

IN LOCAL & STATE, B1 LIVE MUSIC SLOWLY RETURNS



IN SPORTS, A8 MSU WOMEN SWEEP UPPER IOWA

IN NATION & WORLD, A6 WHITE HOUSE AIDE OUSTED

Acquitted and denounced

Seven Republicans vote to convict Trump

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump was acquitted Saturday of inciting the horrific attack on the U.S. Capitol, concluding a historic impeachment trial that spared him the first-ever conviction of a current or former U.S. president but exposed the fragility of America's democratic traditions and left a divided nation

to come to terms with the violence sparked by his defeated presidency. Barely a month since the deadly Jan. 6 riot that stunned the world, the Senate convened for a rare week-end session to deliver its verdict, voting while armed National Guard troops continued to stand their posts outside the iconic building. The quick trial, the nation's first of a former president, showed in raw

and emotional detail how perilously close the invaders had come to destroying the nation's deep tradition of a peaceful transfer of presidential power after Trump had refused to concede the election. Rallying outside the White House, he unleashed a mob of supporters to "fight like hell" for him at the Capitol just as Congress was certifying Democrat Joe Biden's victory. As hundreds stormed the building, some in



Michael van der Veen (maskless), an attorney for former President Donald Trump, fist bumps a colleague Saturday on the Senate Subway after the Senate acquitted Trump in his second impeachment trial.

Please see TRIAL, Page A2

TODAY'S OBITUARIES

- William "Bill" Johnson
Norman Carl Jepsen
Bill LeFor, Ph.D.
Helen Mather
Douglas James Muesing
Lorena Peters

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The week in photos

Each week The Associated Press compiles a collection of its best photo-journalism.

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LOTTERY

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Saturday's Northstar Cash 9-10-17-21-26

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WEATHER, PAGE B10

Brutal

High near 10 below. Low in the 20s below zero.



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Mankato, Minnesota

FINALLY HOME

The journey from homeless to housed



Pat Christman

Bob Swain sits on his couch in his new apartment Wednesday in Mankato, picking between some of his favorite shows from his younger days. The Mankato man, 59, was homeless out in the cold a couple of years back, and also stayed at Connections Shelter and The Salvation Army in the past.

Agencies adjust response during pandemic

By Brian Arola

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Bob Swain remembers nights spent out in the cold, days having doors closed in his face when he needed help, and the hard lessons he learned about survival along the way.

As an individual experiencing homelessness in Mankato, he knew where to look to shield himself from

harsh winds. Sometimes he'd tuck in between buildings, or dig into a snowbank.

In those days he essentially slept with one eye open. Once, a deer jolted him awake with a nudge in the middle of the night.

The most challenging parts about being homeless back then, the Mankato man said, were staying warm and not knowing where he'd find his next meal.

"It's so cold that you know what it's like to shove a piece of newspaper inside your boots to keep warm," he said. "You go to sleep with maybe just a piece of bread inside your stomach for food."

Not having a kitchen table at his new apartment, in comparison, seems like a minor inconvenience. Swain, 59, is grateful to have his

Please see HOMELESS, Page A4

1,255

Homeless and housing calls for service in Blue Earth County Feb. 13, 2020, to Feb 12, 2021.

333

Homeless and housing calls for service in Blue Earth County Feb. 13, 2019, to Feb 12, 2020.

356

Homeless and housing calls for service in Blue Earth County Feb. 13, 2018, to Feb. 12, 2019.

Area counties combine for 67 new confirmed cases

Minnesota Public Radio News can be heard in Mankato on 90.5 FM or at MPRnews.org.

The Free Press and MPR News

MANKATO — South-central Minnesota counties combined for 67 newly confirmed COVID-19 cases Saturday, continuing this week's run of higher daily upticks.

Case totals in the nine area counties generally remained in the 30s for the first six days of February. Over the last seven days, they've been mostly elevated in the 50s, 60s or 70s, according to data from the Minnesota Department of

Health.

Despite the higher case count Saturday, area counties had no newly confirmed COVID deaths. The region had been averaging about one new death linked to the illness per day in February.

The health department confirmed seven more deaths statewide, however, raising Minnesota's pandemic death toll to 6,369.

For cases, Brown and

Please see VIRUS, Page A4

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Pat Christman

Bob Swain stands in front of his kitchen space in his new apartment. He's still in need of a table, but said he's grateful to have housing and a job after experiencing homelessness in the past. Finding housing in a tight affordable housing market is one of the many challenges people experiencing homelessness face during a pandemic. Advocates say there remains a great need for more funding and space.

HOMELESS: Pandemic complicates data on the problem

Continued from Page A1

own place, a job and the stability he needs to better manage his health conditions.

Amid the most frigid stretch of this winter, he was blunt about what might've happened if he still had to brave the overnight cold. "I probably would be dead," he said.

Swain is among the Mankatoans who've gone from being unsheltered outdoors to staying in homeless shelters to finding stable housing. Many others are still out there, whether outside, on couches or in shelters, although the COVID-19 pandemic makes getting a full accounting of them even more difficult than usual.

The pandemic isn't the only new variable making it harder to analyze Mankato's homelessness situation now compared to a year ago. Big changes in homelessness response have happened since then, including Connections Shelter moving into a permanent location and The Salvation Army switching from an overnight men's shelter to a day shelter.

What hasn't changed in the effort to address homelessness at large here, advocates say, is the need for more funding and space to house more people.

"Obviously we need more shelter beds. We need more programs," said Jen Theneman, executive director at the Partners for Housing nonprofit. "I'm a believer that it's not enough to give people a place to stay for an evening or a couple evenings, but giving them a hand up to make sure they're stably housed."

Now versus then

Partners for Housing's clients were averaging about 63-day stays in the nonprofit's housing programs before the pandemic. During the pandemic, the average stays are up to 79 days.

Clients also usually moved out before the 90-day limit before the pandemic. Now, the nonprofit sees more people needing help for longer.

"During COVID we've not been enforcing that, with the intent that after working with them for so long we don't want to put them back in homelessness," Theneman said just before testifying to the Legislature on housing in early February.

The longer stays are effective at keeping people and families out of homelessness longer. There's a tradeoff, though, in that the nonprofit can't serve as many people.

Spots are consistently full. The one exception, Theneman said, is the nonprofit's dedicated apartment for clients who've been exposed to COVID.

Connections Shelter is full these days in its new home within First Presbyterian Church as well.

"We've been seeing more people coming through the doors than ever before," said Erica Koser, the shelter's pastor of community connections.

As of early February, the shelter had 100 individual guests stay there since it opened in mid-October. Capacity is limited to 30 people per night during the pandemic.

"One hundred guests so far,

that's how many we've seen in the previous two seasons, and we're just halfway through this season," Koser said. "Lots more people coming through, and at least here we're seeing fewer families coming through."

She suspects the uptick in individual males and downtick in families has to do with the ongoing halt on evictions in Minnesota during the pandemic. Koser, Theneman and others expressed deep concerns about what will happen when the moratorium eventually ends.

"I feel like it's an impending cliff that will show itself here pretty soon," Theneman said.

As the landlords for 31 households in the Mankato area, Partners for Housing staff members are seeing tenants fall behind on rent. Other landlords are saying the same about their tenants, Theneman said.

Back rent all needs to be repaid somehow. Even though eviction proceedings are lengthy and the halt continues, Partners is already getting calls from people desperately trying to avoid losing housing.

It's clear there are more area residents at-risk for homelessness now, said Andrew Pietsch, supportive housing supervisor for Blue Earth County.

"If that (lifting of the halt on evictions) happens, we're going to see courts inundated with eviction hearings," he said.

He cited data showing calls for housing and shelter services are way up in the area over the last year compared to previous years. The numbers hit home how many more area residents are feeling the squeeze during the pandemic.

Between Feb. 13, 2019 and Feb. 13, 2020, Blue Earth County had 334 requests for housing and shelter services, according to the Minnesota 211 Counts tool. Of the 334 requests, 50% were for shelter space compared to 26.5% for rent assistance.

Between the same dates in 2020 and 2021, the county had 1,255 requests, a 276% increase. The breakdown of what people were most needing, though, flipped.

Over the last year, shelter requests dropped to 30.6%. Calls for rent assistance, meanwhile, jumped up to 55.4%.

The data set provides one of the clearer ways to measure the area's homelessness situation now versus in the past. Due to the pandemic, other traditional methods are more complicated.

Counting challenges

Measuring the full scope of youth homelessness today is an even taller task. Mankato Area Public Schools documents youth homelessness in the district, but it can be harder to track when students are doing distance learning.

District stats showed 122 homeless youth as of Feb. 1. That's essentially the same total as there were in November 2019, when there were 120 students without a permanent residence.

The February 2021 total is probably a little lower than typical due to COVID, said Molly Fox, lead social worker for Mankato Area Public Schools.

"We're not face to face in the buildings," she said. "As some

schools are going back, those numbers might go back up."

A teacher or other school worker can watch for signs of a student's home situation changing when seeing students in person. Distance learning doesn't afford the same close monitoring opportunities, making it harder to tell if a student is having to move around more all of a sudden.

School districts are one of the connection points leading students and families to resources in the community, from ECHO Food Shelf to the Committee Against Domestic Abuse to The Reach Drop-in Center to the Backpack Food Program.

Schools are still doing that work, it's just harder now. The district is also focusing a lot on supporting students, not just those without documented addresses, with mental health services during the pandemic, Fox said.

"If individuals are moving around and if they're connected to somebody, a teacher, social worker, counselor, they're more likely to get the services they need," she said.

The Reach, a Lutheran Social Service program, has also had to significantly adjust its outreach during the pandemic. Its drop-in center for youth experiencing homelessness has been closed since March 17, 2020, in response to the pandemic.

Back then The Reach, which marked its 10th year in Mankato last week, received about 250 visits per month. That was a decline from higher monthly visit totals reported in October 2019, but both months were before the pandemic.

With the drop-in center still closed for now, the nonprofit is instead handing out food at its 125 E. Liberty St. location between 2-4 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, said Tasha Moulton, senior program manager. On other days, staff drop off other supplies for youth in need.

For adult homelessness, agencies usually conduct annual point-in-time unsheltered homelessness counts in January. The region's continuum of care joined others in the state in accepting a waiver to opt out of the count during the pandemic as a way to protect participants and workers, Pietsch said.

It's probable, he added, that there are actually fewer unsheltered people in the continuum of care so far this year.

"That's a direct impact of the pandemic is there were more shelters created with COVID response funding," he said.

City, county and nonprofit efforts to use funding for temporary hotel stays mean those folks wouldn't fit the federal definition of unsheltered.

The additional funding coming in for homelessness response during the pandemic counts as a plus amid a hard year for everyone. It's unclear whether funding will keep coming in, though, as the pandemic winds down and once it ends.

People will still be homeless or at risk for homelessness then, but the list of funding needs across all sectors will likely be as long as the waitlists for shelter space and affordable housing.

On top of the temporary funding help, Pietsch said, another effect of

the pandemic is how it led to more coordination between agencies working on homelessness.

"This has really ramped it up," he said. "... If we're going to continue our mission, we had to get on the same page."

Local coalitions convene weekly and monthly for updates. Members in one discuss ideas for more rental units, and their focuses range from general homelessness to housing issues for Mankato's Black and refugee communities.

Housing secured

Swain overcame several obstacles in securing his apartment.

The affordable housing market is tight enough as it is, let alone when you can't drive due to a history of strokes. He needed a place near a bus line, and preferably within walking distance of Open Door Health Center and a grocery store.

Losing his job at the time about a year ago — the result of COVID restrictions taking effect — compounded the struggle, he said. He found his current job around May and has kept it since.

Still, it took him until January to find his apartment. Swain found temporary shelter at both The Salvation Army and Connections Shelter in the past, most recently staying at Connections until he moved into the apartment.

Now he's gradually furnishing his place with donated items as he saves money for more. One of the top items on his wish list is a table so he won't have to keep using a chair to eat, which he called the "goofiest eating arrangement you can think of."

Even absent such furnishings, Swain's situation has certainly changed for the better during the pandemic. He's able to focus more on his health concerns now that he's out of the cold and in his own place.

What worked for him wouldn't work for all, as the factors keeping people in homelessness are highly variable based on the individual. His story, however, does show that support and emergency housing is one common roadmap people can follow to get out of homelessness.

Seeing big buildings sit vacant in Mankato for months on end frustrates Swain. He thinks about how they could be put to better use sheltering people.

His frustration goes back to those persistently missing pieces in the local efforts to address homelessness: funding and space.

Swain hopes to play his part in helping now that he's in a better position to do so. Apart from the table he needs, an extra mattress for the spare room he now has is another item near the top of his wish list.

If he had it, he feels like he could start giving back by offering it up to people for a night or two when they're in need.

"I've found from being homeless that there's more of a kindred spirit among homeless people," he said. "They're more willing to give up whatever they have to someone else who's homeless because they have walked in the other person's footsteps."

Follow Brian Arola @Brian-Arola

print

main story

VIRUS: Vaccinations on the rise

Continued from Page A1

Faribault counties had the most in the area Saturday. Brown County had 16, while Faribault County had 12.

The full list of new cases by county includes:

- Brown County — 16
- Faribault County — 12
- Blue Earth County — 11

- Watonwan County — 10

- Nicollet County — 7
- Martin County — 5
- Waseca County — 4
- Le Sueur County — 1
- Sibley County — 1

Statewide, the pace of COVID vaccinations in Minnesota has been trending upward in recent days — with Saturday's update from state health officials showing more than 43,000 shots administered.

That's the third-highest single-day total on record in Minnesota, slightly trailing the last two days of January. And it's more than 6,000 doses above what was reported a week ago.

Averaged over the past week, the number of vaccinations administered each day has been ticking upward in recent days — though it's still a slower pace than what was seen a couple weeks ago.

Minnesota ranks 28th among states in doses administered per 100,000 people, according to data collected by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But with federal vaccine shipments rising, the pace of vaccinations may increase in the coming days.

Officials have been emphasizing over the past weeks that the relatively low flow of vaccine supplies from the federal government is the main problem holding back the pace of vaccinations. There's data to back that up.

About 11.5% of Minnesotans had received at least one dose as of Saturday's update. About 3.8% are completely vaccinated, and more than 32% of Minnesotans 65 and older have now been vaccinated.

South-central Minnesota remains slightly behind the statewide progress on vaccines. About 11.2% of residents in the nine counties have received one dose, while 2.9% have completed their vaccine series.

Minnesota's other COVID data continues to offer reasons to be encouraged about the pandemic's path. Key trend lines around the disease remain angled in the right direction — down.

Hospitalization counts remain steady at late September/early October levels. The trend line for known, active caseloads remains at levels not seen since late September.

New cases reported on Saturday were a fairly modest 964.