

Tuesday 12/01/20

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Watch: China's Chang'e-5 Probe Lands on Lunar Surface, Intends to Send Back Moon Samples by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

If the Chang'e-5 probe's mission is successful, not only will it mark a major accomplishment for Chinese space flight, it will also return with the first samples taken from the lunar surface in 44 years.

The China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced late on Tuesday night that the Chang'e-5 spacecraft had successfully and safely touched down at its intended landing site north of Mons Rümker in the Oceanus Procellarum, on the near side of the moon.

During the landing process, cameras aboard the lander snapped photos of the landing area, [the Global Times reported](#).

The probe's landing comes 23 months after its predecessor, Chang'e-4, made history by being the first human craft to make a soft landing on the far side of the moon, which never faces the Earth. However, unlike Chang'e-4, Chang'e-5 hasn't packed a radioisotope heating unit, meaning it has roughly 14 Earth days to complete its work before it [passes out of the sun's light and freezes](#). [SpaceNews reported](#).

However, [according to Xinhua News Agency](#), the CNSA crew handling the craft back on Earth hopes to have its work done in the next 48 hours. The probe will return about 2 kilograms of samples from the lunar soil by launching a container into lunar orbit [for the orbiter-returner spacecraft to deliver to Earth](#).

Wang Yanan, editor of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, told the Global Times Chang'e-5 has a new advanced grappling system that is more effective at sample gathering than past space probes have been.

"Sample collection on a celestial body normally combines the scoop and the drill, since the materials on the surface are usually too complicated to analyze because of all kinds of space weathering effects, and it is the soil and rocks underground that are most valuable for studying," he said.

Mons Rümker is a volcanic plain estimated to be roughly 1.2 billion years old - significantly younger than the other parts of the moon from which samples have been taken in the past. If the samples are successfully returned, they will be the first objects brought back from the moon since 1976, when the Soviet Union's Luna 24 probe returned 6 ounces of samples from the Mare Crisium.

In the longer run, China's space program aims to send unmanned probes to both lunar poles and [eventually for manned missions as well](#), Li Guoping, then-director of CNSA's Department of System Engineering who has since become CNSA's spokesperson, said in 2018.

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Elliot Page, Star of 'Juno' and 'Inception,' Comes Out as Transgender  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The queer Canadian actor has long been a crusader for LGBTQ rights and highlighted the epidemic of violence and discrimination transgender people face in his coming out post on Twitter and Instagram on Tuesday.

"Hi friends, I want to share with you that I am trans, my pronouns are he/they and my name is Elliot. I feel lucky to be writing this. To be here. To have arrived at this place in my life," Page wrote on Tuesday.

The inclusion of gender-neutral English pronouns suggests Elliot identifies as a nonbinary person, neither male nor female, a gender category that has existed in many cultures but is [only recently acquiring legal status in some nations](#). A landmark [trans rights law in Pakistan in 2018](#), for example, gave legal recognition to khawaja sira third gender people and an increasing number of US states offer nonbinary or gender neutral markers on identification documents.

The 33-year-old Canadian actor's breakthrough role came in 2007 in "Juno," in which he played a teenage girl who struggled with an unwanted pregnancy and for which he was nominated for an Oscar. He has also starred in films such as "Inception" and several "X-Men" superhero films, as well as the Netflix series "The Umbrella Academy."

Page's wife, dancer and choreographer Emma Portner, praised her spouse's coming out, [writing on Instagram that she was "so proud" of Page](#). "Trans, queer and non-binary people are a gift to this world. I also ask for patience & privacy but that you join me in the fervent support of trans life every single day. Elliot's existence is a gift in and of itself. Shine on sweet E. Love you so much."

"I love that I am trans. And I love that I am queer. And the more I hold myself close and fully embrace who I am, the more I dream, the more my heart grows and the more I thrive. To all the trans people who deal with harassment, self-loathing, abuse, and the threat of violence every day: I see you, I love you, and I will do everything I can to change this world for the better," Page continued.

Page noted that despite this being a "joyous" moment for him, the trans community continues to suffer from an epidemic of violence.

"The statistics are staggering. The discrimination towards trans people is rife, insidious, and cruel, resulting in horrific consequences. In 2020 alone it has been reported that at least 40 transgender people have been murdered, the majority of which were Black and Latinx trans women," he noted, [citing US statistics collected by Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\)](#), an American LGBTQ rights lobbying and advocacy group.

"To the political leaders who work to criminalize trans health care and deny our right to exist and to all of those with a massive platform who continue to spew hostility towards the trans community: you have blood on your hands," he wrote. "You unleash a fury of vile and demeaning rage that lands on the shoulders of the trans community, a community in which 40%

of trans adults attempting suicide. Enough is enough. You aren't being 'canceled,' you are hurting people. I am one of those people and we won't be silent in the face of your attacks." Page's advocacy for LGBTQ rights is well known, having first come out as a lesbian during a speech at HRC's "Time to Thrive" conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2014.

One notable incident [during the filming of the documentary series "Gaycation"](#) on the lives of LGBTQ Brazilians for Vice in 2016, Page went to the office of then-congressman Jair Bolsonaro and confronted him about disparaging comments he had made about gay people. The now-president told Page he blamed drug abuse and liberal permissivity for the rise of homosexuality since his childhood.

Page's coming out as trans also falls on World AIDS Day, an international day of advocacy intended to bring attention to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Other celebrities who have come out as trans or nonbinary in recent years have included American Olympic athlete Caitlyn Jenner and English singer Sam Smith, although the latter did not adopt a new name after.

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WHO Calls for 'Global Solidarity' on World AIDS Day to Beat HIV, COVID-19 Outbreaks  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Although Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) was first detected more than 40 years ago, the illness continues to infect and kill millions of people around the globe. Its persistence serves as a grim reminder that epidemic illnesses aren't defeated overnight or without concerted effort. Health organizations around the globe commemorated World AIDS Day on Tuesday, and commentators called attention to the parallels between the darkest days of that epidemic and the present COVID-19 pandemic. They noted that while the COVID-19 pandemic might have delayed the world's 2020 AIDS-fighting goals by as many as 10 years, the fight against COVID-19 hasn't suffered the same challenges of awareness and funding as AIDS has.

2020 Goals Delayed By A Decade

[The World Health Organization \(WHO\) noted that worldwide in 2019](#), there were 38 million people with HIV, but one-fifth did not know their status. That year, 1.7 million new cases were reported, and 690,000 people died from complications of the illness.

However, the UN-affiliated health agency warns, the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic have placed greater strains on health systems in the developing world, including dominating the concerns of health workers and interfering with supply chains.

"Now is the time for us to once again make a leap in our response to work together to end COVID-19 and get back on track to end HIV by 2030," the agency wrote. "On World AIDS Day 2020, WHO is calling on global leaders and citizens to rally for 'global solidarity' to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19 on the HIV response."

Those goals are known as "90-90-90" - 90% of people with HIV know their status, 90% of people with HIV are receiving treatment, and 90% of people receiving treatment are achieving

viral suppression using pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) drugs like [Truvada, which is made by Gilead Sciences](#).

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [echoed the WHO's call, warning that "we cannot underestimate](#) the impact of disruptions related to COVID-19 on healthcare system delivery and services particularly in resource-limited settings," such as sub-Saharan Africa. "As programs adapted to COVID-19, HIV treatment was prioritized. Now, we must plan for the rapid recovery and resumption of HIV testing and prevention services – in a responsible and safe way given the current landscape and building from what we have learned during this pandemic," the CDC said in a Monday statement. Testing and treatment programs in the region are heavily funded by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a 2005 initiative begun by then-US President George W. Bush.

First Global Health Day Since 1988

Since December 1, 1988, World AIDS Day has aimed to draw attention to the dangers posed by HIV and the disease the virus causes, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), which effectively strips the human body of its ability to defend itself from pathogens.

By the end of 1988, 82,362 cases of AIDS had been reported in the United States and 61,816 people had died from complications of AIDS since it was first identified just seven years earlier, [according to data collected by amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research](#).

1988 is also the year Anthony Fauci was appointed head of the US National Institute of Health's (NIH) National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), the part of the health agency tasked with finding an effective treatment for HIV.

At the helm of NIAID, Fauci played a decisive role in starting new research efforts and experimental drug testing for a slew of potential treatments for AIDS - many of which were brought to his attention by an unruly group of LGBTQ activists who call themselves [the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power \(ACT UP\)](#) and brought their protests to the doors of the [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#), [the NIH](#) and even [Fauci's office](#).

By 1996, their efforts had paid off, and a triple-drug treatment of protease inhibitors succeeded in both blocking transmission of HIV as well as reversing the deleterious effects of AIDS. However, annual new HIV cases did not level off until 2000, and annual AIDS deaths did not reach their peak until 2006, [with 2.9 million people dying from AIDS complications](#) in that year alone.

In 2020, Fauci is still running NIAID, and the COVID-19 pandemic has spread far faster than HIV, [infecting 63 million people worldwide and killing 1.4 million](#) in less than a year, with close to 270,000 dying in the United States alone, as of Tuesday.

'A Good Thing' COVID-19 Not Treated Like AIDS

Former US Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), who chaired a House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment in the 1980s, [told Time on Tuesday that while there were many similarities](#) between the COVID-19 pandemic and AIDS epidemic, there are many important differences as well, such as government reactions to the outbreak.

"[The COVID-19] pandemic, as awful as it is, is a very different situation. We had trouble getting money to do anything to fight back against the AIDS epidemic, but we've had no problem at all getting money to fight back against COVID," Waxman noted, "which is, is a very good thing."

When AIDS was discovered among a group of gay men in the US in 1981, it was called "gay-related immune deficiency," and its connection to the already-marginalized LGBTQ

community led to even further stigmatization for those who contracted the disease. It took four years for then-US President Ronald Reagan to even mention the epidemic, which he did in 1985 after a close family friend died of AIDS. Still, comprehensive legislation providing funding for research and treatment of AIDS did not come until 1988.

By contrast, just weeks after the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, the US Congress had passed the \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was [followed by several subsequent funding bills](#), although not all have been approved, even as new cases continue to rise.

In 1996, [a New York Times headline announcing Merck's protease inhibitor Crixivan](#) noted the FDA had approved the drug "with record speed," 42 days after being submitted to the FDA but seven years after ACT UP researchers who themselves had AIDS brought the NIH a list of promising treatments for AIDS and volunteered themselves as test subjects. But in 2020, just nine months after SARS-CoV-2 was identified as the virus behind COVID-19, [the Russian Ministry of Health had approved the Sputnik V vaccine](#), and it seems likely that [several more will be approved in the UK and US](#) before the year is out.

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Trump Lawyer Said Fired Cybersecurity Chief Krebs Should Be Shot, 'Drawn and Quartered' by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The Department of Homeland Security's former cybersecurity chief might have been fired last month for contradicting US President Donald Trump's election fraud allegations, but the US attorney general announced similar conclusions by the Department of Justice on Tuesday. Former Director of the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Christopher Krebs has indicated he is considering legal action after a lawyer for Trump's reelection campaign called for him to receive a gruesome, medieval form of punishment associated with treason.

On Monday, Joe diGenova, an attorney for Trump's campaign, [told conservative Boston-area talk radio host Howie Carr](#) that Krebs was "a class A moron" who "should be drawn and quartered. Taken out at dawn and shot" - a punishment he seemed to think should be applied to "anybody who thinks the election went well."

Krebs was [fired by Trump on November 17 for what the called](#) a "highly inaccurate" statement about the absence of electronic fraud during the November 3 US election.

The House Committee on Homeland Security [subsequently denounced the move as Trump putting](#) "his political interests ahead of their responsibilities to the American people. That is not only disturbing, it is antidemocratic."

[Earlier that day, Krebs had tweeted](#): "ICYMI: On allegations that election systems were manipulated, 59 election security experts all agree, 'in every case of which we are aware, these claims either have been unsubstantiated or are technically incoherent.'"

This followed [reports by CISA on November 4 and again on November 12](#) that, despite claims of widespread fraud by Trump, the agency, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, had found “no evidence” of such fraud.

Trump has maintained since the November 3 election that widespread fraud has caused several key states with close races between him and Democratic candidate Joe Biden to swing in Biden’s favor, filing a slew of lawsuits aimed at recounting or dismissing many of the ballots cast. Most mainstream media outlets have informally declared Biden the clear winner, especially as several of the [states that recounted their ballots have certified their results](#) and nearly all of Trump’s lawsuits [have been dismissed by the courts](#). However, Biden will not officially be president-elect until the Electoral College votes on December 14, and in his favor.

On Tuesday, diGenova tried to unring the bell calling for Krebs’ dismemberment, [saying in a statement distributed by the Trump campaign](#), “For anyone listening to the Howie Carr Show, it was obvious that my remarks were sarcastic and made in jest. I, of course, wish Mr. Krebs no harm. This was hyperbole in a political discourse.”

However, his comments followed similar ones by Trump’s attorney and diGenova’s colleague, Rudy Giuliani, on Fox News in which he said [someone should “cut the head off” the Democratic Party](#), making a throat-slashing gesture with his fingers.

Despite diGenova’s walking back of his comments about Krebs, [the former CISA chief told NBC Tuesday he would be](#) “taking a look at all our available opportunities” when asked if legal action might follow the lawyer’s comments.

“I’m not going to give them the benefit of knowing how I’m reacting to this,” he said, adding that “they can know there are things coming, though.”

Later on Tuesday, US Attorney General [William Barr voiced similar conclusions as Krebs](#), telling the Associated Press that “to date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have affected a different outcome in the election.”

“There’s been one assertion that would be systemic fraud and that would be the claim that machines were programmed essentially to skew the election results,” Barr told AP. “And the DHS and DOJ [Department of Justice] have looked into that, and so far, we haven’t seen anything to substantiate that.”

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Photo: Chinese Scientists Test Prototype Hypersonic Aircraft Engine to go Anywhere in 2 Hours by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Using a novel design likely suggested by an American scientist whose work has been largely forgotten, a group of Chinese researchers say they have created an aircraft engine that can propel an airframe as fast as 11,800 miles per hour, or Mach 16.

[According to the South China Morning Post](#), the revolutionary new engine is a standing oblique detonation ramjet (Sodramjet) design, with no moving parts, using the plane’s super-fast speed to push air into the chamber, where it is injected with hydrogen fuel and detonated, flying out the back of the engine as thrust.

That's how all ramjets and scramjets work, which have been used to power missiles since the 1960s. However, the sodramjet design tested in the recent experiments improved on the concept "by replacing diffusive combustion with an oblique detonation that is a unique pressure-gain phenomenon in nature," [according to the abstract of a paper published by a group](#) of Chinese scientists in the Chinese Journal of Aeronautics on Saturday.

"The Sodramjet engine model is developed with several flow control techniques, and tested successfully with the hypersonic flight-duplicated shock tunnel. The experimental data show that the Sodramjet engine model works steadily, and an oblique detonation can be made stationary in the engine combustor and is controllable. This research demonstrates the Sodramjet engine is a promising concept and can be operated stably with high thermal efficiency at hypersonic flow conditions," the researchers noted.

The study authors found that the engine could operate at speeds of up to Mach 16, propelling an airframe around the globe in just two hours.

According to the SCMP, the Chinese scientists were likely inspired by the speculative work of Richard Morrison, an American engineer for the US National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA), who suggested the engine design in a 1980 paper that aimed to address problems created by a conventional scramjet design.

The paper noted that "the US government shifted the bulk of hypersonic research from Nasa to private companies such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin, and Morrison's idea was largely if not completely forgotten by the American defense industry. The contractors put all their resources into scramjet design and continued to suffer setbacks that eventually caused them to trail other countries."

China has claimed to already have hypersonic weapons and several other countries are said to be testing the technology, but a hypersonic vehicle that could carry humans remains an elusive piece of science fiction.

In April 2019, [researchers at China's Xiamen University tested](#) a hypersonic aircraft named Jiageng-1 in the Gobi Desert, and [in August 2018, tested a Starry-Sky "waverider"](#) hypersonic vehicle. In the US, the US Air Force and the Presidential and Executive Airlift Directorate handed out a contract in August 2020 [to develop a hypersonic airliner](#) to serve as a future Air Force One for the US president.

Even for a hypersonic weapon, Mach 16 is very fast. China's Dongfeng-17 hypersonic glide vehicle, a long-range strike weapon, is thought to be able to reach Mach 5. Russia's Kinzhal hypersonic cruise missile has a similar speed, but Russian President [Vladimir Putin suggested in 2018 that Moscow's other hypersonic weapon](#), the Avangard glide vehicle, could reach speeds of Mach 20.

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US Attorney General Barr Says No Evidence of Widespread Voter Fraud in 2020 Election by [Mary F.](#)

The 2020 presidential election was the 59th quadrennial presidential election and was held on November 3. Democratic candidate Joe Biden received 306 electoral votes, while his Republican counterpart, US President Donald Trump, received 232 electoral votes, according to media projections.

US Attorney General William Barr on Tuesday revealed in an interview with the Associated Press (AP) that the US Justice Department has not identified evidence of widespread voter fraud that would alter the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

"To date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have affected a different outcome in the election," [Barr told AP](#), adding that US attorneys and FBI agents have been following up on complaints regarding voter fraud in the election but have yet to identify any vote fraud cases that would change the outcome.

"There's a growing tendency to use the criminal justice system as sort of a default fix-all, and people don't like something they want the Department of Justice to come in and 'investigate,'" Barr said.

"Most claims of fraud are very particularized to a particular set of circumstances or actors or conduct. They are not systemic allegations. And those have been run down; they are being run down. Some have been broad and potentially cover a few thousand votes. They have been followed up on," he added.

Barr also dismissed the theory that [Dominion Voting Systems machines](#) were used to change votes, a claim propagated by attorney and Trump ally Sidney Powell.

"There's been one assertion that would be systemic fraud and that would be the claim that machines were programmed essentially to skew the election results," Barr told AP. "And the DHS [Department of Homeland Security] and DOJ [Department of Justice] have looked into that, and so far, we haven't seen anything to substantiate that."

Barr's comments come as the Trump campaign team, led by lawyer Rudy Giuliani, has filed multiple lawsuits in several battleground states, including Pennsylvania, Michigan and Georgia, claiming voter fraud and challenging the election results.

Most recently, the Trump campaign on Tuesday [filed a lawsuit in Wisconsin](#) claiming that thousands of absentee ballots must be withdrawn from the state's vote count because they were not filed according to state law.

Last month, Barr also issued a directive to US attorneys across the country, which allowed lawyers to pursue "substantial allegations" of voting irregularities, [USA Today reported](#).

"Such inquiries and reviews may be conducted if there are clear and apparently-credible allegations of irregularities that, if true, could potentially impact the outcome of a federal election in an individual State," Barr said in a memo to federal prosecutors last month.

The directive allows prosecutors to pursue investigations into voter fraud before election results are certified.

The attorney general's latest comments on not finding proof of voter fraud also come after Barr previously expressed that he was concerned about the integrity of the 2020 election given the widespread use of mail-in ballots during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The government and the people involved can find out and know how you voted. And it opens up the door to coercion," Barr [said in September](#). He has also claimed that mail-in ballots are more vulnerable to manipulation by foreign powers.

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CDC Votes to First Distribute COVID-19 Vaccine to Health Workers, Long-Term Care Residents  
- Report  
by [Mary F.](#)

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a national public health institute in the United States under the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia.

A CDC panel on Tuesday reportedly voted 13-1 during an advisory committee meeting to give health care workers and long-term care facility residents the first COVID-19 vaccine once it becomes available for public use, [CNBC reported](#). The CDC has yet to make an official statement confirming the news.

Health care workers are defined as paid and unpaid people who work in health care settings and could be exposed indirectly or directly to COVID-19-positive patients or infectious materials. Long-term care facility residents include adults who cannot live independently or adults who live in facilities where they receive medical and personal care.

With around 21 million health care workers in the US, it would take three weeks for most US states to vaccinate all such workers, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, told CNBC.

However, during the Tuesday meeting, CDC officials noted the fact that there is no data on how pregnant women respond to the vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, the two vaccine candidates that are expected to receive Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval later this month. According to a presentation given during the CDC meeting, around 75% of health care workers are women, and 330,000 of them are pregnant. Officials plan to issue guidance on pregnant women once the phase 3 trial data on the vaccines has been completely reviewed, CNBC reported.

In addition, officials said that health care facilities should prepare for workers taking time off from clinical care in the event that they experience symptoms after receiving the vaccine. Dr. Moncef Slaoui, who is leading the Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed vaccine program, revealed that between 10% and 15% of people report side effects from the vaccines, which include symptoms such as redness and pain at the injection site in addition to fever, chills, muscle aches and headaches.

Medical experts have recommended that health care workers be the first to receive vaccine doses, followed by vulnerable people, which include the elderly, people with preexisting conditions and essential workers. Children and young adults are expected to receive vaccines last.

Although states are not required to follow the CDC's guidance, it is a useful framework, Dr. Karen Landers, spokesperson for the Alabama Department of Public Health, recently told CNBC.

“This guidance will be extremely helpful because it will be science-based, and also will give us the framework to be able to ensure that our guidelines are consistent with what is recommended by support staff,” she said.

Earlier this month, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar [told CNBC](#) that around 40 million doses of the vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer will be available by the end of the year, which is enough to inoculate about 20 million people, since both vaccines require two doses. The latest meeting comes as states prepare to distribute a vaccine in just a couple of weeks. Both Moderna and Pfizer have completed phase 3 clinical trials of their vaccines and have applied for emergency approval for their drugs from the FDA.

While Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech [requested emergency use authorization](#) for their vaccine candidate from the FDA earlier this month after finding the drug to be 95% effective against the virus, Moderna, which has developed a vaccine that is 94% effective in preventing COVID-19, announced it had [filed for emergency FDA authorization](#) on Monday.

The FDA’s Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee is slated to hold meetings this month to evaluate both vaccine candidates.

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Videos: Dozens of Bandits Seize Brazilian City, Rob Bank  
by [Mary F.](#)

Crime in Brazil is prevalent, with a homicide rate ranging between 25 and 31 per 100,000 inhabitants over the last several years, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In fact, Brazil has some of the highest numbers of intentional homicides in the world. Overnight on Tuesday, dozens of [criminals](#) armed with rifles invaded a city in Southern Brazil as they robbed a local bank.

The hooded men took over the streets of Criciuma in the state of Santa Catarina and held some local residents hostage while taking over the city of some 220,000 people. The takeover began around midnight and lasted for a couple of hours, [AP reported](#), with the criminals robbing the Bank of Brazil branch in the city.

“It was a surreal scene,” Clésio Salvaro, the city’s mayor, [said in a televised interview on Tuesday morning](#). “The city was left in a state of panic.”

Anselmo Cruz, the head of the state police's robbery and kidnapping department, told local Brazilian channel Globo News that there were at least 30 criminals in 10 cars and that they blocked access points within the city to prevent police from responding. The assailants also deployed explosives during the robbery to prevent police reinforcements from arriving quickly. An altercation between Santa Catarina’s military police and the gunmen took place in the city center. Two people, a security guard and a police officer, were wounded. The police officer, who was shot in the abdomen, remained hospitalized in serious condition on Tuesday.

“It was an unprecedented action for the state. There was never anything with this scope, this violence,” Cruz said.

“The criminals clearly planned, prepared and invested beforehand. This points to a group that came from outside. We don’t have criminals with this profile in Santa Catarina,” Cruz told reporters, [according to the New York Times](#).

According to AP, the Bank of Brazil branch in Criciuma revealed in a Tuesday statement that it will remain closed. However, it did not provide any information on the amount of money stolen. The assailants’ vehicles were located in a neighboring municipality by police, Cruz confirmed. Some of the cars’ interiors had bloodstains, suggesting that the gunmen had been struck by police bullets.

Officials from Santa Catarina, neighboring states and the federal government are all currently searching for the gunmen.

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US COVID-19 Cases Climb as Hospitalizations Hit New High, More ICU Beds Occupied  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Ahead of the US’ Thanksgiving holiday, multiple health officials and agencies warned Americans to avoid travel and opt for remote celebrations, as a sudden rush in celebratory gatherings would promote a spike in COVID-19 cases across the nation.

[New figures released](#) by Johns Hopkins University have recently revealed that 157,901 COVID-19 infections were reported Monday, an increase of nearly 19,000 new cases when compared to Sunday figures.

The Tuesday-released data also indicated that the US documented about 1,172 new COVID-19-related deaths, as the Land of the Free’s nationwide death toll inches closer to 270,000.

With the nation’s positivity ratio having reached 9.71%, university officials noted that the states with the highest daily increases were, in order, California, Texas, Michigan, Tennessee and New York. California topped the pack with 14,809 new COVID-19 cases.

Health officials anticipate that daily case figures will likely exceed the Monday count as the week progresses, since it’s believed that less coronavirus testing took place over the holiday weekend.

Globally, the US has remained undefeated as it still ranks number one in documented novel coronavirus cases, with Turkey, India, Russia and Brazil rounding out the top five countries.

As for hospitalizations, the US has soared in the department as well. The [latest data compiled by the COVID Tracking Project](#) states that 96,039 individuals were hospitalized as of Monday - a record-high spike of over 4,700 individuals when compared to the database’s 7-day average of 91,331.

Of the 96,039 hospitalizations, approximately 18,545 individuals were transferred to a hospital’s intensive care unit (ICU), and 6,520 others were placed on ventilators. The US has marked new hospitalizations highs nearly every day since November 10, [the Wall Street Journal reported](#).

In California, where officials are struggling to curb the deadly virus' spread, Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom has warned that "drastic action" such as imposing full stay-at-home orders may be needed in the coming days, should spiking trends hold.

A [Monday briefing by Newsom](#) revealed that 75% of the ICU beds across the Golden State are occupied. Additionally, projections provided by the governor indicated that without any COVID-19 intervention, ICUs would be overloaded to 112% of capacity with patients suffering from the novel coronavirus.

At present, the US has three vaccine candidates that have showed efficacy rates over 90% in trials. The drugs are expected to be reviewed in the next few weeks before an anticipated clearance is given by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for an emergency use authorization.

The first approved doses are expected to be released to first responders and nursing home residents and staffers; however, after an FDA approval, it's up to states to decide who will be first in line.

Pfizer and BioNTech's vaccine candidate will be the first to be reviewed by a panel of health experts, with the meeting slated for December 10. Moderna's candidate will be analyzed on December 17.

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Photos: Puerto Rico's Iconic Arecibo Telescope Collapses After Suffering Major Damages by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The US National Science Foundation (NSF) announced in mid-November that the scientific body would begin to decommission the radio telescope at Puerto Rico's Arecibo Observatory over fears that recent damages would bring about the structure's collapse.

Ahead of its controlled demolition, the iconic telescope collapsed in on itself overnight, officials revealed Tuesday. The telescope's demise came after the observatory suffered two major cable malfunctions over the last couple of months.

The [NSF revealed in a Tuesday release](#) that the 305-meter telescope collapsed at approximately 7:55 a.m. local time, and that since the structure gave way, officials have launched an investigation to conduct a damage assessment and mitigate any environmental damages.

At present, there have been no reported injuries. In early November, much of the area was cordoned off after a cable failure was detected by specialists.

"We are saddened by this situation but thankful that no one was hurt," NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan said in a statement accompanying the release. The official added that the agency's focus will also be on "finding ways to restore operations at other parts of the observatory, and working to continue supporting the scientific community, and the people of Puerto Rico."

Although the investigation is ongoing, preliminary findings have suggested that the observatory's learning center experienced significant damages from the telescope's support cables after the 900-ton radio instrument plummeted onto the dish platform.

The Arecibo telescope's demise became apparent earlier in August, when one of its many cables became unattached; however, officials became even more concerned when a second cable broke in early November. The NSF ultimately [announced on November 19](#) that the structure would need to be decommissioned, noting that [extensive damages would hinder](#) a safe restabilization of the telescope.

The NSF's decision was largely met with pushback from fans and officials within the scientific community, some of [whom even launched a petition](#) to stave off the planned demolition. As of Tuesday, the petition has collected nearly 37,000 signatures of its goal of 50,000.

Deborah Martorell, a senior meteorologist for WAPA TV and Puerto Rico's El Nuevo Dia outlet, [told the newspaper](#) on Tuesday that bureaucracy and a delay in action from the NSF helped to bring about the telescope's end.

"It was very difficult because yesterday there was a lot of sadness, a lot of regret and concerns," Martorell said, explaining that in the days prior, officials at the site had found that more cables were breaking. "They were very nervous because they knew that at some point it could happen, but they did not want it to happen."

Martorell described the iconic radio telescope as a "jewel of science."

The Arecibo instrument was the second-largest radio telescope in the world and was used to identify asteroids and pulsars in addition to detecting radio wave blasts from the cosmos. The observatory [even managed to make a cameo](#) in the 1995 spy film "GoldenEye."

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F1's Romain Grosjean Reveals He 'Saw Death Coming,' Recalled Niki Lauda Accident Amid Fiery Crash

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The Formula One driving series has had a history of deadly crashes since the competition first started; however, throughout the decades, organizers have increasingly improved safety measures, especially with the introduction of the halo system which largely prevented French driver Romain Grosjean's death during a weekend race in Bahrain.

Grosjean, who is currently in his last season with the Haas F1 team, sat down for his first in-depth [interview with French broadcaster TF1](#) on Tuesday and revealed that as he was trying to escape from his burning F1 car, he thought about his family and the 1976 crash that nearly claimed the life of former racer Niki Lauda.

The Frenchman's life was instantly put in jeopardy on Sunday when he crashed in the opening lap of the Bahrain Grand Prix, striking the barrier at the exit of Turn 3 while going over 130 mph. Immediately upon impact, the Haas car erupted into flames as the vehicle was split in half and saw a portion of the car manage to wedge itself into the barrier.

"It felt much longer than 28 seconds," Grosjean told the outlet, referring to the amount of time that it took him to exit the fiery crash. "I see my visor turning all orange, I see the flames on the left side of the car."

"I thought about a lot of things – including Niki Lauda – and I thought that it wasn't possible to end up like that, not now. I couldn't finish my story in Formula 1 like that," he added.

Lauda, a three-time F1 champion [who died last year](#), is considered one of the greatest drivers in the history of the racing competition, but his involvement in the series almost came to an abrupt end when he crashed during the 1976 German Grand Prix. At the time, Lauda's car burst into flames, ultimately placing the Austrian driver at death's door after he suffered severe burns and inhaled toxic fumes.

Miraculously, Lauda managed to return to his Ferrari F1 team race-ready just a few weeks later, albeit with visible scarring to much of his face.

"I don't know if the word miracle exists or if it can be used, but in any case I would say it wasn't my time [to die]," Grosjean told the outlet, underscoring that thoughts of his family also motivated him to act quickly and remove himself from the wreck.

"For my children, I told myself that I had to get out. I put my hands in the fire, so I clearly felt it burning on the chassis. I got out, then I felt someone pulling on the suit, so I knew I was out." Video footage of the incident shows Grosjean hopping out of the burning car and over the barrier, coming in contact immediately with FIA doctor Ian Roberts and Medical Car driver Alan van der Merwe.

In the end, Grosjean reflected and indicated that the incident made him "more afraid for my family and friends, obviously my children who are my greatest source of pride and energy."

"It's the biggest crash I've ever seen in my life. The car catching fire, exploding, and the battery that burst into flames too, so it added a lot of energy to the impact," he added. "I think there's going to be some psychological work to be done because I really saw death coming."

However devastating the accident was, the French driver isn't stepping away from the track.

Grosjean told TF1 that he hopes to jump back into the car in time for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix weekend, which is scheduled to start on December 11.

"It was almost like a second birth. To come out of the flames that day is something that will mark my life forever," he said.

According to [Guenther Steiner](#), the Haas team principal, Grosjean isn't expected to be released from a Bahraini military hospital until Wednesday. At present, the driver is being treated for burns to both hands and his left leg.

The last fatal incident to shake the Formula series community took place in August 2019, when [Formula 2 racer Anthoine Hubert died](#) during a crash at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit.

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Pardons Abound - Cartoons

Ahead of US President Donald Trump's projected exit from the Oval Office in January, reports have suggested that the commander-in-chief is expected to issue a flurry of pardons to close associates, including former campaign officials.

A [Tuesday report from the New York Times](#) has alleged that Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer and a former New York City mayor, asked the president about prepping a "pre-emptive" pardon for him before Trump's anticipated January exit from the White House.

Citing two sources familiar with the discussion, the Times indicated that it wasn't clear who brought up the possible pardon or if Trump was even considering offering the protection to Giuliani, whose potential criminal exposure is also uncertain at the moment.

Giuliani [has been under investigation](#) by Manhattan federal prosecutors over his finances and his business dealings in Ukraine; however, Robert Costello, Giuliani's lawyer, told the Times that his client was "not concerned about this investigation because he didn't do anything wrong."

Giuliani rejected the Times' report of a pardon discussion in a [Twitter statement](#) in which he said the story was a complete lie, and that it was an example of the outlet fabricating stories "again."

Reports [regarding potential pardons](#) from the Trump administration have run rampant, with speculation hitting a new high before Trump [pardoned former national security adviser Michael Flynn](#) last week.

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Uber Officially Acquires Postmates in \$2.65 Billion Purchase  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Uber Technologies Inc. was recently granted approval by the US federal government for a merger with Postmates to occur amid the COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic, despite fierce pushback from several Democratic lawmakers.

Uber [announced Tuesday morning](#) that it would be "officially welcoming the Postmates team to Uber, and partnering to create an even stronger delivery marketplace to benefit consumers, delivery people, and — in particular — the hundreds of thousands of merchants who use our platforms to grow their businesses."

"This time has also brought much-needed clarity. For our teams, 2020 has brought clarity to the opportunity we have to be strong partners to the restaurants and merchants we serve. We can do even more to help them reach new customers, grow their businesses, and feed their own families," Uber said of the \$2.65 billion deal initially announced over the summer.

The company also rolled out a ["regional listening exercise"](#) through which it seeks to develop "a better understanding of how we can best support our restaurant and merchant partners."

"Our goal is to put restaurants and merchants at the head of the table and create an open dialogue on products, policies, pricing and more," the initiative's registration website details. While Uber claims it will take customer and merchant criticism into consideration, many have argued that the merger, particularly during the US economy's pandemic slump, may have [a negative impact on consumers, employees and merchants](#).

US Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) previously [penned a joint letter to the US Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\) in May](#), arguing the merger of the food delivery services would "raise serious competition issues in many markets around the country."

The Democratic lawmakers also called on the US Department of Justice (DoJ) to "closely monitor this potential transaction and to initiate an investigation if the parties reach an agreement to merge."

The FTC ultimately [granted permission for the acquisition on November 9](#), and the DoJ [moved to approve the deal](#) after its antitrust division [received additional information](#).

This Uber-Postmates deal is not the only merger to occur during the COVID-19 pandemic, as Dutch food delivery company Just Eat Takeaway announced in June that it would acquire US-based industry competitor Grubhub.

"Grubhub is the best food delivery company in the US and it is the only one which is culturally similar to Just Eat Takeaway.com," Just Eat detailed in a [June 10 news release](#), shortly after a proposed deal between Uber and Grubhub fell through.

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Swingers Convention Leaves Dozens Infected With COVID-19  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

The event organizer, who previously said that "masks are the new condoms," claimed that lackadaisical attitudes and maskless dinners may have led to 41 positive cases of COVID-19, including one serious case that required someone to be hospitalized.

At least 41 attendees of the [Naughty in N'awlins swingers convention](#) in New Orleans, Louisiana, have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, according to event organizer Bob Hannaford.

The annual event, which usually brings 2,000 swingers, attracted some 250 attendees to the NOPSI Hotel this year. Like most cities across the US, [New Orleans requires those](#) in public to wear face masks to impede the spread of COVID-19.

"Over 50% of our attendees had the [COVID-19] antibodies and many of the rest got tested right before the event. We were feeling better and better about the risk potential as the event was about to kick off," the 54-year-old [wrote in a blog post](#).

However, after the event's first day, a woman reported that she had tested positive for the contagious disease, while her husband, also in attendance, had tested negative. The couple received negative readings before the convention.

A total of five people had tested positive by the end of the first day, and at least 41 cases were logged by the end of the three-day event.

"If I could go back in time, I would not produce this event again," Hannaford admitted.

The organizer highlighted that there were "plenty of options to be unmasked," as city and state protocols allow people to remove their masks in public when eating or drinking.

Furthermore, many of those who tested positive for the novel coronavirus amid the event confessed they had become somewhat complacent and lackadaisical by the final day of the event.

He noted that "most of the 41 positive cases have mostly been asymptomatic or very mild cases." At the same time, it is not clear how many hotel employees, who had to interact with the attendees and their belongings, may have been infected.

According to the Louisiana Department of Health, [a large number of outbreaks](#) have been traced to bars, amounting to at least 508 traced COVID-19 cases.

"The reason I wouldn't is that I know of two people who had a tougher time and they were suffering," Hannaford wrote. "One of them, a good friend of mine, was hospitalized in serious condition."

He noted in an update to the post that his friend had been released from the hospital "and looks like he will be fine."

"I wouldn't do it again if I knew then what I know now. It weighs on me, and it will continue to weigh on me until everyone is 100% better," Hannaford said.

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Elon Musk Says He's 'Highly Confident' SpaceX Will Get Humans to Mars by 2026  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

SpaceX founder Elon Musk has long expressed his desire to one day see the colonization of Mars. Earlier this year, the South African native indicated that, through his Starship project, he hoped to see 1 million people transported to the red planet by 2050.

Attending the 2020 Axel Springer Award Show on Tuesday in Berlin, Germany, [Musk revealed](#) that he is "highly confident" that he will be able to facilitate humans on Mars by 2026 or in four years' time, should the entrepreneur's team get "lucky."

"I feel fairly confident about six years from now," Musk said, speaking to the possibility of landing humans on the red planet. "I'd say if you say six years from now, I think highly confident. If we get lucky, maybe four years."

Musk stated that he intends to send an unmanned vehicle to Mars in about two years. The timeline is based on the 26-month period representing the closest approach between Earth and Mars.

When asked about his personal goals to go on his first orbit, Musk redirected the inquiry and instead underscored that his main focus is to ensure that the required technology for a Mars mission is in place so that "a lot of people" will be able to visit Mars and "make life interplanetary, and to have a base on the moon."

"I'm optimistic about the future on Earth, but it's important to have life insurance for life as a whole," he added, before agreeing that he does want to be buried on Mars - just not as a result of an impact. "Mars sounds cool."

Musk's remarks largely echoed his 2026 ambitions mentioned [during a September 2016 address](#) at the International Astronautical Congress, in which he stated that he was eyeing a "10-year timeframe" to ship humans to the fourth planet.

At present, the key to realizing the goal is the success of Musk's starship spacecraft program, a reusable launch vehicle SpaceX has been working on since 2012. Although the initiative has been making strides, the company has still to conduct several key engine tests of its prototype ahead of an actual flight.

Most recently, [Space.com reported](#) that the Starship launch test site in Texas was undergoing an environmental review to determine whether the area can be used for a launch.

Musk indicated last week that the program may undergo a new flight test "no earlier than Wednesday." The test itself will be considered the most ambitious to date, as SpaceX is looking to reach an altitude of 50,000 feet.

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US Senators Call for Relief Funds to Address Aftermath of Karabakh War

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US Senators Bob Menendez and Rob Portman called for allocating budget funds to address a humanitarian crisis in South Caucasus caused by a military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

"The humanitarian situation in the south Caucasus is dire, and it will only grow worse as winter approaches," the Senators wrote. "The fighting may have stopped, but the damage it caused will continue to cost lives without robust action by the international community."

In a letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee on Tuesday, they asked for "robust funding in the final FY21 appropriations bill."

They said that the recent "Turkish-backed" conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia wreaked long-term infrastructural damage on the region and displaced more than half of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population, including 90 percent of the region's women and children.

In addition to requesting robust funding for rehabilitation services in Nagorno-Karabakh, Menendez and Portman also asked the Senate to appropriate specific funds for clearing mines and unexploded ordnance in the area.

The armed conflict between Yerevan and Baku ended in November after the warring sides agreed to a ceasefire mediated by Moscow that envisioned the deployment of a Russian peacekeeping mission to Nagorno-Karabakh. The deal led to the transfer of all regions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, seized by the Armenian forces during the 1988-1994 war, to Azerbaijan.

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US Justice Dept. Probing Alleged White House 'Bribery-for-Pardon' Scheme - Filing

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is investigating allegations of a bribery-for-pardon scheme in the White House, unsealed redacted court documents revealed.

The scheme allegedly involves a "substantial political contribution in exchange for a presidential pardon or reprieve of sentence," according to documents unsealed by US District Judge Beryl Howell on Tuesday. The names of those targeted in the investigation were redacted.

The judge granted federal prosecutors a court order earlier this year to access digital media devices to review communications related to the alleged "Bribery-for-pardon" scheme, the court document said.

The court document alleges that there is evidence of a "secret lobbying scheme" in which two individuals acted as lobbyists to senior White House officials without complying with the registration requirement of the Lobbying Disclosure Act.

So far during the course of the probe, the Justice Department has seized over 50 digital media devices, including iphones, ipads, laptops, thumb drives along with emails indicating "additional criminal activity," according to the filing.

US presidents have traditionally handed out may pardons near the end of their term. Every major US media outlet projected Joe Biden the winner of the presidential election more than three weeks ago, although Trump has yet to concede, claiming widespread irregularities. However, the president has agreed to allow the transition process to begin while results have been officially certified in nearly every state legally contested by the Trump campaign.

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US Healthcare Workers, Nursing Home Residents to Get First Shots of COVID-19 Vaccine - CDC

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - A US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) committee voted to give healthcare workers and nursing home residents the first of the COVID-19 vaccines once the doses are rolled out in the coming weeks.

"Most state and local jurisdictions expect to be able to vaccinate their healthcare workers within three weeks," CDC Immunization and Respiratory Diseases Director, Nancy Messonnier, said at Tuesday's meeting.

Nursing home residents, one of the most vulnerable groups to the virus, will also get their shots at the same time as the healthcare workers, the official said.

CDC slides released at the live-streamed meeting showed the agency expecting around 40 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to be available by the end of December, with shipments of 5 million to 10 million doses being made per week once a vaccine is authorized by regulators.

US Health Secretary Alex Azar told a CBS interview on Monday that if all went well, Americans could get their first shots of the coronavirus vaccine before Christmas, well before any previously anticipated deadline. Azar said this after Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc became the first two drug companies to apply for emergency authorization with the Food and Drug Administration to push out doses to curb the virus.

Some 60 million to 70 million doses could be available per month beginning in January, after the expected FDA approval of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, said Moncef Slaoui, an advisor to the Trump administration's "Operation Warp Speed" plan on the vaccines.

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Some 10,000 New COVID-19-Related Deaths Reported in US Within Week - Johns Hopkins

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The total number of deaths related to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the United States has exceeded 270,000, the latest data from the Johns Hopkins University revealed.

The data showed on Tuesday evening that the number of novel coronavirus-related deaths in the United States has reached 270,003.

The United States has estimated nearly 10,000 new virus-related deaths per week over the last three weeks, according to the data.

The United States has reported more than 13.6 million novel coronavirus cases since January, the data showed.

At least two coronavirus vaccines - developed by Moderna and Pfizer - are expected to be distributed throughout the United States before the end of the year.

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**US Approves \$757M In Bradley Fighting Vehicle Modernization Deal - Defense Agency**

WASHINGTON, December 1, 2020 - The US State Department has approved a more than three quarters of a billion dollar deal to modernize 76 vintage Bradley fighting vehicles to Croatia that were used in the 2003 Operation Desert Storm, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced in a press release.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Croatia of refurbishment/modernization and support for 76 M2A2 Operation Desert Storm (ODS) Bradley Fighting vehicles and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$757 million," the DSCA said in the release on Tuesday.

The DSCA pointed out that it had delivered the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale on Tuesday.

The deal includes 84 M240 machine guns; 1,103 TOW 2A Radio Frequency missiles; 16 TOW 2A Radio Frequency fly-to-buy lot acceptance missiles; 100 TOW 2B missiles; eight TOW 2B fly-to-buy lot acceptance missiles and 500 TOW Bunker Buster RF missiles, the release said. The deal will also include smoke grenade launchers; ammunition; radios; simulator; special armor; Hunter/Killer technology, engines maintenance and refurbishment of TOW launchers, the release added.

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**US Attorney General, Trump Campaign Split Over Election Fraud**

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General William Barr drew the ire of President Donald Trump's legal team after he said the Justice Department did not find evidence of decisive election fraud.

The Trump campaign has filed several lawsuits in key swing states in an attempt to overturn the results of the November 3 presidential election. Trump has failed to prevent key swing states from officially certifying the results while his legal team continues to push allegations of widespread voter fraud.

"To date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have affected a different outcome in the election," Barr told AP on Tuesday.

Earlier this month, Barr authorized federal attorneys to launch inquiries into credible allegations of voting irregularities before the 2020 presidential election results were certified.

President Donald Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani fired back at Barr for his assessment.

"With the greatest respect to the Attorney General, his opinion appears to be without any knowledge or investigation of the substantial irregularities and evidence of systemic fraud,"

Giuliani said Tuesday evening. "Nonetheless, we will continue our pursuit of the truth through the judicial system and state legislatures, and continue toward the Constitution's mandate and ensuring that every legal vote is counted and every illegal vote is not."

Giuliani, himself a former attorney-general and mayor of New York City, who became Trump's attorney after the president took office in 2016, alleged that the Justice Department's investigations fell short of acceptable standards.

"With all due respect to the Attorney General, there hasn't been any semblance of a Department of Justice investigation," Giuliani said. "We have gathered ample evidence of illegal voting in at least six states, which they have not examined. We have many witnesses swearing under oath they saw crimes being committed in connection with voter fraud. As far as we know, not a single one has been interviewed by the DOJ. The Justice Department also hasn't audited any voting machines or used their subpoena powers to determine the truth."

US media networks have projected Joe Biden to be the winner of the November 3 presidential election. While Biden Trump has sought recounts in several states and filed lawsuits in state and federal courts, saying only legal votes should be counted and illegal votes should be discarded. Several states have said they did not find widespread evidence of election and voter fraud.

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#### Congressman Asks US Supreme Court to Block Pennsylvania to Perfect Election Certification

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Mike Kelly has filed a request to the US Supreme Court for an emergency injunction to prevent the Pennsylvania authorities from taking any additional actions to perfect the certification of the November election results, a court filing revealed.

"Applicants respectfully request an immediate, emergency writ of injunction to prevent the Respondents, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Governor Thomas W. Wolf, and Secretary of the Commonwealth Kathy Boockvar from taking any further action to perfect the certification of the results of the November 3, 2020, General Election in Pennsylvania for the offices of President and Vice President of the United States of America," the filing said on Tuesday. Kelly also asked the US Supreme Court to block the certification of the Pennsylvania's results for the races for seats in Congress.

On Saturday, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court rejected a bid by Republicans to invalidate millions of mail-in ballots in the state.

The Pennsylvania officials certified the election results earlier this week, declaring that Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden had won by more than 80,000 votes in the state.

Major US media outlets have projected Biden to be the winner of the November 3 presidential election. Biden declared victory but so did President Donald Trump, who said his victory was stolen via massive fraud and acts of impropriety.

Trump has sought recounts in several states and filed lawsuits in state and federal courts, saying only legal votes should be counted and illegal votes should be discarded. Several states have said they found no evidence of systematic fraud and substantial irregularities.

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US Attorney General Barr Appoints Durham as Special Counsel in Russia Probe Investigation

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General William Barr said he appointed Attorney John Durham as Special Counsel in the Russia probe investigation before the November election to assure him he could continue working regardless the outcome.

"I decided to appoint Mr. Durham as a Special Counsel to provide him and his team with the assurance that they could complete their work, without regard to the outcome of the election," Barr said in a letter released on Tuesday to the Senate and House of Representatives judiciary committees.

Barr said he appointed Durham as Special Counsel on October 19 but delayed the announcement due to the proximity to the US presidential election on November 3.

Barr appointed Durham to investigate allegations that Obama administration officials weaponized American intelligence in an attempt to defeat Trump's 2016 bid and then undermine his presidency.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik)

## US POST-ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

- \* The Trump campaign said in a statement on Tuesday that it has filed a lawsuit to the Wisconsin Supreme Court questioning the validity of more than 200,000 votes cast in the 2020 presidential election in the state.
- \* Presumed President-elect Joe Biden said in a press conference that his transition team is already working on a new coronavirus relief package.
- \* Janet Yellen, Biden's nominee for Treasury Secretary, said she would address the US economy's underlying structural problems and would favor urgent measures to extinguish the economic crisis induced by the coronavirus measures.

## EXPLOSION IN KABUL

- \* The car of the Russian embassy in Kabul was hit by an improvised explosive device in the Afghan capital, employees received a slight concussion, Moscow demands a thorough investigation of the incident, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Tuesday.
- \* None of the employees of the Russian embassy in Kabul needed hospitalization after the embassy's car was hit by an explosion, Nikita Ishchenko, the press attache of the Russian diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, told Sputnik.

## US-RUSSIA TALKS

- \* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov and US Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun discussed Korean peninsula over the phone, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.
- \* UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen during his address to the MED 2020 virtual conference has called on Russia and the next US administration to re-engage on the Syrian issue and find a common ground.
- \* NATO believes it is crucial to have a Russian-US agreement regulating the number of nuclear warheads and thus welcomes the dialogue between Moscow and Washington on extension of the New START treaty, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.
- \* NATO should call on the United States to extend the New START instead of continuing with its absurd musings on Russia's military potential, spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova said.

## CAR ACCIDENT IN GERMANY

\* A car crashed into pedestrians in the German city of Trier on Tuesday, SWR broadcaster reported.

\* The death toll in Trier increased to four, N24 broadcaster said.

\* The suspect in the car ramming incident in the pedestrian street of Trier suffers from a mental disorder, at the time of the collision he was drunk, the city's senior prosecutor Peter Fritzen said.

\* A driver, who crashed into a pedestrian area in Trier, did so in a fit of rage, city executive Wolfram Leibe said.

#### US POLICY ON CHINA OVER NORTH KOREA

\* The US government is preparing to impose new sanctions on China in response to its ongoing trade with North Korea, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for North Korea Alex Wong said on Tuesday.

\* The United States will offer up to \$5 million in rewards for information about efforts to evade sanctions on North Korea, Wong said, while accusing China of "flagrant" violations of existing US designations.

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#### Top Senate Democrat Urges Biden to Be Tough on China in More Multilateral Way Than Trump

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer in a press conference on Tuesday said he urged presumed President-elect Joe Biden's national security and foreign policy team to aim to be tough on China in a more multilateral way than the Trump administration.

"Today I had a productive discussion with Secretary of State designate Tony Blinken and Director of National Intelligence designate Avril Haines," Biden said. "We had a wide-ranging discussion that covered the globe and priorities for the US foreign policy national security. In particular I urged the incoming Biden administration to be tough on China but in a smarter, more multilateral way than the Trump administration was."

Last week, Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory message to Biden on winning the US presidential election in which he expressed hope the troubled China-US relations would improve.

Every major US media outlet projected Biden the winner of the presidential election more than three weeks ago, although Trump has yet to concede, claiming widespread irregularities.

However, the president has agreed to allow the transition process to begin while results have been officially certified in nearly every state legally contested by the Trump campaign.

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US Senate Republicans Urge Democrats Swiftly Adopt Consensus COVID-19 Relief Package

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Republican majority called on the Democrats on Tuesday to adopt before the year end coronavirus relief measures they can agree on.

"We just don't have time to waste," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told reporters.

"Deal with the things we can agree on now. And I think we all know that after the first of the year there is likely to be a discussion about some additional package of some size next year depending upon what the new administration wants to pursue."

Senator John Thune, the majority whip, suggested during the briefing that funding for coronavirus vaccines and therapeutics, additional assistance for unemployment insurance and schools, money to replenish the Paycheck Protection Program of forgivable loans are all matters of bipartisan consensus.

"Those are all things that the Democrats say that they agree upon, but they have insisted - at least up until now - on a bloated messaging bill on the order of \$2.5 trillion... which is something that obviously wouldn't pass the Senate and get signed into law by the President," he said.

"The question is what can we get through the House, 60 votes in the Senate and the presidential signature on. I would hope that in the course of the next couple of weeks as we are debating the year end issues that we can get some agreement on something that fits those basic parameters," Thune added.

McConnell said that he is in contact with the Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin who has been "deputized" by President Donald Trump to indicate what he is willing to sign.

"I felt the first thing we needed to do was to find out what the President would in fact sign. We believe we have got an answer to that," he said. "We are going to send that out to all the offices to get some feedback to see how our members react to a proposal that we can say for sure would be signed into law."

McConnell added that he also received "last night" a letter on the matter from Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the Democratic-held House of Representatives, and Chuck Schumer, the Senate minority leader. He didn't elaborate on the contents of the message.

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Trudeau Says Border Restrictions to Remain in Place Until COVID-19 Under Control

TORONTO, December 1 (Sputnik) - Canada will not lift border restrictions until the COVID-19 pandemic is brought under control globally, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in an interview on Tuesday.

"Until the virus is significantly under more control everywhere around the world, we are not going to be releasing the restrictions at the borders," Trudeau told state broadcaster CBC. Addressing the ongoing restrictions on non-essential travel between Canada and the United States, Trudeau said that the flow of goods between the two nations remains intact but that the cap on exchange of travelers is crucial at this juncture.

The prime minister added that despite the projected change in leadership in Washington and President-elect Joe Biden's new approach to the pandemic, the US remains a way's off from getting the pandemic under control.

The Canadian government extended restrictions on non-essential visits of foreign travelers until January 21 on Sunday, citing the surging number of coronavirus cases in the country. Travel restrictions between Canada and the US remain in force until December 21.

All non-essential travel between the United States and Canada has been halted since March 20. As of Tuesday, Canadian authorities have reported over 380,000 coronavirus cases and more than 12,100 virus-related deaths. There are more than 66,037 active cases across Canada, according to the country's public health agency.

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US Envoy to Visit Mozambique, South Africa for Talks on Countering IS - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US government's top envoy to coordinate counterterrorism activities will visit South Africa and Mozambique this week to discuss current threats in the region, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Nathan Sales will travel to Maputo, Mozambique and Pretoria, South Africa this week to discuss terrorist threats in southern Africa," the department said in a press release.

On December 2 and 3, Sales will meet with senior Mozambican government officials to discuss ongoing efforts to counter terrorism in the country and the region linked to the Islamic State (a terrorist group banned in Russia), the State Department said.

Sales will also discuss ways to boost Mozambique's civilian law enforcement capabilities and border security, the note continued.

On December 4, Sales will meet with South African officials to discuss the role South Africa plays in regional security in Africa and ways to strengthen bilateral security cooperation, the State Department said.

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#### US Air Force, Space Command Slashing Bureaucracy to Speed Up Tech Deployment - General

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force and the Space Force are slashing old layers of bureaucracy to accelerate the rate they can develop and deploy new technology in space in competition with other nations, Chief of Space Operations Gen. John "Jay" Raymond said on Tuesday.

"We have redesigned our force to collapse layers of command," Raymond told a Chamber of Commerce Space Launch conference. "We [have] pushed authority down to the lowest levels for the experts to make decisions. ...We are working with disruptive innovators."

However, current Secretary of the Air Force Barbara Barrett told the conference that much work still needed to be done to keep up with the pace of technological development.

"We have to find ways to execute faster revision of the acquisition system. We have got to revamp how we do this," Barrett said.

President Donald Trump's previous Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson had started the process by cutting decision-making levels within the Defense Department bureaucracy for new technological systems and weapons from fourteen layers to only four, Barrett added.

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#### US Expanding Private Sector Partnerships to Keep Up in Space - Air Force Secretary

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense is expanding its partnerships with private industry in the high tech sector to speed up the development of military systems in space, Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett told a Chamber of Commerce Space Launch conference on Tuesday.

"We are very much expanding our commercial suppliers," Barrett said. "All need to be flying and fielding faster... The system was built for the old gears age and we have to move at the speed of electrons for the new age."

The new military-private sector development partnerships covered the areas of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), data analytics, communications, navigation, alert systems and missile warning, the Air Force secretary said.

Chief of Space Operations General John "Jay" Raymond said his force was working to "leverage" the resources and more rapid turnaround capabilities of the private sector to an unprecedented degree.

The US Space Force, he added, would rely more heavily on commercial providers for such activities as space domain awareness and in-orbit servicing of systems as well as the more traditional fields of commercial cooperation such as launch activities and satellite communications (SATCOM).

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#### **Biden Treasury Secretary Pick Pledges to Address US Economy's Structural Problems**

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Janet Yellen, presumed US President-elect Joe Biden's nominee for Treasury Secretary, said on Tuesday that she would address the US economy's underlying structural problems and would favor urgent measures to extinguish the economic crisis induced by the coronavirus measures.

"It's essential that we move with urgency. Inaction will produce a self-reinforcing downturn causing yet more devastation. And we risk missing the obligation to address deeper structural problems," Yellen said after Biden officially introduced his economic team picks.

Yellen said the problems plaguing the US economy include inequality, stagnant wages as well as racial and gender disparities.

"It's a convergence of tragedies that is not only economically unsustainable, but one that betrays our commitment to giving every American an equal chance to get a hand," Yellen said. "But I know this team will never give up that commitment."

If approved by the Congress, Yellen will be the first woman to become Treasury Secretary.

Yellen is a labor economist, most known for her research into the factors affecting unemployment and wages and, and served as a former Federal Reserve Board Governor.

US media networks have projected Biden to be the winner of the November 3 presidential election. While Biden has declared victory so has incumbent President Donald Trump, who said victory was stolen from him via massive election fraud and acts of impropriety.

Trump has sought recounts in several states and filed lawsuits in state and federal courts, saying only legal votes should be counted and illegal votes should be discarded. Several states have said they did not find widespread evidence of election and voter fraud.

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#### **Biden Says Transition Team Already Working on New Coronavirus Relief Package**

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Presumed President-elect Joe Biden said in a press conference on Tuesday that his transition team is already working on a new coronavirus relief package.

"My transition team is already working on what I'll put forward in the next Congress to address the multiple crises we're facing, especially our economic and COVID-19 crises," Biden said.

"The team I'm announcing today will play a critical role in shaping our plan for action starting on day one."

The US Congress has been locked in a stalemate on a successive package to the CARES Act that was passed in March. Republican and Democrat lawmakers have been feuding over the size of the next relief package as thousands of Americans risk losing their jobs without further aid.

Biden said he has nominated former Federal Reserve Chairwoman Janet Yellen to lead the Treasury Department. He also announced that Center for American Progress President Neera Tanden has been nominated to head the Office of Management and Budget.

Biden also said he nominated Wally Adeyemo - who previously served in the Obama administration as Deputy Director of the National Economic Council and Deputy National Security Adviser - to be Deputy Treasury Secretary.

In addition, former Obama Economic Adviser Cecilia Rouse has been nominated to be the Chief Economic Adviser at the White House.

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US Should Consider Restarting Open Skies Treaty as Confidence Building Measure - Senator

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States should consider restarting the Open Skies Treaty with Russia, US Senator Jeff Merkley said during an annual meeting of the Arms Control Association on Tuesday.

"We should consider restarting Open Skies [Treaty] as a confidence building measure to promote trust and avert conflict," Merkley said.

Merkley noted that the Open Skies Treaty was a symbol of transparency and confidence building measures of dialogue with Russia.

"We all recognize that satellite intelligence is in a very different place now than when Open Skies was passed, but still it was at least a building block in a conversation with Russia about this," he said.

The United States' participation in the Open Skies Treaty ended earlier in November, six months after the Trump administration announced its intention to withdraw from the accord. The Open Skies Treaty allows its participants to carry out aerial surveillance as part of a program of scheduled observation flights. More than 30 countries are participating in the program, which was created to boost transparency of military activities.

Trump confirmed the United States' withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty on May 21, citing what he called were violations by Russia and allegations of lack of compliance with the accord. Russia has denied all accusations.

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#### US Treasury Chief Urges Congress to Quickly Pass COVID-19 Stimulus

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin urged Congress on Tuesday to swiftly pass a second coronavirus economic stimulus during the current lame duck session.

The session held between the November elections and January 3, when the next Congress convenes, is referred to as a "lame duck" period, during which significant legislation is often deferred.

"I urge Congress to pass something quickly in this session," Mnuchin told a Senate committee. "We will continue to work with Congress to try to get something done."

The treasury secretary, who said he spoke to President Donald Trump and Republican leaders about the legislation this morning, stressed that the package should be modest versus calls by rival Democrat lawmakers for substantive spending.

In March, Congress passed the bipartisan Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provided about \$3 trillion in business relief along with paycheck protection to qualifying citizens and permanent residents.

Since then, Republicans and Democrats have been locked in a stalemate on a successive package to the CARES, arguing over the size of the next relief, as thousands of Americans, particularly those in the airlines sector, risk losing their jobs without further aid. The negotiations have been further complicated by Trump's loss of the Nov 3 presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden, and the incumbent president's refusal to work with his imminent successor.

On his part, Mnuchin has asked Congress use \$455 billion in leftover funds from the original CARES as "targeted relief" for the economy, instead of undertaking another major fiscal effort.

In his testimony before the Senate on Tuesday, he also suggested that a \$300 billion package be approved specifically for the Paycheck Protection Program meant for Americans.

Democrats have balked at the treasury secretary's overtures, saying a stimulus of at least \$2 trillion will be needed.

Separately, a bipartisan group of lawmakers pushed on Tuesday for quick approval of a \$908 billion COVID-19 relief. The group also criticized legislators who had gone on a break when the nation was in the midst of financial stress caused by the pandemic.

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#### Biden Needs to Stay Prepared for Possible Provocative Acts by North Korea - Senator

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The administration of presumed US President-elect Joe Biden should be ready for possible provocative acts by North Korea, US Senator Jeff Merkley said on Tuesday.

"I think the Biden administration needs to prepare for the possibility of provocative acts by North Korea, acts they do in the early days of the administration - conduct a nuclear weapons test or an ICBM test - and put themselves back into the global conversation in that manner," Merkley said.

Merkley expressed hope that the expected future Biden administration will develop a plan in the hope of preventing such developments and the need to respond.

President Donald Trump has held three summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and developed with Kim what he says is a working relationship. However, the two sides have not achieved a breakthrough on the issue of denuclearization because of the unresolved issue concerning sanctions relief.

During one of the 2020 election race debates, Biden called Kim a "thug" in stark contrast to the relatively good relations Trump had with the North Korean leader.

US media networks have projected Biden to be the winner of the November 3 presidential election. While Biden has declared victory so has Trump, who said victory was stolen from him via massive election fraud and acts of impropriety.

Trump has sought recounts in several states and filed lawsuits in state and federal courts, saying only legal votes should be counted and illegal votes should be discarded. Several states have said they did not find widespread evidence of election and voter fraud.

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#### US Sanctions Garzon Network for Aiding Clan Del Golfo Cocaine Cartel - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US government has sanctioned Colombian national Zapata Garzon and three of his associates for aiding the Clan del Golfo cocaine smuggling cartel, also known as Los Urabenos, the Department of the Treasury announced in a press release issued on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Jhon Fredy Zapata Garzon (Zapata Garzon) pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (Kingpin Act) for materially assisting the international narcotics trafficking activities of the Clan del Golfo," the release said.

Three of Garzon's family members and associates were also designated along with four businesses they controlled, the release added.

"Criminal organizations trafficking cocaine and other drugs are a threat to the safety of the American people. Treasury will continue to use its authorities to identify and disrupt dangerous criminal organizations," Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said in the release.

Clan del Golfo functions as a highly structured and centralized criminal enterprise that has evolved into the largest "Armed Criminal Organization" in Colombia, with a cohesive national presence that sends multi-ton quantities of cocaine to Panama and other countries in Central America, the release said.

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White House Fires Head of Islamic State Task Force, Disbands Office - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The White House has fired Islamic State Task Force chief Christopher Maier and informed him that the office formed to fight the terror group (banned in Russia) has been disbanded, the New York Times reported on Tuesday.

President Donald Trump appointed Maier to the post in March 2017, but has now dropped him just three weeks after firing Defense Secretary Mark Esper, the report said citing three sources whom it said had received official briefings on the affair.

Earlier on Monday, the Defense Department issued a statement saying Esper's successor, Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller, had accepted Maier's resignation.

Maier's functions would be passed to the offices of special operations and regional policies run by Ezra Cohen-Watnick and Anthony Tata, the report said.

The closing of Maier's office and his approximately 15 staff members was preceded by a similar move at the State Department in November where efforts against the Islamic State were transferred to the department's permanent Counterterrorism Coordinator, the report added.

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WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The Trump campaign said in a statement on Tuesday that it has filed a lawsuit to the Wisconsin Supreme Court questioning the validity of more than 200,000 votes cast in the 2020 presidential election in the state.

"President Donald J. Trump's re-election campaign filed a lawsuit to the Wisconsin Supreme Court following the campaign's requested recount to uncover fraud and abuse that irrefutably altered the outcome of this election," the statement said.

The lawsuit includes four cases that the Trump campaign described as "clear evidence of unlawfulness, such as illegally altering absentee ballot envelopes, counting ballots that had no required application, overlooking unlawful claims of indefinite confinement and holding illegal voting events called Democracy in the Park."

The lawsuit also said "These unlawful actions affected no less than approximately 221,000 ballots out of over the three million ballots cast in Wisconsin."

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**Trump's Lawyer Giuliani Denies Discussing Pre-Emptive Pardon With US President**

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani on Tuesday denied a media claim that he discussed the possibility of receiving a pre-emptive pardon from the US president.

"Fake news [New York Times] lies again. Never had the discussion they falsely attribute to an anonymous source. Hard to keep up with all their lies," Giuliani said via Twitter.

Earlier on Tuesday, the New York Times reported that Giuliani discussed with Trump a possible pardon "as recently as last week."

The newspaper admitted that Giuliani's potential criminal exposure is unclear. Giuliani was under investigation last summer by federal prosecutors in Manhattan for his business dealings in Ukraine and his role in ousting the US ambassador there, a plot that was at the heart of the impeachment of Trump, the report said.

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**US Lawmakers Introduce \$908Bln Bipartisan COVID-19 Relief Bill - Senator**

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US lawmakers pushed on Tuesday for quick congressional approval of a COVID-19 fiscal relief of just over \$900 billion, criticizing legislators for going on a break when the nation was in the midst of financial stress caused by the pandemic.

"It's inexcusable for the Senate to leave town. It's not the time for political brinkmanship. We're going to intend to move this forward," Senator Joe Manchin said when introducing the \$908 billion Bipartisan COVID-19 relief bill.

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**US to Offer Up to \$5Mln Rewards on Info on North Korea Sanctions Violations - State Dept**

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States will offer up to \$5 million in rewards for information about efforts to evade sanctions on North Korea, Deputy Assistant Secretary Alex Wong said on Tuesday, while accusing China of "flagrant" violations of existing US and UN designations.

"Today, the State Department is launching a new website, DPRKrewards.com, to reach individuals across the globe, to provide information to our Rewards for Justice program on the

DPRK's sanctions evasion," Wong said at an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Under the program anyone who provides information related to "sanctionable conduct" would be eligible for a reward of up to \$5 million, Wong said.

Wong also said that the US government is preparing to impose new sanctions on China in response to its ongoing trade with North Korea.

"The United States will continue to impose sanctions on any individual or entity perpetrating sanctions evasion, including individuals and entities within China's jurisdiction," Wong said.

Wong said the US has observed ships carrying coal or other sanctioned goods from North Korea to China on at least 555 occasions. The US also believes that Chinese firms continue to conduct business with UN-sanctioned entities and that China hosts at least 20,000 North Korean laborers in violation of UN sanctions, he said.

He added that North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un's government has not engaged "in serious or substantive negotiations" or taken any "concrete steps" toward denuclearization.

Under President Donald Trump, the US has held three summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, having built what the incumbent president says is a working relationship with Pyongyang. The sides have not achieved a breakthrough on denuclearization, though, due to a deadlock on sanctions relief.

During an election debate, Biden called Kim a "thug," a stark contrast when compared to the good chemistry that has been established between Trump and the North Korean leader.

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#### US, Bulgaria Senior Military Officials Discuss Plans for Bilateral Drills in 2021 - EUCOM

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Senior military officials from the United States and Bulgaria held virtual talks to discuss plans for joint exercises and training next year, as well as their Defense Cooperation agreement, US European Command (EUCOM) said in a news release on Tuesday.

"Senior military officials from US European Command (USEUCOM) and Bulgaria's Deputy Chief of Defense conducted the 21st US-Bulgaria Joint Commission on Nov. 25 to discuss the Defense Cooperation Agreement implementation, as well as bilateral training and exercises in 2021," the release said.

The forum was co-chaired by Bulgaria's Deputy Chief of Defense, Air Force Lt. Gen. Tsanko Stoykov and USEUCOM's Deputy Director of Partnering, Security Cooperation and Missile Defense, US Air Force Brig. Gen. Jessica Meyeraan.

Stoykov spoke from Bulgaria's Ministry of Defense in Sofia, while Meyeraan joined the talks from from the US four-star combatant command headquarters in Stuttgart.

"Within the legal framework of the US-Bulgaria Defense Cooperation Agreement and Implementing Agreements, the two senior military officials led discussions covering a full

spectrum of issues ranging from military operations, exercises and logistics to environmental, legal and taxation issues," the release said.

The 20th US-Bulgaria Joint Commission took place in November 2019 in Sofia, according to the EUCOM.

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US to Impose New Sanctions on China in Response to Trade With DPRK – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The US government is preparing to impose new sanctions on China in response to its ongoing trade with North Korea, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for North Korea Alex Wong said on Tuesday.

"The United States will continue to impose sanctions on any individual or entity perpetrating sanctions evasion, including individuals and entities within China's jurisdiction," Wong said during online event at the Center of Strategic and International Studies.

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