



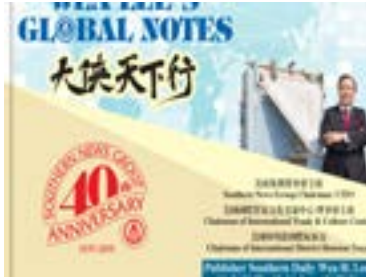
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Inside C2

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With Biden's agenda at stake, Georgia voters cast ballots in Senate runoff elections



ATLANTA (Reuters) - Voters in Georgia cast ballots on Tuesday in a pair of runoff elections that will determine both control of the U.S. Senate and Democratic President-elect Joe Biden's ability to push through an ambitious legislative agenda.

Republican incumbents David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler faced Democratic challengers Jon Ossoff, a documentary filmmaker, and the Rev. Raphael Warnock, a pastor at a historic Black church in Atlanta.

Democrats must win both contests in Georgia to take control of the Senate. A double win for the Democrats would create a 50-50 split in the Senate, giving Vice President-elect Kamala Harris the tie-breaking vote after she and Biden take office on Jan. 20. The party already has a majority in the House of Representatives.

If Republicans hold onto the Senate, they would effectively wield veto power over Biden's political and judicial appointees as well as many of his policy initiatives in areas such as economic relief, climate change, healthcare and criminal justice.

Both Biden and Republican President Donald Trump campaigned in the state on Monday, underscoring the stakes.

The results could be known as early as Wednesday morning but could also take longer, depending on the margins, according to state officials, who reported a largely smooth vote on Tuesday. The state's voting systems manager, Gabriel Sterling, said in the early afternoon that the average statewide wait time was only one minute.

No Democrat has won a U.S. Senate race in Georgia in 20 years, but opinion surveys show both races as exceedingly close. The head-to-head runoff elections, a quirk of state law, became necessary when no candidate in either race exceeded 50% of the vote in November.

Biden's narrow statewide win in the Nov. 3 election - the first for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1992 - has given the party reason for optimism in a state dominated by Republicans for decades.

Factbox-A preacher and filmmaker face two former CEOs in Georgia U.S. Senate runoffs
More than 3 million Georgians voted early by mail or in person, shattering the record for runoff elections even before Election Day arrived. The two races drew nearly half a billion dollars in advertising spending since Nov. 3, a staggering total that fueled a tsunami of television commercials.

In Smyrna, about 16 miles (26 km) northwest of Atlanta, Terry Deuel said he voted Republican to ensure a check on Democratic power. "The Democrats are going to raise taxes,"

the 58-year-old handyman said. "And Biden wants to give everyone free money - \$2,000 each or something like that for COVID stimulus? Where are we going to get the money?"

Ann Henderson, 46, cast ballots at the same location for Ossoff and Warnock, saying she wanted to break Washington's gridlock by delivering the Senate to Democrats.

"It's the social issues - civil rights, racial equality, voting rights, pandemic response," she said. "If we take it, maybe we can get something done for a change."

TRUMP RAGES
The campaign's final days were overshadowed by Trump's continued efforts to subvert the presidential election results.

On Saturday, Trump pressured Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, on a phone call to "find" enough votes to reverse Biden's victory, falsely claiming massive fraud.

planning to object to the certification of Biden's win when Congress meets on Wednesday to formally count the presidential vote - have caused a split in his party and condemnation from critics who accuse him of undermining democracy.

At Monday's rally in Georgia, Trump again declared the November vote "rigged," an assertion some Republicans worried would dissuade his supporters from voting on Tuesday.



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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

01/05/2021

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

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We Are Defending Our Democratic System

All the living former U.S. Secretaries of Defense issued a statement declaring that the U.S. presidential election is over as President Trump continues to deny his election loss to Joe Biden.

In the letter, the former secretaries stated that, "Our election has occurred, recounts and audits have been conducted, appropriate challenges have been addressed by the court, governors have certified the results and the Electoral College has voted. The time for ques-

tioning the results has passed. The time for the formal counting of the Electoral College votes as prescribed in the Constitution and statute has arrived."

Some election lawyers have piled on calling for criminal investigations as to whether President Trump broke the election fraud law when he pressed Georgia officials on a phone call Saturday to "find" 11,870 votes that would reverse his loss in the states.

In Washington D.C., Trump's supporters will gather to show their support on January 6. On Wednesday the D.C. National Guard will assist the Metropolitan Police Department with crowd management and traffic control. Anyone who carries a gun at the protest will be arrested.

Many senior officials and people close to President Trump have expressed new levels of uncertainty as to how Trump will resist the coming end of his tenure. No one is sure where this is heading. Trump is still the president for another two weeks.

After all, Trump has mostly abandoned the day-to-day running of the government. He has spent much of the time complaining about voter fraud. He has claimed that, "We won this election in a landslide."



Today we are facing serious challenges for our nation. The political drama in Congress and the White House are really damaging our political system. We all hope the Constitution of this great nation will guide us to the next chapter of the country.

We all need to defend our democratic values and system.



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Stay Home!

BUSINESS

Wear Mask!

U.S. COVID-19 Death Toll Tops 350,000



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The U.S. has hit another devastating milestone: COVID-19 has killed more than 350,000 people in the country, according to a Johns Hopkins University tracker. The grim number comes as a new variant of the coronavirus is spreading across dozens of countries. The coronavirus variant was first spotted last month in the U.K. and has now spread to dozens of countries, likely passed on by infected people who traveled around the world and unknowingly brought the microscopic invaders with them. The variant is now in dozens of countries, including the United States, where it has infected people in Colorado, California and Florida.

Health care workers are bracing for a particularly deadly January, after the U.S. saw record high numbers of infections in December. President-elect Joe Biden cautioned this week that "the next few weeks and months are going to be very tough, a very tough period for our nation — maybe the toughest during this entire pandemic." Researchers say the new variant — dubbed B.1.1.7 — probably originated in the South East region of England in September, before being detected there in November. According to a new report from Imperial College London, Britain's November lockdown did little to curb its spread, which was most prevalent in young people under 20 years old. The World Health

Organization says the new variant is responsible for more than half of new infections in the U.K. Europe is riddled with the variant, which has been reported in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. It has also been detected in Asia, Australia, the Middle East and South America.



The new version of the virus has 17 mutations, NPR global health correspondent Michaelene Doucleff told Weekend Edition. "Mutations in viruses crop up all the time, when the virus grows inside a person — specifically when it reproduces and makes a bunch of copies of itself," Doucleff said. Mutations occur because of random mistakes as the virus gets copied. "In the vast majority of cases, these mistakes are harmless or they even weaken the virus," Doucleff said. "But in rare instances, mutations can help the virus — they can give it this little boost, or advantage, over the other versions."

The good news is that the new variant doesn't appear to be more deadly. But it is much more contagious — researchers are still trying to determine exactly how much more, but many have estimated it could be 50% more transmissible than the original strain. That may be because it leads to an increased viral load inside a person's nose or respiratory tract — and so it gets dispersed more easily when people talk or cough. Another theory is that the new variant binds to human cells more easily. The variant is helping drive the current increase in cases in the U.K., which saw a massive spike in recent weeks. According to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, December set a record for new cases there, with more than 862,000 added that month. The U.K. variant is but one of multiple mutations that scientists have discovered. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a variant that emerged in South Africa in October shares some of the same mutations as the U.K. variant. Yet another mutation has been found in Nigeria. Neither of the variants are believed to be more serious.

Related

Florida Becomes 3rd U.S. State To Identify New Coronavirus Variant

Florida is the third U.S. state to announce it has a case of the more contagious coronavirus strain that first emerged in the United Kingdom.

A man in his 20s, with no history of travel, tested positive for the mutated coronavirus. The state Department of Health said he is in Martin County.

The man's diagnosis follows a similar case identified in California on Wednesday in which a male patient, also in his 20s, had not spent any time outside of the U.S. in the weeks prior to his illness.



The Florida Department of Health said

officials are working alongside the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to figure out how a 20-something-year-old man contracted the new, more contagious coronavirus strain that was first discovered in the U.K. (Photo/Lynne Sladky/AP)

The first two cases in the U.S. also adhere to that pattern. Two male members of the Colorado National Guard tested positive for the new strain — referred to as B.1.1.7 or VUI-202012/01 — and neither reported international travel. At least one of the two men is in his 20s. Florida officials said they are working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to investigate the case. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, on Wednesday said that he expected the new variant is likely present in multiple states.



Florida Dept. Health @HealthyFla
Dec 31, 2020

Florida has evidence of the first identified case of the UK COVID-19 variant in Martin County. The individual is a male in his 20s with no history of travel. The Department is working with the CDC on this investigation. We encourage all to continue practicing COVID-19 mitigation.



Florida Dept. Health@HealthyFla
Dec 31, 2020

At this time, experts anticipate little to no impact on the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine. For updates on the state's vaccination efforts, text FL-COVID19 to 888777

Referring to reports of the mutation in California, Fauci said, "This is something that's expected."

There is no evidence to suggest the new strain is more deadly, nor is there re-

search suggesting it is impervious to the effects of the vaccines that are being administered across the country.



Florida health officials urged residents to follow public health orders and "continue practicing COVID-19 mitigation" to prevent further spread of the virus. Earlier this month, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis told Floridians they should not expect any additional lockdowns or mask mandates during the pandemic, saying such measures are "totally off the table."

"The lie of the lockdown was that if you just locked down, then you can beat the virus," he said. "Then why are people having to lockdown two or three times then?"

Officials say Florida has had over 1,300,000 cases of the coronavirus and more than 21,000 deaths. (Courtesy npr.org)



Editor's Choice



Supporters listen while U.S. President Donald Trump speaks as he campaigns with Republican U.S. Senator Kelly Loeffler on the eve of Georgia’s run-off election in Dalton, Georgia. REUTERS/Brian Snyder



A woman walks past a mural in Manchester, Britain. REUTERS/Phil Noble



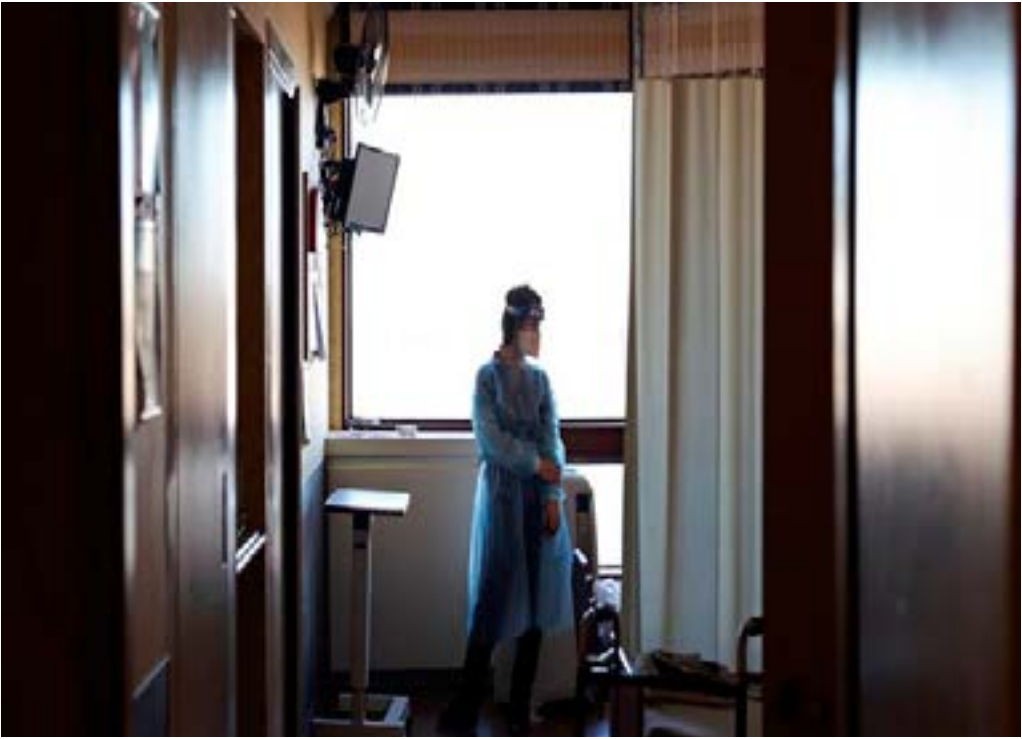
Elderly people, who are 65 and over, wait in line at the Department of Health Sarasota COVID-19 vaccination clinic in Sarasota, Florida. REUTERS/Octavio Jones



People line up for coronavirus tests in their vehicles at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, California. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson



A person walking next to the Tower Bridge is reflected on a window in London, Britain. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls



A Walgreens Pharmacist prepares the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine at Hamilton Park Nursing and Rehabilitation, a nursing home facility, in Brooklyn, New York. REUTERS/Yuki Iwamura



Migrants wait to disembark from a Spanish coast guard vessel, in the port of Arguineguin, in the south part of the island of Gran Canaria, Spain. REUTERS/Borja Suarez



U.S. President-elect Joe Biden campaigns for Democratic U.S. Senate candidates Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock at a rally ahead of runoff elections in Atlanta, Georgia. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst

Fast Rollout Of Virus Vaccine Trials Reveals Tribal Distrust In Native American Communities



Registered nurse Starla Garcia prepares a coronavirus vaccine in Chinle, Ariz., for someone who enrolled in the COVID-19 vaccine trials on the Navajo Nation and initially received a placebo. (Photo/Nina M. Ritchie/Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health via AP)

By Felicia Fonseca, Member of the Associated Press Race and Ethnicity Team
Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The news came during a hopeful time on the largest Native American reservation. Daily coronavirus cases were in the single digits, down from a springtime peak of 238 that made the Navajo Nation a U.S. hot spot. The tribe, wanting to ensure a COVID-19 vaccine would be effective for its people, said it would welcome Pfizer clinical trials on its reservation spanning Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Right away, tribal members accused their government of allowing them to be guinea pigs, pointing to painful times in the past when Native Americans didn't consent to medical testing or weren't fully informed about procedures. A Navajo Nation review board gave the study quicker approval than normal after researchers with Johns Hopkins University's Center for American Indian Health made the case for diversity. Without Native volunteers, how would they know if tribal members responded to vaccines the same as others? "Unfortunately, Native Americans have effectively been denied the opportunity to participate in these clinical trials because almost all of the study sites are in large, urban areas that have not done effective outreach to Native Americans," said Dr. Laura Hammitt

of Johns Hopkins. About 460 Native Americans participated in the trials for the vaccine by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, including Navajos. The enrollment reflects a growing understanding of the role that people of color play in vaccine development and the push to rapidly deploy it to curb infections among populations that have been disproportionately affected by the virus. Yet, few of the country's 574 federally recognized tribes have signed on for the studies, a hesitation often rooted in suspicion and distrust. Many tribes also require several layers of approval for clinical trials, a challenge researchers aren't always willing to overcome and don't face in the states.




Arvena Peshlakai opening the gate to her

sheep corral at her home in Crystal, New Mexico. She and her husband Melvin volunteered to participate in coronavirus vaccine trials on the Navajo Nation. As coronavirus vaccines were being developed around the world, few Native American tribes signed up to participate. The reasons range from unethical practices of the past to the quick nature of the studies amid the pandemic. (Courtesy Arvena Peshlakai via AP). While vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna Inc. roll out across Indian Country, others are being studied. In the Pacific Northwest, the Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe plan to participate in a vaccine trial from another company, Novavax Inc. A Cheyenne River Sioux researcher plans to enroll Native Americans and others in South Dakota in the Novavax trial and another by Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline. On the Navajo Nation, Arvena Peshlakai, her husband, Melvin, and their daughter Quortanii volunteered for the Pfizer trials. Arvena Peshlakai said the rumors were rampant: Navajos would be injected with the virus, and researchers would use plasma from people who got COVID-19. She was assured that wasn't happening and let the words of her parents and grandparents guide her: Don't let our struggles be your struggles, begin with our triumphs. "What else am I supposed to do? Just sit back and say, 'No, I don't trust them' and not try something new to see if we can find a breakthrough?" Peshlakai said. "We have to do something, we can't just sit by and wait and hope and pray." She overcame her fear of needles to get the doses and keeps track of her well-being daily on an app. As trial participants, the family can get the vaccine if they initially received a placebo. The Pfizer trials among the Navajo and White Mountain Apache tribes enrolled 275 people, about 80% of them Native American, Hammitt said. It wasn't as many as researchers had hoped for, but she said it's enough to compare immune and antibody responses in Native patients to others. Vaccine trials nationwide have been moving quickly, which doesn't always align with tribal guidelines on considering research proposals.



Dr. Cristina Toledo-Cornell, left, shares a socially distanced fist bump with Dr. Dakotah Lane after the first COVID-19 vaccination was given to a Lummi Nation

tribal member Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020, on the Lummi Reservation, near Bellingham, Wash. The Native American tribe began rationing its first 300 doses of vaccine as it fights surging cases with a shelter-in-place order. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson) "It must be done with respect for tribal sovereignty and knowing that each individual has truly been given informed consent," said Abigail Echo-Hawk, director of the Urban Indian Health Institute in Seattle. It helped that Johns Hopkins has a decades-long history with the Navajos and Apaches, including other clinical trials. Hammitt said the Navajo Human Research Review Board was receptive to a quick review of the vaccine trials because of the devastating impact of the pandemic. In South Dakota, the Cheyenne River Sioux tribal health committee initially pushed back on Dr. Jeffrey Henderson's proposal for trials of the Novavax vaccine. Henderson, a tribal member, was sent into the community to gauge support. He expects to get approval from a newly seated tribal council but for now, plans to set up a mobile unit outside the reservation. "We refuse to do this type of research or any research within the boundaries of a tribe without having explicit approval from the tribe," Henderson said. In Washington state, the Nooksack tribe is set to begin enrolling volunteers in the Novavax trials Monday, said Dr. Frank James, the tribe's health officer. "I expect a slow start to it, and we have to get a few brave people who are comfortable with it and then people to follow," he said. The nearby Lummi Nation is moving forward with a three-part review and approval process for the Novavax trials. Initial hesitation among the tribe stemmed from a researcher who took photos of Lummi children years ago to develop a tool to diagnose fetal alcohol syndrome but didn't offer any ways to address it, said Dr. Dakotah Lane, executive medical director of the Lummi Tribal Health Clinic. "I had already known and was aware of certainly some distrust with any kind of research within our community," Lane said. "But I also knew the only way out of this

pandemic was with access to vaccines."  Melvin Luke Peshlakai, left, and Arvena Peshlakai at their home in Crystal, New Mexico. The couple volunteered to participate in coronavirus vaccine trials on the Navajo Nation. As coronavirus vaccines were being developed around the world, few Native American tribes signed up to participate. (Courtesy Arvena Peshlakai via AP) Other stories about the sterilization of Native American women, noted in a 1976 federal report, and military testing of radioactive iodine on Alaska Natives have bred distrust. The Havasupai Tribe also settled a lawsuit a decade ago that accused Arizona State University scientists of misusing blood samples meant for diabetes research to study schizophrenia, inbreeding and ancient population migration without the tribe's permission. That case came to mind when Annette Brown, a Navajo woman, heard about her tribe's willingness to participate in COVID-19 vaccine trials. "There's this historical distrust when it comes to any type of experimenting," she said. "It's just experience, I don't know that there are many families out there who haven't been touched by some sort of experimentation (or) biological attacks on tribal communities." Researchers and doctors in Native American communities also have found that standard doses for medications like blood thinners weren't always the best fit for tribal members. For Marcia O'Leary, helping with a study that indirectly discovered that HPV vaccines don't protect against a strain that's a leading cause of cancer among Native American women in the Great Plains shows the importance of having more Native researchers and being involved in clinical trials. "We can't wait for this to trickle down," said O'Leary, director of Missouri Breaks, a small Native American-owned research group on the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation. "It seems like in Indian Country, we keep chasing the ball of health and we never get ahead of it." (Courtesy https://apnews.com/)

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