Michigan has averaged more than 7,000 new cases a day — a number that makes the state second in the nation behind New York. Michigan also has the highest number of new cases per capita, with 1 of every 203 state residents getting diagnosed with COVID-19 between March 31 and April 7, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

In Detroit, which is about 80% Black, officials said they plan to start visiting homes to talk about the importance of protecting themselves from the virus with vaccinations and how to sign up to receive the shots.

"We're going to knock on every residential door in the city, making sure every Detroiter knows how to make an appointment," Victoria Kovari, an executive assistant to Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, told The Detroit News.

Only 22% of Detroit residents have received at least one vaccine dose compared to 38% for all of Michigan, according to Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services.

Other Midwestern states have seen troubling signs in recent days, including a school district in Iowa where 127 students and five staff members tested positive for the coronavirus or are presumed positive.

In Massachusetts, where the seven-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen to over 2,100 new cases per day, the Massachusetts Public Health Association called on Republican Gov. Charlie Baker to reinstate public health measures. The group urged Baker to limit indoor dining capacity and other indoor activities, saying the rise in cases and hospitalizations followed Baker's decision to loosen those restrictions.

"We are currently in a race between the vaccines and the variants," Carlene Pavlos, the group's executive director said Thursday. "Without these public health measures, even more innocent lives will be needlessly lost."

## **Governments give varying advice on AstraZeneca vaccine**

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — In Spain, residents now have to be over 60 to get an AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine. In Belgium, over 55. In the United Kingdom, authorities recommend the shot not be given to adults under 30 where possible, and Australia's government announced similar limits Thursday to AstraZeneca shots for those under 50.

A patchwork of advice was emerging from governments across Europe and farther afield, a day after the European Union's drug regulator said there was a "possible link" between the AstraZeneca vaccine and a rare clotting disorder while reiterating the vaccine is safe and effective.

Regulators in the United Kingdom and the EU both stressed that the benefits of receiving the vaccine continue to outweigh the risks for most people, and the EU agency maintained its guidance that the vaccine can be used in all adults. But experts fear the confusing messages about the vaccine could still dampen enthusiasm for it at a time when Europe and many other parts of the world are facing surging cases.

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Experts hammered home the rarity of the clots Thursday.

"The risks appear to be extremely low from this very rare side effect," Anthony R. Cox, of the University of Birmingham's School of Pharmacy, told the BBC. "I mean it's the equivalent of the risk of dying in the bath, drowning in the bath, for example, it's that rare, or a plane landing on your house."

Dr. Sabine Straus, chair of the EU regulator's 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.

The EU is trying, but so far failing, to avoid different policies among its 27 nations, which all look to the European Medicines Agency for guidance. Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides called Wednesday evening for a coherent approach to ensure that "on the basis of the same set of evidence, similar decisions are taken in different member states."

News of the tiny risk already is already having an effect. In Croatia, the government said that one in four people due to get an AstraZeneca shot Thursday didn't show up. Poland, too, has also seen people cancel or not appear for appointments to get the vaccine.

French general practitioner Dr. Joel Valendoff said many of his patients were still coming to get their shot, but many others were canceling.

When vaccines first became available, "I was refusing people because I had a lot of demand and not enough vaccines. Today I am facing the opposite. I have vaccines but not enough volunteers."

Mbaye Thiam, a 59-year-old Parisian, was among those who got vaccinated.

"I am closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation throughout the world. I am not worried. In an exceptional situation we need exceptional measures," he said. "It is true that the vaccine was created in a record time, but the world has stopped and we need solutions to make it start again, and the vaccine is one of the solutions."

European Commission spokesman Stefan De Keersmaecker said the EMA's findings were based on its stringent monitoring system and that should promote trust among the bloc's 27 member states.

"We want to avoid, of course, a vaccination hesitancy," he said.

Any such reluctance is worrying since experts say the shots are key to stamping out the coronavirus pandemic, but AstraZeneca's role is especially vital. The vaccine, which is cheaper and easier to store than many others, is critical to immunization campaigns in Europe and the U.K. and is also a pillar of the U.N.-backed program known as COVAX that aims to get vaccines to some of the world's poorest countries.

John Nkengasong, the top official with the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said his group is not issuing new recommendations and that the overarching message from the U.K. and EU regulators was clear.

"The benefits outweigh the risks because these are very rare occurrences that they are picking up due to very strong surveillance systems that they have put in place," Nkengasong told a briefing. "So, I think these vaccines continue to be safe."

Africa's target is to vaccinate 60% of its 1.3 billion people by the end of 2022 — a goal that could prove extremely hard to achieve without widespread use of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose country's vaccination program leans heavily on AstraZeneca's shot, announced that the Pfizer vaccine should be adopted as the preferred vaccine for people under 50.

"We've been taking the necessary precautions based on the best possible medical advice," Morrison said. "It has not been our practice to jump at shadows."

Some EU nations were at pains to stress the safety and did not change their advice.

The Polish state TV broadcaster used a headline declaring, "AstraZeneca is safe."

The head of Italy's drug regulator, Nicola Magrini, appealed for calm even as he said late Wednesday that Italy will pivot from primarily using the AstraZeneca vaccine for people under 65 to using it on those



over 60.

Underscoring how such changing rules were causing confusion and anxiety, the governor of the Veneto region said operators had fielded 8,000 calls about AstraZeneca in recent days. "Obviously there is some uneasiness spreading," Luca Zaia told reporters.

Hungarian government minister Gergely Gulyas called the EMA announcement "a clear decision which is in line with the point of view of Hungarian authorities: AstraZeneca is reliable and provides protection."

German officials made clear that they will stick to their current recommendation — issued March 30 when concerns about the rare clots were already circulating — to restrict the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine to people over 60 in most cases, in line with larger European nations including Spain and Italy.

In the Croatian capital, Zagreb, Josip Pavlic was among a large group of masked people who lined up for an AstraZeneca vaccination. He said he would take any shot, as infections rise sharply in the country.

"They are all the same to me. The most important is the we have vaccine, and that we can have some protection with vaccine," he said.

## **EXPLAINER: Is the US border with Mexico in crisis?**

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

Nearly 19,000 children traveling alone were stopped at the Mexican border in March, smashing previous highs set during periods of heavy child migration in 2014 and 2019.

Is it a crisis? Spin and semantics aside, migration to the U.S. from Mexico is increasing in a major way for the third time in seven years under Republican and Democratic presidents — and for similar reasons.

**HOW HAS MIGRATION CHANGED SINCE JOE BIDEN BECAME PRESIDENT?**

Border encounters — a widely used but imperfect gauge that tells how many times U.S. authorities came across migrants — rose sharply during Donald Trump's final months as president, from an unusually low 17,106 last April to 74,108 in December. They soared during President Joe Biden's first months in office. Encounters totaled more than 172,000 in March, up from about 100,000 the previous month and the highest since March 2001.

That's only part of the picture, though. Who's crossing is just as important a gauge as how many are making the attempt, if not even more.

Mexican adults fueled last year's rise, a throwback to one of the largest immigration increases in U.S. history, spanning from 1965 through the Great Recession of 2008. In March 2020, the Trump administration introduced pandemic-related powers to immediately expel people from the United States without an opportunity to seek asylum. Facing no consequences, Mexican men kept trying until they made it.

About 28% of people expelled in March had been ousted before, according to Biden administration officials, compared with a 7% pre-pandemic recidivism rate in the 12-month period that ended in September 2019. The recidivism rate was 48% among Mexican adults during one two-week stretch last year in San Diego.

Families and children traveling alone, who have more legal protections and require greater care, became a bigger part of the mix after Biden took office. They accounted for more than 40% of all encounters in March, up from 13% three months earlier.

Authorities encountered 18,890 unaccompanied children in March, well above previous highs of 11,475 in May 2019 and 10,620 in June 2014 reported by the Border Patrol, which began publishing numbers in 2009.

**WHY ARE FAMILIES AND CHILDREN COMING NOW?**

It's complicated. Central Americans have been fleeing poverty and violence at least since civil wars of the 1980s, and Hurricane Eta in November and hunger have given new impetus for some in Guatemala and Honduras.

Migrants also are guided by changes in U.S. policy — both real and rumored. Biden exempted unaccompanied children from pandemic-related expulsions, allowing them to remain in the United States to pursue asylum.

About one of every three encounters with families in March resulted in expulsion, bringing families to

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the border with hopes they can remain in the U.S. Mexican authorities have resisted taking back Central American families with children 6 and under from Texas' Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. That's prompted U.S. authorities to start daily flights to El Paso, Texas, and San Diego to expel families from there.

While he has kept Trump's pandemic-related expulsion powers in place, Biden quickly jettisoned other policies as cruel and inhumane, making good on campaign promises.

Trump, responding to a massive increase in Central American families and children that peaked in May 2019, expanded his "Remain in Mexico" policy to force asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration court. It was unquestionably effective at deterring asylum — less than 1% have won their cases, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse — but asylum-seekers were exposed to violence in Mexico, as documented by advocacy group Human Rights First and others. Attorneys were extremely difficult to find in Mexico.

Other Trump-era policies included fast-track asylum proceedings inside U.S. Customs and Border Protection holding facilities, where access to attorneys was next to impossible. Agreements were struck with Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador for the U.S. to send asylum-seekers to the Central American countries with an opportunity to seek protection there instead.

## WHAT IS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION DOING?

Short-term border holding facilities are overtaxed: More than 4,000 parents and children — mostly unaccompanied kids — have been crammed into a CBP tent complex designed for 250 in Donna, Texas. More than 600 children were packed into a room built for 32 last week, separated by plastic walls.

To address severe overcrowding, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which cares for children longer term, has reached a slew of agreements to move unaccompanied children into large venues while officials make arrangement to release them to "sponsors" in the United States, usually family or close relatives. New sites include convention centers in Dallas and San Diego, a stadium in San Antonio and Fort Bliss army base in El Paso, Texas. Long Beach, California, agreed Tuesday to house up to 1,000 in its convention center.

Biden aides are speeding the release of children to parents, relatives and others in the United States, partly by covering airfare in some instances.

People are traditionally released in the U.S. with notices to appear in immigration court. But in the Rio Grande Valley, the Border Patrol stopped issuing court notices to many migrant families in March to save time, instead ordering they report to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office within 60 days.

The Biden administration is seeking \$4 billion to address "root causes" of migration from Central America. It is stepping up efforts to have children apply for asylum from their homes in Central America instead of making the dangerous journey to the U.S. border.

Last month, Biden tapped Vice President Kamala Harris to lead the U.S. response.

## Number of kids alone at border hits all-time high in March

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government picked up nearly 19,000 children traveling alone across the Mexican border in March, authorities said Thursday, the largest monthly number ever recorded and a major test for President Joe Biden as he reverses many of his predecessor's hardline immigration tactics.

A complex mix of factors in the United States and Central America drove the increase. It has coincided with the Biden administration's decision to exempt unaccompanied children from pandemic-related powers to immediately expel most people from the country without giving them an opportunity to seek asylum. Children are instead released to "sponsors" in the U.S., usually parents or close relatives, while being allowed to pursue their cases in heavily backlogged immigration courts.

The Border Patrol encountered 18,663 unaccompanied children in March, well above previous highs of 11,475 in May 2019 and 10,620 in June 2014. The agency started publishing the numbers in 2009. Before then, adults made up the vast majority of those crossing the border.

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March's count was roughly double the number of unaccompanied children encountered by the Border Patrol in February and more than five times the number in March 2020.

The huge increase in children traveling alone — some as young as 3 — and families has severely strained border holding facilities, which aren't allowed to hold people for more than three days but often do. It's left the government scrambling to find space and hire staff to care for children longer term until they can be placed with sponsors.

For many, a hurricane that hit Central America in November added urgency to endemic poverty and violence that have led people to flee for decades. Changes in U.S. policy under Biden also have guided their decisions, whether real or rumored.

Hermelindo Ak, a Guatemalan corn grower who barely makes enough to feed his family, was expelled to Mexico from Texas' Rio Grande Valley with his 17-year-old son. Ak decided to send his son alone for a second attempt after learning unaccompanied children can stay in the U.S. Ak, 40, said he would return to family in Guatemala after selling his house to pay smugglers. The plan was for his oldest son to live with relatives in the U.S.

"I didn't want to leave him alone," Ak said last week in the Mexican border city of Reynosa. "Necessity obligates us."

Amid the growing numbers, more than 4,000 people at a U.S. Customs and Border Protection holding facility have been jammed into a space designed for 250 at a tent complex in Donna, Texas. They lay inches apart on mats on the floor with foil blankets.

CBP must transfer unaccompanied children within 72 hours to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, whose facilities are more suited to longer-term care while arrangements are made to release them. More than 2,000 children were held longer than that at the Donna facility one day last week, with 39 there at least 15 days.

HHS opened its first temporary holding facility in Carrizo Springs, Texas, on Feb. 22, and has since struck a slew of agreements to occupy large venues near the border, including convention centers in Dallas and San Diego, a stadium in San Antonio and Fort Bliss army base in El Paso, Texas. The department also has been paying for flights for children and sponsors to limit time in government custody.

Overall, the Border Patrol had 168,195 encounters with migrants on the southern border in March, its busiest month since March 2001, when it counted 170,580 arrests. The numbers aren't entirely comparable because more than half of last month's encounters resulted in expulsions under pandemic-related authority instituted by former President Donald Trump and kept in place by Biden.

People who are expelled are far more likely to try again because they face no legal consequences.

Unlike expulsions, people arrested under immigration laws can face jail time, felony prosecution for repeat offenses and bans on entering the country legally through marriage or other means. Biden administration officials said 28% of expulsions in March were people who had been expelled before, compared with a 7% pre-pandemic recidivism rate for the 12-month period that ended in September 2019.

The Border Patrol had 52,904 encounters with people arriving as families, with only about one in three being expelled and the rest allowed to stay in the U.S. to pursue asylum.

Mexico's refusal to accept Central American families with children 6 and under because of a new law against detaining migrant families has limited the effectiveness of expulsions, administration officials said. Mexico is especially reluctant to accept families with young children in Tamaulipas state bordering the Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings.

The means hundreds of migrants go to bus stations in Texas border towns like McAllen and Brownsville on their way to their final destinations in the U.S. To save time, the Border Patrol last month began releasing migrant families — about 9,600 people as of Tuesday, according to U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar — without notices to appear in court, instead directing them to report to a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in 60 days.

Numbers grew sharply during Trump's final year in office but further accelerated under Biden, who quickly ended many of his predecessor's policies, including one that made asylum-seekers wait in Mexico

for court hearings in the U.S.

Mexicans represented the largest proportion of people encountered by the U.S. Border Patrol, and nearly all were single adults. Arrivals of people from Honduras and Guatemala were second and third, respectively, and more than half of the people from those countries were families or children traveling alone.

## Steep decline in giant sea turtles seen off US West Coast

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and HAVEN DALEY Associated Press

MONTEREY, Calif. (AP) — Scientists were documenting stranded sea turtles on California's beaches nearly 40 years ago when they noticed that leatherbacks — massive sea turtles that date to the time of the dinosaurs — were among those washing up on shore. It was strange because the nearest known population of the giants was several thousand miles away in the waters of Central and South America.

Their mysterious presence led researchers to a startling discovery. A subset of leatherbacks that hatches on beaches in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands were migrating 7,000 miles across the Pacific Ocean to the cold waters off the U.S. West Coast, where they gorged on jellyfish before swimming back. The epic journey stunned scientists.

"There are birds that go farther, but they fly. There's a whale shark that might swim a little further, but it doesn't have to come up for air. This animal is actually pushing water all the way across the Pacific Ocean," said Scott Benson, an ecologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's fisheries service in Monterey, who has studied the turtles for decades. "It's just a majestic animal."

But now, just as scientists are beginning to fully understand the amazing odyssey, the turtles are disappearing — and fast.

In less than 30 years, the number of western Pacific leatherbacks in the foraging population off of California plummeted 80% and a recent study co-authored by Benson shows a 5.6% annual decline — almost identical to the decline documented thousands of miles away on nesting beaches. About 1,400 adult females were counted on western Pacific nesting beaches, down from tens of thousands of turtles a few decades ago, and there are as few as 50 foraging off California, Benson said.

If nothing changes, scientists say, the leatherbacks — creatures that can weigh half as much as a compact car and have 4-foot-long flippers — could be gone from the U.S. West Coast within three decades, a demise brought on by indiscriminate international fishing, the decimation of nesting grounds and climate change.

"The turtles were there and we finally started paying attention," said Jim Harvey, director of San Jose State University's Moss Landing Marine Laboratories at San Jose State University and the study's co-author. "We got into looking at the story just as the story was ending."

The study provides critical, but devastating, new population information that doesn't bode well for the leatherbacks, said Daniel Pauly, a fisheries professor at the University of British Columbia and an international expert on reducing commercial fishing's impact on marine ecosystems.

"If you find the decline in one place, that might have a number of causes, but if you find the same estimate of decline in two places that indicates something much more serious," said Pauly, who was not involved in the study. "They are really in big trouble."

NOAA launched an aggressive initiative to save them in 2015 and will now release an updated action plan this month to inspire greater international cooperation in reducing the number of eggs pillaged on beaches and the number of Pacific leatherbacks entangled in commercial fishing gear.

"There is an opportunity right now to stop the decline, but we must seize that opportunity immediately and that will require an international effort by all the nations this animals interacts with," said Benson. "If nothing is done to reverse this course, this population will become, essentially, extinct in the Pacific Ocean."

The leatherbacks have likely been foraging off the U.S. West Coast for millennia. There are six other distinct leatherback populations scattered around the world but none of them complete such a long migration. As many as 60% of the leatherback turtles that hatch in the western Pacific Ocean make the trip to California — and scientists aren't sure why some do and others don't. Some go farther north, to waters off Oregon and even Washington state.



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All the world's leatherbacks are under pressure, but the subset that migrates for months across the vastness of the Pacific faces unique threats that are particularly difficult for conservationists to counter. Leatherbacks in the eastern Pacific, which nest in Mexico and Costa Rica, are also experiencing a population crash from a sharp reduction in nesting beaches.

In the water, commercial fishing boats pursue swordfish in an international no-man's-land, where strict U.S. fishing laws don't apply, and fishing nets and long lines intended for swordfish can injure or kill turtles. They must navigate the fishing grounds of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Japan and other nations to reach the U.S. West Coast.

On land, leatherback eggs on nesting beaches in the western Pacific are frequently wiped out by wild animals or humans, who collect the delicacies to eat or sell. Sand-mining operations and development on private beaches are also encroaching on leatherback nests.

In the U.S., swordfish fishing with long lines has been banned for 20 years from mid-August to mid-November to protect the giant turtles in a 186,000-square-mile (481,787-square-kilometer) zone off the West Coast. Most recently, California is phasing out the only small drift gill net fishery in the state by 2024, and the long-line swordfish fleet in Hawaii and California must shut down if they accidentally catch more than 16 leatherbacks fleet-wide in a season.

Last year, President Donald Trump vetoed a bill co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Diane Feinstein, a California Democrat, that would have phased out a type of fishing with large mesh underwater nets known to ensnare sea turtles and other species. She reintroduced it in February.

These measures have been largely successful in driving down harm to Pacific leatherbacks off the U.S. West Coast and Hawaii. Between 1990 and 2000, 23 leatherback turtles were entangled and killed off the West Coast. Between 2014 and 2018, there were zero, according to NOAA Fisheries.

Damien Schiff, an attorney who's sued on behalf of fishermen impacted by the reduction of the swordfish industry, said environmentalists continue to pursue more restrictions on the U.S. fishery when other foreign fisheries are the problem.

"Every swordfish that you don't catch in California is going to then be ... supplied by an overseas fishery that doesn't have a good environmental rating," he said. "I don't think you can dispute that fact."

Now, with worldwide leatherback numbers plummeting, the pressure is on to replicate these successes outside U.S. waters and spur more cooperation from international fisheries that compete directly with U.S. vessels in far-flung Pacific waters.

Some ideas include requiring swordfish imported to the U.S. to be harvested using the same turtle-sparing equipment that's required of American fleets or to expand the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act to include sea creatures that aren't mammals, said Todd Steiner, executive director of Turtle Island Restoration Network, which has pushed for leatherback protections worldwide.

"We are one of the largest markets in the world for fish and so once we have our own fisheries having to meet certain requirements, then we can ask other countries to do the same if they want to sell to us," he said. "But at what point is it too late? We've won some battles, but we're losing the war."

## Trump-loving Alabama county faces uphill vaccination effort

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

HALEYVILLE, Ala. (AP) — Tending a thrift store that displays a faded Trump flag in a nearly all-white Alabama county with a long history of going against the grain, Dwight Owensby is among the area's many skeptics of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Owensby, 77, said he doesn't often watch TV news or read the local paper, and he doesn't spend much time talking about the pandemic with others — it's just not a big topic in this rural, heavily forested part of the state. But he suspects the coronavirus pandemic was planned, as a discredited conspiracy theory holds, and he said there's no way he's getting any shot.

"If it's your time to go, you're going to go. If it ain't, it ain't gonna bother you," Owensby said.

He isn't alone in Winston County, which ranks last in terms of people who have been fully vaccinated

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in a state that has the country's lowest vaccination rate, according to federal statistics. To many here, the pandemic isn't much of a concern. Businesses are open and relatively few people wear masks, even though Alabama's rule requiring them to be worn in public wasn't scheduled to end until Friday.

A Union stronghold where some pushed for secession from pro-slavery Alabama during the Civil War, Winston County is a prime example of a problem that health officials say they'll have to overcome to end the pandemic: Many white conservatives such as Owensby aren't lining up quickly enough for vaccines.

The 25% of Americans who say they probably or definitely won't get vaccinated tend to be Republican, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, and then-President Donald Trump carried 90% of the vote last year in Winston County, which was his highest margin in Alabama. The county's population of roughly 23,700 is 96% white, and many work in small manufacturing plants.

More than 2,700 people have contracted COVID-19 in Winston County, putting it in the middle of the pack statewide, and 71 have died of the disease. Yet only 7.3% of the county's residents, or about 1,730 people, had been fully vaccinated as of Thursday. That's about one-third of the percentage in Alabama's leading vaccination counties, which tend to be heavily Black and vote Democratic.

As Winston County's sheriff and the publisher of the local newspaper, the Northwest Alabamian, which has covered the pandemic and vaccination effort closely, Horace Moore has a unique perspective. Whereas he and many of the paper's workers have gotten shots, Moore doesn't know of a single colleague on the sheriff's office's 33-person staff who has gotten one.

"I wish they'd get it, but I'm the only one," he said.

Moore is baffled by the reluctance, which a poll commissioned by the state health agency in March showed isn't unique to Winston County, which is about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northwest of Birmingham. It found that about half Alabama's residents were either somewhat or very unwilling to be vaccinated.

Skepticism cut across racial and ethnic lines in the poll, but a pattern is obvious: Both large and small, urban and rural, the counties with the state's lowest immunization rates all have mostly white populations, and Trump carried all but one by wide margins in November. By contrast, counties with the highest vaccination rates are more likely to have large Black populations that favored Democratic President Joe Biden.

The differences may reflect the politicization of the pandemic since its outset, with Trump repeatedly downplaying the virus' threat, at least early on, and Republican-led states pushing more aggressively to lift mask orders and restrictions meant to slow its spread.

While state-funded public outreach and National Guard-run vaccine clinics have helped boost immunizations in mostly Black areas of Alabama, officials are trying to figure out how to increase them among rural white people who think shots are more dangerous than COVID-19, which has killed more than half a million Americans.

"I would say we are struggling a little bit with how to develop a message to reach that group. It's not clear what the most effective strategy would be to reach them," said Dr. Scott Harris, head of the Alabama Department of Public Health.

In Winston County — known as the "Free State of Winston" for its anti-Confederate tendencies during the Civil War — some say vaccine supply is more of a problem than vaccine reluctance. Lakeland Community Hospital in Haleyville said it has immunized more than 2,000 people and is awaiting additional doses.

"Our only hurdle so far has been vaccine availability," CEO Ashley Poole said in an email. Down the street from the hospital, a worker at a Walmart store was vaccinating people as quickly as she could on Monday, the first day Alabama expanded eligibility to everyone age 16 or older.

Doctors at nearby Family Medical Associates often encourage patients to be vaccinated, but demand isn't universal, said office manager Vijaya Reddy. "Some people want to take it and some do not," she said.

That description fits Sharon Harris and Kristie Mobley, co-workers at a rural convenience store.

Harris already has had both her shots, and she wasn't nervous about getting either. "I was glad to," she said.

Mobley is among the leery, however. Her fiancé has gotten a shot, she's helped others find vaccination appointments, and she knows people who had to go on ventilators after contracting COVID-19, but Mobley

is waiting. She wants to see whether others suffer long-term side effects from vaccines, which officials say are extremely unlikely.

"I'm just going to wait and make sure you don't grow a third eyeball or something," she said.

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

By CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer

HUNTINGTON, W. Va. (AP) — Larrecca 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, 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?"

Larrecca Cox has a file cabinet back in her office, and the top three drawers are filled with thousands of

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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.

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.



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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 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

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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.

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Larrecsa 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.

Lesa 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.

"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?"

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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.

## Paul Andrew steps down as Ferragamo creative director

MILAN (AP) — Designer Paul Andrew is stepping down as creative director of Salvatore Ferragamo, effective in May, the fashion house said Thursday.

Andrew joined the Florence-based company as women's footwear designer in 2016 and was promoted to creative director for all categories in 2019.

"After five years, with pride and a heavy heart, I have decided it's time for a new challenge," Andrew said in a post on Instagram. "It's been a true honor to give new life to Salvatore's legacy, his genius design and ground-breaking innovation. I will always be grateful for this opportunity, and proud of the work I have accomplished."

Ferragamo said upcoming collections will be entrusted to the current in-house design team. CEO Micaela le Divelec Lemmi thanked Andrew for his "passion" and for "enhancing the position and creative vision of the house."

British-born Andrew did not announce plans. He suspended his namesake luxury show label when he joined Ferragamo.

Luxury fashion has been hit hard by the pandemic, with restrictions forcing new collections to be mostly previewed on-line and stores to close.

Salvatore Ferragamo swung to a 72-million-euro loss last year, compared with 2019 earnings of 87 million euros, as full-year revenues plunged by a third. The family-owned fashion house cited the lockdowns that forced stores to close their doors for periods during 2020.

Like other brands, Ferragamo invested in e-commerce during the pandemic, launching new sites in North America, fast-growing China, Japan and South Korea, as well as in countries using the euro.

## US jobless claims up to 744K as virus still forces layoffs

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week to 744,000, signaling that many employers are still cutting jobs even as more people are vaccinated against COVID-19, consumers gain confidence and the government distributes aid throughout the economy.

The Labor Department said Thursday that applications increased by 16,000 from 728,000 a week earlier. Jobless claims have declined sharply since the virus slammed into the economy in March of last year. But

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they remain stubbornly high by historical standards: Before the pandemic erupted, weekly applications typically remained below 220,000 a week.

For the week ending March 27, more than 3.7 million people were receiving traditional state unemployment benefits, the government said. If you include supplemental federal programs that were established last year to help the unemployed endure the health crisis, a total of 18.2 million are receiving some form of jobless aid the week of March 20.

Economists monitor weekly jobless claims for early signs of where the job market is headed. Applications are usually a proxy for layoffs: They typically decline as the economy improves. Or they rise as employers retrench in response to sluggish consumer demand.

During the pandemic, though, the numbers have become a less reliable barometer. States have struggled to clear backlogs of unemployment applications, and suspected fraud has clouded the actual volume of job cuts.

By nearly all measures, though, the economy has been strengthening. During March, employers added 916,000 jobs, the most since August, and the unemployment rate declined from 6.2% to 6%. In February, the pace of job openings reached its highest level on record. Last month, consumer confidence posted its highest reading in a year.

And this week, the International Monetary Fund forecast that the U.S. economy will grow 6.4% this year. That would be the fastest annual pace since 1984 and the strongest among the world's wealthiest countries.

Most economists say they think the still-high level of unemployment applications should gradually fade. "Jobless claims may bounce around week to week as the recovery takes hold, but we expect they will start to decline more consistently as the economy gains momentum," economists Nancy Vanden Houten and Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics said in a research note. "We expect the stellar March jobs report to be the first of many and look for a hiring boom in the spring and summer months."

Still, the United States still has 8.4 million fewer jobs than it had in February 2020, just before the pandemic struck. New confirmed coronavirus cases, which had dropped sharply from early January through early March, have plateaued over the past month. In addition, the vaccination rate for elderly Americans, who are among the most vulnerable, has dramatically slowed even as the supply of vaccines has expanded.

And the data firm Womply reports that the percentage of businesses that remained closed last week rose from the beginning of March — from 38% to 45% for bars; from 35% to 46% for beauty shops; and from 30% to 38% for restaurants.

## **Pandemic-weary chefs, cooks enjoy serving from home**

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP) — When COVID-19 shutdowns hit in March 2020, Mike Winneker, a hotel executive sous chef, found himself without work for the first time in years. Between caring for a 6-year-old son and waiting for unemployment benefits, days now spent at home in Scottsdale were stressful.

One night in June, Winneker, 33, cooked up some tacos with beef chuck and beef cheeks. Seeing what a large quantity he had, he came up with the idea of selling tacos. His first test run was a post on the NextDoor app offering brisket barbacoa tacos in his driveway. Winneker decided he would only do it if he had at least \$300 in pre-sales.

He made \$800 in one day.

"As of right now, I got 300 people on an email list," said Winneker, who has since been offering tacos twice a week via email and Instagram. "If I capture even a small percentage of that, it helps pay my bills."

Beaten down by the pandemic, many laid-off or idle restaurant workers have pivoted to dishing out food with a taste of home. Some have found their entrepreneurial side, slinging culinary creations from their own kitchens.

In many cases, that can mean running up against or accommodating health regulations. These chefs and caterers say they need money and a purpose, and their plight has cast new light on an ongoing debate about regulations over the sale of home-cooked meals.



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The rules around serving food for immediate consumption vary across states, making for a complex patchwork of requirements, said Martin Hahn, an attorney at Hogan Lovells, which specializes in food industry law. States generally refer to federal guidelines, but counties and cities drive permit and licensing conditions. While some states have cottage food laws allowing in-house preparation, those are for "low-risk" products like jams and breads.

"The first place I would go is call my local health department, find out whether there are any licensing requirements, permits you need to have and any restrictions on being able to operate this type of a business out of your home," Hahn said.

Don Schaffner, a food science professor at Rutgers University who has given workshops on food safety, said home-cooked foods with items like raw meat are a gamble for consumers. They have to assume that proper storage, prevention of cross-contamination and other best practices were followed.

"I totally get why (the chefs) are doing it. Just from a food safety perspective, I can't endorse it," he said.

Eight doors down from Winneker, Ruby Salgado, 26, and her husband, Jose Hernandez, spend their weekends making pizzas in a backyard oven they built. Some nights, they churn out as many as 30 pies with toppings like fennel sausage, fresh mozzarella and carne asada.

Salgado works as a configuration analyst for pharmacy benefits. But Hernandez, a restaurant line cook, has had his hours cut. Salgado's 23-year-old brother, whose hours as a restaurant server can fluctuate, also lives with them.

When they moved in in September, Salgado noticed people leaving Winneker's home with takeout containers and inspiration struck. She and Hernandez planned to someday own a food truck or trailer to peddle pizzas. The pandemic slowdown seemed like a good time to test their concept and earn "extra income to be able to help our family out."

For foods other than cottage foods, Arizona requires that you get a license from a county environmental health department and cook in a licensed commercial kitchen. For Salgado, renting one wouldn't be worthwhile unless they consistently sold 50 pizzas.

"I have to do my research and find kitchens close to us that would be willing to rent us a kitchen the morning of to do the prepping," she said.

Both Winneker and Salgado say they have food managers/handlers cards and are fastidious about cleanliness. They have refrigerators dedicated to their food businesses, and they wear masks and gloves.

Like Salgado's family, Thao Nguyen was selling pizzas out of her backyard, in Yucca Valley, California, after her home goods store closed. After three months, her small pizza operation was shut down last summer by San Bernardino County health officials.

"They got a formal complaint from somebody and they came up for a visit and they looked on social media for evidence to build a case against me," said Nguyen, who has since started cooking for pop-ups out of a kitchen at the local community college.

It was frustrating, Nguyen said, because a 2018 California law allows home kitchens to be used for a "microenterprise" — which involves one full-time employee and gross yearly sales that don't exceed \$50,000. But it's up to each county to implement it. While San Bernardino County isn't on board, neighboring Riverside County is.

"I think this is a really great thing to help people who can't afford or don't have the means or lifestyle to really commit to having a brick-and-mortar restaurant," Nguyen said.

Lee Thomas, a former San Leandro, California, councilman who works for the Oakland Unified School District, had a side business called GrilleeQ, barbecuing food for events at people's homes. Because of COVID-19, he now cooks in his backyard — against Alameda County rules. He's worried about getting in trouble but wants to draw attention to the issue.

"People are going to do this regardless," Thomas said. "You might as well legalize it, take the fear away from people... but also create this ecosystem of making sure that food is safe."

California, Wyoming and North Dakota allow limited sales of higher-risk foods such as meat, according to C.O.O.K. Alliance, an advocacy group lobbying for home cooks. Utah signed off on similar legislation in

March.

In New Mexico, the pandemic has spurred new interest in the sale of homemade canned goods. In March, state legislators voted to ease restrictions on the sale of homemade food that can be stored safely without refrigeration. Sellers still have to complete a short training course, label products, and keep the kitchen "free of pets or children" during food preparation.

"We're working on other states," said Peter Ruddock, C.O.O.K. Alliance's California policy and implementation director. "We take food safety very seriously. We just think there are many ways to do it and total prohibition — which is what we basically have — isn't the best way."

Schaffner, the professor, advised that any legislation include regular health inspections and intensive training just like restaurant chefs would get. "Those two things would be a really good first step," he said.

Winneker doesn't plan on doing a side hustle from home forever. He isn't ruling out returning to his job, but he wants to get a vendor's license and move to a commercial kitchen. In the meantime, he's prepared if forced to close up taco shop.

"(The pandemic) made me realize if my back's against the wall, I'll figure it out," Winneker said. "Worst case scenario, they're going to tell me to stop. If they tell me to stop, I'll make it legit and start over."

## **UK infections drop about 60% amid vaccinations, lockdown**

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K.'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 the 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."

The positive news came amid renewed scrutiny of vaccinations that followed revised UK government guidance Wednesday that it will offer people under 30 an alternative inoculation to the AstraZeneca shot where possible. The change followed studies that the shot may be linked to very rare blood clots.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Sky News that the public should be reassured by the abundance of caution demonstrated by authorities to make sure the vaccine rollout is as safe as possible.

"What we've learned in the last 24 hours is that the rollout of the vaccine is working, we've seen that the safety system is working, because the regulators can spot even this extremely rare event — four in a million — and take necessary action to ensure the rollout is as safe as it possible can be," he said. "And we are seeing that the vaccine is working. It's breaking the link between cases and deaths."

Some 31.7 million people had been given a first dose by Tuesday, or just over 60% of the country's adult population.

But Imperial 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. Future rounds of the study will assess the impact that further easing of restrictions has on infection rates.

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 findings are based on data gathered by the 10th round of Imperial College's Real-Time Assessment of Community Transmission study, which 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.

Even though Britain has had one of the world's fastest vaccine rollouts, its death toll from the pandemic is the highest in Europe at over 127,000.

## Students lead US push for fuller Black history education

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — Ebele Azikiwe was in the sixth grade last year when February came and it was time to learn about Black history again. She was, by then, familiar with the curriculum: Rosa Parks, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and a discussion on slavery. Just like the year before, she said, and the year before that.

Then came George Floyd's death in May, and she wrote to the administration at her school in Cherry Hill, in New Jersey's Philadelphia suburbs, to ask for more than the same lessons.

"We learned about slavery, but did we go into the roots of slavery?" Ebele, 12, said in an interview. "You learned about how they had to sail across, but did you learn about how they felt being tied down on those boats?"

Her letter went from the principal to the superintendent and then began to make headlines, leading to pledges to include fuller Black history courses.

In the months since Floyd's killing in Minneapolis, educators say they've heard a demand from students for fuller Black history lessons beyond what was already offered. Lawmakers and states have passed or begun implementing legislation calling for more inclusive instruction.

The previous generation of courses focused on cultural awareness. What schools found, according to Maurice Hall — the dean of the College of New Jersey's arts and communications school and a social justice scholar — was that students still had socioeconomic, cultural and racial blind spots.

Growing up with a majority point of view could mean thinking that the way a particular culture sees the world "is in fact the right way," Hall said.

Connecticut implemented a law in December requiring high schools to offer courses on Black and Latino studies. New Jersey, where learning standards already included some diversity education lessons, last month became the latest state to enact a law requiring school districts to incorporate instruction on diversity and inclusion.

A handful of other states have pending legislation that would make similar changes, including Washington and Virginia, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The pandemic is partly credited with the response to Floyd's death while pinned by a white police officer, a confrontation that was caught on video and beamed into homes where people were isolating. The effect spilled over into schools, said Michael Conner, the superintendent in Middletown, Connecticut. Students held rallies and helped put race at the top of educators' consciousness.

African American and other non-European history tends to focus on how those societies were marginalized, while Europeans get portrayed as culturally competent, Conner said, something he calls a "deficit" context, as opposed to an "asset" context.

Like 12-year-old Ebele, he pointed to learning about the same handful of prominent African-American figures.

"When I look at my education, the only time I learned about Black history in school was during the month of February," he said. "I learned about my culture at the dining room table with my mother and grandmother."

Districts adding diversity to their curricula now have to determine how to do it and what that looks like.

In New Jersey, the education department is required to come up with sample activities and resources for districts. And some schools there and elsewhere are adding books to the curriculum or examining them in new ways.

In Middletown, Dan Raucci, an English supervisor, pointed out how "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee has long been a 10th-grade staple. Students and teachers are discussing whether Atticus Finch, the white attorney who defends a Black man accused of raping a white woman, is a "hero of today, or of that time period?"

But the district has added new books, like Jason Reynolds' "The Boy in the Black Suit," a novel that follows a Black teenager as he deals with grief.

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The changes actually came before the Connecticut law's 2020 implementation, but last year's events underscored the imperative to revise the curriculum.

New Jersey's legislation calls for creating a welcoming environment "regardless of race or ethnicity, sexual and gender identities, mental and physical disabilities, and religious beliefs." It also seeks to examine unconscious bias, or implicit prejudice.

That raised concerns among some right-leaning groups that the government was forcing students to adopt beliefs. Among those testifying against the bill was the conservative Family Policy Alliance of New Jersey.

"Students should learn to be respectful of others' beliefs and backgrounds based upon their unique experiences and cultures," said Shawn Hyland, advocacy director, said in a statement last year. "However, 'diversity' trainings in public schools are the very opposite of respect."

That criticism suggests conservative states — unlike liberal New Jersey and other states passing laws on curriculum diversity — may balk at such curricula. Already in Iowa, lawmakers have passed a bill to ban school diversity training, and in Idaho, lawmakers voted to kill a higher education budget over diversity programs in universities.

But in New Jersey, Ebele's mother, Rume Joy Azikiwe-Oyeyemi, 38, was surprised her daughter's efforts were met with such support. She said she had no idea that so much headway could be made in such a short time.

"As her mom I am beyond proud," she said. "What's next?"

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, April 9, the 99th day of 2021. There are 266 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 9, 1939, Marian Anderson performed a concert at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., after the Black singer was denied the use of Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

On this date:

In 1682, French explorer Robert de La Salle claimed the Mississippi River Basin for France.

In 1865, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his army to Union Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia.

In 1940, during World War II, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway.

In 1942, during World War II, some 75,000 Philippine and American defenders on Bataan surrendered to Japanese troops, who forced the prisoners into what became known as the Bataan Death March; thousands died or were killed en route.

In 1959, NASA presented its first seven astronauts: Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, Alan Shepard and Donald Slayton. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright, 91, died in Phoenix, Arizona.

In 1963, British statesman Winston Churchill was proclaimed an honorary U.S. citizen by President John F. Kennedy. (Churchill, unable to attend, watched the proceedings live on television in his London home.)

In 1967, the first test flight of Boeing's new 737 took place as the jetliner took off from Boeing Field in Seattle on a 2½-hour trip to Paine Field in Everett, Washington.

In 1968, funeral services, private and public, were held for Martin Luther King Jr. at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and Morehouse College in Atlanta, five days after the civil rights leader was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

In 1979, officials declared an end to the crisis involving the Three Mile Island Unit 2 nuclear reactor in Pennsylvania, 12 days after a partial core meltdown.

In 2003, jubilant Iraqis celebrated the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, beheading a toppled statue of their longtime ruler in downtown Baghdad and embracing American troops as liberators.

In 2005, Britain's Prince Charles married longtime love Camilla Parker Bowles, who took the title Duch-



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ess of Cornwall.

In 2010, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens announced his retirement. (His vacancy was filled by Elena Kagan.)

Ten years ago: A man armed with several weapons opened fire in a crowded shopping mall in the Netherlands, killing six people before taking his own life. Sidney Lumet, the award-winning director of such American film classics as "Network," "Serpico," "Dog Day Afternoon" and "12 Angry Men," died in New York at age 86.

Five years ago: After weeks of frantic searching, Belgian authorities announced they had identified recently detained Paris attacks suspect Mohamed Abrini as the "man with the hat" who was spotted alongside two suicide bombers who blew themselves up at Brussels Airport the previous month.

One year ago: The government reported that 6.6 million people had sought unemployment benefits in the preceding week, bringing the total to 16.8 million in the three weeks since the coronavirus outbreak took hold. New York recorded another 799 deaths from the virus; it was the third straight day in which the daily total reached a new high. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was moved out of intensive care at the London hospital where he was being treated for the virus. The Food and Drug Administration sent a warning letter to conspiracy theorist and radio host Alex Jones, telling him to stop pitching bogus remedies for the coronavirus.

Today's Birthdays: Satirical songwriter and mathematician Tom Lehrer is 93. Actor Jean-Paul Belmondo is 88. Actor Michael Learned is 82. Country singer Margo Smith is 79. Actor Dennis Quaid is 67. Comedian Jimmy Tingle is 66. Country musician Dave Innis (Restless Heart) is 62. Talk show host Joe Scarborough is 58. Actor-sports reporter Lisa Guerrero is 57. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey is 57. Actor Mark Pellegrino is 56. Actor-model Paulina Porizkova is 56. Actor Cynthia Nixon is 55. Rock singer Kevin Martin (Candlebox) is 52. TV personality Sunny Anderson is 46. Rock singer Gerard Way (My Chemical Romance) is 44. Actor Keshia Knight Pulliam is 42. Rock musician Albert Hammond Jr. (The Strokes) is 41. Actor Charlie Hunnam is 41. Actor Ryan Northcott is 41. Actor Arlen Escarpeta is 40. Actor Jay Baruchel is 39. Actor Annie Funke is 36. Actor Jordan Masterson is 35. Actor Leighton Meester is 35. Actor-singer Jesse McCartney is 34. R&B singer Jazmine Sullivan is 34. Actor Kristen Stewart is 31. Actor Elle Fanning is 23. Rapper Lil Nas X is 22. Actor Isaac Hempstead Wright is 22. Classical crossover singer Jackie Evancho (ee-VAYN'-koh) is 21.