

BERLIN (AP) — World powers that are part of a landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Iran urged Tehran on Wednesday to roll back violations of the accord and return to full compliance during a virtual meeting in Vienna, a German official said. The meeting came as the signatories to the agreement — Germany, France, Britain, China and Russia — continue to try and keep it from collapsing after the unilateral withdrawal of the United States in 2018. The three European powers have expressed hope that with the change of administrations in Washington, the U.S. could be brought back into the deal, whose goal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb — something Tehran insists it doesn't want to do. President-elect Joe Biden has said he hopes to return the U.S. to the deal, which was negotiated while he was vice president.

BERLIN (AP) — Germany reported a record level of coronavirus deaths as it entered a harder lockdown Wednesday, closing shops and schools to try to bring down stubbornly high new daily infections. The country recorded 179.8 virus infections per 100,000 residents over the last seven days, a new high and significantly more than the 149 per 100,000 reported a week ago by the Robert Koch Institute, the country's disease control center. It also blew past its previous daily death toll, with Germany's 16 states reporting that 952 more people had died of the virus, the institute said. That was far greater than the previous daily record set Friday of 598 deaths, although it included two days of figures from the hard-hit eastern state of Saxony, which did not report Tuesday. It brought the country's overall pandemic death toll to 23,427. "It's as if the virus wanted to remind us how important what we're now doing is," Health Minister Jens Spahn said of the surge in deaths being reported on the day new restrictions come into force.

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's top diplomat on Wednesday brushed off media reports that there had been several attempts to poison Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and that Russian security forces might have orchestrated and carried out the poisoning. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow was "used to" Western countries airing accusations against Russia in the media. "It's amusing to read all this news, but the manner in which (it was) presented says only one thing: that our Western partners lack any ethical norms and any skills of normal diplomatic work, and (are unwilling) to be guided by international law norms when it's about establishing facts," Lavrov charged at a news conference after meeting with his Croatian counterpart in Zagreb, Croatia's capital. Navalny fell ill on Aug. 20 during a domestic flight in Russia, and was flown in a coma to Germany for treatment two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that Russia's opposition leader was exposed to a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

BRUSSELS (AP) — After weeks of relentless pessimism, the European Union said Wednesday there was now a clear, if narrow, path to reaching an agreement with the United Kingdom on a post-Brexit trade deal that should avoid costly chaos on the borders at the end of the year. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she is seeing clear progress in the talks held in Brussels, saying that “the good news is that we have found a way forward on most issues.” Von der Leyen confirmed that the major sticking points had been reduced to just two — fair competition in the EU market and fishing rights for EU vessels in U.K. waters. Even though she still spoke only of a “very narrow” path to a deal, she added that “I can tell you that there is a path to an agreement.” It was far more optimistic than previous comments coming from British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and even any assessment in the past few months. Britain left the 27-nation bloc in January but until the end of this year remains in a transition period that keeps all trade ties the same with the EU. These talks deal with trading relations between the two sides starting on Jan. 1.

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — Rebels from the Boko Haram extremist group claimed responsibility Tuesday for abducting hundreds of boys from a school in Nigeria’s northern Katsina State last week in one of the largest such attacks in years, raising fears of a growing wave of violence in the region. More than 330 students remain missing from the Government Science Secondary School in Kankara after gunmen with assault rifles attacked their school Friday night, although scores of others managed to escape. The government and the attackers are negotiating the fate of the boys, according to Garba Shehu, a spokesman for Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. “The kidnappers had made contact and discussions were already on, pertaining to the safety and return” of the children to their homes, said Shehu on Twitter during talks with Katsina Gov. Aminu Masari. Neither official said whether the negotiations are with Boko Haram or another group. Masari said security agencies “deployed for rescue operations have also informed us that they have located their position.”

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea’s parliament on Monday approved contentious legislation criminalizing the flying of propaganda leaflets by balloon toward North Korea, despite fierce criticism that the country is sacrificing freedom of expression to improve ties with the rival North. The legislation passed with the support of 187 lawmakers, mostly governing party members who support President Moon Jae-in’s policy of engagement with North Korea. Outnumbered opposition lawmakers didn’t attend the vote after their attempt at delaying the balloting with nonstop speeches was foiled by governing party lawmakers and their allies who used their three-fifths supermajority to halt the speeches in a separate vote. It was the first time that South Korea’s parliament has passed a bill formally banning civilians from floating anti-North Korea leaflets across the tense border. South Korea has previously banned such activities only during sensitive times, and has normally allowed activists to exercise their freedom of speech despite repeated protests from North Korea.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hundreds more hospitals around the country began dispensing COVID-19 shots to their workers in a rapid expansion of the U.S. vaccination drive Tuesday, while a second vaccine moved to the cusp of government authorization. A day after the rollout of Pfizer-BioNTech's coronavirus shots, the Food and Drug Administration said its preliminary analysis confirmed the effectiveness and safety of the vaccine developed by Moderna and the National Institutes of Health. A panel of outside experts is expected to recommend the formula on Thursday, with the FDA's green light coming soon thereafter. The Moderna vaccine uses the same technology as Pfizer-BioNTech's and showed similarly strong protection against COVID-19 but is easier to handle because it does not need to be kept in the deep freeze at minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 70 Celsius). Another weapon against the outbreak can't come soon enough: The number of dead in the U.S. passed a staggering 300,000 on Monday, according to Johns Hopkins University, with about 2,400 people now dying per day on average.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top congressional leaders are nearing agreement on a long-delayed COVID-19 relief package, hoping to seal a deal as early as Wednesday that would extend aid to individuals and businesses and help ship coronavirus vaccines to millions. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., a coauthor of a \$908 billion bipartisan package, said leadership negotiators are close to agreement on legislation that would extend direct payments of perhaps \$600 to most Americans. No. 2 Senate Republican John Thune of South Dakota confirmed the likely addition of direct payments in that range, as well as a \$300-per-week bonus federal unemployment benefit to partially replace a \$600-per-week benefit that expired this summer. "We made major headway toward hammering out a bipartisan relief package," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. The bill would include a new round of stimulus checks, enhanced federal unemployment insurance benefits, and other avenues for delivering aid to states, localities, territories and tribes, according to two people familiar with the talks and authorized to characterize them. Their statement said that a GOP-sought provision shielding businesses from COVID-19-related lawsuits would be dropped.

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is set to introduce former presidential rival Pete Buttigieg on Wednesday as his nominee for transportation secretary, adding a youthful voice to an incoming administration so far dominated by people with decades of Washington experience. The 38-year-old former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, would also be the first openly gay person confirmed by the Senate to a Cabinet post. In a tweet on Tuesday, Biden described Buttigieg, who has served as a Navy reserve intelligence officer in Afghanistan, as "a leader, patriot, and problem-solver." The nomination was applauded by union leaders, transportation industry officials, LGBTQ activists and Democratic lawmakers as a solid pick by Biden. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, called Buttigieg "more than ready to finally address our nation's infrastructure crisis." Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., applauded Biden for tapping someone with "plenty of intellect, vision, and drive" to take a shot at modernizing America's crumbling transportation infrastructure.

NEW YORK — Restaurants across New York City are facing the challenge of how to protect makeshift outdoor dining spaces from a fleet of snow plows that will roll out to deal with a major snowstorm. The city has ordered all outdoor dining suspended by 2 p.m. Wednesday, around the time when the storm is expected to start dumping a foot or more of snow in the city and throughout the Northeast. New York City restaurants aren't being required to break down wooden shacks and other structures they've set up in parking spaces for outdoor dining during the pandemic. But the city wants them to remove or secure outdoor furniture, remove heaters and the tops of their structures to make way for the plows that typically push piles of snow into parking spaces. The eateries were already struggling to cope with a state shutdown on Monday of all indoor dining. Meanwhile, New Jersey is poised to restrict commercial traffic from some highways because of the impending snow storm.

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks edged higher in midday trading as investors continue to balance hope for additional aid from Washington with a spike in virus cases that continues holding back a broad economic recovery. The S&P 500 rose 0.2% early Wednesday and is hovering around its record high after a broad rally on Tuesday broke a four-day losing streak. Those gains pushed the tech-heavy Nasdaq to a record high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 38 points, or 0.1%, to 30,160 as of 11:55 a.m. Eastern time. The tech-heavy Nasdaq rose 0.4%. Smaller stocks slipped. The Russell 2000 index fell 0.3% and slightly backed off the record high it set a day earlier. Top congressional leaders are nearing agreement on a long-delayed COVID-19 relief package and a deal could be sealed as early as Wednesday. Investors have been hoping that Democrats and Republicans might be able to move past their partisan bickering to give businesses and people another financial lifeline.

Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker laid out more than \$700 million in cuts Tuesday to deal with a projected \$3.9 billion budget deficit, contending Republicans need to offer their own plan and blaming them for playing a role in destabilizing state finances even before the pandemic sent tax revenues crashing. Republicans quickly countered that the budget problems were self-inflicted by Democrats who enacted what Illinois House GOP leader Jim Durkin called a "fantasy budget" that hinged on voter approval of Pritzker's proposed graduated-rate income tax and a "fingers crossed hope for a federal bailout" that has not materialized. Pritzker said his \$711.2 million menu of cuts could be implemented through executive action. He said the cuts represented only a first round and wants lawmakers to authorize additional reductions. His plan includes \$425 million in reductions in grants and operating costs across human services, health care, public safety, economic development, agriculture and other budget lines. It also includes \$75 million in "personnel cost adjustments" to be "developed through negotiations with the unions." Pritzker said the administration would seek furloughs and wage adjustments.

An Aurora man has been charged with reckless homicide after a passenger in his vehicle died during a crash in the city, officials said. Gustavo Gutierrez-Aguilar, 35, of the first block of Margarets Lane, has also been charged with multiple counts of aggravated driving under the influence, Aurora police said in a news release. Aurora police officers were dispatched at 6:15 p.m. Sunday to Mountain Street and Austin Avenue on the city's East Side for a single-vehicle crash. Officers found a car crashed into a tree and saw the driver, Gutierrez-Aguilar, outside the car, struggling to walk and maintain his balance, police said. The responding officer said he could smell a strong odor of alcohol from Gutierrez-Aguilar's breath, police said. Gutierrez-Aguilar was later found to have a blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit, police said.

Major decisions could be made about Chicago Public Schools this week related to its coronavirus response and plans to resume in-person learning. The Chicago Board of Education is set to vote on extending its emergency COVID-19 spending authorization until March, allowing the district to take on costs tied to the pandemic without the usual approval process. So far, CPS reports it has spent about \$132 million on coronavirus measures, including \$68 million of the \$75 million earmarked for emergencies. If approved by the board, the extension would give CPS three additional months to spend the remaining \$7 million. Then a hearing on legal action that would halt the district's reopening plan is set for Thursday, the day before eligible families are supposed to get classroom assignments. The Chicago Teachers Union last week filed a motion for an injunction with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board over the plan that would have students in prekindergarten and moderate to severe special education clusters programs return Jan. 11. Other students in kindergarten through sixth grade, and most seventh and eighth graders, would start a hybrid model on Feb. 1.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot on Wednesday followed through on a pledge to introduce a plan to the City Council that would eliminate loopholes in the city's Welcoming City Ordinance that allow police to in some cases cooperate with federal immigration agents. Lightfoot drew the ire of some Latino aldermen and activists this fall when she tried to include the changes in her 2021 budget as a way to try to get their support. Facing criticism, the mayor removed the language from the package, and it passed 29-21. The mayor's proposed ordinance would no longer let Chicago police cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents if arrestees' names are in Chicago's gang database, if they have charges or convictions in their background, or if they have criminal warrants. The mayor's proposal also would prohibit city agencies from detaining people solely because they might be in the U.S. without legal permission, or transferring anyone to ICE custody for immigration enforcement.

Two boys, 13 and 15, have been charged with stealing a woman's car at gunpoint in Rogers Park, according to Chicago police. The teens were both arrested around 4:15 p.m. Tuesday in the 4700 block of North Racine Avenue, police said. They were taken into custody less than 30 minutes after a 65-year-old woman was carjacked after parking in the 1200 block of West Farwell Avenue about 2 1/2 miles away. They were both charged with felony aggravated vehicular hijacking with a firearm and aggravated vehicular hijacking of a person with a handicap, police said. The teens were expected to appear at a bail hearing Wednesday.

The NFC East is no longer the laughingstock division in the NFL. After combining to win just two of their first 21 non-division games this season, the teams from the NFC East have been knocking off some powerhouses in recent weeks. Philadelphia beat NFC leading New Orleans last week in the first game with rookie Jalen Hurts starting at quarterback. That came a week after Washington handed Pittsburgh its first loss of the season and the New York Giants upset Seattle on the road. With Washington winning again last week against San Francisco and Dallas knocking off Cincinnati, the NFC East won three non-division games in the same week for the first time since Week 3 in 2018.

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Giannis Antetokounmpo has agreed to a supermax extension with the Milwaukee Bucks that takes the two-time reigning MVP off next summer's free-agent market. "I'm blessed to be a part of the Milwaukee Bucks for the next 5 years," Antetokounmpo posted Tuesday on his social media platforms. The Bucks announced later in the day that Antetokounmpo had signed an extension without announcing the terms or length. The 26-year-old Antetokounmpo had until Monday to sign the Bucks' supermax extension offer. If he turned it down, Antetokounmpo could have become a free agent after the upcoming season. The Athletic and Stadium reported that he agreed to a five-year extension worth \$228 million that includes an opt-out clause in 2025. "This is my home, this is my city," Antetokounmpo said in his post on social media. "I'm blessed to be able to be a part of the Milwaukee Bucks for the next 5 years. Let's make these years count. The show goes on, let's get it."

NCAA Men's Basketball:

Appalachian State	38	Minnesota	65
10 Tennessee	79	13 Illinois	92
Loyola	63	24 Clemson	60
12 Wisconsin	77	Virginia Tech	66

Today: Scattered snow showers. Cloudy, with a high near 33. North northeast wind around 10 mph, with gusts as high as 15 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

Tonight: Scattered snow showers before 9pm, then scattered snow showers and freezing drizzle. Cloudy, with a low around 29. North wind 5 to 10 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

Thursday: A chance of snow showers and freezing drizzle before 11am, then a chance of rain and snow showers between 11am and noon. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 36. West northwest wind around 5 mph. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

Thursday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 26. West northwest wind around 5 mph becoming calm.

Friday: Partly sunny, with a high near 40. South wind 5 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.

Friday Night: A chance of snow after midnight, mixing with rain after 2am. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 34. Chance of precipitation is 30%.

Saturday: A chance of rain and snow before 8am, then a chance of rain. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 40. Chance of precipitation is 50%.

Saturday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 28.

Sunday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 39.

Sunday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 32.

Every year, Idaho harvests about 13 billion pounds of potatoes from 311,000 acres of mineral-rich volcanic soil. That means about 1/3 of all potatoes grown in the United States are grown in Idaho! That's a lot of spuds! It seems like an impossible feat, but the Idaho potato growers, many of whom work and live on the farms their grandparents and great grandparents established, rely on the history of the land, the practices they learned from their families and of course technology, to grow America's favorite vegetable. Idaho Potatoes are delicious and nutritious and loaded with important vitamins and nutrients, like Vitamin B6, Potassium and Vitamin C, that help keep your body fueled and strong all day long! To be sure you're getting genuine, top-quality Idaho Potatoes, look for the "Grown In Idaho" seal. Idaho's growing season of warm days and cool nights, ample mountain-fed irrigation and rich volcanic soil, give Idaho Potatoes their unique texture, taste and dependable performance. Idaho Potatoes: Grown In Idaho.