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Mr. Lee's Commentary and Dairy



Inside C2

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Biden hits campaign trail in Georgia after top Republicans acknowledge his win



FILE PHOTO: U.S. President-elect Joe Biden delivers a televised address to the nation, after the U.S. Electoral College formally confirmed his victory over President Donald Trump in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, from Biden's transition headquarters at the Queen Theater in Wilmington, Delaware, U.S., December 14, 2020. REUTERS/Mike Segar/ File Photo

ATLANTA (Reuters) - Hours after speaking with Republican Senator Mitch McConnell and vowing to try to work together, President-elect Joe Biden urged Georgians on Tuesday to oust McConnell as majority leader by electing the two Democratic candidates in Jan. 5 Senate runoffs.

In a speech that marked his return to the campaign trail a day after the Electoral College confirmed his Nov. 3 election victory, Biden, a Democrat, laid out the stakes of the twin contests in no uncertain terms, warning that leaving the Senate in Republican hands could threaten much of his policy agenda.

"Are you ready to vote for two senators who know how to say yes and not just no?" Biden told an Atlanta drive-in rally, where attendees remained in their cars because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Democrats Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff are challenging Republican incumbents Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue, respectively. A Democratic sweep would give the party control of both chambers of Congress as well as the White House, while even one Republican win would allow McConnell to block many of Biden's legislative goals.

Earlier on Tuesday, McConnell broke with Republican President Donald Trump and congratulated Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris for the first time from the Senate floor. Trump has refused to concede, even as his myriad efforts to overturn the results have met with failure.

Biden told reporters he and McConnell agreed to meet soon to discuss potential areas of cooperation.

During the campaign event, he made clear, however, the limits of that partnership, telling Georgians a Democratic Senate was necessary to make progress on coronavirus relief, funding for testing and vaccine distribution, aid to state and local governments, climate change and criminal justice.

He also attacked Loeffler and Perdue for embracing a lawsuit filed by Texas and supported by Trump that sought to invalidate the election results in Georgia and three other states that went for Biden. The U.S. Supreme Court summarily dismissed the case on Friday.

"They fully embraced nullifying nearly 5 million Georgia votes," Biden said. "Maybe they think they represent Texas. Well if you want to do the bidding of Texas, you should be running in Texas, not Georgia."

U.S. Senate leader McConnell acknowledges Biden victory; laments Trump defeat

Despite Trump's attacks, Biden has pressed ahead with building his Cabinet, with word of more picks emerging on Tues-

He has chosen Pete Buttigieg, his former rival for the Democratic presidential nomination, to lead the U.S. Transportation Department, according to three people familiar with the matter.

Buttigieg, 38, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, would be the first openly LGBTQ Cabi-

U.S. Representative Deb Haaland, 60, of New Mexico, is Biden's leading choice to head the Interior Department, according to three sources familiar with the proceedings, a selection that would make her the first Native American to lead a Cabinet agency if confirmed by the Senate. **COVID-19 RELIEF**

net secretary approved by the Senate.

Biden has pushed Congress to pass a new round of coronavirus relief before the year's end. Congressional leaders were meeting on Tuesday as they seek to finalize a government funding bill and end a months-long standoff on economic relief.

McConnell and his top deputies also pressed other Senate Republicans not to join with any House Republicans who may object to the election outcome when Congress meets on Jan. 6 to ratify the decision.

Any such effort to challenge the results is all but certain to fail since it would require approval by both chambers, including the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. Biden was congratulated on Tuesday by Russian President Vladimir Putin, a favorite of Trump's, and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, both of whom had held off on acknowledging Biden's victory.

Biden and Harris will be sworn in on the steps of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 20 with far fewer people present than is customary due to the raging coronavirus that has killed more than 300,000 people in the United States, the inaugural planning committee said on Tuesday.







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WEALER'S GLOBAL NOTES

12/15/2020

CORONAVIRUS DIARY Wealee@scdaily.com

It Is Time To Turn The Page

nation and declared that, "It is time to turn the page" on the 2020 election after the Electoral College formally cast its votes for him to replace President Donald Trump on January 20, 2021. Biden said, "Wethepeople voted. Faith in The U.S. has started giving the first dosourinstitutionsheld. The integrity of ourelections remainsintact. And so, now it is time to turn the page. To unite. To heal.

The president has refused to concede while he and his allies have undermined faith in the country's democratic system of governance. He tweeted about a "Rigged Election" and massive fraud.

President-elect Joe Biden spoke to the Today in Washington, D.C., Attorney General William Barr resigned and will depart next week. Mr. Barr recently acknowledged that the department had found no widespread voter fraud.

> es of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine as the nation surpassed 300,000 virus-related deaths. U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams called the roll out. "Just tremendous and I am smiling bigger than I' ve smiled in a long time because it has been a hard vear for so many people out there."

> The first doses of the vaccine were iniected Monday to most of the city's



healthcare workers.

We are so glad that help is really on the

way. All of the people are looking for a better tomorrow.



Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Stay Home!

BUSINESS

Wear Mask!

Most States Aren't Ready For Distribution Of The **Leading COVID-19 Vaccine**



Arizona expects the Pfizer vaccine will not be able to reach the state's rural and tribal areas. (Daniel Slim/AFP via Getty Images)

KEY POINTS

A review of state distribution plans reveals that officials don't know how they'll deal with the difficult storage and transport requirements of Pfizer's vaccine, especially in the rural areas currently seeing a spike in infections.

The US government plans to start vaccinating Americans next month if Pfizer has its COVID-19 vaccine approved by the FDA

Health and human services secretary Alex Azar says the US could receive 20 million doses per month starting at the end of this month

Dr Anthony Fauci has estimated, based on Pfizer's initial findings, that the general population could get the vaccine by April

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

As the first coronavirus vaccine takes a major stride toward approval, state governments' distribution plans show many are not ready to deliver the shots. The challenge is especially steep in rural areas, many of which are contending with a surge of infections, meaning that access to the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines may be limited by geography.

Pfizer announced Monday that its vaccine demonstrated more than 90% effectiveness and no serious bad reactions in early trial results — an impressive outcome that will pave the way for the company to seek an emergency

authorization once it collects more safety data for another week or two. But establishing that the vaccine is safe and effective is just the first step. Pfizer says the vaccine it has been developing with German partner BioNTech SE is 90 percent effective against COVID-19 and it expects to have safety data as soon as next week to apply for emergency use authorization.

The Pfizer vaccine is unusually difficult to ship and store: It is administered in two doses given 28 days apart, has to be stored at temperatures of about minus 100 degrees

Fahrenheit and will be delivered in dry icepacked boxes holding 1,000 to 5,000 doses. These cartons can stay cold enough to keep the doses viable for up to 10 days, according to details provided by the company. The ice can be replenished up to three times. Once opened, the packages can keep the vaccine for five days but can't be opened more than twice a day. The vaccine can also survive in a refrigerator for five days but can't be refrozen if unused.

Health officials haven't figured out how to get the ultracold doses to critical populations living far from cities, according to a review of distribution plans obtained through open records laws in every state. Needing to use 1,000 doses within a few days may be fine for large hospital systems or mass vaccination centers. But it could rule out sending the vaccine to providers who don't treat that many people, even doctors' offices in cities. It's especially challenging in smaller towns, rural areas and Native communities on reservations that are likely to struggle to administer that many doses quickly or to maintain them at ultracold temperatures.



Dr. Anthony Fauci, based on Pfizer's initial findings, said he expects the doses of the vaccine to be available for certain high priority groups in December and that the general population could get the vaccine

Massive vaccine campaigns are nothing new but stamping out the coronavirus is a distinctly new challenge due to three factors: The short time frame for vaccinating a huge number of people, the fact that most vaccines will require two doses and the very low temperature at which some of the vaccines must be stored. Pfizer's vaccine needs to be stored at -94 degrees Farenheit. So with all the positive news of potential vaccine breakthroughs, what is the government's plan to effectively distribute the jab to Americans once it's available?

The efforts to provide vaccinations to 300

million Americans is being led by US Army general Gustave Perna, who has been put in charge of Operation Warp Speed - the program created by the Trump administration to produce and coordinate the distribution of

the COVID-19 vaccine. The Operation Warp Speed program has projected optimism about its readiness to distribute the vaccine. On Monday, General Perna told NPR, "I think we're in a good place," saying that "with the right planning. we can execute it with zero loss of vaccine." But the federal program is only going to be responsible for delivering vaccines to the states, which must then figure out on their own how to get the shots to the people who need them most.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asked each state to turn in distribution plans on Nov. 2, imagining a scenario in which a vaccine with Pfizer's specifications came first. The media was given full preliminary plans for 47 states (Hawaii, Pennsylvania and Minnesota say they're still working on theirs). Many struggled with how to handle a Pfizer-like vaccine. Washington state's Health Department does not have its own warehouse that can store the Pfizer vaccine at a cold enough temperature. Arizona expects the Pfizer vaccine cannot be handled by the state's rural communities and tribal lands. North Dakota and Oregon aren't sure how to take care of migrant workers. Kansas' plan appears to mistakenly assume shipments will be far smaller than 1,000 doses. Georgia's Public Health Department is relying on local districts and counties to work



Pfizer has already created a staging ground at its Michigan facility (pictured above) complete with 350 large freezers to hold the vaccines, which need to be stored at -94F, once they're created and ready to ship.

"Early, when we don't have lots of doses, I

frankly do not anticipate that vaccine will be widely available in every rural community," Dr. Amanda Cohn, chief medical officer for the CDC's Vaccine Task Force, said during a call on vaccine implementation planning with rural stakeholders on Nov. 3. "The first couple months will be not ideal, but we really want to listen to our rural partners and understand what we can do to make it bet-

ter," she added. The concern is most pronounced in places like Mt. Vernon Countryside Manor, a nursing home in southern Illinois more than 100 miles from the nearest major city, where the staff is working to contain the facility's first COVID-19 outbreak. Glenda Lee Young, a nurse at the home, said four residents and an employee tested positive for COVID-19 in recent weeks. The sick have been isolated from the other 70 elderly residents, and are

The surrounding county has a fatality rate of 4.5%, more than double that of Illinois as a whole, according to data from the Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 dashboard. The staff at Mt. Vernon is eager for a vaccine to help them and their residents. Illinois' distribution plan includes health care workers and people 65 years and older among the first groups to be immunized.

"Our people would not travel," Young said. "If a vaccine becomes available, it would have to come to us."



However, Illinois' plan does not specify how shots will be provided to rural parts of the state that may not have enough people or ultracold storage. The state's Department of Public Health didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Young said she was not surprised by the state's silence on rural vaccine access. "We get the shaft on a lot of stuff."

(Article continues on page C4)

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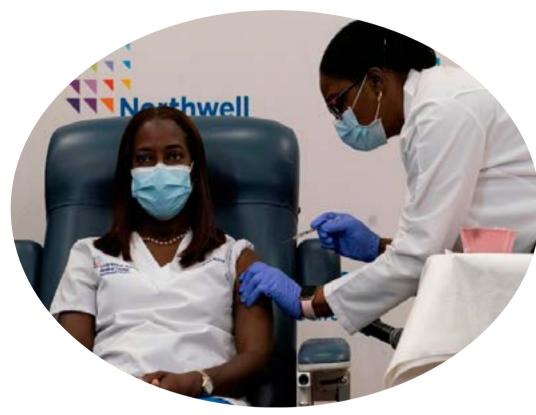
Editor's Choice



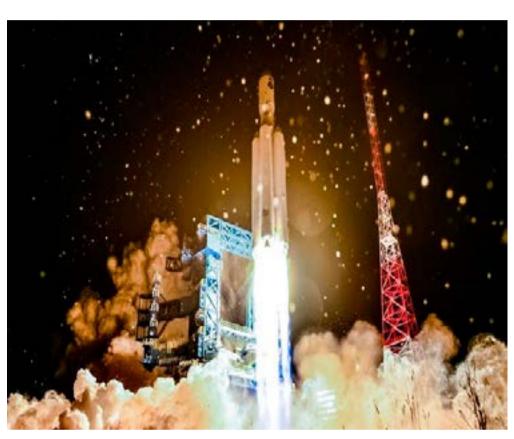
Protestors pray outside as Arizona electors gather to cast their votes for the U.S. presidential election, at the Arizona Capitol, in Phoenix, Arizona. REUTERS/Cheney Orr



An employee dressed in a Santa Claus costume plays with cats at the Catgarden in Seoul, South Korea. REU-TERS/Kim Hong-Ji



Sandra Lindsay, a nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, is inoculated with the coronavirus vaccine by Dr. Michelle Chester from Northwell Health at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New Hyde Park, New York. Mark Lennihan/Pool via REUTERS



Angara A5 space rocket blasts off at the Plesetsk cosmodrome, Russia. Russian Defence Ministry/via REUTERS



Democratic Electoral College elector Steve Henson looks at his signed vote for Joe Biden for President of the United States in the Georgia State Senate chambers in the Georgia State Capitol building in Atlanta, Georgia. REUTERS/Elijah Nouvelage..



A Lim Kim hoists the championship trophy after winning the U.S. Women's Open golf tournament at Champions Golf Club in Houston, Texas. Erik Williams-USA TODAY Sports



Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro arrives with his security detail ahead of electors gathering to cast their votes for the U.S. presidential election at the state capitol complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



A bird is seen next to a solar eclipse, visible in parts of Chile, Argentina and Brazil, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. REUTERS/Diego Vara





COMMUNITY

(Article continued from page C2)

Most States Aren't Ready For Distribution Of The Leading COVID-19 Vaccine

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

Officials Are Trying to Hit "a Moving Target"

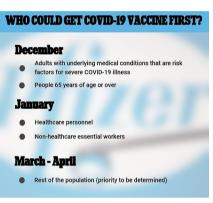
Health officials stressed that the plans are still evolving as they receive changing information. Even though Pfizer's vaccine has long been seen as the likely front-runner, details from the trial, including the vaccine's efficacy in specific populations like the elderly, have yet to be published. Shipping and storage logistics are also expected to continue to be fine-tuned with each passing week.

"It's a moving target," Dr. Philip Huang, director of the Dallas County Health and Human Services Department, said. "There's new info every day."

The changing details make it harder to plan, and some officials acknowledged they haven't gotten very far.

"There are too many variables still to be worked out at the federal level," a spokeswoman for the Georgia Department of Public Health said by way of declining an interview request for this article. "Much of what happens going forward will depend on the vaccine itself, when we receive it and what the protocols will be for prioritizing distribution among various populations."

The problem with waiting for details on the vaccine to be revealed is that mass immunization is a multilayered process, involving public communication campaigns, ordering of equipment, hiring of staff, training of vaccine providers and the added complexity, in this pandemic, of making sure all vaccine sites are safe and won't contribute to the spread. Operation Warp Speed has said its goal is to begin shipping the day that a vaccine is given the green light by the FDA, so states need to be ready at any moment.



For the initial months after the Food and Drug Administration signs off on a vaccine, the CDC advised state and local health authorities to prioritize health care workers, then move on to other essential work-

ers and at-risk populations such as nursing home res-

idents. Access would expand to the general public as manufacturing ramps up to make more doses available.

Who will get the vaccine first and when will it be rolled out?

HHS secretary Alex Azar offered up a timeline on Tuesday regarding who would be the first to receive the COVID-19 vaccination if they can start rolling out the jabs next month as planned.

The elderly in nursing homes and assisted living facilities will likely be the first to the vaccinated. Adults with underlying medical conditions that put them at risk of severe COVID-19 illness and people over 65 years of age could also fall into this initial category, according to according to Operation Warp Speed's strategy plan. Inoculations of healthcare workers and first responders will follow, with a goal to complete those shots by the end of January. Azar said he expects to have enough vaccinations for 'all Americans' by the end of March to early April.

A final priority list is still being determined by the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices that will based, in part, on vaccine efficacy data from the various trials, including Pfizer and Moderna. But there are a lot of details left to determine within those broad categories. Some health care workers have more exposure than others; North Dakota wants hospitals to document how they decided whom to vaccinate first. Maryland is prioritizing people in jails and prisons (where sharing close quarters has led to severe outbreaks), but states like Idaho and Mississippi have scheduled them for later.



HHS secretary Alex Azar offered up a timeline on Tuesday regarding who would be the first to receive the COVID-19 vaccination if they can start rolling out the jabs

next month as planned.

Arkansas, which has a large chicken industry, considers meatpacking workers to be essential. Oklahoma is prioritizing its long-term care population. Some states stressed communities of color, which have been disproportionately sickened and killed by the virus. "We are currently in the midst of a social justice movement across the county," Kentucky's plan notes.

Rural Communities Are "the Greatest Challenge"

Across the country, authorities are grappling with how to accommodate the Pfizer vaccine's finicky specifications. So far, state plans show few have come up with clear solutions. Oregon, for instance, said it still needs to "develop [a] plan" for how to handle 1,000-dose orders in "remote Oregon locations, while maintaining the ultracold chain and avoiding wastage."

Perna, the general leading logistics for Operation Warp Speed, told NPR that it's up to states to buy more freezers. That contradicts the CDC's instruction to not invest in more equipment. But many states said they're doing so anyway, or at least looking into it. They're also taking stock of what facilities already exist in their states at hospitals and universities, or where they can get dry ice. North Dakota, where the virus has killed roughly 1 out of every 1,200 people, is considering whether to break down the 1,000-dose packages and, on its own, distribute smaller quantities to individual hospitals and clinics

"The greatest challenge will be to moving small amounts of vaccine to widely scattered locations during Phase 1 since only a small percentage of the small population will be eligible for the vaccine," the state's plan said. It describes one health district that has three hospitals, two of which are more than an hour's drive away from the nearest city via a two-lane road, and eight long-term care facilities that are even more remote. "Reaching small populations with-

out redistribution may not [be] possible."



Even in the case where prioritized health care workers were physically capable of driving themselves to the city to get a vaccine, relying on doctors and nurses to get themselves to a vaccine "doesn't compute," said Tim Size, executive director of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative, which represents 43 rural acute hospitals. Wisconsin is battling its worst outbreak of the pandemic, and every hospital is stretched thin on staff, he said. Requiring everyone to take time off, twice, to get the Pfizer vaccine "means two days of lost staff time at a time we're desperately short of staff."

Size urged Pfizer to figure out a way to package its vaccine in smaller shipments so it could be delivered directly to rural hospitals. A spokeswoman for Pfizer declined to comment on whether the company is working on that. Later vaccines will likely have less onerous storage requirements, and at least one, made by Johnson & Johnson, only requires one dose instead of two, so many states are hoping to have multiple options to work with that may make it easier to reach remote populations. Some states appeared to be avoiding the issue of Pfizer's packaging for now. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment's plan assumes any approved vaccine will be "available in minimal quantities such as 100 doses per order." Kansas' department did not respond to requests

"If Pfizer comes out and says they're going to provide doses of 25 instead of 1,000, that's a game changer," said Imelda Garcia, associate commissioner for the Texas Department of State Health Services' Division for Laborato-

ry and Infectious Disease Services. "The manufacturers were imagining mass vaccination efforts and not really thinking about rural areas. We've been pushing pretty hard at the federal level for them to provide smaller packages. We don't know if that will occur or not."



The Trump administration has paid \$1.95 billion for 100 million initial doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Pfizer says it could have up to 50 million doses available by the end of this year if approved.

As Texas and other states consider the need to break down the 1,000-dose packages into smaller shipments, that's an additional cost that they'd have to shoulder, since the federal government will only pay to move the vaccines once. Several states identified funding as a major problem.

Virginia's plan included a "preparedness gap analysis" that estimates that it will need \$71 million to establish and operate mass vaccination clinics, which would include hiring temporary staff and covering facility rental costs, translation services, signage and other operating costs.

The plan also calls for a further \$2.5 million in equipment such as refrigerators and thermometers and \$3 million for public education, including TV, radio and social media ads, as well as "targeted outreach to clinicians, vulnerable populations and other key groups."

CDC Director Robert Redfield has said Congress will need to provide up to \$6 billion for vaccine distribution, but funding negotiations stalled ahead of the election. To date, the federal government has allocated 3% of that amount, \$200 million, to the states to immunize the nation.

Much of the implementation will spill into the next administration. President-elect Joe Biden on Monday named a team of public health experts to advise him on the COVID-19 response. But so far the Trump administration is refusing to cooperate with the transition. (Courtesy www.propublica.org and www.dailymail.co.uk)

