TODAY

It's Saturday, Feb. 6, the 37th day of 2021. There are 328 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

In **1778**, during the American Revolutionary War, the United States won official recognition and military support from France with the signing of a Treaty of Alliance in Paris.

In **1756**, America's third vice president, Aaron Burr, was born in Newark, N.J.

In **1788**, Massachusetts became the sixth state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In **1815**, the state of New Jersey issued the first American railroad charter to John Stevens, who proposed a rail link between Trenton and New Brunswick. The line, however, was never built.

In **1862**, during the Civil War, Fort Henry in Tennessee fell to Union forces.

In **1911**, Ronald Wilson Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, was born in Tampico, Illinois.

In **1933**, the 20th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the so-called "lame duck" amendment, was proclaimed in effect by Secretary of State Henry Stimson.

In **1952**, Britain's King George VI, 56, died at Sandringham House in Norfolk, England; he was succeeded as monarch by his 25-year-old elder daughter, who became Queen Elizabeth II.

In **1991**, comedian and television performer Danny Thomas died in Los Angeles at 79.

In **1993**, tennis Hall of Famer and human rights advocate Arthur Ashe died in New York at 49.

In **1998**, Carl Wilson, a founding member of The Beach Boys, died in Los Angeles at 51.

In **2008**, the Bush White House defended the use of the interrogation technique known as waterboarding, saying it was legal — not torture as critics argued — and had saved American lives.

Ten years ago: Egypt's vice president met with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups and offered sweeping concessions, including granting press freedom and rolling back police powers in the government's latest attempt to end two weeks of upheaval. The Green Bay Packers won Super Bowl XLV, defeating the Pittsburgh Steelers 31-25.

Five years ago: Seven GOP Republican hopefuls faced off three days before the New Hampshire primary; Marco Rubio, a first-term senator on the rise in the presidential race, faced a barrage of attacks while Sen. Ted Cruz, fresh off his victory in the Iowa caucuses, also came under withering criticism. A magnitude-6.4 earthquake struck Tainan, Taiwan, killing 116 people. Brett Favre, Ken Stabler, Marvin Harrison, Kevin Greene, Orlando Pace and Tony Dungy were elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton won The Associated Press NFL Most Valuable Player award in a landslide.

One year ago: A 57-year-old woman died in California's Santa Clara County; autopsy results would later reveal that the woman, identified by family members as Patricia Dowd of San Jose, had the coronavirus, despite not having traveled outside the country to a coronavirus outbreak area. The death came some three weeks before health officials in the Seattle area announced what were believed then to be the first U.S. deaths from the virus. A Chinese doctor, Li Wenliang, who got in trouble with authorities there for sounding an early warning about the coronavirus outbreak, died after coming down with the illness. Roger Kahn, the writer who wove memoir and baseball in "The Boys of Summer," a romantic account of the Brooklyn Dodgers, died in a New York suburb; he was 92.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Mamie Van Doren is 90. Former NBC News anchorman Tom Brokaw is 81. Singer Fabian is 78. Actor Gayle Hunnicutt is 78. Actor Michael Tucker is 76. Producer-director-writer Jim Sheridan is 72. Actor Jon Walmsley is 65. Actor Kathy Najimy is 64. Actor-director Robert Townsend is 64. Actor Barry Miller is 63. Actor Megan Gallagher is 61. Rock singer Axl Rose (Guns N' Roses) is 59. Country singer Richie McDonald is 59. Singer Rick Astley is 55. Rock musician Tim Brown (Boo Radleys) is 52. "Good Morning America" co-host Amy Robach is 48. Actor Josh Stewart is 44. Actor Brandon Hammond is 37. Actor Anna Diop is 33. R&B singer/actor Tinashe is 28.

— Associated Press

LOCAL, STATE & REGION

WILDFIRES

Scientists say smoke could carry 'mind-bending' amounts of fungi

BY JOSEPH SERNA
The Los Angeles Times

When wildfires roar through a forest and bulldozers dig into the earth to stop advancing flames, they may be churning more into the air than just clouds of dust and smoke, scientists say.

Those dark, billowing plumes of smoke that rise on waves of heat during the day and sink into valleys as the night air cools may be transporting countless living microbes that can seep into our lungs or cling to our skin and clothing, according to research published recently in Science. In some cases, researchers fear that airborne pathogens could sicken firefighters or downwind residents.

"We were inspired to write this because we recognize that there are many trillions of microbes in smoke that haven't really been incorporated in an understanding ... of human health," said Leda Kobziar, the University of Idaho's wildland fire science director. "At this point, it's really unknown. The diversity of microbes that we've found are really mind-bending."

As recent fire seasons suggest, the need to understand what's in the wildfire smoke we can't help but breathe and how it may affect us has never been more pronounced, but scientists say we are seriously behind the curve.

Wildfires burned across more than 10.2 million acres of the United States in 2020, federal statistics show, including some 4.2 million acres in California, where a greater number of residents were exposed to smoke for a longer period of time than ever before. More than 1 million acres burned in Oregon in 2020, bringing some of the worst air quality in the nation for several days in September.

Brittany Hosea-Small/AFP via Getty Images

A woman walks Sept. 9 along The Embarcadero under an orange smoke-filled sky in San Francisco.

Wildfire smoke now accounts for up to half of all fine-particle pollution in the Western U.S., according to researchers. Although there are many studies on the long-term impacts to human health from urban air pollution and short-term impacts from wildfire smoke, there's little known about the multitude of ways the latter can hurt us over a lifetime.

"Frankly, we don't really know about the long-term effects of wildfire smoke because community exposures haven't been long-term before," said Dr. John Balmes, a professor of medicine at University of California, San Francisco and a member of the California Air Resources Board.

Kobziar and study co-author George Thompson III, an associate professor of medicine at UC Davis, said that up until now, the connection between microbes and wildfires has been anecdotal — such as the tendency for wildland firefighters to get sick with Valley fever after working on an incident. The illness is contracted by inhaling spores of the fungi genus Coccidioides.

"We have more questions than answers at this point," Thompson said. "Our lungs are exposed to pathogens every day we don't think much of. But [what] if we increase the number of microbes in there with fire?"

Yet, determining what pathogens exist in wildfire smoke has been difficult.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA and team of chemists, physicists, biologists and forest and fire ecologists from a number of universities have been collaborating for years to study wildfire smoke around the country, under the assumption that nobody will be immune to its effects in the future.

"As the climate changes, as the temperature warms up, as we build houses in places that are surrounded by human populations and housing development expand into regions susceptible to fires, it's a matter of time," said Berry Lefero, manager of NASA's Tropospheric Composition Program, which includes a DC-8 jetliner that circles the globe studying wildfire smoke, ozone and aerosols in the atmosphere's lower layer.

To solve the riddle of what microbes are in the smoke and why, Kobziar and Thompson need to understand what type of fuel is burning, like a grass, shrub, or tree; how much of it there was initially; how severely it was burned; and where the smoke originated.

Once those variables are determined, there's the complicated task of actually capturing the smoke, which is by no means uniform, Kobziar said.

In September, Kobziar, a former firefighter, used a drone to capture samples of the air over Idaho when it was inundated with smoke from fires in Eastern Washington and Oregon. She then placed the samples in a petri dish, added some food that microbes like to eat and waited to see what would happen.

"Even a couple hundred miles away from the source of the smoke, it was still significant," Kobziar said. "We're still trying to isolate all the things we found."

State panel calls for lawmaker's ouster

BY ANDREW SELSKY
The Associated Press

SALEM — The conduct committee of the Oregon House of Representatives voted Friday in favor of expelling one of its members for alleged sexual harassment and asked the full House to make a decision.

The fate of Rep. Diego Hernandez, a Democrat from Portland and once considered a rising political star, hangs in the balance.

A resolution passed by the House Committee on Conduct says "Hernandez has engaged in disorderly behavior ... and be it further resolved, that with the concurrence of two-thirds of the members of the House of Representatives, Representative Hernandez be expelled."

It was not immediately clear when a vote might happen. The next House floor session is scheduled for Tuesday.

Hernandez allegedly harassed three women, including throwing his cellphone toward one. He is accused of repeatedly trying to rekindle consensual romances with the women, despite their telling him they weren't interested.

Anna Reed/Statesman-Journal via AP, file

Oregon state Rep. Diego Hernandez speaks during a 2017 immigrant rights rally at the Oregon State Capitol in Salem.

Hours before the committee voted, Gov. Kate Brown said he should step down immediately.

Hernandez has expressed no intention of doing so.

He declined to comment. In a letter to the conduct committee, he apologized for making anyone uncomfortable and said he made mistakes in these relationships.

In a Friday letter to the committee, his attorney, Kevin Lafky, said Hernandez had presented evidence that rebuts testimony heard by lawmakers.

Washington man charged with entering U.S. Capitol

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — A southwest Washington man has been arrested and charged with entering the U.S. Capitol with a pro-Trump mob during the Jan. 6 deadly insurrection.

Jeffrey Grace of Battle Ground was arrested Thursday at his home and charged by. file complaint in Washington, D.C., with one count of unauthorized entering or remaining in any restricted building or grounds, according to charging documents.

Grace, 61, made an initial appearance in federal court in Portland on Thursday afternoon, The Seattle Times reported. He faces up to one year in prison, if convicted.

It was not clear Thursday whether Grace had a lawyer, and calls the newspaper made to phone numbers listed for Grace were not immediately returned.