

Philanthropy

\$15b from Gates

French Gates 'tops' 2021 biggest gift list

NEW YORK, Jan 2, (AP): It was a healthy year for big gifts to charitable causes in 2021, a year that saw one of the largest multibillion-dollar contributions in more than a decade, according to a Chronicle of Philanthropy tally.

The power philanthropists Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates announced in May that they were divorcing and then gave a jaw-dropping \$15 billion to their foundation in July. The money will bolster its endowment and support the grant maker's work in global health, development, policy and advocacy, and US education well into the future.

The gift increased the grant maker's endowment to about \$65 billion and is the Gateses' biggest infusion of money into the foundation since 2000, when they transferred Microsoft stock then valued at \$20 million.

When they announced this year's gift, the two philanthropists indicated they planned to continue running the foundation together for the time being but announced through the foundation that if after two years either one of them decides not to work together, then French Gates will resign as co-chair and trustee.

Regardless, the philanthropists made clear in two new Giving Pledge letters that they both intend to keep giving big in the years ahead.

French Gates wrote that she will continue to support efforts to fight poverty and "advance equality for women and

girls and other marginalized groups." Gates wrote in his Giving Pledge letter that the work of the foundation will continue to be his "top philanthropic priority" and that he plans to increase his giving in other areas like "mitigating climate change and tackling Alzheimer's."

Nonprofits that focus on those causes are likely to reap big rewards, given that Bill Gates's net worth is pegged at about \$137 billion and Melinda French Gates's at \$6 billion.

Meanwhile, Nike co-founder Phil Knight and his wife, Penny's, \$500 million contribution to the University of Oregon tied for second place on the list. The gift will be used to expand the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact and follows a \$500 million donation the Knights gave to launch the science campus in 2016. The Knight Campus aims to speed up the process of transforming new scientific discoveries into medical treatments and other developments to improve people's lives.

Pledge

Phil Knight, whose net worth stands at about \$60 billion, earned a bachelor's degree in business from the university in 1959. The couple have given the university a total of at least \$1.6 billion to date.

Also tied for No. 2 is a \$500 million challenge pledge the financier George Soros made through his Open Society Foundations to Bard College for its endowment. The pledge aims to persuade other donors to back the college's effort to raise \$1 billion over the next five years.

College officials announced in April that the pledge had already helped them raise \$250 million from other donors. Soros, whose net worth is pegged at \$8.6 billion, founded Soros Fund Management, a New York firm that manages hedge funds.

Next on the list is a \$480 million donation to Northwestern University from Patrick Ryan, founder of Ryan Specialty Group, an insurance services company, and his wife, Shirley. The Ryans, whose net worth stands at close to \$8 billion, gave the money to their alma mater for a variety of programs.

The money will back education and research efforts in applied microeconomics, business, digital medicine, global health, neuroscience, and translational research programs at the university's Feinberg School of Medicine. A portion of the gift will also pay for building projects.

The Chronicle's annual rankings are based on the 10 biggest publicly announced gifts. The tally does not include contributions of artwork or gifts from anonymous donors. In February, the Chronicle will unveil its annual ranking of the 50 biggest donors, a list based on individuals' total contributions in 2021 rather than single gifts.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy's Top 10 List of Biggest Gifts

1. Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft, and Melinda French Gates, founder of Pivotal Ventures, an investment firm, gave \$15 billion to Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for endowment

2. (tie) Philip Knight, co-founder of Nike, and his wife, Penny gave \$500 million to University of Oregon to expand the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact

3. (tie) George Soros, chairman of Soros Fund Management, through his Open Society Foundations gave \$500 million to Bard College for endowment

4. Patrick Ryan, founder of Ryan Specialty Group, an insurance services company, and his wife, Shirley gave \$480 million to Northwestern University for a variety of programs

5. Denny Sanford, chairman of United National Corporation Sanford Health, gave \$350 million to establish a virtual-care hospital

6. Denny Sanford, chairman of United National Corporation Sanford Health, gave \$300 million for graduate medical education and to expand a sports complex

7. William Goodwin Jr., a real-estate developer, his wife, Alice, and their late son, Hunter, gave \$250 million to establish Break Through Cancer, a foundation that will support cancer research

8. Joe Tsai, co-founder of Alibaba Group, and Clara Wu Tsai, co-owner of professional sports teams, through their Joe and Clara Tsai Foundation, gave \$220 million to establish the Wu Tsai Human Performance Alliance, a medical research nonprofit

9. Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon gave \$200 million to Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum for an education center and museum renovations

10. Gerald Chan, co-founder of Morningside Group, an investment firm, through his Morningside Foundation gave \$175 million to University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School for endowment

Also:

SEATTLE: Brian "Red" Hamilton was in the middle of moving equipment on the Vancouver Canucks' bench in between periods on Oct. 23 in Seattle when he noticed a woman behind the bench pressing her phone against the plexiglass.

The message on her phone was written in a large font and caught the attention of Hamilton, the assistant equipment manager for the Canucks. The message expressed Nadia Popovici's concern that she believed a mole on the back of Hamilton's neck was cancerous and that he needed to get it checked.

It turned out she was right. "I felt bad at the moment because I'm walking off the bench and she put her phone up to the glass and on the phone it said the mole on the back of your neck is cancer. And it threw me off," Hamilton recalled on Saturday before the Canucks played their second game of the season in Seattle. "So I kind of just shrugged and kept going. My initial response when I found out was I felt bad because I felt like I didn't really give her the time of day. I'm excited that she knows because she needs to know."

The Canucks posted a letter from Hamilton on Saturday retelling the story of how all this played out and expressing his thanks and desire to meet the woman in question. Within barely an hour, both the Canucks and Seattle Kraken said the 22-year-old Popovici had been contacted after spending New Year's Eve working at a crisis hotline. The pair were able to meet about 90 minutes before the Kraken and Canucks played on Saturday night.



Finn Washburn, 9, shows his vaccination site as his mother, Kate Elsley, takes a photo shortly after he received a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in San Jose, Calif., on Nov. 3, 2021. The omicron-fueled surge that is sending COVID-19 cases rocketing in the US is putting children in the hospital in close to record numbers, and experts lament that most of the youngsters are not vaccinated. (AP)



A medical worker puts a nasal swab in a solution at COVID-19 testing site, in Nantes, western France, Friday, Dec. 31. Paris region health authorities have instructed hospitals to cancel more non-urgent medical procedures to free up intensive-care beds for the growing influx of people gravely sick with COVID-19. (AP)

Discovery

Rare mussels discovered: Biologists discovered a cluster of rare mussels that could be more than 100 years old in the upper St. Croix River this past summer.

Wisconsin Public Radio reported Wednesday that biologists from the University of Minnesota, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service discovered eight spectacle mussel mussels in the river in August.

Spectacle mussels rely on moon-eye and goldeye fish to serve as hosts for their larvae. But a hydroelectric dam built in 1907 has prevented the fish from swimming upstream and reaching the mussels in the upper St. Croix. Younger spectacle mussels have been found downstream of the dam, but researchers stopped looking for them upstream in 1987. They were surprised to find any still alive in the river's upper reaches, DNR officials said in a news release.

"Native mussels can live a long time, but these mussels were pushing the limits," Lisie Kitchel, a DNR biologist who was on the team that discovered the cluster, said in the news release.

She told WPR that the cluster will probably die off but biologists will keep monitoring them to see how long they live.

DNR officials said in the news release that biologists will try to preserve the cluster's genetics before they perish in hopes of growing the population in the upper St. Croix or reintroduce moon-eye or goldeye above the dam to encourage reproduction. (AP)

Fossil footprints puzzle scientists: Prehistoric footprints that have puzzled scientists since the 1970s are getting a second look: Were they left by extinct animals or by human ancestors?

When famed paleontologist Mary Leakey first uncovered the footprints in Tanzania 40 years ago, the evidence was ambiguous.

Leakey focused her attention instead on other fossil footprints that could be more clearly linked to early humans. Those footprints, found at a site called Laetoli G, are the first clear evidence of early humans walking upright.

Decades later, a new team re-excavated the confusing footprints, found at a site called Laetoli A, and made photos and 3-D scans available for other researchers to continue the debate.

The research was published Wednesday in the journal Nature.

"These footprints have been in the mystery category for 40 years," said Rick Potts, who directs the Smithsonian Institution's Human Origins Project.

"It's a really exciting idea to re-examine them and study them again," added Potts, who was not involved in the research.

What's long perplexed scientists is that those tracks — broad footprints with enlarged fifth toes and estimated to be around 3.7 million years old — don't closely match anything scientists have elsewhere identified.

"They didn't have the right weight

Coronavirus

Brazil turns to online survey

Should kids be vaccinated?

BRASILIA, Brazil, Jan 2, (AP): As world leaders rely on public health specialists to inform their decisions about whether and how to vaccinate children against the coronavirus, Brazil's government is asking the online public for guidance.

In recent weeks, President Jair Bolsonaro has staked out a position against immunizing kids aged between 5 and 11, and his administration took the unusual step of creating a platform that could validate a stance that is widely opposed by experts. Since his government on Dec. 23 unveiled its online questionnaire on the issue, the president's supporters have been highly engaged on messaging apps trying to pressure parents to swing the results.

One widely shared post Wednesday on the Telegram group 'Bolsonaro Army,' which has about 37,000 members, said the vaccine is experimental and suggested that receiving shots could be more harmful than getting infected, although several studies have shown the opposite is true. It also included a link to the government's survey, which other people were posting along with instructions to relay to friends and family.

The rally for resistance resembles online behavior observed earlier this month, which catapulted Bolsonaro to the top of the heap in TIME magazine's readers poll for Person of the Year. David Nemer, an expert on Brazil's far-right groups on messaging apps, told The Associated Press. Bolsonaro garnered about one-quarter of the more than 9 million votes — nearly triple that of the runner-up, former US President Donald Trump. The magazine's editors instead chose Elon Musk as 2021 Person of the Year.

This time, however, online efforts are aimed at something far more significant than bestowing an honorific on the president. The survey, which concludes Jan. 2, stands to shape vaccination policy in Latin America's most populous nation, home to 20 million kids aged 5 to 11. Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga has said they will soon be eligible for vaccination, but survey results will help determine guidelines including whether shots could only be administered with parental consent and a doctor's prescription.

"This is a tool of democracy, it widens the discussion on the topic and it will bring more ease for parents so they can take their children to immunize against COVID-19," Queiroga said Wednesday.

Health experts, for their part, are aghast. Some Brazilian states' health secretariats have already pledged to ignore any health ministry guidelines on childhood vaccination if based on the public consultation. Gonzalo Vecina, founder and director of Brazil's health regulator between 1999 and 2003, says public consultation on vaccines is "unprecedented".

"Bolsonaro is against the vaccine and his employee, the health minister, believes that health is a matter of public opinion. It is a spurious and non-sensical approach," Vecina told the AP. "If only deniers send their opinion in the public consultation, is the government going to say that the vaccine doesn't have to be used?"

Do at-home COVID-19 tests detect the omicron variant?

NEW YORK, Jan 2, (AP): Do at-home COVID-19 tests detect the omicron variant?

Yes, but US health officials say early data suggests they may be less sensitive at picking it up.

Government recommendations for using at-home tests haven't changed. People should continue to use them when a quick result is important.

"The bottom line is the tests still detect COVID-19 whether it is delta or alpha or omicron," says Dr. Emily Volk, president of the College of American Pathologists.

Government scientists have been checking to make sure the rapid tests still work as each new variant comes along. And this week, the Food and Drug Administration said preliminary research indicates they detect omicron, but may have reduced sensitivity. The agency noted it's still studying how the tests perform with the variant, which was first detected in late November.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top US infectious disease expert, said the

FDA wanted to be "totally transparent" by noting the sensitivity might come down a bit, but that the tests remain important.

There are many good uses for at-home tests, Volk says. Combined with vaccination, they can make you more comfortable about gathering with family and friends.

If you've been exposed to a person who tested positive but you don't have symptoms, a rapid test five days later can give a good indication of whether you caught the virus. It can also help if you're not sure whether your runny nose or sore throat is COVID-19.

But consider the context when looking at results. If you feel sick after going out to a nightclub in an area with high infection rates, for example, you should look at a negative result from an at-home test with a little more skepticism, Volk says.

Following up with a PCR test is a good idea, she says. Those tests are more accurate and are done at testing sites and hospitals.

Denialism from the top in Brazil is a bit of deja vu. Even as COVID-19 exploded, driving the nation's death toll to the second highest in the world, Bolsonaro spent months sowing doubts about vaccines and was obstinate in his refusal to get a shot. He has cited the fact he contracted the coronavirus in 2020 to claim, incorrectly, that he is already immune, and routinely characterizes vaccination as an issue of personal choice rather than a means for ensuring the common good.

Side-effects

So when Brazil's health regulator authorized use of Pfizer's shot for children on Dec. 16, Bolsonaro was stunned.

"Kids are something very serious," he said the same night in his weekly live broadcast on social media. "We don't know about possible adverse future effects. It's unbelievable — I'm sorry — what the agency did. Unbelievable."

A study released Thursday by US health authorities confirmed that serious side effects from the Pfizer vaccine in children ages 5 to 11 are rare. The findings were based on approximately 8 million doses dispensed to youngsters in that age group.

Bolsonaro added that he would name and expose the public servants who issued the approval, prompting a union representing health agency workers to express concern about online abuse or even physical attacks.

Despite fervent support among his base, Bolsonaro's anti-vaccine stance hasn't gained as much traction in Brazil — which has a proud history of inoculation campaigns — as in the US. More than two-thirds of Brazilians are fully

vaccinated, as compared to 63% in the US, according to Johns Hopkins University's vaccination tracker, though American children have been eligible for shots since early November.

In neighboring Argentina, the government has allowed kids 12 years and older to be vaccinated since August, and more recently began giving shots to children as young as 3. In the face of subsequent criticism, the nation's health ministry cited the recommendation of the nation's association of pediatricians. In Chile, two-thirds of kids aged between 3 and 17 have already received both their shots, after the nation's health regulator analyzed an immunization study of 100 million children.

For the time being, Mexico isn't vaccinating children except those 12 years or older with illnesses that put them at greater risk. Mexico's point man for the pandemic, Hugo López-Gatell, said Tuesday the World Health Organization hasn't recommended vaccinating children aged 5 to 11, and that countries with ample vaccine coverage, like Mexico, shouldn't vaccinate kids until developing nations with limited coverage can raise their adult vaccination rates.

In Brazil, Mauro Paulino, general director of prominent pollster Datafolha, said one problem with the Bolsonaro government's survey is the way questions are framed, repeatedly asking interviewees, "Do you agree that...?" Such failure to present questions neutrally can induce responses.

"Datafolha always gives the two possible alternatives: whether the interviewee agrees or disagrees with the statement," he said. "Both sides of the question are necessary."



Potts



Leakey

and foot movement to be easily identified as human, so other explanations were sought," including that they may belong to an extinct species of bears, said co-author and Dartmouth paleoanthropologist Jeremy DeSilva.

He and other researchers returned to the site in 2019 and used Leakey's original maps to locate the enigmatic prints, preserved in a layer of volcanic ash that had cooled and hardened.

Co-author Ellison McNutt of Ohio

University studied the foot mechanics of black bear cubs at a wildlife rescue center in New Hampshire to see whether a small bear walking on hind legs could leave similar footprints.

She held a tray of apple sauce to lure the cubs into walking toward her. Each footprint was recorded in a track of mud, to be analyzed.

Bears walking upright first put weight on the heels of their feet, like humans, she said. (AP)