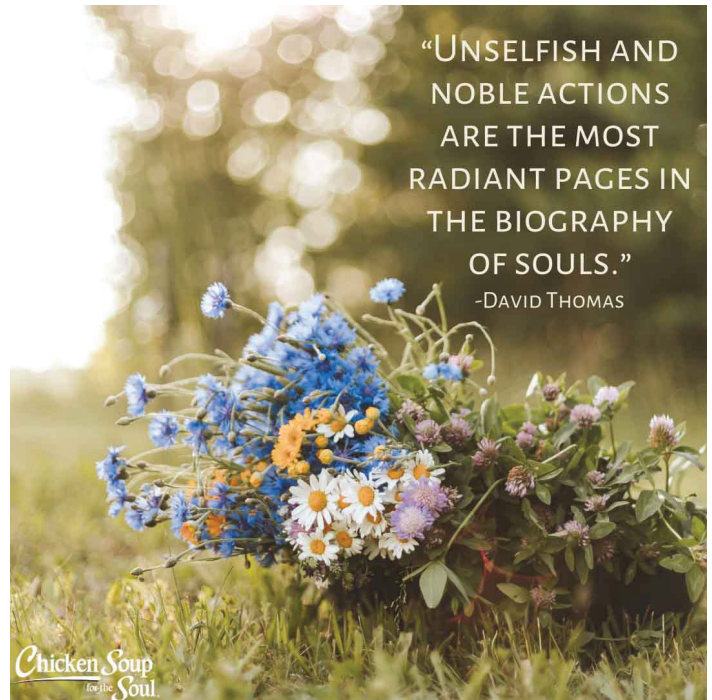


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“UNSELFISH AND NOBLE ACTIONS ARE THE MOST RADIANT PAGES IN THE BIOGRAPHY OF SOULS.”

-DAVID THOMAS



The City of Groton will be doing adult mosquito control Tonight.

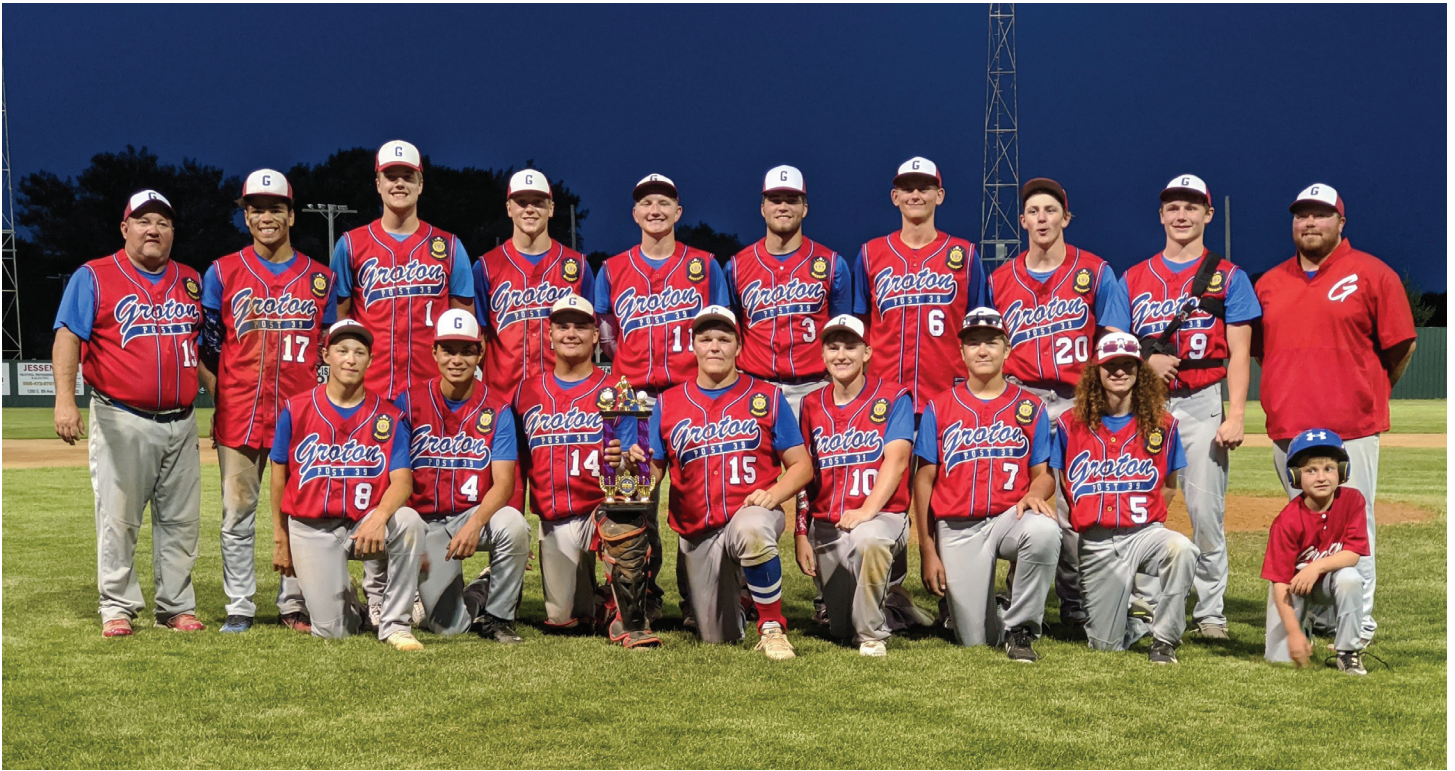
OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Groton Legion wins Cactus Tournament

Groton took first place in the Cactus League Tournament held this week in Redfield, beating the host team, 11-8.

Back row: Coach Matt Locke, Darien Shabazz, Brody DeHoet, Johnny Doeden, Chandler Larson, Peyton Johnson, Tristan Traphagen, Garrett Schoeder, Austin Jones, Coach Seth Erickson

Front row: Connor Thaler, Anthony Schinkel, Alex Morris, Wyatt Locke, Riley Thurston, Lee Iverson, Douglas Heminger, Bat Boy Mason Locke. (Photo by Becky Morris)

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Junior Legion is Consolation Champions

The Groton Junior Legion team won the consolation championship of the Cactus League tournament held in Redfield. A team had dropped out of the tournament so the Junior Legion team competed against the senior teams and took fifth place.

L to R back row: Andrew Marzahn, Lane Krueger, Evin Nehls, Jace Kroll, Tate Larson, Jordan Bjerke, Coach Aaron Severson, Jayden Zak, Cade Larson

Front Row: Caleb Hanten, Pierce Kettering, Kaden Kurtz, Coach Dalton Locke, Jackson Cogley, Jacob Lewandowski, Cole Simon. (Photo by Jesse Zak)



COVID-19 outbreak infects students at Northern State University in Aberdeen

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

Eight students of Northern State University in Aberdeen and a youth who attended a recent athletic camp on the NSU campus have tested positive for COVID-19, according to a university spokesperson.

The university is working closely with the state Department of Health to undergo contact tracing of those with confirmed cases and to monitor the campus and students for the potential that more cases could arise, said Justin Fraase, vice president of enrollment, communications and marketing at Northern State.

"That [number] may blossom or expand, and that's where Department of Health contact tracing comes into play and why we continue to work with the department," Fraase said.

So far, all of those with confirmed cases of COVID-19 have had no symptoms or only mild symptoms of the potentially deadly disease, Fraase said. The university was formally made aware of the positive tests by the state on Tuesday, July 28.

People who tested positive were present at three recent youth athletic camps for girls: a volleyball camp on July 20-22, a basketball camp on July 23-24, and a soccer camp on July 24-26, Fraase said.

The NSU students who became infected do not live on campus but likely live in the larger Aberdeen community, Fraase said.

NSU is hosting youth basketball and football camps on campus this week, and those events are continuing as scheduled, with masks being worn by attendees. The infected students are isolating off campus and are not attending those ongoing camps, Fraase said.

"To say this is exclusively tied to athletics, I can't say that right now," Fraase said.

Fraase said he did not have details as to how the outbreak was initially discovered and referred questions on the origin to the state health department. Phone calls and emails sent to the state by News Watch were not returned on Wednesday.





Justin Fraase

At this point, it isn't clear if the virus was spread on campus or off campus among the students, Fraase said.

"They may be living here because of their affiliation to Northern, and we can't say definitively, but right now we're not able to correlate these back to on-campus activities," he said. "It's possible the spread took place outside the boundaries of campus."

Fraase said it was important for Northern State to let the public know about the outbreak.

"We want to just let people know there's been a few cases here and this should be a reminder to us all that this is out there and we all need to take the necessary precautions at this time," Fraase said.

Campus activities will continue as planned, including visits by prospective students and summer learning, research and athletic activities, Fraase said. The outbreak also is not anticipated to affect the university's plans to welcome about 3,600 students back on Aug. 17 for the fall semester and the start of classes on Aug. 19.

"Today's news does not impact plans for the return to campus or athletic plans that are ongoing," he said. "We feel very strongly we have taken the necessary steps to ensure we are slowing the spread of covid on campus and in our community."

The South Dakota Board of Regents, which governs the university system, announced on May 1 that all six universities and two special schools in the system would return to in-person teaching for the fall semester. The six universities, including Northern State, will begin classes on Aug. 19 and end in-person teaching on Nov. 24, with all finals exams to be administered remotely.

The Regents voted unanimously on Wednesday, July 22, to begin the academic year with a requirement that masks be worn inside all public buildings on campus. The Level 3 designation, the third-most stringent on a scale of 1-4, will be reviewed and could be changed after 30 days. Individual universities can also request a change in level at any time if conditions change on their campus.

Universities are undergoing significant planning and preparation for the return to classes, including extensive cleaning, installation of protective barriers, providing of sanitizer and protective equipment, and re-configuring of classrooms to ensure social distancing.

Northern State President Timothy Downs posted a message to faculty, staff and students on July 24 with an update on preparations for a return to in-person classes.

Downs noted that hand sanitizer would be available at every building entrance, sanitizing wipes will be in every classroom and masks will be provided to people who need them. He also noted that the state health department is making Abbott ID-Now testing machines available for use by students at no cost.

"I'm pleased with the progress we've made in preparing for a return to campus this fall, and I'm confident that we can work together to keep our entire campus community safe and healthy," Downs wrote. "I ask again that everyone be vigilant in continuing to follow CDC guidelines when it comes to preventative measures, and remain alert to campus messaging regarding policies and procedures as we get closer to fall."

The NSU outbreak comes as colleges and high schools across South Dakota and the country are planning for a return to in-person teaching and learning and making preparations to keep students, teachers and staff as safe as possible.

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#157 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

It was not a good day. I had a glimmer of hope that maybe we were turning a bit when the last three days hung there around or below 60,000 new cases; but today sort of blew that out of the water. We're at 69,300 new cases today, a 1.6% increase to 4,433,300 cases in the US. This is our fifth-worst day for new case reports, and we're now at a solid month of worst-ever days. Daily new cases peaked in April, but are now more than double those numbers. I still have 29 states and territories showing growth over 14 days. California reported a record number of new cases today.

We talked last night about the 21 red-zone states, so designated by the White House Coronavirus Task Force, based on new case reports per population. Today, the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis pointed out that 17 of those 21 states, are not following the guidelines laid out in that same report which made the designation. That is very discouraging.

As this latest surge in cases develops, evidence is emerging to confirm the transmission experts have been predicting, that young adults who have been the bulk of new cases in this surge are taking the virus home, to work, and to school where they are exposing older, more vulnerable people. Hospitalization and death patterns confirm this is occurring. All of the celebration we saw at the fact that the new cases were mostly in young people was, indeed, premature. The fact is that age groups mix, and an infection running rampant in one age group will find its way to other age groups.

We hit another milestone today, topping 150,000 deaths; there have been 151,098, including the 1420 newly reported ones from today, a 0.9% increase. This daily count is going the wrong direction too. The number of new deaths was at its lowest point late last month and has been growing ever since. Daily death counts are increasing in 24 states and territories. California, Idaho, North Carolina, and Florida reported single-day record numbers of deaths with Florida breaking a record set just yesterday. Thirteen states had record seven-day average deaths, and eight states (Texas, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Florida) have now had at least one 200-death day.

The Association of American Medical Colleges, a nonprofit representing medical schools and teaching hospitals weighed in on this crisis, presenting an 11-step plan for the country to deal with the virus, heavy on testing, face coverings, PPE for health care workers, and lab capacity as well as recommending a lot more federal coordination than we have been seeing. They also warn we could see deaths in "the multiple hundreds of thousands" if the country "does not change its course—and soon."

Here's an interesting—and fraught—topic: a priority list for who gets the early doses of any successful Covid-19 vaccine. It is important to realize that, even if a fully-proven and approved vaccine landed in our laps tomorrow, everyone won't be vaccinated tomorrow—or this month—or this year, for that matter. Vaccination programs take some time, and vaccine (along with the vials in which it travels, needles for injection, and all the other accoutrements) will trickle out slowly at first. It will probably be at least a year after the vaccine is approved before everyone in the US has the opportunity to receive it, so with two vaccine candidates in phase 3 trials, the finish line is at least in sight. This means attention has turned to the question of how scarce doses of vaccine are allocated. I do not plan to weigh in on the question myself except in a general way; but I can report on the kinds of ideas being tossed around. Here are some ideas which have been floated, along with a note for each on the underlying rationale.

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- (1) Health care workers: high risk of exposure, essential to societal functioning, especially at this time
- (2) Essential workers: high risk of exposure, no option to work from home, essential to societal functioning
- (3) Older adults: unless the successful vaccine is shown not to be highly effective in this group
- (4) Residents of long-term care facilities and group homes: high risk of exposure, high-risk of serious disease
- (5) People with underlying medical conditions: high risk of serious disease
- (6) Members of minority communities: high risk of exposure, significantly higher mortality rate
- (7) Volunteers for vaccine trials who received placebos: compensation for undertaking the risk

There will be subsets that get highest consideration within whatever categories are finally chosen; and it probably won't be a perfect system. There is a federal advisory panel working with a committee of experts and the CDC to establish vaccination priorities. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, says, "This is going to be controversial and not everyone's going to like the answer. There will be many people who feel that they should have been at the top of the list, and not everybody can be." I'm betting he's right about that. Monica Schloch-Spana, a medical anthropologist at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, adds, "If there was ever a time when public perception of fairness and justice was important, that would be now. She's right too. I hope we each can—for once—rise above our own self-interest and contemplate as objectively as possible who our society needs to protect first and who our society owes protection to the most. That person, sadly, is probably not I, and it may not be you either.

Today, I read an analysis by a group of experts of why this particular virus, SARS-CoV-2, was so successful in creating a pandemic with the disastrous effect this one has had. This is only the sixth time in its over 70-year history, the WHO has declared a global health emergency, and "it is easily the most severe," according to the WHO's general director, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Why is that? Turns out this virus has a constellation of features which, taken together, make it well-suited to hell-raising, a one-in-a-million "perfect storm" of a virus, in the words of Andrea Pruijssers of Vanderbilt University.

It spreads super-fast. Respiratory infections, in general, are excellent transmitters because we all go around breathing all the time. And then we add to the trouble by also speaking, singing, shouting, coughing, and sneezing. It does not require touching someone who's infected; all you have to do is get close enough to share air.

But it doesn't spread so fast it will burn itself out. A virus that spreads too quickly can rapidly create herd immunity in a community, which tamps down further spread to other communities. Too-rapid spread can actually work against the pathogen.

It can be transmitted by someone who has no symptoms. This has been a huge issue with this virus. By contrast, with SARS, back in 2003 and 2004, people didn't really start transmitting until they had symptoms, so it was relatively easy to identify those who were a source of infection and quarantine them until they were no longer shedding virus. We do not have that option here. The reason the SARS outbreak died down so quickly was that it was possible to apply public health measures to shut down transmission. There have been no known cases of SARS since 2004 after only some 8000 people had been infected.

The severity of this disease strains health care systems. The damage the virus does will, for a number of the infected, require hospitalization and very high-level care; this is resource-intensive. When systems are overwhelmed, people can die simply because the system cannot provide the required level of care to everyone who needs it.

This one is still up in the air, but if it would turn out to be a thing, we're going to be in a new world of

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hurt: Perhaps the virus can be transmitted back and forth between people and animals. I'm going to say this is pretty speculative, at least as a more than rare occurrence, but we do have a virus initially transmitted from animals to people and one that can, at least occasionally be transmitted from people to animals, for example, pets. And while we have no evidence animals can transmit it back to people, there is an incident under investigation where minks on Dutch fur farms are thought to have given the virus to humans. I'm not going to start losing sleep over this yet, but I can say that would be very bad news. If domesticated animals can act as a reservoir for this virus, we may never rid ourselves of it.

It's a novel virus, that is, a brand new one about which we didn't know a thing when it started. Our lack of knowledge about transmission and control or treatment enabled it to spread across the globe and involve millions of people.

I saw an update on convalescent plasma trials for prophylaxis (prevention). There have been trials underway for some time using convalescent plasma for treatment of those who are already ill; but these new trials are being done in people who've been exposed or are at high risk of exposure. These are controlled, double-blind studies, which means some participants receive convalescent plasma and others receive serum from people who were never exposed to Covid-19 and that neither the study participants nor the researchers know which is which. Participants are being recruited across the country, concentrating on hot spots because there's where you have the best chance of seeing results—just as with vaccine trials. Another trial is underway now to examine whether the plasma can prevent serious illness in people known to be infected, but who are not sick.

We've talked about monoclonal antibody treatments, where the necessary antibodies are lab-produced instead of gathered from recovered individuals. The advantage convalescent plasma has is that it is significantly cheaper, so it is a good option for resource-limited situations. Results on these trials are expected by mid-September if all goes well.

This is an old story that harks back to an older story, but I ran across it the other day and thought it was worth telling. Do you remember New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's coronavirus briefing back in late March when Mr. Cuomo told the story of the Kansas farmer who mailed him a single N95 respirator he had to spare, asking him to give it to a health care worker? It was a touching moment as he told of this elderly farmer who gave the only thing he had that could help the beleaguered people of New York back in those dark days. As the Washington Post put it, "It was the humblest of offerings in a desperate time."

I thought you'd want to know that sometimes goodness is rewarded. That farmer, Dennis Ruhnke, had been forced by his father's sudden death back in 1971 to leave Kansas State two credits short of his degree. He went home to run the family farm, foregoing his degree to take care of his family. He had said he didn't doubt he'd made the right decision, but he always regretted not finishing that degree almost 50 years ago. Well, recently, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly presided over a commencement ceremony at the Kansas statehouse to hand him his diploma. This was not an honorary degree, but the real thing. Citing his decades of experience in agribusiness for that two credits, University President Richard Myers judged that the University could award an official degree, and so that's what happened.

Mr. Cuomo said in his press briefing, "It's that love, that courage, that generosity of spirit that makes this country so beautiful." And he's right. College graduate Ruhnke told those present on his graduation day, "Just pay it forward as much as you can afford to do so." Good advice. Let's take it.

Be well. We'll talk tomorrow.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	July 22	July 23	June 24	June 25	July 26	July 27	July 28
Minnesota	47,457	47,961	48,721	49,488	50,291	51,153	51,803
Nebraska	23,190	23,486	23,818	24,174	24,395	24,618	24,899
Montana	2,712	2,813	2,910	3,039	3,260	3,342	3,381
Colorado	41,059	41,698	42,314	42,980	43,789	44,336	44,565
Wyoming	1,830	1,864	1,923	1,972	2,008	2,029	2,072
North Dakota	5207	5367	5493	5614	5736	5876	5986
South Dakota	8019	8077	8143	8200	8305	8395	8444
United States	3,902,233	3,971,343	4,038,864	4,114,817	4,178,730	4,234,140	4,294,770
US Deaths	142,073	143,193	144,305	145,565	146,463	146,935	148,056

Minnesota	+350	+504	+760	+ 773	+805	+871	+650
Nebraska	+343	+296	+332	+356	+221	+223	+281
Montana	+91	+101	+97	+129	+221	+82	+39
Colorado	+493	+639	+616	+455	+457	+547	+229
Wyoming	+40	+34	+59	+49	+36	+21	+43
North Dakota	+81	+160	+126	+121	+122	+140	+110
South Dakota	+76	+58	+66	+57	+105	+90	+49
United States	+70,828	+69,110	+67,521	+75,953	+63,913	+55,410	+60,630
US Deaths	+1,164	+1,120	+1,112	+1,260	+898	+472	+1,121

	July 29	July 30
Minnesota	52,281	52,947
Nebraska	25,157	25,422
Montana	3,475	3,676
Colorado	45,314	45,796
Wyoming	2,136	2,172
North Dakota	6141	6227
South Dakota	8492	8641*
United States	4,352,304	4,427,493
US Deaths	149,260	150,716

Minnesota	+478	+666
Nebraska	+258	+265
Montana	+94	+201
Colorado	+749	+482
Wyoming	+64	+36
North Dakota	+155	+86
South Dakota	48	+149
United States	+57,534	+75,189
US Deaths	+1,204	+1,456

* The July 29, 2020, daily update includes cases reported to the South Dakota Department between Monday, July 27 at 1 p.m. and Tuesday, July 28 at 7 p.m. due to a delay in the daily data extraction.

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July 29th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Before everyone panics about the numbers, the Department of Health Reported that today's numbers INCLUDE cases reported between Monday, July 27, 1 p.m. and Tuesday, July 28, 7 p.m. So we basically have about 2 days worth of data to sift through. I'm sure some media will have a hayday!

There were six deaths reported. One in Brown County, Lincoln County had one, Lyman had one, Minnehaha County had one, and Union County had one and Roberts County recorded its first death. One was in the 50-59 age group, one in the 60-69 age group and three in the 80+ age group.

Grant County and Sanborn County are now fully recovered. We lost Perkins County from that list as they had two positive cases.

Brown County:

Active Cases: +2 (27)
Recovered: +2 (360)
Total Positive: +5 (390)
Ever Hospitalized: 0 (20)
Deaths: +1 (3)
Negative Tests: +45 (3991)
Percent Recovered: 92.3% (-0.7)

South Dakota:

Positive: +149 (8641 total)
Negative: +2074 (101,073 total)
Hospitalized: +2 (810 total). 46 currently hospitalized (down 3 from yesterday)
Deaths: +6 (129 total)
Recovered: +135 (7609 total)
Active Cases: +8 (903)
Percent Recovered: 88.0 +/-0

Counties with no positive cases report the following negative tests: Harding +1 (49)

Fully recovered from positive cases (Lost Custer, Gained Hamlin): Bennett 5-5, Bon Homme 13-13, Campbell 1-1, Edmunds 10-10, Haakon 1-1, Hamlin 14-14, Hand 7-7, Hyde 3-3, Jackson 7-7, Jones 1-1, Perkins 4-4, Stanley 14-14, Sully 1-1.

The following is the breakdown by all counties. The number in parenthesis right after the county name represents the number of deaths in that county.

Aurora: 2 active cases
Beadle (9): +2 positive, +6 recovered (34 active cases)
Bennett: Fully Recovered
Bon Homme: Fully Recovered
Brookings: +1 recovered (6 active cases)
Brown (3): +5 positive, +2 recovered, 1 death (27 active cases)
Brule: 2 active cases
Buffalo (3): +2 recovered (6 active cases)
Butte: +2 positive, +1 recovered (3 active cases)
Campbell: Fully Recovered

Charles Mix: +16 recovered (23 active cases)
Clark: 2 active cases
Clay: +3 positive, +4 recovered (12 active cases)
Codington: +5 positive, +1 recovered (22 active cases)
Corson: +2 positive (5 active cases)
Custer: +1 positive (2 active cases)
Davison: +2 positive, +5 recovered (11 active cases)
Day: 1 active case
Deuel: +1 positive, +1 recovered (2 active cases)
Dewey: +1 positive, +17 recovered (25 active cases)

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cases)

Douglas: 3 active cases
 Edmunds: Fully Recovered
 Fall River: 1 active case
 Faulk (1): 4 active cases
 Grant: +1 recovered (FULLY RECOVERED)
 Gregory: 2 active cases
 Haakon: Fully Recovered
 Hamlin: +1 recovered (FULLY RECOVERED 14-14)
 Hand: Fully Recovered
 Hanson: +1 positive (6 active cases)
 Harding: No infections reported
 Hughes (3): +1 recovered (7 active cases)
 Hutchinson: +2 recovered (2 active cases)
 Hyde: Fully Recovered
 Jackson (1): Fully Recovered
 Jerauld (1): 1 active cases
 Jones: Fully Recovered
 Kingsbury: 3 active cases
 Lake (2): +9 positive, +2 recovered (27 active cases)
 Lawrence: 2 active cases
 Lincoln (2): +24 positive, +9 recovered, 1 death (97 active cases)
 Lyman (2): +1 positive, +1 recovered, 1 death (7 active cases)
 Marshall: 1 active case)
 McCook (1): 4 active cases
 McPherson: 1 active case
 Meade (1): +2 recovered (9 active cases)
 Mellette: +1 positive (12 active cases)
 Miner: 3 active cases
 Minnehaha (63): +60 positive, +24 recovered, 1 death (322 active cases)
 Moody: +1 positive, +1 recovered (4 active cases)

Oglala Lakota +3 positive, +3 recovered (23 active cases)
 Pennington (24): +9 positive, +24 recovered (109 active cases)
 Perkins: +2 positive (2 active cases)
 Potter: 1 active case
 Roberts (1): +3 positive, +2 recovered, 1 death (6 active cases)
 Sanborn: +1 recovered (FULLY RECOVERED)
 Spink: +1 positive (3 active cases)
 Stanley: Fully Recovered
 Sully: Fully Recovered
 Todd (4): +2 recovered (4 active cases)
 Tripp: 1 active case
 Turner: +2 recovered (11 active cases)
 Union (2): +7 positive, 1 death (31 active cases)
 Walworth: 2 active cases
 Yankton (2): +1 positive (12 active cases)
 Ziebach: +1 positive, +1 recovered (6 active cases)

North Dakota Dept. of Health Report
 COVID-19 Daily Report, July 29:

- 3,458 tests (1,037)
- 6,227 positives (+89)
- 5,087 recovered (+130)
- 102 deaths (+2)
- 1,038 active cases (-46)

RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
Asian, Non-Hispanic	723	8%
Black, Non-Hispanic	1016	12%
Hispanic	1191	14%
Native American, Non-Hispanic	1385	16%
Other	838	10%
White, Non-Hispanic	3488	40%

County of Residence	# of Deaths
Beadle	9
Brown	3
Buffalo	3
Butte	1
Faulk	1
Hughes	2
Jackson	1
Jerauld	1
Lake	2
Lincoln	2
Lyman	2
McCook	1
Meade	1
Minnehaha	63
Oglala Lakota	1
Pennington	26
Roberts	1
Todd	4
Union	3
Yankton	2

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons
▲			
Aurora	37	35	354
Beadle	585	542	1791
Bennett	5	5	492
Bon Homme	13	13	710
Brookings	111	105	2428
Brown	390	360	3991
Brule	38	36	690
Buffalo	105	96	601
Butte	10	7	711
Campbell	1	1	84
Charles Mix	99	76	1158
Clark	16	14	366
Clay	110	98	1209
Codington	117	95	2586
Corson	26	21	406
Custer	13	11	734
Davison	83	72	2138
Day	21	20	579
Deuel	9	7	368
Dewey	54	29	1925
Douglas	16	13	381
Edmunds	10	10	381
Fall River	14	13	887
Faulk	26	21	169
Grant	18	18	660
Gregory	7	5	354
Haakon	1	1	278
Hamlin	14	14	579
Hand	7	7	264
Hanson	20	13	175
Harding	0	0	50
Hughes	83	73	1593
Hutchinson	24	22	849

Hyde	3	3	117
Jackson	7	6	412
Jerauld	39	37	263
Jones	1	1	50
Kingsbury	11	8	510
Lake	78	51	861
Lawrence	26	24	1943
Lincoln	521	422	6044
Lyman	85	77	864
Marshall	8	7	417
McCook	24	19	599
McPherson	6	5	197
Meade	68	57	1794
Mellette	23	15	306
Miner	13	10	239
Minnehaha	4118	3733	25034
Moody	29	25	584
Oglala Lakota	139	117	2859
Pennington	796	663	10039
Perkins	6	4	138
Potter	1	0	267
Roberts	67	60	1543
Sanborn	13	13	209
Spink	19	16	1073
Stanley	14	14	226
Sully	1	1	64
Todd	66	59	1881
Tripp	20	19	573
Turner	42	31	834
Union	187	154	1750
Walworth	18	16	636
Yankton	101	87	2871
Ziebach	8	2	278
Unassigned****	0	0	5657

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

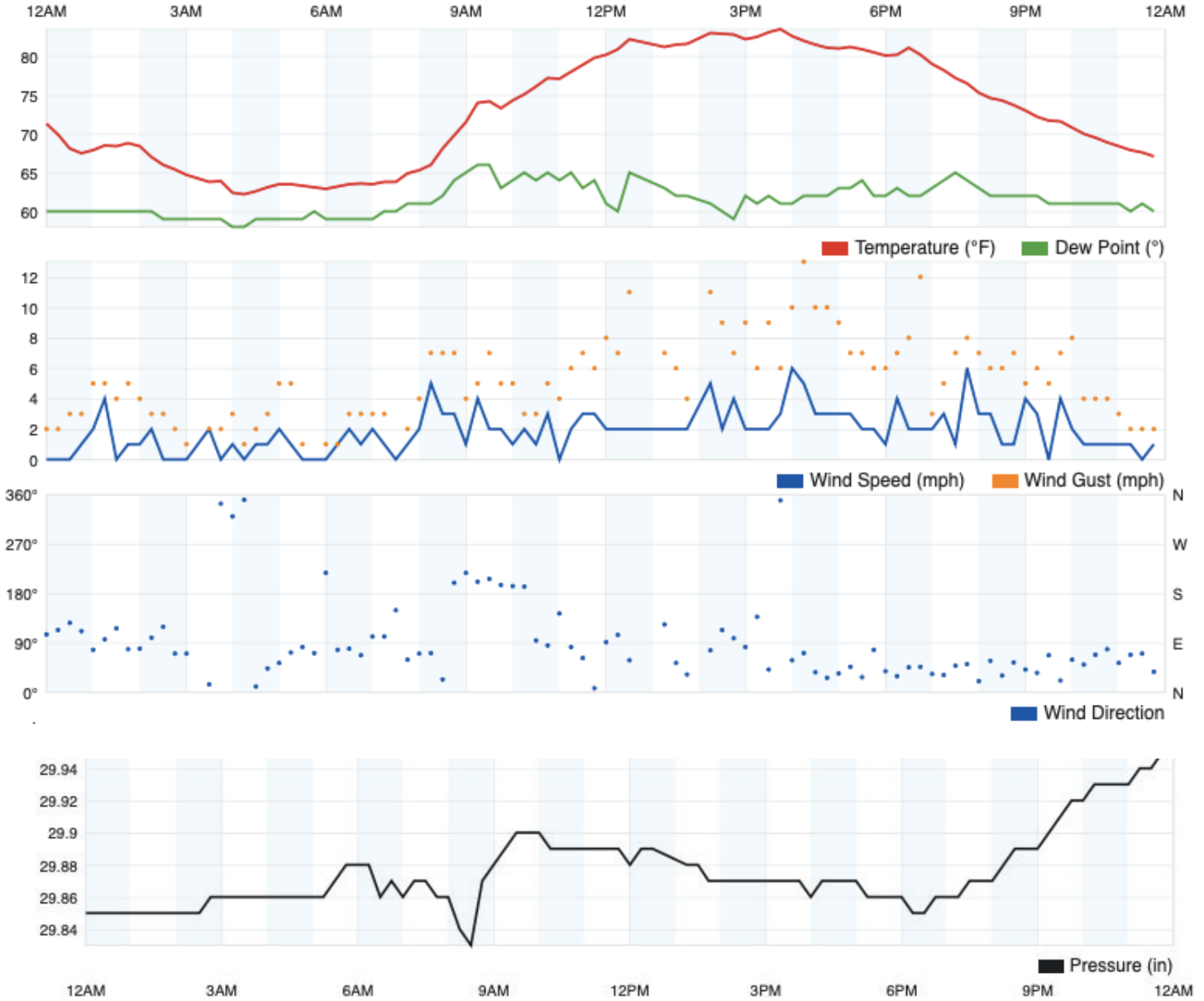
Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
▲		
Female	4227	66
Male	4414	63

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
▲		
0-19 years	1071	0
20-29 years	1830	1
30-39 years	1729	6
40-49 years	1337	7
50-59 years	1295	17
60-69 years	772	25
70-79 years	320	18
80+ years	287	55

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 85 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 58 °F

Friday



Sunny then
Slight Chance
T-storms

High: 87 °F

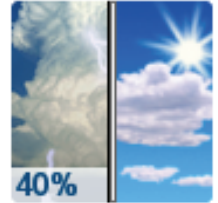
Friday
Night



Chance
T-storms

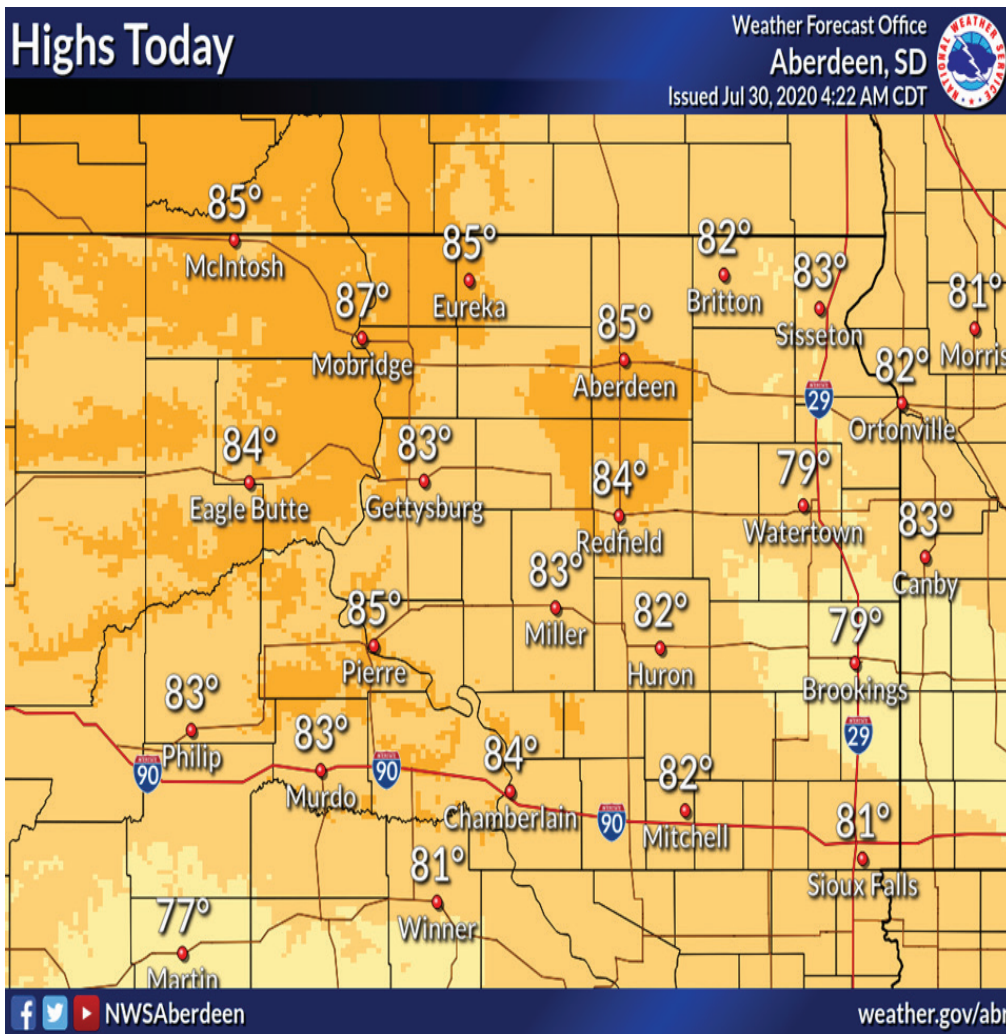
Low: 63 °F

Saturday



Chance
T-storms then
Mostly Sunny

High: 79 °F



Look for sunny skies, low humidity and temperatures right around average. A little warmer for tomorrow with isolated to scattered afternoon storms.

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Today in Weather History

July 30, 1981: Operation Skywarn organized by the National Weather Service in Bismarck four years ago had a perfect opportunity to put the training into operation on this day. A spotter 20 miles west of Bismarck identified a rotating wall cloud 10 minutes before a tornado touchdown. The strong tornado was rated as having F3 strength, leaving behind an 18-mile long path of destruction. The force of the storm drove a stick between a tire and rim. A 6-inch steel beam was twisted and found near the high tension tower which had been toppled.

July 30, 2001: Strong winds of 81 mph blew much of the roof off of the bowling alley in Mobridge. Some flying debris also damaged a trailer home. Many trees were snapped in two or uprooted, and many power lines were downed. High winds brought down tree branches and also knocked the power out for several hours in Pollock.

July 30, 2010: Very heavy rains of 5 to 10 inches caused the Rosehill Dam to break in the early morning hours in southeast Hand County. Flash flooding began around 1 am CDT with two campers being swept up around 130 am CDT. The two campers clung to a tree until they could be rescued about 6 am CDT. They were both injured with one camper being treated for hypothermia and other airlifted to Sioux Falls for broken ribs and head trauma. The dam broke at 330 am CDT with the spillway breaking at 420 am CDT. There was between a 100 to the 150-foot hole left by the dam break. The flash flooding continued downstream on Sand Creek causing damage to area farms, filling basements, and flooding many roads.

1970: Hurricane Celia was born in the northwest of the Caribbean Sea on this day. The hurricane would be one of the worst ever to hit Texas and would reach Texas late on August 3. The storm reached its peak as it made landfall near Corpus Christi, Texas, as a strong Category 3 hurricane. Hurricane Celia is currently the last major hurricane to make landfall on the middle Texas Coast until Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

1979: A forty-minute hailstorm bombed Fort Collins, Colorado with baseball to softball size hail. Two thousand homes and 2500 automobiles were damaged, and about 25 persons were injured, mainly when hit on the head by the huge stones.

1949 - The state record for Connecticut was established when the town of Greenville registered an afternoon high of 102 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1965 - The temperature at Portland, OR, reached 107 degrees to equal their all-time record high. (The Weather Channel)

1979 - A forty-minute hailstorm bombed Fort Collins, CO, with baseball to softball size hail. Two thousand homes and 2500 automobiles were damaged, and about 25 persons were injured, mainly when hit on the head by the huge stones. A three month old baby died later of injuries. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Afternoon highs of 105 degrees at Aberdeen SD, 102 degrees at Bismarck, ND, and 102 degrees at Pueblo, CO, were records for the date. Pueblo, CO, reported just .09 inch of rain for the first thirty days of the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A dozen cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Downtown Baltimore, MD, hit 103 degrees, marking a record eight days of 100 degree heat for the month, and ten for the year. The high of 101 degrees at Billings, MT, marked a record seventeen days of 100 degree heat for the year. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the northeast, with nearly fifty reports of large hail or damaging winds in Pennsylvania and New York State. A tree fell on a car at Erie, PA, injuring four persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms over central Missouri deluged Columbia with 5.98 inches of rain causing flash flooding. Daytime thunderstorms in Kentucky drenched Paducah with 1.73 inches of rain in less than half an hour. Evening thunderstorms in the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 78 mph east of Moccasin, MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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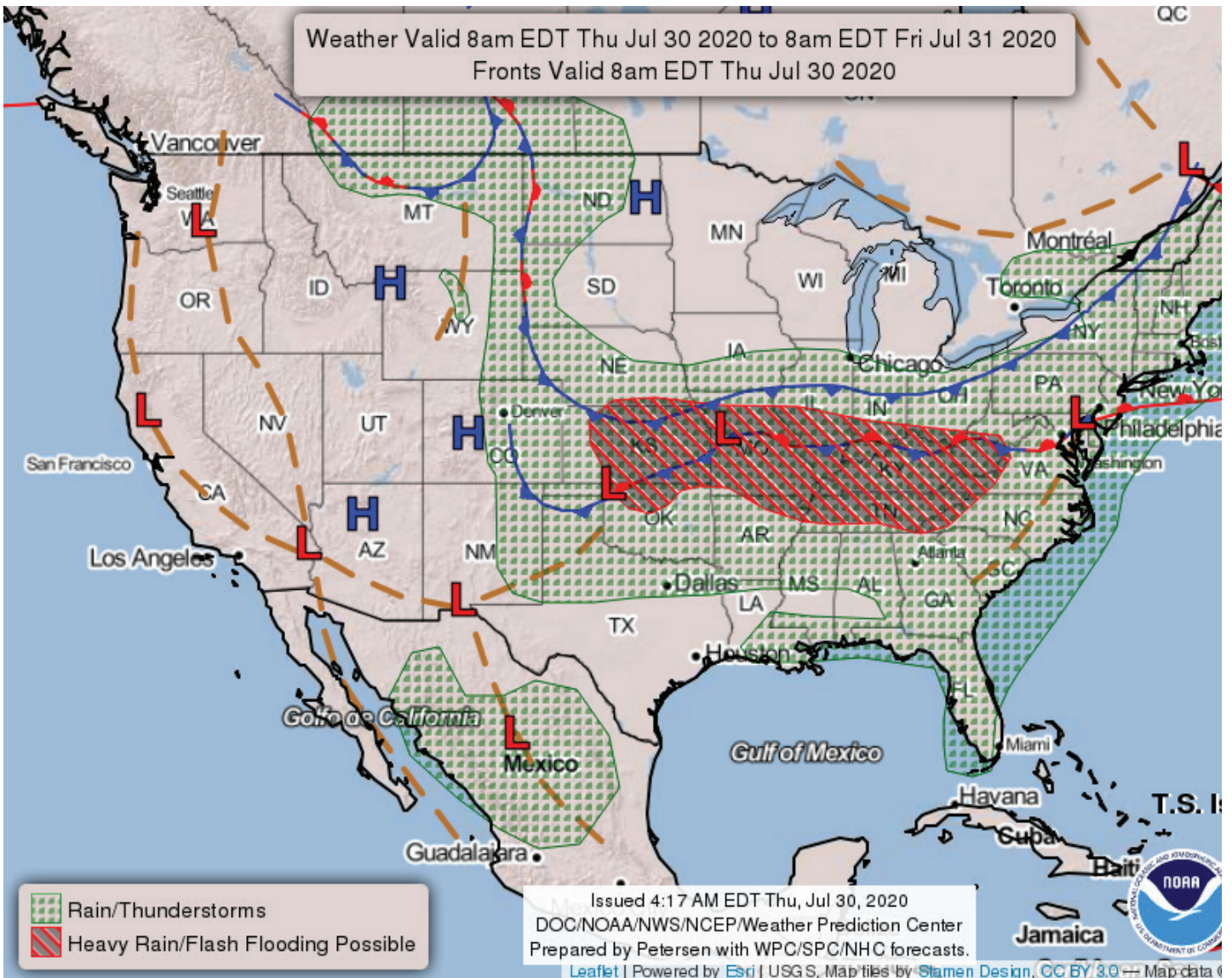
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 3:51 PM
Low Temp: 62 °F at 4:02 AM
Wind: 13 mph at 4:12 PM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 106° in 2006
Record Low: 39° in 1971
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in July.: 2.86
Precip to date in July.: 2.19
Average Precip to date: 13.70
Precip Year to Date: 10.51
Sunset Tonight: 9:03 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:17 a.m.



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RIGHT FOR GOD'S PLAN

Charlie Brown was sitting behind his desk holding his head between his hands, as his elbows kept them in place. With a worried look on his face he moaned, "The moment I set foot on the stage of life, they took one look at me and said, 'Not right for the part!'"

Not so for the Christian!

Paul, writing to the Ephesians said, "When you believed in Christ, He called you, He identified you as His own by giving you the Holy Spirit ." That's God's guarantee that we belong to Him, that He has a unique plan for our lives, and we are just "right for the part."

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, it is the beginning of a new way of living because we have become "new creations" through Christ Jesus. We know that "old things have passed away and all things have become new!" An, whatever "part" God has for us is one that meets His needs and we will certainly be able to fulfill that "part" for His glory because of His plan for us.

We must always remember that the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives at this very moment – continually reforming and transforming us into the image and likeness of Christ right now. Often we look at the "end product" - being with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. We must always remember that His power is always at work in us. And, when we look back and see where we were, and look forward and know where we will be, we know He has a "part" for us.

Prayer: We pray, Lord, that we will be as patient with You as You are with us. Shape us and mold us and work with us until we are "right for our part." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today : When you believed in Christ, He called you, He identified you as His own by giving you the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- **CANCELLED** Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
- **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- **POSTPONED** Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
- **CANCELLED** Father/Daughter dance.
- **CANCELLED** Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
- **CANCELLED** Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
- 07/24/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ferney Open Golf Tourney
- 07/25/2020 City-Wide Rummage Sales
- **CANCELLED** State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
- 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
- **CANCELLED** Andover Threshing Show
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
- 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/31/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
- 11/14/2020 Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
- 12/05/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
- 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

07-09-14-16-26

(seven, nine, fourteen, sixteen, twenty-six)

Estimated jackpot: \$80,000

Lotto America

29-30-38-45-51, Star Ball: 1, ASB: 4

(twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-eight, forty-five, fifty-one; Star Ball: one; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$3.65 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Powerball

07-29-35-40-45, Powerball: 26, Power Play: 2

(seven, twenty-nine, thirty-five, forty, forty-five; Powerball: twenty-six; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$126 million

South Dakota GOP lawmakers wait to use of COVID-19 funds

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Top South Dakota Republican lawmakers on Wednesday said they would rather wait until the legislative session in January to decide how to use most of the federal coronavirus aid the state has received.

Following a conference call with Gov. Kristi Noem on Tuesday night, Republican legislative leaders said they were following the current negotiations in Congress over the new coronavirus aid package and hoping that Congress would extend the deadline beyond the end of the year to allocate most of the \$1.25 billion the state has received. If that happens, there may not be a special session this fall, said House Majority Leader Lee Qualm, a Platte Republican.

Qualm cautioned that it may be a couple of weeks before Congress finalizes the rules for spending the aid, saying, "There's still some things up in the air."

The state has spent about \$75 million of the aid so far, with most of that going toward unemployment benefits. As leaders figure out what to do with roughly a billion dollars of what's left, the governor told lawmakers that if Congress extends the deadline, there would likely be no need for a special session, according to state Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, a Watertown Republican.

Republicans said the Legislature needs time to make sure the money has the most impact. It would allow legislative committees to vet the allocations, rather than deciding in a rushed special session. Senate Majority Leader Kris Langer, a Republican from Dell Rapids, said she is hoping Congress also allows state governments to put some of the federal funding towards covering losses in revenue.

"That's what we're looking for — as much flexibility as we can have," she said.

But Democrats, who hold a minority in the Legislature, argued that waiting to spend the money until next year would be too late for people and businesses struggling from the pandemic. Senate Minority Leader Troy Heinert, a Democrat from Mission, called for legislators to convene as early as September, creating a task force of convening committees.

Although schools and businesses have been able to tap other federal funds during the pandemic, Heinert said there's many people who "fell through the cracks."

Speaker Steve Haugaard, a Republican from Sioux Falls, said he plans to spend the next months hearing

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from constituents to understand how the money can best be used. He said that as increased unemployment benefits expire and people cut back on their spending, the economic impact will become more clear.

"There is information that needs to be developed right now so that decisions can be made sooner rather than later," he said.

Meanwhile, the state's Department of Health reported 149 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday. It was the largest daily increase since May, but the Department of Health said that the report covered the results from a 30-hour time period rather than the usual 24-hour period due to a delay in reporting data. Health officials reported the results of 2,223 tests, which is higher than normal.

Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has increased by about 9, an increase of roughly 16%.

Health officials also reported that an outbreak at Camp Judson, a Christian summer camp in Keystone, has resulted in 32 people testing positive for COVID-19.

The state also reported six new deaths, bringing the statewide tally to 129. Almost 90% of the 8,641 people who have been confirmed to have COVID-19 have recovered, while there are 903 people with active cases.

Suspect arrested after man stabbed in Aberdeen

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Police in Aberdeen have arrested a suspect in a stabbing. Authorities say a man was stabbed in the abdomen shortly before 10 p.m. Tuesday after the 30-year-old suspect broke into his apartment. Police arrested the male suspect on a possible charge of aggravated assault, KELO-TV reported. The victim was taken to Avera St. Luke's hospital where he had surgery.

CEO South Dakota's largest fair says it's COVID-19 ready

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Organizers of the Sioux Empire Fair in South Dakota say they're prepared to deal with the coronavirus outbreak when the event kicks off this weekend.

COVID-19 has caused other states, including North Dakota and Minnesota, to cancel their state fairs. But, in South Dakota, the largest fair, the Sioux Empire that typically draws about 300,000 people, and the State Fair made no plans to cancel.

South Dakota's biggest event, the Sturgis motorcycle rally which drew about 490,000 last year, is also still on.

Sioux Empire Fair CEO Scott Wick told Minnehaha County Commissioners Tuesday that more hand washing stations have been added, about 80 hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed around the fairgrounds and 1 million doses of hand sanitizer are available, the Argus Leader reported.

Wick estimated the fair is operating at about 80%.

Commissioner Cindy Heiberger thanked Wick for moving forward with the fair and said people will be grateful to have something to do outside.

The fair runs Saturday through Aug. 8.

NASA launches Mars rover to look for signs of ancient life

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The biggest, most sophisticated Mars rover ever built — a car-size vehicle bristling with cameras, microphones, drills and lasers — blasted off Thursday as part of an ambitious, long-range project to bring the first Martian rock samples back to Earth to be analyzed for evidence of ancient life.

NASA's Perseverance rode a mighty Atlas V rocket into the morning sky in the world's third and final Mars launch of the summer. China and the United Arab Emirates got a head start last week, but all three missions should reach the red planet in February after a journey of seven months and 300 million miles (480 million kilometers).

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The plutonium-powered, six-wheeled rover will drill down and collect tiny geological specimens that will be brought home in about 2031 in a sort of interplanetary relay race involving multiple spacecraft and countries. The overall cost: more than \$8 billion.

In addition to addressing the life-on-Mars question, the mission will yield lessons that could pave the way for the arrival of astronauts as early as the 2030s.

"There's a reason we call the robot Perseverance. Because going to Mars is hard," NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said just before liftoff. "It is always hard. It's never been easy. In this case, it's harder than ever before because we're doing it in the midst of a pandemic."

The U.S., the only country to safely put a spacecraft on Mars, is seeking its ninth successful landing on the planet, which has proved to be the Bermuda Triangle of space exploration, with more than half of the world's missions there burning up, crashing or otherwise ending in failure.

China is sending both a rover and an orbiter. The UAE, a newcomer to outer space, has an orbiter en route.

It's the biggest stampede to Mars in spacefaring history. The opportunity to fly between Earth and Mars comes around only once every 26 months when the planets are on the same side of the sun and about as close as they can get.

Launch controllers wore masks and sat spaced apart at the Cape Canaveral control center because of the coronavirus outbreak, which kept hundreds of scientists and other team members away from Perseverance's liftoff.

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be," said Alex Mather, the 13-year-old Virginia schoolboy who proposed the name Perseverance in a NASA competition and traveled to Cape Canaveral for the launch.

If all goes well, the rover will descend to the Martian surface on Feb. 18, 2021, in what NASA calls seven minutes of terror, in which the craft goes from 12,000 mph (19,300 kph) to a complete stop, with no human intervention whatsoever. It is carrying 25 cameras and a pair of microphones that will enable Earthlings to vicariously tag along.

Perseverance will aim for treacherous unexplored territory: Jezero Crater, a dusty expanse riddled with boulders, cliffs, dunes and possibly rocks bearing signs of microbes from what was once a lake more than 3 billion years ago. The rover will store half-ounce (15-gram) rock samples in dozens of super-sterilized titanium tubes.

It also will release a mini helicopter that will attempt the first powered flight on another planet, and test out other technology to prepare the way for future astronauts, including equipment for extracting oxygen from Mars' thin carbon-dioxide atmosphere.

The plan is for NASA and the European Space Agency to launch a dune buggy in 2026 to fetch the rock samples, along with a rocket ship that will put the specimens into orbit around Mars. Then another spacecraft will capture the orbiting samples and bring them home.

Samples actually brought home from Mars, not drawn from meteorites discovered on Earth, have long been considered "the Holy Grail of Mars science," according to NASA's original and now-retired Mars czar, Scott Hubbard.

To definitively answer the profound question of whether life exists — or ever existed — beyond Earth, the samples must be analyzed by the best electron microscopes and other instruments, far too big to fit on a spacecraft, he said.

"I've wanted to know if there was life elsewhere in the universe since I was 9 years old. That was more than 60 years ago," the 71-year-old Hubbard said from his Northern California cabin. "But just maybe, I'll live to see the fingerprints of life come back from Mars in one of those rock samples."

Said Bridenstine: "There is nothing better than bringing samples back to Earth where we can put them in a lab and we can apply every element of technology against those samples to make determinations as to whether or not there was, at one time, life on the surface of Mars."

Two other NASA landers are also operating on Mars: 2018's InSight and 2012's Curiosity rover. Six other spacecraft are exploring the planet from orbit: three from the U.S., two from Europe and one from India.

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2 grim reports are expected on virus' damage to US economy

Associated Press undefined

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government is poised Thursday to deliver a double-dose of sobering news — on the devastation the coronavirus caused the U.S. economy last quarter and the damage it continues to inflict on the job market.

The pandemic is believed to have caused the economy to shrink during the April-June period at an annual rate exceeding 30%. That would easily shatter the existing record for a quarterly contraction, a 10% drop in 1958.

The virus forced millions of employers to slash jobs as consumers stopped shopping and traveling, and hotels, restaurants and small businesses closed their doors. Most analysts expect the economy to manage a sharp bounce-back in the current July-September quarter. Yet with confirmed coronavirus cases elevated in a majority of states, the economy could worsen in the months ahead.

At the same time that the government will estimate how the economy fared last quarter, it will issue its latest snapshot of the weekly toll of layoffs that remain persistently high as companies continue to cut jobs. More than 1 million people have applied for unemployment benefits for 18 straight weeks.

After 99 days of success, virus returns to haunt Vietnam

By HAU DINH Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — For 99 days, Vietnam seemed to have defeated the coronavirus. There wasn't a single reported case of community transmission. Not a single death. A handful of cases were caught and isolated at the border, but otherwise people were returning to their normal lives. The country of 96 million people was hailed globally as a standout success.

But then a week ago, an outbreak began that has now grown to 43 cases in six parts of the country, including three of the largest cities, and forced authorities to reimpose restrictions many thought they had put behind them. And experts worry the outbreak could be much larger than currently known.

The outbreak began last Thursday in the picturesque coastal city of Da Nang, where thousands of tourists were taking their summer vacations on golden beaches. A 57-year-old man was hospitalized with a fever and tested positive. His condition soon worsened and he was put on a ventilator.

Health authorities swung into action. But the man's case was puzzling. He hadn't left his hometown for over a month and tests on his family and 100 other possible contacts all came back negative.

Then health workers found three other infections in Da Nang over the weekend. And then on Monday, another 11. All of those were other patients or health workers at the Da Nang Hospital, where the man remains in critical condition.

On Monday, authorities encouraged 80,000 tourists to leave the city by providing extra flights. Hotels emptied out and thousands canceled their plans to visit.

Then on Tuesday, the city was put into lockdown. The packed beaches were closed, roamed only by patrolling security guards. But the order of events left some scratching their heads. Surely the fleeing tourists had the potential to spread the virus further?

Indeed by Thursday, authorities had found 43 cases, including two people in the capital, Hanoi. All of the cases seemed to link back to Da Nang and returning travelers.

The cases included an American who had been a patient last week at Da Nang Hospital before moving to another hospital in Ho Chi Minh City in the south. His companion also tested positive.

Authorities are now reimposing broader restrictions. They're closing nonessential services and banning large public gatherings in Da Nang and other nearby cities, and closing bars and clubs in Hanoi. They're also planning to test 21,000 people in the capital who recently returned from Da Nang.

Pham Hien, owner of a noodle restaurant in Hanoi, said she will no longer have seated guests and in-

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stead will offer only takeout service or deliveries. She said her business is hurting but she will abide by government recommendations.

"What is important now is that all citizens join hands together with the government in this fight," she said.

Just how the virus crept back remains a mystery. Authorities say they think the source was from outside Vietnam because this time the virus is a different strain.

"One big difference I've noticed between this wave and the previous one is that the cases we have right now, a lot of them are severe," said Marc Choisy, a Hanoi-based bio-mathematician with the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit.

He said such a high proportion of severe cases could indicate that hundreds more asymptomatic cases remain undetected in the community.

"It's very likely the disease is transmitting silently at the moment," he said.

The government, meanwhile, has been cracking down on people being smuggled into the country to avoid quarantine, making a string of arrests in cases of smuggled Chinese nationals. But authorities have yet to make any direct links between the people smuggling and the new outbreak.

Vietnam's struggle to contain the virus even after its initial success has been reflected in other places around the world. Australia was down to single-digit daily increases when an outbreak exploded in the city of Melbourne this month. On Thursday, authorities reported more than 700 new cases in and around Melbourne, a record. Other places from Hong Kong to Spain are battling new outbreaks after seemingly having the virus under control.

Vietnam's quick actions in the face of its latest outbreak reflect the speed with which the government reacted to the initial virus threat, which experts say helped halt its spread.

In mid-February, for example, Vietnam put all 10,000 residents of the town of Son Loi, near Hanoi, under a three-week lockdown, even though there were only 16 confirmed cases in the entire country at that time.

The Communist government also used texts and social media to deliver concise instructions to its citizens. It even added short messages to every phone call.

By March 22, Vietnam had essentially closed itself off to the outside world, stopping most international flights and shutting down the 900-mile (1,440-kilometer) land border it shares with China.

Whenever authorities saw even a single case of community transmission, they jumped on it with contact tracing, lockdowns and widespread testing. The country also drew on its past experience defeating the SARS outbreak in 2003.

But Choisy, the bio-mathematician, worries authorities have caught this coronavirus wave much later in its cycle than the first wave.

"When you haven't heard about new virus cases for a while, you begin to forget very quickly and you return to normal life," Choisy said. "You get used to it."

Associated Press science writer Victoria Milko in Jakarta, Indonesia, and reporter Nick Perry in Wellington, New Zealand, contributed to this report.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

US agents in Portland to pull back, but tensions remain

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and MIKE BALSAMO Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The Trump administration and Oregon leaders declared victory after it was announced that U.S. agents guarding a federal courthouse during violent demonstrations in Portland will pull back, but it wasn't clear the agreement will reduce tensions that have led to more than two months of protests.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said Wednesday agents with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement will begin leaving the city's downtown area on Thursday, but Acting

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Secretary for the Department of Homeland Security Chad Wolf wouldn't specify where they would go. He insisted a federal presence would remain in Portland until the Trump administration was assured the agreement was working and the Oregon State Police was sufficiently protecting federal property.

Many demonstrators are peaceful, but smaller numbers have thrown fireworks, flares, rocks and ball bearings at federal agents, used green lasers to blind them and spread graffiti over the face of the Mark O. Hatfield Federal Courthouse.

President Donald Trump earlier this month sent federal authorities as protests against racial injustice increasingly targeted U.S. government property, including the stately courthouse in downtown Portland. The deployment appeared to have the opposite effect, reinvigorating demonstrations with a new focus: getting rid of the federal presence.

The deescalation plan calls for the U.S. Marshals Service and Federal Protective Service agents to remain inside a fence set up around the federal courthouse, along with some state police, to keep protesters out. State police will also be outside the fence to keep protesters back.

"I want to be clear about this, the entire DHS law enforcement presence in Portland will remain in Portland, whether they're staying inside the courthouse, next door or a different location," Wolf said on a call with reporters.

Oregon State Police Superintendent Travis Hampton said his agency would deploy a special operations team and some uniformed troopers to the courthouse for a two-week rotation. The agency hopes its efforts will allow the protective fence to be removed and "restore a semblance of normalcy, while meeting community expectations and our obligations to protect the federal property," Hampton said, adding that the troopers were Oregonians.

Tyler Smith worked flipping burgers Wednesday afternoon at a stand that's giving away free food to protesters in the park across from the courthouse. The stand was until recently known as Riot Ribs but is being run by new volunteers after a dispute over donated money.

"I think that's a great idea," he said of the agreement to pull back the U.S. agents.

"I've been thinking this needs to be handled by the state or by the city for some time," Smith said, adding that because Oregon state police troopers are Oregonian and they might take a softer approach with protesters.

The agreement also calls for the U.S. government to clean the graffiti off of the courthouse, which is federal property. Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler has previously said the federal government refused to clean the courthouse, contributing to the impression that the entire city was under siege.

Trump declared victory shortly after the announcement, tweeting that federal agents prevented Portland from being "burned and beaten to the ground." The conflicts between protesters and the federal agents have been limited to roughly two square blocks around the courthouse and have not affected the rest of the city, which has been much more subdued amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Wheeler, meanwhile, also claimed a win in a Twitter post.

"The federal occupation of our community has brought a new kind of fear to our streets. Federal agents nearly killed a demonstrator, and their presence has led to increased violence and vandalism in our downtown core," he said.

Like many other protests nationwide touched off by the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, the Portland demonstrations sought to highlight and call for an end to racial injustice, but they had increasingly focused on federal property even before the U.S. agents arrived.

Brown cautioned Wednesday that the lower visibility of the federal agents — and their ultimate departure — won't immediately resolve the conflict at the courthouse.

"The violence, the property destruction, which includes burning of trash cans and throwing of rocks, that must stop," the governor told The Associated Press.

Many protesters want the Portland Police Bureau defunded and are angry that officers used tear gas on protesters multiple times before federal agents arrived. Brown said the departure of the federal agents was a chance to address that anger and begin to make improvements in community policing.

"This was a political theater for the Trump administration to bring federal troops into Portland streets.

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It was about winning political points with their base," she said.

Balsamo reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Zeke Miller and Colleen Long contributed from Washington.

Follow Gillian Flaccus on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/gflaccus> and Mike Balsamo at <https://twitter.com/MikeBalsamo1>.

Asia Today: 723 cases in Australia, closures in Vietnam

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Australia's coronavirus hot spot, Victoria state, will make masks compulsory statewide after reporting a record 723 new cases on Thursday.

Masks have been mandatory in the state capital, Melbourne, and a neighboring semi-rural district for the past week. Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said the measure will be extended starting Sunday.

Residents around the city of Geelong will not be allowed to have visitors in their homes from late Thursday.

The 723 new cases and a daily record 13 deaths exceeded the previous record of 532 cases on Monday.

"These numbers today are a reflection of increased cases in aged care," Andrews said, referring to new infections in Melbourne's nursing homes.

Melbourne and neighboring Mitchell Shire are halfway through a six-week shutdown, which Andrews said could be extended.

He said extending mandatory masks and banning visitors to homes are meant to keep the infection rate low in regional centers. "We need to jealously guard those low numbers," Andrews said.

"As challenging as this is, it is within our control," Andrews said. "All of us, as proud Victorians, if we follow the rules, if we play our part, then we can defeat this. We can drive these numbers down."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the weeklong lockdown was not giving the desired results. He said the additional restrictions, while necessary, will come at an impact to the economy. "But equally not containing these outbreaks will have that effect also," he said.

In other developments around the Asia-Pacific region:

— India reported more than 50,000 cases for the first time in 24 hours on Thursday, taking the national total to 1,583,792. The number of recoveries from the coronavirus also crossed 1 million as the recovery rate of 64.4% continues to improve. The Health Ministry reported another 775 deaths, driving total fatalities to 34,968. India has the world's third-highest caseload after the United States and Brazil. The reported deaths in India, however, mark a far lower fatality rate at 2.23% than in the other two countries.

— China on Thursday reported another 105 confirmed cases of COVID-19, almost all of them in Xinjiang. The northwestern region accounted for 96 of the cases, with five others in the northeastern province of Liaoning and one in Beijing. The remaining three were brought by Chinese travelers from overseas. While China has largely contained the virus in other parts of the country, the Xinjiang outbreak centered on the regional capital and largest city of Urumqi continues to grow with 96 new cases. Authorities have locked down some residential communities in the city, restricted public transit and ordered widespread testing. Hong Kong is also struggling to contain its latest outbreak, with more than 100 new cases reported Thursday.

— China is stepping up testing for COVID-19 in an attempt to get a handle on new outbreaks that have defied the country's considerable success in containing the coronavirus that was first detected in the central city of Wuhan late last year. In the northeastern city of Dalian, authorities issued a open letter urging all 5.6 million residents to get tested following consecutive days of new cases. As of midnight Wednesday, samples had been collected from more than 4 million people, and a second round of tests is being launched in high-risk areas. Extensive testing has also been carried out in Urumqi, where more than 100 specialists from the Centers for Disease Control are investigating the outbreak. Leading epidemiologist Zhong Nanshan also urged tests to be carried out on every one of Hong Kong's 7.5 million residents following a new wave of infections that is adding around 100 new cases per day. The city's Hospital Authority says it's planning to adapt an exhibition center into a community treatment facility.

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— Vietnam on Thursday reported nine more cases of COVID-19, as the first outbreak in over three months spread to cities while authorities say they cannot trace its source. The Health Ministry said eight of the new infections are from hot spot Da Nang, while the other case was confirmed in Hanoi in a man who returned from the coastal city. The outbreak has spread to five other cities and provinces with 43 cases reported since the weekend. Dak Lak province is the latest to reimpose social distancing, close down nonessential services and ban public gatherings of more than 20 people. Da Nang neighbors Quang Nam and Quang Ngai have closed their beaches and limited businesses. Meanwhile, Hanoi canceled public events, closed bars and clubs and plans to mass test some 21,000 people returning from Da Nang.

— Sri Lankan authorities have decided to reopen schools on Aug. 10, nearly five months after they were shut because of the coronavirus. The Education Ministry said Thursday that all public and government-approved private schools will resume with social distancing measures. Students in grades 5, 10, 11, 12 and 13 will attend school every day because of the need to prepare for government examinations. Students in grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 will attend one day per week, while those in grades 4 and 9 will attend two days a week. This arrangement will continue until Oct. 9, when school holidays begin. The reopening comes as health authorities announced that the coronavirus is now under control in Sri Lanka except for two clusters. The country has reported 2,811 cases, including 11 deaths.

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at <http://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Trump vs. Biden: Where they stand on health, economy, more

By BILL BARROW and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and his Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, both promise sweeping progress over the next four years — via starkly different paths.

Trump, like many fellow Republicans, holds out tax reductions and regulatory cuts as economic cure-alls and frames himself as a conservative champion in seemingly endless culture wars. But the president, still trying to fashion himself as an outsider, offers little detail about how he'd pull the levers of government in a second term.

Biden, for his part, sounds every bit the Democratic standard-bearer as he frames the federal government as the collective force to combat the coronavirus, rebuild the economy and address centuries of institutional racism and systemic inequalities. A veteran of national politics, Biden also loves framing his deal-making past as proof he can do it again from the Oval Office.

It leaves Americans with an unambiguous choice. A look at where the rivals stand on key issues:

ECONOMY, TAXES

Decades-low unemployment and a soaring stock market were Trump's calling cards before the pandemic. While the stock market has clawed much of its way back after cratering in the early weeks of the crisis, unemployment stood at 11.1% in June, higher than the nadir of the Great Recession. There were still about 14.7 million fewer jobs last month than there were prior to the pandemic in February.

Trump has predicted that the U.S. economy will rebound in the third and fourth quarters of this year and is set to take off like a "rocket ship" in the new year, a prediction that bakes in the assumption that a coronavirus vaccine or effective therapeutics have hit the market that allow life to get back to normal. He's still advocating for a payroll tax cut, though such a measure faces stiff bipartisan opposition. Winning a second term — and a mandate from voters — might be his best hope at getting it through.

Biden pitches sweeping federal action as necessary to avoid an extended recession or depression and to address long-standing wealth inequality that disproportionately affects nonwhite Americans. His biggest-ticket plans: a \$2 trillion, four-year push intended to eliminate carbon pollution in the U.S. energy grid by 2035 and a new government health insurance plan open to all working-age Americans (with generous subsidies). He proposes new spending on education, infrastructure and small businesses, along with raising the national minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

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Biden would cover some but not all of the new costs by rolling back much of the 2017 GOP tax overhaul. He wants a corporate income tax rate of 28% (lower than before but higher than now) and broad income and payroll tax hikes for individuals with more than \$400,000 of annual taxable income. All that would generate an estimated \$4 trillion or more over 10 years. Biden frames immigration as an economic matter, as well. He wants to expand legal immigration slots and offer a citizenship path for about 11 million residents who are in the country illegally but who, Biden notes, are already economic contributors as workers and consumers.

EDUCATION

Trump has used his push for schools to fully reopen this fall amid the pandemic as an opportunity to spotlight his support for charter schools and school choice.

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, a longtime proponent of charter schools and school voucher programs, has suggested that families be allowed to take federal money allotted to school districts that don't open and spend it in private schools that do open. For most of Trump's first term, his administration has sought major increases to federal charter school grant aid. But Congress has responded with relatively small increases.

With higher education, Trump has repeatedly complained that campuses are beset by "radical left indoctrination." He recently threatened to defund universities, saying that he was having the Treasury Department reexamine tax-exempt status and federal funding of unspecified schools.

Biden wants the federal government to partner with states to make public higher education tuition-free for any student in a household earning up to \$125,000 annually. The assistance would extend to everyone attending two-year schools, regardless of income. He also proposes sharply increasing aid for historically Black colleges. His overall education plans carry a 10-year price tag of about \$850 billion.

He calls for universal access to prekindergarten programs for 3- and 4-year-olds; tripling Title I spending for schools with higher concentrations of students from low-income households; more support for non-classroom positions like on-campus social workers; federal infrastructure spending for public school buildings; and covering schools' costs to comply with federal disability laws. Biden also opposes taxpayer money being routed to for-profit charter school businesses, and he's pledged that his secretary of education will have classroom teaching experience.

HEALTH CARE

As a candidate for the White House, Trump promised that he would "immediately" replace President Barack Obama's health care law with a plan of his own that would provide "insurance for everybody." In the last leg of his first term, Americans are still waiting for Trump to make his big reveal. Trump officials say the administration has made strides by championing transparency on hospital prices, pursuing a range of actions to curb prescription drug costs and expanding lower-cost health insurance alternatives for small businesses and individuals. But those incremental steps are far short from the sweeping changes Trump had promised.

Biden wants a "Medicare-like public option" to compete alongside private insurance markets for working-age Americans, while increasing premium subsidies that many working-class and middle-class workers use already under the Affordable Care Act. Biden estimates that would cost about \$750 billion over 10 years. That positions Biden between Trump, who wants to scrap the 2010 law, and progressives who want a single-payer system to replace private insurance altogether. Biden sees his approach as the next step toward universal coverage and one he could get through Congress.

CORONAVIRUS

After months of insisting that the worst days of the pandemic have passed, Trump recently acknowledged that the pandemic may "get worse before it gets better" as many states — including several critical to his path to 270 Electoral College votes — have seen a surge in the virus.

Trump is again holding regular briefings to directly get his message out on the virus and other matters. Trump believes that a key to economic recovery from the virus is fully reopening schools — though Americans are wary. Only about 1 in 10 Americans think day care centers, preschools or K-12 schools

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should open this fall without restrictions, according to a recent poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs.

Trump also says he's "pretty damn certain" that vaccines and therapeutics for the virus are coming in the not-so-distant future — a game changer as Americans and the world seek a glide path to normalcy. Congress approved about \$3 trillion in coronavirus relief in March and April, and Democrats, Republicans and the White House are negotiating another significant round of funding. The package, however, won't include a payroll tax cut — something that Trump badly wanted but that Senate Democrats and even some Senate Republicans balked at including.

Biden draws some of his sharpest contrasts with Trump on the pandemic, arguing that the presidency and federal government exist for such crises. Trump, by contrast, has largely shifted responsibility to governors. Biden endorses generous federal spending to help businesses and individuals, along with state and local governments, deal with the financial cliffs of the pandemic slowdown. He's promised aggressive use of the Defense Production Act, the wartime law a president can use to direct certain private-sector activity. Additionally, Biden promises to elevate the government's scientists and physicians to communicate a consistent message to the public, and he would have the U.S. rejoin the World Health Organization. He's also willing to use executive power for a national mask mandate, even if its enforcement is questionable.

TRADE

Trump views the signing of two major trade deals — an updated pact with Mexico and Canada and Phase 1 of a China agreement — as signature achievements of his presidency. U.S. and China signed Phase 1 in January, less than two months before the coronavirus pandemic put an enormous strain on U.S.-Sino relations. Trump says Phase 1 led to China buying roughly \$200 billion over two years in U.S. agricultural products, energy and other American products. In return, the U.S. canceled planned U.S. tariffs on Chinese-made smartphones, toys and laptop computers. The U.S. also cut in half, to 7.5%, the tariff rate levied on \$120 billion in other China imports.

Phase 2 of the deal is expected to focus on some tougher issues between the countries, including Trump's wish to get China to stop subsidizing its state-owned enterprises. But for Trump, who has come to frequently refer to the coronavirus as the "China virus," it remains to be seen whether he will be able to effectively reengage Beijing on trade. Trump recently said he's "not interested" in presently talking to China.

Biden has joined a growing bipartisan embrace of "fair trade" abroad — a twist on decades of "free trade" talk as Republican and Democratic administrations alike expanded international trade. Biden wants to juice U.S. manufacturing by directing \$400 billion of federal government purchases to domestic firms (part of that for buying pandemic supplies) over a four-year term. He wants \$300 billion in new support for U.S. technology firms' research and development. Biden says the new domestic spending must come before he enters into any new international trade deals. He pledges tough negotiations with China, the world's other economic superpower, on trade and intellectual property matters. China, like the U.S., is not yet a member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the multilateral trade agreement that Biden advocated for when he was vice president.

FOREIGN POLICY

During his first term, Trump built his foreign policy around the mantra of "America First." Besides the trade deals, he counts as major achievements building more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) of his promised wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, cajoling more NATO members to fulfill their pledge to spend 2% of GDP on defense spending and reducing the U.S. military footprint in Afghanistan and other hot spots. He also announced his intended withdrawal from the Paris climate accord.

Trump can officially withdraw the U.S. from the Paris agreement — it sets the goal of holding global warming below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit — as an example of an agreement that "disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries." The deal, which was signed by Obama, stipulates that no nation can leave until four years after they signed on. For the U.S., that's Nov. 4 — one day after the U.S. election.

The president has also made clear his desire to leave Afghanistan sooner than the timeline laid out in the Feb. 29 peace agreement with the Taliban, which set the path for U.S. troops to leave the country

in 12 to 14 months if the insurgent group met certain conditions. There are currently about 8,600 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Trump also counts his engagement with North Korea's Kim Jong Un as a monumental achievement. The president has not been able to prod Kim to give up the nation's nuclear program, but he has met the autocrat twice for face-to-face talks.

Biden says he'd begin "the day after the election" rebuilding relationships with allies ruffled by Trump's approach. Biden's top priority is reestablishing the foundations of NATO, the post-World War II alliance of Western powers that Biden said is necessary to counter Russia's aggressive, expansionist aims in eastern Europe and Asia. Biden said he'd immediately confront Russian President Vladimir Putin about his country's interference in U.S. elections. Biden pledges to "end forever wars" but clarifies that U.S. special forces — as opposed to large-scale ground missions — remain a vital part of world stability. Biden frames immigration and combating the climate crisis as national security matters. He calls for rebuilding a decimated U.S. diplomatic corps, rejoining the Paris climate accord and pushing China and other large economies to reduce carbon pollution. On immigration, Biden calls for expanding legal immigration opportunities while reversing Trump's cuts to foreign aid programs intended to promote world stability and reduce migration.

Pilgrims pray on peak day of hajj in shadow of coronavirus

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Masked pilgrims arrived Thursday at Mount Arafat, a desert hill near Islam's holiest site, to pray and repent on the most important day of the hajj, the annual pilgrimage in Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

The global coronavirus pandemic has cast a shadow over every aspect of this year's pilgrimage, which last year drew 2.5 million Muslims from across the world to Mount Arafat, where the Prophet Muhammad delivered his final sermon nearly 1,400 years ago.

Only a very limited number of pilgrims were allowed to take part in the hajj amid numerous restrictions to limit the potential spread of the coronavirus. The Saudi government has not released a final figure on the number of hajj pilgrims this year, but has said anywhere from 1,000 to 10,000 would be taking part. All of this year's pilgrims are either residents or citizens of Saudi Arabia.

In past years, a sea of pilgrims dressed in white terrycloth garments would start to gather at Mount Arafat, or hill of mercy as it's known, before dawn and remain there until nightfall, spending the day in deep contemplation and worship. It is common to see pilgrims with tears streaming down their faces, their hands raised in worship on the slopes of the rocky hill where the Prophet Muhammad called for equality and unity among Muslims.

The sliver of pilgrims performing the hajj this year arrived at Mount Arafat before noon by bus on Thursday. They are traveling in small groups of 20, following strict guidelines around social distancing, have undergone tests for the COVID-19 disease and were in quarantine before the hajj.

Kehinde Qasim Yusuf, an Australian biomedical engineer who teaches at a university in Medina, was among the few selected to take part in the hajj after submitting an application online. He normally travels during the summer back to Australia to see his children, but due to travel restrictions he remained in the kingdom and decided to make the most of his time by applying for the hajj.

"Honestly, I just applied and stayed optimistic. I feel so fortunate to be selected since there's no guarantee," Yusuf said as he arrived in the Arafat area.

Like other pilgrims who've spoken with The Associated Press, Yusuf said the pilgrimage has been "well-planned and well-organized" by the Saudi government, which has covered all expenses for travel, accommodation, meals and health care for pilgrims on this hajj.

Although he isn't facing massive crowds and traffic along hajj routes, Yusuf said this year's hajj isn't without its own challenges of being in self-isolation and separated from loved ones.

"This year's hajj also comes with huge sacrifice, as well, on the mental side," he said.

Unlike in past years, pilgrims are not allowed to stand shoulder to shoulder with other Muslims from

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around the world, all considered equal in Islam before God, seeking mercy, blessings, good health, bounty and healing. Pilgrims are wearing wristbands provided by the Saudi Health Ministry that are connected to their phones and monitor their movements to ensure physical distancing.

International media were not allowed to cover the hajj from Mecca as was customary in past years. Instead, state-run Saudi TV has carried a live broadcast of some parts of the hajj, including Thursday's arrival of pilgrims to Namira Mosque in Arafat where a sermon will be delivered.

After spending the day in prayer on Mount Arafat, pilgrims will head toward an area called Muzdalifa, about 5.5 miles (9 kilometers) west of Mount Arafat.

In Muzdalifa, pilgrims rest and traditionally pick up pebbles that will be used for a symbolic stoning of the devil and casting away of evil. This year, however, the pebbles have been prepackaged and sterilized.

The final ritual takes place over three to four days in Mina, an area about 12 miles (20 kilometers) east of Mecca. The final days of hajj coincide with Eid al-Adha, or the festival of sacrifice, celebrated by Muslims worldwide.

John Lewis' funeral set for Atlanta church that MLK once led

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — When John Lewis is mourned, revered and celebrated at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta on Thursday, he returns to a sacred place imbued with civil rights history.

The arc of Lewis' legacy of activism will once again be tied to Ebenezer's former pastor Martin Luther King Jr., whose sermons Lewis discovered while scanning the radio dial as a 15-year-old boy growing up in then-segregated Alabama.

King continued to inspire Lewis' civil rights work for the next 65 years as he fought segregation during sometimes bloody marches, Greyhound bus "Freedom Rides" across the South and later during his long tenure in the U.S. Congress.

Lewis died July 17 at age 80.

Former President Barack Obama will be attending Thursday's funeral and is expected to address mourners, according to a person familiar with the arrangements who was not authorized to speak publicly. President George W. Bush's office said the former president and first lady Laura Bush also will attend.

"He was my hero," Ebenezer's senior pastor, The Rev. Raphael Warnock, said in an interview late Wednesday. "He laid it all on the line, at the risk of life and limb."

"He read the Gospel, and he actually believed it — love your enemies," added Warnock, who will officiate the funeral.

When Lewis was 15, he heard King's sermons on WRMA, a radio station in Montgomery, Alabama, he recalled in an interview for the Southern Oral History Program.

"Later I saw him on many occasions in Nashville while I was in school between 1958 and '61," Lewis said. "In a sense, he was my leader."

King was "the person who, more than any other, continued to influence my life, who made me who I was," Lewis wrote in his 1998 autobiography, "Walking with the Wind."

By the summer of 1963, Lewis was addressing thousands of people during the March on Washington, speaking shortly before King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. He spoke then about Black people beaten by police and jailed — themes that resonate vividly in today's times.

"My friends, let us not forget that we are involved in a serious social revolution," Lewis told the huge crowd on the Washington Mall.

"To those who have said, 'Be patient and wait,' we have long said that we cannot be patient," he added. "We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want to be free now! We are tired. We are tired of being beaten by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again."

In 1965, Lewis was beaten by Alabama state troopers in the city of Selma in what became known as "Bloody Sunday."

Last Sunday, his casket was carried across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. The wagon rolled over a

carpet of rose petals on the bridge that spans the Alabama River. On the south side of the bridge, where Lewis was attacked by the law officers, family members placed red roses that the carriage rolled over, marking the spot where Lewis spilled his blood and suffered a head injury.

Lewis was later awarded the Medal of Freedom by the nation's first Black president in 2011.

He spent more than three decades in Congress, and his district included most of Atlanta.

On Monday, a memorial service at the U.S. Capitol in Washington drew congressional leaders from both parties. Lewis was the first Black lawmaker to lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda. On Wednesday he was lauded as a warrior and hero during a ceremony at the Georgia Capitol, where people paid their final respects to the civil rights icon in one of the last memorials.

Lewis was a member of Ebenezer, and "it was my honor to serve as pastor to John Lewis, a man of faith and a true American patriot who selflessly risked life and limb in the sacred cause of truth-telling and justice-making in the world," Warnock said in a statement before the funeral.

"He was wounded for America's transgressions, crushed for our iniquities and by his bruises we are healed," Warnock added. "Today we weep. Tomorrow we continue the work of healing that was his life's work."

Associated Press Writers Aamer Madhani and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed.

Can the coronavirus spread through the air?

Can the coronavirus spread through the air?

Yes, it's possible.

The World Health Organization recently acknowledged the possibility that COVID-19 might be spread in the air under certain conditions.

Recent COVID-19 outbreaks in crowded indoor settings — restaurants, nightclubs and choir practices — suggest the virus can hang around in the air long enough to potentially infect others if social distancing measures are not strictly enforced.

Experts say the lack of ventilation in these situations is thought to have contributed to spread, and might have allowed the virus to linger in the air longer than normal.

In a report published in May, researchers found that talking produced respiratory droplets that could remain in the air in a closed environment for about eight to 14 minutes.

The WHO says those most at risk from airborne spread are doctors and nurses who perform specialized procedures such as inserting a breathing tube or putting patients on a ventilator. Medical authorities recommend the use of protective masks and other equipment when doing such procedures.

Scientists maintain it's far less risky to be outside than indoors because virus droplets disperse in the fresh air, reducing the chances of COVID-19 transmission.

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: FactCheck@AP.org.

More Viral Questions:

Can I get COVID-19 through my eyes or ears?

Is it safe to go to the gym during the coronavirus pandemic?

How risky is flying during the coronavirus pandemic?

Sarajevo's landmark hotel faces hard times amid pandemic

By ELDAR EMRIC Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — The bright yellow Hotel Holiday in downtown Sarajevo has seen good times and bad times in its 37-year history. Mostly, it has been a symbol of survival in the once-turbulent Bosnian capital.

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Now the boxy landmark is in danger once again, with the coronavirus pandemic leaving it with few guests. Bosnia, like the rest of the Balkans, has been hit hard by the virus. Cases have been rising in Bosnia since mid-May, when a strict lockdown was lifted and many people seemed to start disregarding social distancing rules and ditching masks.

The country of 3.5 million has reported nearly 10,500 cases and 294 deaths, many since the restrictions were eased.

Amid the pandemic, there are hardly any tourists or business travelers visiting the capital, leaving the hotel with many empty rooms.

It originally opened as part of the Holiday Inn hotel chain and was luxurious accommodation for royalty, movie stars and other dignitaries who came to the 1984 Winter Olympics.

Less than a decade later, it was ground zero for the bloody siege of Sarajevo in the 1990s and an uneasy shelter for the many foreign journalists who arrived to cover the conflict.

"The hotel was working all the time through the war," said general manager Zahid Bukva, who has been employed there since it opened in 1983.

"There was so much shelling and sniping aimed at our hotel, it was devastating," he said. "There wasn't a single window left intact here. But even then, we fought and we provided the service to these foreign journalists."

The hotel, controversial from the start because of its bright color and Lego-like structure, was often targeted by Serbs in the nearby hills during their three-year siege of the capital that left thousands dead and injured in the capital.

It survived several direct hits from grenades and shells, as well as constant sniper fire that prompted journalists and staff to use side doors instead of the main lobby entrance.

Just before the start of the war in 1992, former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic — now a convicted war criminal — used the hotel as his headquarters, surrounded by armed men wearing masks to hide their identities.

They were believed to be Serbian security officers who fired their sniper rifles from the hotel at peaceful protesters in April 1992 — the incident believed to have triggered the start of the civil war that left more than 100,000 dead and millions homeless.

As journalists rushed to Sarajevo to cover the escalating tensions, the Holiday Inn became the place to be. At the end of a dangerous day, they often swapped their front-line experiences and stories in a ground-floor restaurant.

"This hotel became something as a front line for a period," said Kenneth Morrison, a history professor at De Montfort University in Leicester, England, who wrote a book about it.

"It was used exclusively by journalists, aid workers and some diplomats," he said. "The courage and resourcefulness of the staff during those difficult times is an incredible story in itself."

He said the hotel "faced many challenges in its relatively short history."

"It's only 37 years old, but in many ways, the challenges it's facing now are far more significant," Morrison said of the pandemic.

"One can only hope that this building, which survived all that's been thrown at it, can survive this latest crisis," he said.

Hotel director Hajro Rovcanin believes it will.

"The hotel survived through a lot, and I think that we will overcome this corona crisis," he said.

Associated Press writer Dusan Stojanovic in Belgrade, Serbia, contributed.

A virus cluster in France splits generations, raises fears

By JOHN LEICESTER and ARNO PEDRAM Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — As the sun went down, their partying got into full flow, with an unwanted guest: the coronavirus.

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An outbreak among 18- to 25-year-olds at a seaside resort on the Brittany coast is crystallizing fears that the virus is flaring again in France, on the back of vacationers throwing COVID-19 caution to the summer winds.

With 72 infections by Wednesday — mostly among that age group — uncovered in a week of furious contact tracing, the cluster on the Quiberon peninsula was thought to have originated with a supermarket summer worker who partied with others at a nightspot.

It is becoming a textbook case of the virus pitting generations against each other.

The government's top regional official, a former soldier and intelligence officer in his 50s, hasn't minced his words in decrying the "irresponsibility of young people who are vacationing or living here, gathering in large numbers for festivities at night, ignoring the danger."

The official, Patrice Faure, prefect of Brittany's Morbihan region, personally served a two-month closure order on a Quiberon discotheque, the Hacienda Cafe. Among the nightspots where now-infected people congregated, it skirted a national coronavirus ban on nightclubbing by converting itself into a late-night watering hole, blocking off its dance floor with tables and bar stools.

The owners told the regional newspaper Ouest-France that they urged patrons to wear masks but also noted: "They're young, on holiday or doing summer jobs, and they'd been drinking. They didn't listen."

Although authorities insist the outbreak is under control, the peninsula that used to be a sardine-fishing hub has become a flashpoint for fears that France is going backward in the epidemic that has infected more than 185,000 and killed at least 30,200 in the country. Infection rates are creeping up and authorities warn that people are disregarding pleas to use common sense as millions revel in the country's July-August break.

In Paris, nurse Damien Vaillant-Foulquier worries that a second wave of infections will derail the plans that he and his wife, also a nurse, have made to join the exodus in mid-August. His hospital, which managed to empty its ICU wards after weathering the initial wave, already is seeing new COVID-19 patients and asking trainee nurses if they'll be around later in the summer to work, he said.

"At the hospital, we sense the arrival of the second wave," he said. "I'm depressed because it's my impression that people don't see the danger and have forgotten why we were locked-down at home."

Cycling recently through the French capital, "I saw that the bars on the big boulevards had been turned into nightspots, full inside and outside, everyone was dancing, no masks, nothing, absolutely no respect for social distancing," Vaillant-Foulquier said.

"The young are accused a lot of not being responsible, but it's not just the young," he said.

Romain Arnal, a 20-year-old student, is among those who have been letting their hair — and their guard — down in Quiberon. He vacations there every year, hooking up with a holiday sweetheart whom he first met in the resort three summers ago.

"When we're in smaller groups, with friends, we don't really pay attention, even if it's people we've just met. We invite each other over, with no masks on, obviously," he said.

Worried by the infection spike, Arnal says he has gone to a makeshift testing station set up in Quiberon to contain the outbreak, but has been foiled by the long lines. Authorities have urged that everyone get tested, especially the Hacienda's partygoers. That's a mammoth task on the peninsula, where the population swells from 5,000 to 60,000 in the summer.

Quiberon has made mask-wearing mandatory on some of its busiest streets, joining other vacation towns in going further than the national requirement for masks in all indoor public spaces. And it slapped nighttime curfews on beaches and public parks, concerned that young people without symptoms could spread the coronavirus to the less-healthy.

"I hope, or at least I imagine, that they have no desire to spread the virus to their parents, their grandparents, their neighbors, uncles and aunts," said Faure, the prefect. "It's extremely inopportune to party today like in 2019."

Fishing guide Alexandre Lesage, 39, says he feels for the generation he sees trying to enjoy itself at the same spots and beaches where he spent his youth, free of the uncertain future now facing young people

confronting a job market in coronavirus turmoil.

"They're being treated like pest-carriers, as if they're totally irresponsible, when in fact they are just young at heart," he said. "I would not like to be in their shoes."

Leicester reported from Le Pecq, France.

Follow AP coverage of the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Joining the conflict in Libya, Turkey sees economic gains

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — When Turkey's president signed a security deal last year to back one of the sides in Libya's civil war, another agreement was waiting to be signed by his new proteges the same day: a memorandum redrawing the two countries' maritime borders.

In Recep Tayyip Erdogan's memo, Turkey and Libya lay claim to large areas of the Mediterranean Sea and the potential natural gas deposits under it. The deal achieved a longtime goal of Turkey — finding a partner to back its claims.

Officials in Libya's U.N.-supported government in the capital, Tripoli, have disclosed for the first time to The Associated Press the deliberations that resulted in Turkey becoming a major broker in the war, opposite Russia. They describe the relationship as necessary, and say Turkey's foray into the conflict goes hand-in-hand with its economic designs.

Several officials say their side entered the deals with Turkey reluctantly, late last year, believing they had no choice. They desperately needed an ally as their opponent in the war, Libyan commander Khalifa Hifter, bore down on Tripoli with his forces, strengthened by Russian, Emirati and Egyptian backing.

"It was like a give-and-take game," said one official in Tripoli-based Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj's office. "They took advantage of our weakness at the time." He and other officials spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing for their safety in a country largely ruled by an array of militias.

In the end, Turkey sent troops and thousands of Syrian mercenaries and other military support that helped pro-Sarraj forces repel Hifter's assault this spring, preventing the collapse of the Tripoli-based administration and shifting the tide of the war.

But Ankara's role is just one side of how outside powers are exploiting and fueling the civil war in the oil-rich North African nation.

Russia has sent weapons, air defense systems and mercenaries to Libya's front lines to back Hifter's offensive, launched last year and aimed at capturing Tripoli. That help has continued even after Hifter's withdrawal, though Russia has denied any role in the Libyan conflict.

The interventions are deepening a civil war born after a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 toppled and killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi. Hifter controls eastern and southern Libya. Sarraj's government controls Tripoli and its surroundings, in the west.

Erdogan has only acknowledged sending high-level advisers to help pro-Sarraj forces. In reality, Ankara deployed a few hundred troops and an estimated 3,500-3,800 Syrian mercenaries over the first quarter of the year, a Pentagon report last week said. Turkey also sent weapons, military equipment and air defense systems.

Sarraj's office didn't answer several calls seeking comment on the relationship with Turkey.

One Libyan official acknowledged to the AP the Tripoli government's "full reliance" on Turkey. However, "we would not have reached this point" if not for Hifter's offensive, he said.

The officials said Turkey pushed the government for over a year to approve the maritime deal, but Sarraj resisted. In part, he felt he did not have the authority to strike international agreements, being head of a transitional government. He may have also been wary of making Mediterranean claims certain to be rejected by the Europeans.

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"It was a relentless pressure," one official said, adding that Islamists inside Sarraj's administration also wielded influence in support of Ankara. "Turkey was the only country that promised support, and we agreed only after all other doors were closed."

The security and maritime deals were signed in late November. Under the accord, Libya and Turkey claim adjoining parts of the Mediterranean and exploration rights there. Greece disputes the deal, considering the waters part of its continental shelf. The EU said it violates international law and poses a "threat to stability."

Turkey has long wanted to alter the old boundaries and its drive gained urgency as Egypt, Israel and Cyprus moved to exploit newly discovered natural gas fields in their waters.

"We are tearing up maps of the East Mediterranean that were drawn up to imprison us on the mainland," Erdogan deputy Fuat Oktay said.

Turkey's moves, particularly its claim on Greek waters, have heightened tensions between the two NATO members, who openly clashed 46 years ago in the conflict over Cyprus.

The maritime claims give Turkey "pressure points" to apply against other nations around the Eastern Mediterranean, said Oded Berkowitz, an Israeli security analyst who specializes in the Libyan conflict. It can aim to block Egypt, Israel and Cyprus from directly exporting natural gas to Europe and to influence migrant trafficking.

Turkey has long had interests in Libya, mainly construction and energy projects. It has also been pressing for new business opportunities and recouping losses sustained since Ghadafi was pushed from power. The Turkish Contractor's Association estimated that in 2011, just after the country's popular uprising, Turkish companies had more than \$18 billion in contracts in Libya. Many of those were lost in the ensuing chaos and war.

In June, a Turkish delegation including the foreign and finance ministers, met Tripoli officials and presented bills for \$2 billion owed to Turkish firms, another official said. Tripoli agreed to pay back that and \$1.7 billion in other debts and compensation for machinery and equipment lost in the war, he said. The agreement still needs final approval from Sarraj.

Libyan officials have said Turkey is building a naval base as part of Misrata's port and a base at the al-Waitya air base in the desert southwest of Tripoli.

A Turkish government official told the AP that the "issue of bases is not on the agenda." He spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Meanwhile, Turkish and pro-Sarraj forces are preparing an operation to retake the coastal city of Sirte and the inland Jufra air base, which Hifter's ally Egypt has said would prompt it to deploy troops to Libya.

But it's only a part of the bigger picture, said Jalel Harchaoui, a research fellow specializing in Libyan affairs at the Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

"Control over that territory isn't so much about Libya's oil itself as it's about the natural gas under the Mediterranean Sea," he said.

Associated Press writer Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, contributed to this report.

Lawmakers batter Big Tech CEOs, but don't land many blows

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE, MARCY GORDON and MATT O'BRIEN AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional lawmakers finally got a chance Wednesday to grill the CEOs of Big Tech over their dominance and allegations of monopolistic practices that stifle competition. But it's not clear how much they advanced their goal of bringing some of the world's largest companies to heel.

Invective flew as legislators questioned Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Sundar Pichai of Google and Tim Cook of Apple at a hearing of the House Judiciary subcommittee on antitrust. For the last year, that panel has probed the business practices of the Silicon Valley giants with an eye to determining if they need to be regulated more heavily, or even broken up.

In nearly five hours of testimony and questioning, however, there were few startling revelations or striking confrontations. While the executives faced hostile questioning and frequent interruptions from lawmakers

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of both parties, little seemed to land more than glancing blows.

The CEOs testified via video to lawmakers, at times appearing together on the committee room display as tiny individual figures in a mostly empty array of squares. Most committee members were seated, masks on, in the hearing room in Washington.

The execs provided lots of data purporting to show how much competition they face and just how valuable their innovation and essential services are to consumers. But they sometimes struggled to answer pointed questions about their business practices. They also confronted a range of other concerns about alleged political bias, their effect on U.S. democracy and their role in China.

The panel's chairman, Rep. David Cicilline, a Rhode Island Democrat, said each platform controlled by Facebook, Amazon, Google and Apple "is a bottleneck for a key channel of distribution."

"Whether they control access to information or to a marketplace, these platforms have the incentive and ability to exploit this power," he said. "They can charge exorbitant fees, impose oppressive contracts, and extract valuable data from the people and businesses that rely on them."

"Simply put: They have too much power."

The four CEOs command corporations whose products are woven into the fabric of everyday life, with millions or even billions of customers, and a combined market value greater than the entire German economy. One of them, Bezos, is the world's richest individual; Zuckerberg is the fourth-ranked billionaire.

And they had a few rough moments. Pichai and Zuckerberg, for instance, appeared discomfited when pressed about unsavory aspects of their companies' businesses, but got respites when their inquisitors ran out of time. Bezos also acknowledged that alleged misdeeds at Amazon — such as reports that the company has used data generated by independent sellers on its platform to compete against them — would be "unacceptable" if proven to be true.

Outside observers were able to draw radically different conclusions from the event. Richard Hamilton Jr., a former Justice Department antitrust lawyer, said that everyone on the committee seemed to be in agreement on the need for tougher regulation of all four companies — an "ominous" sign, he said. But Stephen Beck, CEO of the management consulting firm cg42, said the tech companies and their brands emerged relatively unscathed.

In particular, he said, Cook was particularly polished and well prepared, enabling the Apple CEO to put on what Beck called "a master class in terms of how to handle these situations." Cook drew less attention from lawmakers than did the other CEOs after arguing that Apple isn't dominant in any of its markets.

Among the toughest questions for Google and Amazon involved accusations that they used their dominant platforms to scoop up data about competitors in a way that gave them an unfair advantage.

Bezos, who was appearing before Congress for the first time, said he couldn't guarantee that the company had not accessed seller data to make competing products, an allegation that the company and its executives have previously denied.

"We have a policy against using seller specific data to aid our private label business," Bezos said in a response to a question from Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a Washington Democrat. "But I can't guarantee to you that that policy hasn't been violated."

Pichai deployed an old Washington trick — appealing to the specific interests of legislators. In his opening remarks, he touted Google's value to mom-and-pop businesses in Bristol, Rhode Island, and Pewaukee, Wisconsin, which just happen to be located in the home districts of Cicilline and Rep. James Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin, the panel's senior Republican.

But the Google executive struggled as Cicilline accused the company of leveraging its dominant search engine to steal ideas and information from other websites and manipulating its results to drive people to its own digital services to boost its profits.

Pichai repeatedly deflected Cicilline's attacks by asserting that Google tries to provide the most helpful and relevant information to the hundreds of millions of people who use its search engine each day in an effort to keep them coming back instead of defecting to a rival service, such as Microsoft's Bing.

As Democrats largely focused on market competition, several Republicans aired longstanding grievances, claiming the tech companies are censoring conservative voices and questioning their business activities

in China. "Big Tech is out to get conservatives," insisted Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio.

In its bipartisan investigation, the Judiciary subcommittee collected testimony from mid-level executives of the four firms, competitors and legal experts, and pored over more than a million internal documents from the companies. A key question: whether existing competition policies and century-old antitrust laws are adequate for overseeing the tech giants, or if new legislation and enforcement funding are needed.

Cicilline has called the four companies monopolies, although he says breaking them up should be a last resort. While forced breakups may appear unlikely, the wide scrutiny of Big Tech points toward possible new restrictions on its power.

The companies face legal and political offensives on multiplying fronts, from Congress, the Trump administration, federal and state regulators and European watchdogs. The Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission have been investigating the four companies' practices.

Liedtke reported from San Ramon, California, and O'Brien from Providence, Rhode Island. AP Business Writer Joseph Pisani in New York contributed to this report.

Follow Gordon on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/mgordonap>.

House orders broad mask mandates after Gohmert gets virus

By ALAN FRAM and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Capitol officials issued broad new mask requirements Wednesday after a Republican member of Congress tested positive for the coronavirus. The member, Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert, often shunned wearing masks and was known to vote without one.

Pelosi announced Wednesday evening that all members will be required to wear a mask when voting on the House floor and that one will be provided if anyone forgets. Several hours later, the House sergeant-at-arms and the Capitol's top physician issued an order requiring masks inside House office buildings, with few exceptions. That mandate goes into effect at 8 a.m. Thursday.

Pelosi said failure to wear a mask on the House floor is a "serious breach of decorum" for which members could be removed from the chamber. Members will be able to temporarily remove them while speaking, however. In the House office buildings, people can remove them to eat, drink and give interviews, among a few other specific situations.

"It's a sign of respect for the health, safety and well-being of others present in the chamber and in surrounding areas," Pelosi said.

Gohmert tested positive just before he was scheduled to travel to his home state with President Donald Trump. He was forced to cancel his plans and was immediately criticized by colleagues for not always wearing a mask. "A selfish act," one lawmaker said.

The 66-year-old Gohmert, one of the House's most conservative and outspoken members, told a Texas news station that he tested positive before boarding Air Force One and planned to self-quarantine. He is at least the 10th member of Congress known to have tested positive for the coronavirus.

Gohmert's positive test raised further questions about the lack of mask and testing requirements in the Capitol as members frequently fly back-and-forth from their hometowns and gather for votes, hearings and news conferences.

Several GOP senators said they were pushing for more regular testing in the Capitol, as there is currently no testing program or requirements.

"I think particularly for members of Congress who are going back-and-forth, they represent sort of the perfect petri dish for how you spread a disease," said GOP Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri, chair of the Senate Rules Committee. "You send 535 people out to 535 different locations, on about 1,000 different airplanes, and bring them back and see what happens."

An eight-term lawmaker, Gohmert participated in the House Judiciary Committee hearing Tuesday where Attorney General William Barr testified. Before the hearing, Gohmert was seen approaching the meeting

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room behind Barr, and neither man was wearing a mask.

Gohmert also voted on the House floor Tuesday and attended a House Natural Resources Committee hearing, where a staff member sat close behind him on the dais as he talked without a mask. The chair of that committee, Democratic Rep. Raúl Grijalva of Arizona, said he would self-quarantine.

"In the meantime, my work schedule and the lives of my employees are disrupted," Grijalva said. "This stems from a selfish act by Mr. Gohmert, who is just one member of Congress."

When Gohmert flew to Washington on Sunday, he sat next to Rep. Kay Granger, R-Texas, who also went into quarantine after learning of her colleague's test results. A third lawmaker, Republican Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana, said he was advised to quarantine after having dinner with Gohmert on Monday.

Mask wearing had been strongly encouraged but not enforced for lawmakers in the Capitol, while other workers and law enforcement officers were required to wear masks. Committees had rules requiring face coverings in hearing rooms, but until now, they hadn't been required in hallways or personal offices.

In a letter late Wednesday, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., wrote to the House Office of Employee Assistance and, citing Gohmert's positive test, asked if officials there had "sufficient resources to meet the greater demand for staff counseling created by these incidents." He asked that the office take additional measures to publicize its services.

Most senators had worn masks, but a few had refused, including Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, a doctor who says it's unnecessary because he previously tested positive for the virus. There is no proven science saying that a person cannot get the virus again.

In a television interview, Gohmert said he was given a rapid test by the White House that came back positive and then took a more thorough test to rule out a false positive. That test came back positive, too, so "apparently I have it," Gohmert told KLTN's East Texas Now.

Gohmert also suggested that he might have contracted the virus by wearing a mask. Medical experts say masks are one of the best ways to prevent transmission of the virus, which is thought to mainly spread through people who are in close contact.

Justice Department spokesperson Kerri Kupec said Barr would be tested Wednesday. Gohmert did not wear a mask while questioning Barr, but the seats in the hearing room are spaced many feet apart, and it is common practice to remove masks during questioning.

During the Barr hearing, the committee chair, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., chastised some of Gohmert's GOP colleagues for not wearing masks when they weren't speaking. Nadler did not call out Gohmert by name.

Nadler tweeted Wednesday: "When individuals refuse to take the necessary precautions it puts everyone at risk. I've regularly instructed all members to wear their masks and hope this is a lesson by all my colleagues."

Multiple GOP senators said Wednesday they were pushing Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., to allow expanded testing. McConnell and Pelosi jointly rejected Trump's offer for rapid testing for lawmakers in May, saying they wanted instead to direct resources to front-line workers.

Blunt said he believes that lawmakers should be tested every time they travel and that staff and others should be tested occasionally. He said McConnell and the Capitol physician would have to be on board for that to happen, and he doesn't know why it hasn't.

Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo and Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

Trump downplays West Texas energy worries, attacks Democrats

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

MIDLAND, Texas (AP) — President Donald Trump took sweeping digs at "crazy left radical Democrats" on a trip Wednesday to the fracking fields of West Texas, launching unsubstantiated claims that a Democratic administration would destroy everything from the country's suburbs to the U.S. energy industry.

Trump, speaking in front of stacked oil barrels, also played down the difficulties of the U.S. oil and gas

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industry, which is still struggling with the pandemic economic downturn and global oversupply that briefly drove oil prices into negative territory this spring. Prices have rebounded to around \$40 a barrel, still below what some producers here need to break even.

"We're OK now. We're back, we're back," Trump said to a crowd scattered with people wearing cowboy hats and face masks. He sought to contrast his support for oil and gas with Democratic rival Joe Biden's more climate-friendly energy plan, though Biden himself has stopped short of calling for a ban on hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, the production method that spurred U.S. oil and gas to a yearslong boom that started under President Barack Obama.

"If they got in, you would have no more energy coming out of the great state of Texas," warned Trump, whose poll numbers for the 2020 election are lagging. He claimed the same, without evidence, for Ohio and Pennsylvania, two fracking states that also are battlegrounds in the presidential race.

Speaking under a tent on a hot, windy day, Trump alluded to the opposing party in the most extreme terms, saying a Democratic White House win and the policies of the "Washington crazy left radical Democrats" would mean "the death of American prosperity. It would destroy our country."

Trump also praised a step he took last week to rescind an Obama-era fair housing rule for low-income families, one that had Trump tweeting warnings to what he called the "Suburban Housewives of America." "It's been hell for suburbia," he said Wednesday.

"They want to uproot and demolish every American value. They want to wipe away every trace of religion from national life. They want to indoctrinate our children, defund our police, abolish the suburbs, incite riots and leave every city at the mercy of the radical left," Trump declared.

Trump was combining campaigning and fundraising in his first trip to an oil and gas rig and his first visit as president to the Permian Basin. He expected to raise \$7 million, including \$100,000 per person for one event.

Trump's loyal donors and supporters in the oil and gas industry are dealing with the state's fierce coronavirus outbreak and the boom-turned-bust of oil and gas.

Texas, over the past month, has experienced a dramatic spike in newly confirmed cases, hospitalizations and fatalities. The state became one of the nation's hot spots as Texas politicians debated masks and other measures. The outbreak even impinged on Trump's trip Wednesday, as an unexpected positive test result for the coronavirus kept Rep. Louie Gohmert, a Texas Republican who like Trump often declines to wear a mask, from joining the president's flight. A Republican congressional candidate also tested positive.

Even as Air Force One carried Trump to Texas, the U.S. Energy Information Administration reported American petroleum use plummeted to a nearly 40-year low this spring, owing to the pandemic lockdown and market oversupply, partly because of intensive oil and gas production that Trump encouraged.

Trump's government has exerted itself for the oil and gas industry. That includes rolling back environmental and public health protections and speeding up permitting as part of what Trump describes as an American march to global energy dominance.

His administration has moved to open up vast wilderness areas to oil and gas interests over the objections of environmental groups. Trump also has sought to override various regional objections to oil and gas pipelines with executive orders.

And next month, the administration is expected to announce its latest effort to block regulation of the industry's emissions of methane, a potent agent of climate change. West Texas environmental activists say the methane emissions are part of a too-little-regulated industry's assault on the air, water and public health in the region's yearslong expansion of oil and gas production. Successful legal challenges stopped the administration's earlier attempts.

Flying at night into the West Texas city of Odessa, among the areas Trump visited, "it looks like a huge birthday cake, there are so many flares out here" from facilities burning off methane as an oil and gas byproduct, said the Rev. Gene Collins, an activist demanding more regulation of what environmental groups and satellite data-gathering depict as surging methane emissions in the Permian Basin.

For years, Democrats have been watching Texas demographics — with growing populations of Latinos, young people and ex-Californians — and pining for the election cycle when it would be in play.

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Although Trump won the state comfortably in 2016, former Democratic Rep. Beto O'Rourke gave Republican Sen. Ted Cruz a scare two years ago, and Democrats have used that race to try to build an organization that could swing the state blue. Sensing an opportunity, Biden has begun airing advertisements in Texas as coronavirus cases surge there.

Losing Texas would upend Republicans' plan for capturing the electoral vote needed to hold the White House. Though privately Trump campaign officials concede the need to spend time and money in Texas, assets they would prefer to spend elsewhere, they remain confident they can retain the state and have expressed hope that Democrats will waste resources trying to obtain a prize that is out of reach.

The president does have plans to frequently visit Texas. Trump's Wednesday visit allowed him to raise needed money — Biden has cut into the president's fundraising advantage — and showcase both his administration's deregulation agenda and its attempts to get the economy roaring again.

Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City. Associated Press writers Matthew Brown in Billings, Mont., and Cathy Bussewitz in New York contributed to this report.

Misinformation on coronavirus is proving highly contagious

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — As the world races to find a vaccine and a treatment for COVID-19, there is seemingly no antidote in sight for the burgeoning outbreak of coronavirus conspiracy theories, hoaxes, anti-mask myths and sham cures.

The phenomenon, unfolding largely on social media, escalated this week when President Donald Trump retweeted a false video about an anti-malaria drug being a cure for the virus and it was revealed that Russian intelligence is spreading disinformation about the crisis through English-language websites.

Experts worry the torrent of bad information is dangerously undermining efforts to slow the virus, whose death toll in the U.S. hit 150,000 Wednesday, by far the highest in the world, according to the tally kept by Johns Hopkins University. Over a half-million people have died in the rest of the world.

Hard-hit Florida reported 216 deaths, breaking the single-day record it set a day earlier. Texas confirmed 313 additional deaths, pushing its total to 6,190, while South Carolina's death toll passed 1,500 this week, more than doubling over the past month. In Georgia, hospitalizations have more than doubled since July 1.

"It is a real challenge in terms of trying to get the message to the public about what they can really do to protect themselves and what the facts are behind the problem," said Michael Osterholm, head of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.

He said the fear is that "people are putting themselves in harm's way because they don't believe the virus is something they have to deal with."

Rather than fade away in the face of new evidence, the claims have flourished, fed by mixed messages from officials, transmitted by social media, amplified by leaders like Trump and mutating when confronted with contradictory facts.

"You don't need masks. There is a cure," Dr. Stella Immanuel promised in a video that promoted hydroxychloroquine. "You don't need people to be locked down."

The truth: Federal regulators last month revoked their authorization of the drug as an emergency treatment amid growing evidence it doesn't work and can have deadly side effects. Even if it were effective, it wouldn't negate the need for masks and other measures to contain the outbreak.

None of that stopped Trump, who has repeatedly praised the drug, from retweeting the video. Twitter and Facebook began removing the video Monday for violating policies on COVID-19 misinformation, but it had already been seen more than 20 million times.

Many of the claims in Immanuel's video are widely disputed by medical experts. She has made even more bizarre pronouncements in the past, saying that cysts, fibroids and some other conditions can be caused by having sex with demons, that McDonald's and Pokemon promote witchcraft, that alien DNA is used in medical treatments, and that half-human "reptilians" work in the government.

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Other baseless theories and hoaxes have alleged that the virus isn't real or that it's a bioweapon created by the U.S. or its adversaries. One hoax from the outbreak's early months claimed new 5G towers were spreading the virus through microwaves. Another popular story held that Microsoft founder Bill Gates plans to use COVID-19 vaccines to implant microchips in all 7 billion people on the planet.

Then there are the political theories — that doctors, journalists and federal officials are conspiring to lie about the threat of the virus to hurt Trump politically.

Social media has amplified the claims and helped believers find each other. The flood of misinformation has posed a challenge for Facebook, Twitter and other platforms, which have found themselves accused of censorship for taking down virus misinformation.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was questioned about Immanuel's video during an often-contentious congressional hearing Wednesday.

"We did take it down because it violates our policies," Zuckerberg said.

U.S. Rep. David Cicilline, a Rhode Island Democrat leading the hearing, responded by noting that 20 million people saw the video before Facebook acted.

"Doesn't that suggest that your platform is so big, that even with the right policies in place, you can't contain deadly content?" Cicilline asked Zuckerberg.

It wasn't the first video containing misinformation about the virus, and experts say it's not likely to be the last.

A professionally made 26-minute video that alleges the government's top infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, manufactured the virus and shipped it to China was watched more than 8 million times before the platforms took action. The video, titled "Plandemic," also warned that masks could make you sick — the false claim Facebook cited when it removed the video down from its site.

Judy Mikovits, the discredited doctor behind "Plandemic," had been set to appear on the show "America This Week" on the Sinclair Broadcast Group. But the company, which operates TV stations in 81 U.S. markets, canned the segment, saying it was "not appropriate" to air.

This week, U.S. government officials speaking on condition of anonymity cited what they said was a clear link between Russian intelligence and websites with stories designed to spread disinformation on the coronavirus in the West. Russian officials rejected the accusations.

Of all the bizarre and myriad claims about the virus, those regarding masks are proving to be among the most stubborn.

New York City resident Carlos Lopez said he wears a mask when required to do so but doesn't believe it is necessary.

"They're politicizing it as a tool," he said. "I think it's more to try to get Trump to lose. It's more a scare tactic."

He is in the minority. A recent AP/NORC poll said 3 in 4 Americans — Democrats and Republicans alike — support a national mask mandate.

Still, mask skeptics are a vocal minority and have come together to create social media pages where many false claims about mask safety are shared. Facebook has removed some of the pages — such as the group Unmasking America!, which had nearly 10,000 members — but others remain.

Early in the pandemic, medical authorities themselves were the source of much confusion regarding masks. In February, officials like the U.S. surgeon general urged Americans not to stockpile masks because they were needed by medical personnel and might not be effective in everyday situations.

Public health officials changed their tune when it became apparent that the virus could spread among people showing no symptoms.

Yet Trump remained reluctant to use a mask, mocked his rival Joe Biden for wearing one and suggested people might be covering their faces just to hurt him politically. He did an abrupt about-face this month, claiming that he had always supported masks — then later retweeted Immanuel's video against masks.

The mixed signals hurt, Fauci acknowledged in an interview with NPR this month.

"The message early on became confusing," he said.

Many of the claims around masks allege harmful effects, such as blocked oxygen flow or even a greater chance of infection. The claims have been widely debunked by doctors.

Dr. Maitiu O Tuathail of Ireland grew so concerned about mask misinformation he posted an online video of himself comfortably wearing a mask while measuring his oxygen levels. The video has been viewed more than 20 million times.

"While face masks don't lower your oxygen levels. COVID definitely does," he warned.

Yet trusted medical authorities are often being dismissed by those who say requiring people to wear masks is a step toward authoritarianism.

"Unless you make a stand, you will be wearing a mask for the rest of your life," tweeted Simon Dolan, a British businessman who has sued the government over its COVID-19 restrictions.

Trump's reluctant, ambivalent and late embrace of masks hasn't convinced some of his strongest supporters, who have concocted ever more elaborate theories to explain his change of heart. Some say he was actually speaking in code and doesn't really support masks.

O Tuathail witnessed just how unshakable COVID-19 misinformation can be when, after broadcasting his video, he received emails from people who said he cheated or didn't wear the mask long enough to feel the negative effects.

That's not surprising, according to University of Central Florida psychology professor Chrysalis Wright, who studies misinformation. She said conspiracy theory believers often engage in mental gymnastics to make their beliefs conform with reality.

"People only want to hear what they already think they know," she said.

Associated Press writers Beatrice Dupuy in New York, Eric Tucker in Washington, and Amy Forliti in Minneapolis contributed to this report.

Federal court to review 'protest bans' in Portland arrests

By REBECCA BOONE and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

U.S. court officials in Oregon are reviewing bans on future protesting that were placed on some people arrested during protests in Portland after some raised concerns that the prohibitions violated the First Amendment.

"We're reviewing every case again right now and looking at the wording of some of the conditions," Brian Crist, chief pretrial services officer for the U.S. District Court in Portland, said Wednesday. "A lot of this I think will be resolved."

Crist said he couldn't comment on individual cases, but he noted the court looks at each defendant individually and doesn't have "blanket conditions" that are placed on everyone.

Portland has seen nightly protests for more than two months since the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The unrest intensified after federal agents were dispatched to protect a downtown U.S. courthouse.

The protest bans, first reported by ProPublica, were imposed in at least a dozen cases — most of them involving misdemeanor charges of failing to obey a lawful order. Defendants had to agree to the prohibitions in order to be released from jail while they await trial.

Some of the protest bans were hand-written in the court documents, others were typed out: "Defendant may not attend any other protests, rallies, assemblies or public gatherings in the state of Oregon," many of the release documents read.

Several experts have raised concerns that the bans violate the U.S. Constitution's protections of free speech.

"I can't believe that they think this is constitutional," said Aaron Caplan, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. "It's really broad and it's hitting at something that is constitutionally protected."

In at least some of the cases, the protest bans were added by U.S. Magistrate Judge John Acosta. He didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Kevin Sonoff, spokesman for U.S. Attorney Billy J. Williams, said his office didn't ask for the bans.

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"We have only sought geographic (five blocks from the Hatfield Courthouse) and curfew restrictions. The additional restrictions were added by the court," Sonoff wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

Noelle Mandolfo, a 30-year-old wellness coach and yoga instructor, was among those banned from protests while awaiting trial. She was charged with misdemeanor assault on a federal officer early Monday after joining the Portland protests on her way to her father's home in California.

Video of her saying "I can't breathe" as federal officers in tactical gear held her down amid clouds of gas circulated widely online. Mandolfo said an agent claimed she'd aimed a laser pointer at officers, but she said she didn't have a laser pointer and never used one during the protest.

Mandolfo said she waited nearly 16 hours for a court hearing. Desperate to get out of jail and get medical attention, Mandolfo didn't hesitate to agree to the conditions.

"I was agreeing to anything that they wanted from me," she said. "I just really wanted to get away from the whole situation."

Mandolfo hasn't yet discussed the conditions of her release with her public defender, who is busy with many other protest cases.

"I feel it's against my constitutional rights. Of course it is," Mandolfo said. "But I understand that, to save time, if they really are trying to pose me as a threat, why they can request that from me. And if I have to prove I'm not a threat by not attending, I'm definitely willing to do that, because I'm not a threat. I never was a threat."

Federal Defender Lisa Hay said her office is working to get the conditions modified in some of the cases.

"We think that kind of condition is overbroad and unconstitutional," she said. "We understand the court was weighing specific concerns of different defendants who wanted to be able to work and not have a curfew, and so the court made that condition an alternative."

Typically pretrial release conditions are narrowly targeted to the crime, Caplan said. For instance, if someone is accused of assault, they may be banned from having any contact with the victim in the case or going near their home.

But protests, rallies and other forms of political speech are protected by the First Amendment, Caplan said, and not necessarily connected to the crime of failing to obey a lawful order.

"You just can't go to any protests anywhere? Well that's ridiculous," he said. "It's no longer related to the crime that you were charged with, it's not connected to any particular victim. It's just taking away your right to freedom of speech."

There's plenty of case law on the subject, Caplan said. In the 1970s, Russell Means, an Oglala Lakota activist for the rights of Native Americans, was ordered by a North Dakota state judge to refrain from political activities on behalf of the American Indian Movement as a condition of bail. The prohibition was later overturned by a federal judge who said forcing Means to give up his First Amendment rights was a violation of due process.

The wording of the ban in Portland — especially "public gatherings" — is so broad that it could apply to a baseball game or a church service, Caplan said.

"Whoa — this person was accused of disobeying an order to disperse and now they can't go worship? That's a problem," Caplan said. "Ideally the conditions of bail need to be spelled out so they are specific and something everyone can agree on."

More narrowly tailored geographical restrictions aren't uncommon in protest-related cases. In Denver, some arrested protesters were released during the days of larger protests in May with the condition that they stay away from a big swath of downtown beyond the area near the state Capitol that was the main focus of demonstrators.

The city attorney's office asked for the restriction for most protesters but a judge only granted them for those with a criminal history or who were accused of acting violently during the protest, not those who simply violated the curfew in place at the time.

Public defenders objected to the restrictions, pointing out that they would criminalize things like simply passing through the area on a bus, but there were no constitutional arguments raised against it.

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Associated Press writers Colleen Slevin in Denver; Andrew Selsky in Salem, Oregon, and Gillian Flaccus in Portland, Oregon, contributed. Boone reported from Boise, Idaho, and Bleiberg reported from Dallas.

Malik B, founding member of The Roots, has died at 47

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Malik B, a rapper and founding member of The Roots, has died. He was 47. The group announced the death of the Philadelphia-born emcee in a social media post Wednesday. The cause of death was not released.

Malik B, whose real name is Malik Abdul Basit, was a major contributor to the group, which includes Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson and Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter. He appeared on four albums before departing the group in 1999. The group won its first Grammy the following year.

The Roots, who also perform as the house band on the Jimmy Fallon's "Tonight Show," paid homage to Malik B for his rap talents and faith.

"We regretfully inform you of the passing of our beloved brother and long time Roots member Malik Abdul Basit," the group said on Twitter. "May he be remembered for his devotion to Islam and innovation as one of the most gifted MCs of all time. We ask that you please respect his family in our time of mourning."

Malik B returned as a featured guest on the group's 2006 album "Game Theory" and "Rising Down" in 2008. As a solo artist, he released two studio albums named "Street Assault" and "Unpredictable."

Civil rights icon Lewis lauded as hero at Georgia Capitol

By JEFF AMY and SUDHIN THANAWALA undefined

ATLANTA (AP) — John Lewis was lauded as a warrior and a hero during a ceremony Wednesday at the Georgia Capitol, where the civil rights icon who represented much of Atlanta in Congress will lie in repose before a funeral service that at least two former presidents are expected to attend.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms said Lewis called on "America to be America again," referencing the poem in which Langston Hughes reproaches the country for not living up to its ideals.

"Until his last days, he was calling on America to be America again in his words and deeds," she said, citing his visit to the Black Lives Matter street mural in Washington, D.C., as well as a videoconference he participated in with former President Barack Obama.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp called Lewis a "beloved Georgian, an American hero and a friend to all who sought a better, fairer, more united society."

"And even today, as our country faces a public health crisis and new challenges rooted in injustice, I know that the example left behind by Congressman Lewis ... will inspire all of us to do the hard necessary work to overcome our shared challenges and emerge stronger," Kemp said.

Kemp presented the Lewis family with a folded Georgia state flag.

Among the other guests at the ceremony was Martin Luther King III, the son of the great civil rights leader who Lewis joined on the podium in the March on Washington.

King brought his 12-year-old daughter, Yolanda, saying her presence was an appropriate tribute to Lewis. "Whenever he saw young people, he always made a bee line for them to encourage them. His entire career was about lifting up the next generation," King said.

People lined the streets as the hearse carrying Lewis' body moved through downtown. It stopped briefly in front of a mural of Lewis with the word "Hero" before arriving at the state Capitol, where it was met by Kemp and Bottoms.

Members of the public later filed into the state Capitol rotunda to pay their respects to Lewis, pausing to take photographs in front of his flag-draped coffin. It lay underneath a life-size portrait of former Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens.

Jeff Haynes and his wife Daniele brought their two young daughters, Ava and Nya.

Haynes, an Atlanta resident, said he felt a connection to Lewis in part because his family is of mixed race. "Now, with the Black Lives Matter movement and the inequality situation, it's almost symbolic that he

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would die at this time," he said. "It's almost like he's passing the torch."

The funeral service in Atlanta is scheduled for Thursday, followed by a private burial.

Obama will be attending Lewis' service and is expected to address mourners, according to a person familiar with the funeral arrangements who was not authorized to speak publicly. President George W. Bush's office said the former president and first lady Laura Bush also will attend.

Bottoms recalled that Lewis' wife would visit her mother's salon and said she was deeply moved when the congressman's chief of staff told her a couple of days ago that Lewis was watching news of Atlanta and proud of its leadership.

Bottoms recently defied Kemp and required people to wear masks during the coronavirus outbreak, prompting a lawsuit from Kemp. The two have also clashed over the governor's decision to mobilize the National Guard in the city earlier this month after a weekend of gun violence left five people dead, including an 8-year-old girl.

Bottoms seemed to reference the fights in recalling Lewis' praise, echoing his signature advice to get into "good trouble."

"And so, governor, when the good trouble continues, know that it is with the blessings of Congressman Lewis," she said to applause.

Wednesday's service is part of a series of public remembrances for Lewis that began over the weekend.

A memorial service at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Monday drew congressional leaders from both parties. Lewis was the first Black lawmaker to lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda. Shortly after 9 a.m. Wednesday, his flag-draped casket was carried down the Capitol steps and placed in a hearse as people watched solemnly, many with their hands on their hearts.

On Sunday, his casket was carried across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, where the one-time "Freedom Rider" was among civil rights demonstrators beaten by state troopers in 1965.

Lewis, who spent more than three decades in Congress, died July 17 at the age of 80. Born to Alabama sharecroppers during Jim Crow segregation, he spoke ahead of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 March on Washington and was awarded the Medal of Freedom by the nation's first Black president in 2011.

US agents to pull back in Portland but will stay on standby

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and MIKE BALSAMO Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Some federal officers guarding a U.S. courthouse that's been targeted during violent protests in Portland will leave in the next 24 hours, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said Wednesday. But the Trump administration's insistence that some agents would remain in the building and the entire contingent would stay in the city in case they're needed sparked confusion and concern among demonstrators.

While each side declared victory in the political fight over the federal deployment, it was not clear if the agreement would reduce tensions on the streets of the liberal city, where nightly protests have persisted for more than two months.

Many demonstrators are peaceful, but smaller numbers have thrown fireworks, flares and rocks at federal agents, used lasers to blind them and sprayed graffiti across the downtown Mark O. Hatfield Federal Courthouse. Agents have responded with tear gas, pepper balls, stun grenades and nearly 100 arrests.

The deal also seemed likely to further muddle the situation by adding yet another law enforcement agency to the mix — Oregon State Police.

President Donald Trump earlier this month sent agents to the city from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. Marshals Service as protests against racial injustice increasingly targeted federal property. The deployment appeared to have the opposite effect, reinvigorating demonstrations with a new focus: getting rid of the federal presence.

The Democratic governor said CBP and ICE agents will begin leaving the downtown area Thursday, but Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf wouldn't specify where the agents would go. He insisted that a federal presence would remain until the Trump administration was assured the agreement was

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working and state police were sufficiently protecting federal property.

The plan calls for agents with the U.S. Marshals Service and Federal Protective Service to stay inside a fence set up around the courthouse, along with some state police, to keep out protesters. State police will be outside the fence.

"I want to be clear about this, the entire DHS law enforcement presence in Portland will remain in Portland, whether they're staying inside the courthouse, next door or a different location, obviously I'm not going to get into that," Wolf said on a call with reporters. "If ... we have indicators and warnings that (the state police) deployment is not working, that entire DHS law enforcement presence is available."

He said federal agents have made 94 arrests.

Oregon State Police Superintendent Travis Hampton said his agency would deploy a special operations team and some uniformed troopers to the courthouse for a two-week rotation. The agency hopes its efforts will allow the protective fence to be removed and "restore a semblance of normalcy, while meeting community expectations and our obligations to protect the federal property," Hampton said.

The agreement also calls for the U.S. government to clean the graffiti off the courthouse. Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, a Democrat, has previously said the federal government refused to clean the building, contributing to the mistaken impression that the entire city was under siege.

The conflicts between protesters and the federal agents have been limited to roughly two square blocks around the courthouse and have not affected the rest of the city.

Trump declared victory, tweeting that federal agents prevented Portland from being "burned and beaten to the ground" and later repeating his refrain at a speech in Texas that protesters are agitators and anarchists.

Wheeler also claimed a win in a lengthy Twitter post.

"The federal occupation of our community has brought a new kind of fear to our streets. Federal agents nearly killed a demonstrator, and their presence has led to increased violence and vandalism in our downtown core," he said.

A protester was critically injured July 11 and required facial reconstructive surgery after a federal agent fired a non-lethal round that struck him in the head.

Wednesday's announcement was an abrupt about-face from just two days earlier, when the U.S. government said it might send more federal agents to Portland.

In fact, the Marshals Service were taking steps to identify up to 100 additional personnel who could go in case they were needed to relieve or supplement those working in Oregon, spokesman Drew Wade said.

Like protests that swept the nation following George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police, the Portland demonstrations called for an end to racial injustice, but they had increasingly focused on federal property even before the U.S. agents arrived.

Their deployment against the wishes of state and city officials touched off a debate about the role of the federal government and ended up drawing more residents into the streets after protests had begun to devolve into smaller, though still violent, gatherings.

Oregon's governor cautioned Wednesday that the lower visibility of the federal agents — and their ultimate departure — won't immediately resolve the conflict.

"I have grown increasingly concerned at the nightly confrontation between local community members and federal officers," Brown said. "We need to recognize that the protests in Portland are not solely about the federal presence."

Many protesters want to see reduced funding for Portland police and are angry that officers used tear gas on protesters multiple times before federal agents arrived. Brown said the departure of the agents was a chance to address that anger and start improving community policing.

Balsamo reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Zeke Miller and Colleen Long contributed from Washington.

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Follow Gillian Flaccus on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/gflaccus> and Mike Balsamo at <https://twitter.com/MikeBalsamo1>.

Fed sees dim economic outlook as virus squeezes economy

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned Wednesday that the viral epidemic is endangering the modest economic recovery that followed a collapse in hiring and spending this spring. As a result, he said, the Fed plans to keep interest rates pinned near zero well into the future.

That faltering economy, pressured by a resurgence of the virus, has heightened the need for Congress to continue providing significant financial aid, Powell said. Members of the House and Senate are negotiating a new package but are nowhere near agreement. Senate Republicans and the White House are proposing a plan that would provide less help for unemployed Americans than they are now receiving.

Speaking at a virtual news conference after a two-day Fed meeting ended, Powell said the economy had rebounded after nearly all states lifted their broad business shutdown measures in May. But since then, he noted, as new confirmed cases have soared, measures of spending and hiring have slipped or plateaued at low levels.

"Now that the cases have spiked again, the early data ... suggest that there is a slower pace of growth at least for now," he said. "We don't know how deep or for how long it will be."

The economic stumble, amid the worsened viral outbreak, underscores the connection between the virus and the economy's ability to sustain any recovery, the chairman said. This point was also highlighted in the Fed's statement, which added a new sentence: "The path of the economy will depend significantly on the course of the virus."

That observation was an acknowledgement that uncertainty about when the health crisis might be solved has complicated the Fed's ability to set interest rate policy.

It's also a point that Powell has made, in one way or another, for months as most states have succeeded only fitfully in controlling the virus and the ability of businesses to stay open. And it suggested that Powell and the Fed envision a prolonged recovery that will depend in large part on how well the U.S. can contain the pandemic.

"A full recovery is unlikely until people are confident that it is safe to re-engage in a broad range of activities," Powell said.

In the meantime, he said, "We are committed to using our full range of tools to support the economy. We will continue to use these powers until we are confident we are solidly on the road to recovery."

Yet despite its concerns, the Fed announced no new policies. It said it will also continue to buy billions of dollars in Treasury and mortgage bonds each month, which are intended to inject cash into financial markets and spur borrowing and spending.

William English, a finance professor at Yale School of Management and former top Fed official, said that Powell stressed that he wanted to see more comprehensive data, such as next week's July jobs report, before taking further steps.

"He acknowledged the softer high frequency data but didn't put a huge weight on it," he said. "He took the weight off that by emphasizing the uncertainty."

Powell also said that Congress had helped spur the modest economic recovery that occurred in May and June, when spending at retail stores and restaurants surged and employers added 7.5 million jobs. Still, that amounted to just one-third of the jobs lost in March and April.

"In a broad sense, it's been well spent," Powell said of the \$2 trillion package Congress approved in March. That legislation provided \$600 in jobless benefits a week and set up a small business lending program.

"It's kept people in their homes, it's kept businesses in business."

Yet "there will be a need for more support from us, and from fiscal policy," Powell said, referring to Congressional tax and spending powers.

Congress is in the early stages of negotiating an economic relief package that might extend several

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key support programs, such as the expiring \$600-a-week unemployment benefit. That benefit will likely be reduced in any final legislation.

With the two parties far apart, the federal jobless benefit will likely lapse for at least several weeks for about 30 million people who are unemployed. That would likely slow consumer spending and weaken the economy.

Economists say the Fed has time to consider its next policy moves because short- and long-term rates remain historically ultra-low and aren't restraining economic growth. Home sales have picked up after falling sharply in the spring. The housing rebound has been fueled by the lowest loan rates on record, with the average 30-year mortgage dipping below 3% this month for the first time in 50 years.

Still, with the economy struggling just to grow, small businesses across the country in serious danger and unemployment very high at 11.1%, the pressure is likely to increase on the Fed to take further steps. Few investors expect the Fed to hike interest rates for years to come. After its previous meeting last month, the Fed signaled that it expected to keep its key short-term rate near zero at least through 2022.

The Fed's overall message that it would keep rates low indefinitely with the economy in a severe downturn was widely expected by investors, and reaction in financial markets was muted. Stocks maintained their gains, and Treasury yields held steady.

Most analysts say they think the Fed's next move will be to provide more specific guidance about the conditions it would need to see before raising its benchmark short-term interest rate from zero.

Economists call such an approach "forward guidance," and the Fed used it extensively after the 2008-2009 recession. Some Fed watchers expect no rate increase until 2024 at the earliest given the bleak outlook for the economy and expectations of continued ultra-low inflation. But by providing more certainty for investors about when a rate hike may occur, forward guidance can help keep longer-term rates lower than they might otherwise be.

AP Economics Writer Martin Crutsinger contributed to this report.

Census head wasn't told about Trump district drawing order

By MIKE SCHNEIDER

U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham testified Wednesday that he wasn't informed ahead of time about President Donald Trump's order seeking to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from the process of redrawing congressional districts.

Dillingham testified during an emergency congressional hearing that he was unaware of anyone from the Census Bureau playing a role in the order that civil rights groups have called unconstitutional. The bureau is collecting the head count data that will be used to redraw the districts.

The Democratic-controlled House Committee on Oversight and Reform held the hearing after Trump issued a memorandum last week seeking to exclude people in the country illegally from being included during the district redrawing process. Civil rights groups have filed multiple lawsuits challenging the memorandum as unconstitutional and an attempt to limit the power of Latinos and immigrants of color.

Democratic lawmakers expressed both dismay and sympathy with Dillingham, a Trump appointee, for being kept out of the loop on such a vital decision involving the bureau.

Opponents of Trump's order say it could discourage immigrants and noncitizens from participating in the once-a-decade head count used for deciding how many congressional seats each state gets in a process known as apportionment. A Pew Research Center analysis shows that the order, if it stands up to challenges, could cost California, Florida and Texas congressional seats.

"That is unbelievable to me that you are the director of the Census and that you didn't hear anything about this before," said U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a Democrat from Florida.

Democratic lawmakers also expressed frustration over their inability to pin Dillingham down on whether the Census Bureau was moving ahead with a request to extend the deadline for turning over the apportionment data past Dec. 31. Sticking to the end-of-the-year deadline would keep the data processing for

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apportionment under Trump's watch should he lose the November election, even though Census Bureau officials have said they need extra time to make up for pandemic-related delays.

"We have, for planning purposes, made assessments and continue to do so," Dillingham said after repeatedly being asked about the deadline extension.

That answer drew a warning from U.S. Rep. Jimmy Gomez, a Democrat from California, that Dillingham's name "would go down in history, if this is the worst census conducted by the United States government."

"You will be responsible," Gomez said.

The committee's chairwoman, U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney, a Democrat from New York, said Trump was trying to "weaponize" the census to hurt immigrants and help Republicans.

"Let me be clear: The president's directive is unconstitutional. It's illegal, and it disregards the precedent set by every other president, beginning with George Washington," Maloney said in opening remarks.

But U.S. Rep. James Comer, the ranking Republican on the committee, said Trump's order just applied to the process of redrawing congressional districts and didn't affect the count or how \$1.5 trillion in federal spending is distributed. The Kentucky Republican said the order was constitutional. Including people living in the U.S. illegally during the apportionment process would undermine "the principle of one person, one vote," he said.

Although the Census Bureau has started examining methodologies for complying with the president's order, that doesn't change its goal of trying to count every person in the U.S., Dillingham said.

The White House has requested an additional \$1 billion for the 2020 census to help with the challenges posed by the pandemic, but the Senate is proposing only \$448 million, Dillingham said.

Concerns about the virus's spread caused the Census Bureau to suspend field operations in March and April and push back deadlines. The deadline for wrapping up the head count moved from the end of July to the end of October, though the bureau on Wednesday removed a reference to ending the count on Oct 31 from its website .

In April, the Census Bureau asked Congress to grant it a delay in the deadline for turning over data used for the process of redrawing congressional districts and legislative districts. If granted, the request would push back the deadline for turning over the data used for apportionment from Dec. 31 to April 30. It also would postpone the deadline for turning over data for redistricting legislative and local districts from March 30 to July 31.

The Democratic-controlled House agreed to the extensions as part of coronavirus relief legislation, but the Republican-controlled Senate has yet to do so

Outside experts worry that the extra funding requested by the White House signals an abandonment of the delay requests and is an attempt to speed up the count so that the numbers-crunching process for apportionment is conducted on Trump's watch and not a new administration should the president lose the election to presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

Last year, Trump issued an order to gather citizenship data on U.S. residents through administrative records after the U.S. Supreme Court blocked his administration's effort to add a citizenship question to the 2020 census form. Trump's order last week showed what the administration's true purpose was in trying to obtain citizenship information, said Gomez, the Democratic lawmaker.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>.

Guatemala burying dozens of unidentified COVID-19 dead

By SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Guatemalan hospitals say they have had to bury dozens of COVID-19 victims who have never been identified, and one hospital is creating archives in hopes that once the pandemic passes, their relatives will come looking for them.

Workers at one of the country's largest public hospitals have started photographing patients who arrive alone and too ill to give their personal details. Those who die unidentified are placed in body bags with

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transparent windows over the faces in case relatives finally arrive.

Protocols that call for rapidly burying the dead during a pandemic only make the situation more difficult, officials say.

The government has reported more than 47,000 confirmed infections and more 1,800 deaths nationwide.

The first of 63 unidentified dead at the San Juan de Dios Hospital, one of the capital's largest, died April 25. She was in her 20s and was buried the same day.

Byron Fuentes, director of the Public Health Ministry's Public Cemetery Administration, said that so far no one has come forward seeking any of the 41 men and 22 women they have buried, identified only as "XX."

The hospital declined to comment on how it handles those who die unidentified.

At Roosevelt Hospital, another of Guatemala's largest, Dr. Luis Chávez, head of pathology, said staffers have been looking for ways to help relatives eventually identify the dead.

They started using body bags with windows with the hope that relatives arriving any time before burial could identify someone, because for health reasons, the bags can't be opened, Chávez said.

"We had a case some weeks ago of a person who arrived in taxi," he said. "It was a woman. They admitted her to the hospital and she died. She was taken to the morgue as XX." He said hospital workers broke protocol to wait two days and fortunately relatives arrived.

They were shown a photograph taken through the window in her body bag and identified her, he said.

The hospital started using a refrigerated trailer to hold bodies if relatives can't arrive in the six hours the protocols allow for claiming a body after death.

No hospitals appear to be taking advantage of a national identity database that contains the fingerprints of anyone with a national identity card. A registry spokeswoman said a search of the National Register of Persons would only be possible with an order from a judge, prosecutors or forensic medicine officials.

One death certificate viewed by The Associated Press showed the person identified only as "XX XX, XX XX," with the gender and an estimated age. For cause of death it listed acute respiratory distress syndrome and COVID-19.

For now the unidentified COVID-19 victims are buried in a designated area deep in the capital's Verbena Cemetery. Surrounded by trees and near a settlement of improvised housing, unadorned graves are simply marked with a number.

For relatives who may one day seek out their loved ones, there is little to go on.

Officials estimate an age, record the gender and the hospital where they arrived. Relatives would have to provide information to match those limited details, said Fuentes, the cemeteries chief. Even then confirmation would be complicated.

"The law establishes that when someone dies from a quarantined illness, they can't be exhumed," he said. "The same law gives us an exception, but it is on a judge's order, the judge would be the one responsible."

"Since we stated to bury, we have not received any requests from anyone looking for a relative," Fuentes said.

Confirmed deaths from the coronavirus in the US hit 150,000, by far the highest toll in the world

NEW YORK (AP) — Confirmed deaths from the coronavirus in the US hit 150,000, by far the highest toll in the world.

2020's final Mars mission poised for blastoff from Florida

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The summer's third and final mission to Mars — featuring NASA's most elaborate life-hunting rover — is on the verge of liftoff.

The rover Perseverance will follow China's rover-orbiter combo and a United Arab Emirates orbiter, both launched last week. It will take the spacecraft seven months to reach Mars after traveling 300 million miles.

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Once on the surface, Perseverance will scrounge for evidence of past microscopic life in an ancient lakebed, and gather the most promising rock samples for future pickup. NASA is teaming up with the European Space Agency to return the samples to Earth around 2031.

This unprecedented effort will involve multiple launches and spacecraft — and cost more than \$8 billion. “We don’t know if life existed there or not. But we do know that Mars at one point in its history was habitable,” NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said on the eve of launch.

The U.S. remains the only country to land successfully at Mars. If all goes well next February, Perseverance will become the ninth U.S. spacecraft to operate on the Martian surface.

First things first, though: Good flying weather is forecast for United Launch Alliance’s Atlas V rocket. The Denver-based rocket maker and its heritage companies have launched all of NASA’s Mars missions, beginning with the Mariners in 1964.

ULA chief executive Tory Bruno said Perseverance is arguably the most sophisticated and most exciting of all the Mars missions.

“We are literally chomping at the bit to take this nuclear-powered dune buggy out to Mars,” he said earlier this week.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Gaps in federal oversight add to virus woes at vets homes

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Big gaps in federal oversight of long-term care facilities for aging veterans may have contributed to rampant coronavirus infections and more than 200 deaths at state-run homes, according to a congressional watchdog agency.

The Government Accountability Office found the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs failed for years to require robust inspections at over 150 state-run veterans homes nationwide and to make sure all deficiencies were rectified, even as it regularly doled out federal dollars for the care.

That could have made a bad situation worse in places like the Soldiers’ Home in Holyoke, Massachusetts, one of 50 veterans homes nationwide where VA is the only federal agency monitoring it, according to GAO. A recent investigation conducted for the state of Massachusetts found the superintendent there was not qualified to run a long-term care facility, and that officials with a state agency were aware of his “shortcomings,” but failed to do enough about it.

By law, VA is barred from making federal payments until facilities meet standards of quality care.

“VA needs to continue to strengthen its oversight,” Sharon Silas, director of health care at GAO, told a House panel Wednesday. Her team is conducting a wider investigation of VA’s oversight into the facilities in light of surging coronavirus deaths.

She said infection control methods such as washing hands and isolating residents — a problem at Holyoke — have been among the most prevalent but also overlooked safeguards at nursing homes.

“It is imperative that VA ensure the health and safety of these veterans,” Silas said.

At least 158 residents of the 278-bed Massachusetts facility, or 57%, have tested positive for COVID-19. At least 76 residents have died. Similar outbreaks have occurred in New Jersey, where more than 80 have died due to COVID-19, as well as Pennsylvania, more than 40, and elsewhere.

In the House hearing, lawmakers heard tales of missed opportunities and disarray in addressing the coronavirus outbreak, including shortages of personal protective equipment and delays in testing. Many of the COVID-19 outbreaks happened after asymptomatic staff unknowingly brought in the virus from hot-spot communities, underscoring the need for robust testing, said Melissa Jackson, president of the National Association of State Veterans Homes.

The VA still does not have capability to conduct testing among all residents and employees who may need one, and state-run homes have been a lower priority in getting federal help.

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"I am not convinced they are prepared to deal with a second wave," said Paul Barabani, a former director of the Massachusetts veterans home who is now an advocate for the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition.

Still when pressed on who's in charge of ensuring quality care, the answers were vague.

"That is something we have not discussed," said Jackson, when asked if her group would support the VA taking greater control. "Any death of any veteran is a tragedy and we all need to learn ... any investigation will benefit all of us."

"We respect the autonomy of the states," replied Dr. Teresa Boyd, a VA assistant undersecretary for health.

Florida Rep. Neal Dunn, the top Republican on the House Veterans Affairs health panel, pointed out that these are state veterans nursing homes and said the states, not the VA, have the ultimate responsibility for management..

"That said, the VA undoubtedly has a special relationship with the state veterans homes and ... given the unique circumstances, now is a good time for us to reevaluate that relationship," he said.

Lawmakers said they found it troubling that GAO urged VA more than a year ago to address problems of lax oversight, but got little response. VA now says it is seeking to speed up some of the fixes, which could take up to two years.

"As it stands now, I have to wonder: how many lives could have been saved at state veterans homes during this pandemic if there had been stronger, more consistent oversight on the part of VA?" said Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., who chairs the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Boyd insisted that VA has no control over state-run facilities. She said that as early as March VA was holding town halls, providing informational checklists and other guidance to the veterans homes and ultimately sent hundreds of VA doctors and nurses to assist the state facilities.

In contrast to those facilities, nursing homes fully operated by VA have had few infections after it early on imposed lockdowns and other safeguards to keep the virus out of facilities.

Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif., who heads the House Veterans Affairs subcommittee on health, called the disparities unacceptable. "We have a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that residents of state veterans homes are afforded similar access to safe, high-quality care and protections during this pandemic," she said.

About 40,000 residents of long-term care facilities nationwide, both veteran and non-veteran, have died of COVID-19—accounting for an estimated 40% of all coronavirus deaths in the U.S. But it's not known how many of these happened at state-run veterans homes because not all of them are required to report coronavirus infection and death rates to VA.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services provides oversight for about two-thirds of state-run veterans homes that receive Medicare or Medicaid payments.

According to GAO, VA was lax with inspections and allowed a contractor to classify potential safety problems at veterans homes that were seen as "minimal harm" as a recommendation, rather than a deficiency. VA also allowed the contractor to grant on-site corrections so a veterans home could avoid a formal citation. VA said Wednesday it would change their practices.

"At the end of the day, if the VA is not doing its job of inspections and oversight, we're going to lose more lives," Brownley said.

VA pays over \$1 billion each year to state-run facilities to care for 20,000 of the nation's veterans, representing over half of the 39,000 veterans that receive VA-funded nursing home care.

US is expected to report a record-breaking economic plunge

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Having endured what was surely a record-shattering slump last quarter, the U.S. economy faces a dim outlook as a resurgent coronavirus intensifies doubts about any sustained recovery the rest of the year.

A huge plunge in consumer spending as people stayed home and avoided shopping, traveling or gathering in crowds as the virus raged is estimated to have sent the economy sinking at a roughly 32% annual

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rate in the April-June quarter. That would be more than triple the previous worst quarterly economic fall, a 10% drop set in 1958. Depressed activity in such areas as business investment, home construction and government spending also likely contributed to the worst quarterly contraction on records dating to 1947.

On Thursday, the government will issue its first of three estimates of economic activity, as measured by the gross domestic product, for the April-June quarter.

So dizzying was the contraction last quarter that most analysts expect the economy to manage a sharp bounce-back in the current July-September quarter, perhaps of as much as 17% or higher on an annual basis. Yet with the rate of confirmed coronavirus cases now rising in a majority of states, more businesses being forced to pull back on re-openings and the Republican Senate proposing to scale back the government's aid to the unemployed, the economy could worsen in the months ahead.

The Trump administration is betting against that outcome in asserting that the economy will undergo a V-shaped recovery in which last quarter's plunge would be followed by an impressive rebound in the current quarter — a hoped-for dose of good news that would be reported in late October, not long before Election Day.

Yet many economists are talking about a different letter of the alphabet. Noting that the economy can't fully recover until the pandemic is defeated or a vaccine is widely available, they envision a W-shaped scenario, in which a rebound in the current quarter would be followed by a sustained period of tepid growth or even outright recession.

"The markdowns are coming because of the clear economic damage the virus is doing," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, who said he believes the economy is losing jobs this month after two months of gains.

"We are going in reverse here," Zandi said.

Analysts warn that the outlook could darken still further if Congress fails to enact enough financial aid to replace the expiring \$600-a-week federal boost in unemployment benefits or provide sufficient help for businesses and state and local governments. Senate Republicans released a \$1 trillion proposal on Monday that falls far short of a \$3 trillion measure the House has passed, leaving an enormous gap for Democrats and Republicans to bridge as some elements of Congress' earlier emergency relief programs run out.

Recent reports sketch a cautionary picture of the economy, with weekly applications for unemployment benefits still topping 1 million and consumer confidence falling sharply, with big declines in Michigan, Florida, Texas and California, all of which suffered a resurgence in confirmed virus cases.

Yet in a more hopeful sign, sales of new and previously owned homes have been rising after sharp declines in the spring, thanks to ultra-low mortgage rates. And it was reported Wednesday that the number of Americans signing contracts to buy homes jumped 16.6% in June after a record 44% gain in May.

Economists regard increased government aid as essentially a stop-gap action to keep the recession from deepening further. The most critical need, they agree, is to control the virus, most likely through a vaccine that most likely won't be widely available until next year.

"If you tell me what will happen to the virus, I will tell you what will happen to the economy," said Sung Won Sohn, a business and economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "At the moment we are seeing rollbacks and a slowing in activity" because of the upsurge in virus cases.

Sohn noted that the economy needed 6½ years to regain the ground it had lost in the 2007-2009 Great Recession. This time, he said, the recovery will likely take even longer.

The government support has been intended in large part to sustain households and businesses — from struggling jobless workers to people facing eviction from apartments to shop owners at risk of bankruptcy. Yet even though the government has spent the colossal sum of roughly \$3 trillion with more to come, and the Federal Reserve has cut borrowing rates to record lows, the benefits may ease only some of the damage.

Consider Sara Farish, who had to close her inn on Orcas Island, north of Seattle, between March and June. With the inn limited to 50% capacity by local orders, revenue remains well off the Outlook Inn's normal levels. Thirty-five weddings that had been booked for this summer have been canceled.

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Farish worries about what will happen if the inn is forced to close again if there's a resurgence of the virus in Washington state. It's not just a short-term problem; the inn needs to be highly profitable in the summer to cover its expenses during the slower months.

She received a Paycheck Protection Program loan and a Small Business Administration disaster loan. But her bank, apparently worried about the risk of loans going bad, canceled her line of credit.

"We're trying to do everything we can, day by day, to keep the health of our business," Farish said.

AP Business Writer Joyce M. Rosenberg in New York contributed to this report.

As crime surges on his watch, Trump warns of Biden's America

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

President Donald Trump is painting a dystopian portrait of what Joe Biden's America might look like, asserting crime and chaos would ravage communities should the former vice president win the White House in November.

Left unsaid: A recent surge in violent crime in several American cities has happened on his watch.

"Irony is way down the list of things that President Trump worries about," said Robert Spitzer, a political scientist at the State University of New York College at Cortland whose research focuses on gun politics and the American presidency. "He's turning to the old playbook — appeal to the fears of Americans and then associate those fears with the Democratic Party, specifically Joe Biden."

Trump's attempt to cast Biden in that light follows a pattern seen throughout his presidency, where he attempts to shift responsibility, often to President Barack Obama, even more than three years after taking office.

With echoes of Richard Nixon's law-and-order campaign in 1968 — when American streets were rife with racial protests and Nixon campaigned vowing to crack down and restore order in an appeal tailored to white voters — Trump is trying to energize his conservative base while also making an appeal to a small patch of undecided voters by posing the question: Which man will keep you safer?

By leaning hard on select scenes of violence, Trump is banking on that unrest continuing. But the protests could wane. Violent crime around the U.S. has been on a downward trajectory for the better part of the last three decades.

Lanae Erickson, a senior vice president for social policy and politics at the center-left think tank Third Way, said Trump's attempt to use the Nixon playbook and tap into anxieties about crime is odd given that, unlike Nixon in 1968, Trump is already in the White House.

"Trump is the incumbent, so if bad things are happening right now, they get blamed on him," Erickson said. "I don't know how he can persuade voters that it's Joe Biden's fault."

Trump has tried to paint Biden as captive to his party's most liberal elements, who've called for dramatically reshaping policing in America.

His campaign has aired advertising in battleground states showing a woman calling police for help as an intruder breaks into her home and getting a voice recording informing her that, because the police have been defunded, no one is available to take her call.

The Republican president recently tweeted a warning to "Suburban Housewives of America" that "Biden will destroy your neighborhood and your American dream." He sought to amplify the message to "people living their Suburban Lifestyle Dream" by noting in another tweet on Wednesday that he recently revoked an Obama-era housing regulation designed to eliminate racial disparities in the suburbs.

"With Biden, our country wouldn't have a chance," Trump told reporters Wednesday..

Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and New York have seen spikes in violent crime and homicides this year. And Trump has dispatched federal agents or announced plans to send agents to Albuquerque, New Mexico, Chicago and Kansas City, Missouri, to try to stop the unrest. He's also sent federal agents to Portland, Oregon, to try to forcibly quell protests around the federal courthouse.

Trump, who has repeatedly fumed that cities hit by crimes spikes are all led by Democrats, has tried to

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argue that Biden, at least implicitly, would condone unchecked violence.

Last week, Trump said he'd like to flood Chicago, which has seen a 51% increase in homicides and a 47% increase in shootings compared with the same time last year, with "50,000 or 75,000 people" and "solve it like you wouldn't believe."

But Trump said he wouldn't do it because of a lack of cooperation from the city's leadership.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot said Trump, despite his tough talk, has shown little interest in addressing a central issue driving the violence in the city: About 60% of firearms recovered in crimes committed in Chicago were purchased outside Illinois.

"We need you, as President, to take a leadership role in enacting meaningful and common-sense gun legislation, which you so far have refused to do," Lightfoot, a Democrat, wrote to Trump last week.

At the center of Trump's attempts to cast Biden as weak on crime is pushing the unfounded notion Biden wants to defund the police.

In an interview with "Fox News Sunday" host Chris Wallace, Trump incorrectly cited a charter between Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., that was signed as part of the Unity Task Force, an effort to find common ground between the more moderate Biden backers and Sanders' liberal supporters.

But the task force's recommendations for the Democratic platform doesn't mention defunding police. Trump was unable to show Wallace language in the task force document that said as much.

Still, Trump campaign spokesperson Hogan Gidley hammered on the point during a Monday call to update grassroots activists on strategy.

"He has consistently been silent in the midst of communities devolving into lawlessness," Gidley said of Biden. "The only time he does pop up out of his hidy-hole, he says we're going to defund the police."

Peter Scharf, a criminologist at Louisiana State University School of Public Health who has advised the New Orleans Police Department's reform efforts, said Biden's stance on policing is complicated and one Trump will look to further muddy.

Biden, as a senator, played a key role in writing the 1994 crime bill — tough-on-crime legislation that critics say fueled mass incarceration.

During the primary, fellow Democrats criticized Biden over the bill. His criminal justice proposal reverses some key provisions of the crime bill. He has apologized for supporting some 1990s policies he now recognizes were harmful, such as sentencing disparities between crack and powder cocaine.

While Biden doesn't support defunding police departments, the push in some left-leaning big cities to overhaul police budgets could put him in a difficult position, Scharf said. The majority of Seattle's nonpartisan City Council, for example, has publicly embraced calls to cut the city's 2021 police budget by half.

That makes it crucial Biden become more proactive in laying out his vision for reinvention of the modern police force to prevent Trump's anti-police jabs from sticking, Scharf added.

"You don't want this to turn into your Willie Horton moment," said Scharf, referring to the effort by George H.W. Bush's 1988 campaign to tie Democratic Gov. Michael Dukakis to a convict who raped a woman during a weekend furlough. "If he's not proactive, Trump could turn this into Biden's Achilles' heel."

Iran launches underground ballistic missiles during exercise

By AMIR VAHDAT and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard launched underground ballistic missiles Wednesday as part of an exercise involving a mock-up American aircraft carrier in the Strait of Hormuz, highlighting its network of subterranean missile sites.

Although state television documentaries have focused on operations at underground bases, all have avoided showing geographic details revealing their locations. Wednesday's launch from what appears to be central Iran's desert plateau may have changed that amid heightened tensions between Tehran and the U.S. over its tattered nuclear deal with world powers and as economic pressures grow.

"We have carried out the launch of ballistic missiles from the depths of the earth for the first time," Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Guard's aerospace division, told state TV. "That means without utilizing conventional launchpads, the buried missiles suddenly rip out of the earth and hit their targets

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precisely.”

Drone footage captured by the Guard showed two missiles blasting out from covered positions in the desert early Wednesday morning, with debris flying up into the air in their wake. The Guard did not identify the location of the launch, nor the missiles involved.

The launch, six months after the Guard shot down a Ukrainian jetliner and killed all 176 people on board, appeared geared toward demonstrating the strength of its missile program to a domestic audience, missile expert Melissa Hanham said. The above-ground footage shown on state television, coupled with investigative techniques, make it possible to locate the site, she said.

“Once you find the silo, it’s really not a safe place to keep your missile anymore,” said Hanham, who works as the deputy director of an Austria-based group called the Open Nuclear Network.

Since its bloody 1980s war with Iraq, which saw both nations fire missiles on cities, Iran has developed its ballistic missile program as a deterrent, especially as a U.N. arms embargo prevents it from buying high-tech weapons systems. The underground tunnels help protect those weapons, including liquid-fueled missiles that can only be fueled for short periods of time, Hanham said.

“What they’re trying to do is increase the survivability of their missile forces,” she said. “They feel that their missile forces are exposed and that they could be taken out preemptively. By building this elaborate tunnel scheme, they’re trying to increase the survivability.”

Iran also could have used missiles buried in hermetically sealed canisters for the launches without the need for a major underground base, said Michael Elleman, a missile expert and the director of the nonproliferation and nuclear policy program at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Solid-fuel propellant could allow such missiles to be buried for years, he said.

“Presumably, these missiles can be launched remotely, without a launch crew on site,” Elleman said. “Perhaps the launch crew is nearby, and has operational control of several to a handful of missiles.”

However, he said he suspected the U.S. likely knew where the missiles were buried.

“Maybe not all of them, but a large percentage,” Elleman said. “If so, they are vulnerable to pre-launch strikes during a crisis.”

The drill, called “Great Prophet 14,” also sends a message to the United States. Iran has been firing at a fake aircraft carrier resembling America’s Nimitz-class carriers towed out to the strait by a tugboat. Adm. Ali Reza Tangsiri, the Guard’s naval chief, said its armed drones attacked the bridge of the fake carrier Wednesday, the semiofficial Tasnim news agency reported.

During Wednesday’s drills, footage showed a missile striking a target resembling an American missile defense system known as a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD.

Tasnim published a graphic overnight that altered the image of an American carrier into the shape of a casket with a set of crosshairs on it, with a caption quoting Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei pledging to seek revenge for the U.S. drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in January.

The drill — and the American response to it — underline the lingering threat of military conflict between Iran and the U.S. after a series of escalating incidents last year led to the January drone strike. Tehran responded to that strike by firing ballistic missiles that wounded dozens of American forces in Iraq.

While the coronavirus pandemic has engulfed both Iran and the U.S. for months, there has been a growing confrontation as America argues to extend the yearslong U.N. weapons embargo on Tehran that is due to expire in October. A recent incident over Syria involving an American jet fighter approaching an Iranian passenger plane also has renewed tensions.

Economic pressure from the collapse of the nuclear deal, caused by President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrawing America from the accord, has seen Iran’s rial currency drastically drop in value. At the time of the deal in 2015, \$1 cost 32,000 rial. Today, \$1 is worth some 235,000 rials.

Ballistic missile fire detected from the drill Tuesday resulted in American troops being put on alert at Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and Al-Udeid Air Base, the forward headquarters of the U.S. military’s Central Command in Qatar, the military said. Troops briefly sought cover during that time.

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Both bases are hundreds of kilometers (miles) away from where Iran placed the replica aircraft carrier in the strait, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all oil traded passes.

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Oregon governor says US agents will start leaving Portland

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Federal agents who have clashed with protesters in Portland, Oregon, will begin a “phased withdrawal” from the city, Gov. Kate Brown said Wednesday.

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said in a statement the plan negotiated with Brown over the last 24 hours includes a “robust presence” of Oregon State Police in the downtown of the state’s largest city.

“State and local law enforcement will begin securing properties and streets, especially those surrounding federal properties, that have been under nightly attack for the past two months,” Wolf said.

Agents with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement will begin leaving the city’s downtown area on Thursday, Brown said. Federal Protective Service agents — who are always posted at the Mark O. Hatfield Federal Courthouse — will work alongside state police to guard the exterior of the courthouse and a limited number of other federal agents will remain inside the courthouse, she said.

Wolf said that although federal agents will leave the downtown area, they will maintain a presence in Portland “until we are assured that the Hatfield Federal Courthouse and other federal properties will no longer be attacked and that the seat of justice in Portland will remain secure.” If conditions in Portland “improve significantly,” then the U.S. government will reassess its staffing levels in the city, he said.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler applauded the end of what he called “an illegal occupation” in a lengthy Twitter post, saying the news came on the same day that the City Council would vote on whether to refer a major police reform initiative to voters in November.

“The federal occupation of our community has brought a new kind of fear to our streets. Federal agents nearly killed a demonstrator, and their presence has led to increased violence and vandalism in our downtown core,” he said. “The work of reform deserves our community’s full and complete attention, and I know that Portlanders will stay engaged.”

Before departing Wednesday for a trip to Texas, President Donald Trump insisted federal troops would not leave Portland until local authorities “secured their city.”

“Either they’re gonna clean up Portland soon, or the federal government is going up, and we’re gonna do it for them,” he said.

The announcement was an abrupt about-face from just two days earlier, when the U.S. government said it might send more federal agents to Portland instead.

The U.S. Marshals Service and Department of Homeland Security had been weighing this week whether to send in more agents. The marshals were taking steps to identify up to 100 additional personnel who could go in case they were needed to relieve or supplement the deputy marshals who work in Oregon, spokesman Drew Wade said.

Brown, who worked with Vice President Mike Pence on the withdrawal, cautioned Wednesday that the departure of the Border Protection and immigration agents may not immediately resolve the conflict at the courthouse. Protests have roiled Portland for more than two months since the death of George Floyd, a Black man who died after being pinned at the neck by a white Minneapolis police officer.

Like many other protests nationwide, they sought to highlight and call for an end to racial injustice, but they had increasingly focused on federal property even before the U.S. agents arrived.

“I have grown increasingly concerned at the nightly confrontation between local community members and federal officers. We need to recognize that the protests in Portland are not solely about the federal presence,” Brown said.

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Many protesters want to see the Portland Police Bureau defunded and are angry that officers used tear gas on protesters multiple times before the federal government arrived and tensions escalated further. Brown said the departure of the federal agents was a chance to address that anger and begin to make improvements in community policing.

"I will work with community leaders and elected officials to take bolder action to reform our police practices — including those of the Portland Police Bureau. We need to get this right," she said.

The nightly Portland protests often spiral into violence as demonstrators target the U.S. courthouse with rocks, fireworks and laser pointers. Federal agents respond with tear gas, so-called less-lethal ammunition and arrests.

Protesters have tried almost every night to tear down a fence erected to protect the building, set fires in the street and hurled fireworks, Molotov cocktails and bricks, rocks and bottles at the agents inside. Authorities this week reinforced the fence by putting concrete highway barriers around it.

Demonstrators near the courthouse Wednesday were met before dawn with tear gas, pepper balls and impact munitions fired by agents, the Oregonian newspaper reported.

Lemire reported from Washington.

Follow Gillian Flaccus on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/gflaccus> and Andrew Selsky at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>.

Plush toys, jewelry, dance lessons — Broadway's side hustles

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Broadway seamstress Amy Micallef hasn't put her talent on hold while theaters are shut. She's been making plush toys — unusual plush toys.

Micallef, who has worked in the wardrobe departments of "Hamilton," "Waitress" and "Frozen," makes gleeful representations of COVID-19, complete with a pair of eyes and faux fur.

Each one goes for \$23 and she encourages buyers to unleash their anger on her creations — be merciless against a virus that has caused so much loss and disruption.

"Sometimes you need to throw something against the wall, you need to step on something. Do you want to run that thing over with your car? Honey, be my guest," she said. "Here is here is your chance for sweet, sweet vengeance."

While stages remain dark, Broadway workers like Micallef are finding ways to keep the lights on at home with side hustles. Some teach dance. Some offer music lessons or acting tips via Zoom. Some make jewelry or prints of their art. Some sell skincare products or handmade journals.

"Actors' normal side gigs are catering and even those jobs don't exist. No one's hosting parties," said Jeanna de Waal, who is to play the title role in the musical "Diana." "A lot of people are having to learn new side hustles and utilize any skill that they've got to pay the bills."

The survival picture is certain to get darker when the government's \$600-a-week pandemic unemployment compensation program expires this month. Unemployment checks in New York top out at \$504 a week but most people get a fraction of that, not enough to get by in an expensive city. The relief group The Actors Fund has distributed more than \$14 million in assistance to some 12,000 people, but more is needed. The city doesn't expect shows to restart until at least January.

"I can't say this any clearer: The arts and the entertainment sector as a whole is on the verge of the biggest existential crisis we've ever had," said Adam Krauthamer, the president of Local 802, which represents musicians. "We're on the edge of the cliff."

He said many of his 7,000 members are taking a hard look at their careers and may not return to Broadway orchestra pits or symphony spaces. Krauthamer warns the sound of New York may soon be very different without help.

"If the right politicians and philanthropists and people who help the arts are not engaged to put together

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a program that will save culture and the arts in New York City, it's going to change as we know it forever."

Ali Solomon's career was finally soaring when the pandemic hit in mid-March. Like many Broadway artists, she had a patchwork of jobs: She was an associate choreographer for the off-Broadway show "Trevor: The Musical," the tour choreographer for "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and was helping a show in development. All were stopped — but rent wasn't.

"You're at the top of your game after working for so many years and now to go find a job in another industry, where do you start? You're at the bottom of the totem pole. You're lucky if you'll make minimum wage," she said.

To make ends meet, she is a skincare consultant for Rodan and Fields and teaches — both in-person at a studio on Long Island and virtually for PassDoor, an online dance studio created by Broadway veterans.

"I'm starting to add little bits of income. None of it will compare to what I was making before. But it's something and luckily I've been able to save. But the fear, though, is that nest egg that you've been saving is quickly going to diminish because the cost of living is so high."

Living with easy access to the theater district has always been key to Broadway's talent pool. But those apartments often command the highest rent. So some workers are letting their leases lapse, moving out and biding their time to when the shows restart, raising fears of a talent drain.

"I already know tons of people who've left the city," said Solomon. "It doesn't mean that they're never coming back, but they've given up their homes. And they're like, 'Until we have a reason to come back, there's no need to be here.'"

De Waal has gone from acting to hiring. She's put her focus on Broadway Weekends, a company she and her sister, Dani, started in 2017 offering in-person theater camps for adults. Following the shutdown, she decided to focus online and recruited fellow performers. "All my friends were unemployed. So it was very easy to ask around."

Broadway Weekends now offers 20-30 classes a week on Zoom, charging \$39 a month for unlimited access. Enrollment has rocketed to over 7,000. De Waal is paying her teachers and is working to establish a non-profit version and an educational arm for school kids.

Jenny Florkowski, a veteran at "Wicked," crafts jewelry on the side and is also looking to the wider community. She gives away all proceeds from sales of her beaded and friendship bracelets to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Color of Change.

"During this time, a lot of performers feel they've lost their purpose," she said. "It was nice to connect with a lot of people and feel like we were all giving towards something bigger than ourselves."

Broadway producers have donated millions of dollars to emergency funds and one has even reached into her own pocket to employ 70 dancers to lead free virtual dance-exercise session classes.

Jenna Segal, the co-producer of such shows as "Hadestown" and "What the Constitution Means to Me," launched Get In Shape Grrl! on Facebook and has expanded it to an app, attracting some 15,000 members.

"I just thought to myself, 'Wouldn't it be fun to bring Broadway to people who are sad because the season was just about to open? Let's do something where they can participate and we can keep dancers employed,'" said Segal.

Mackenzie Warren, a dancer and instructor, has turned to a different art form — offering prints of her lovely watercolor floral arrangements. She says it's another way to tell a story and bring light to people. But she also hits a heartbreaking note for theater lovers.

"I've gotten to perform some dream shows, I've gotten to perform on Broadway. I'm so grateful and I hope that my career is not over in that area. But if it is, I can look back with gratitude and say, 'OK, well, what's the next adventure? How can I adapt?'"

The pandemic has both revealed the creativity of the Broadway community and its fragility. Micallef, the plush toy maker, immediately donated masks for frontline workers when the virus struck. But now her side hustle is barely enough to keep her in yarn. She still has faith.

"I have the benefit of knowing two very important things that I think most people may not believe or may not truly understand — No. 1: This will end. It will. I promise it will," she said. "And second, there is

good on the other side.”

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

Israeli artist takes aim at Netanyahu with life-size statue

By ODED BALILTY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Residents of Tel Aviv woke up Wednesday to a jarring sight: a pop-up exhibit of a life-sized statue of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu enjoying a lavish meal by himself at a sprawling table, in a sendup of Leonardo da Vinci’s “The Last Supper.”

The installation, displayed in Tel Aviv’s central Rabin Square, is the latest twist in a summer of demonstrations against Netanyahu. In recent weeks, thousands of people have taken to the streets, calling on Netanyahu to resign, angry over what they say is his bungled response to an economic crisis caused by the coronavirus and depicting him as a hedonist out of touch with common people.

Many critics accuse him of trampling over Israel’s democratic traditions as he clings to power while on trial for corruption charges and pushes for emergency powers under the guise of battling the coronavirus crisis.

In an interview earlier this week from his studio outside Tel Aviv, artist Itay Zalait said the installation, made of polymer materials and painted in lively colors, is meant to symbolize the “last supper of the Israeli democracy.”

In a Facebook post, Netanyahu denounced the display, saying there was no place for incitement and death threats against him, “including the disgraceful threat of crucifixion today in Tel Aviv.”

The 10-meter (11-yard) long table is filled with platters of juicy fruit, wads of cash, empty bottles of liquor and a cigar — a jab at the expensive gifts Netanyahu is accused of improperly accepting from wealthy associates. Netanyahu, appearing pudgy and disheveled in a dark suit and red tie, is seen digging into a large cake — alone amid 12 empty chairs.

“You have the prime minister of Israel sitting in the center of the table and grabbing and sucking all this rich food to himself. Now he’s practically finished this meal and he’s now at the stage of the dessert, which is referring to the last minutes of time we can do something to save Israeli democracy,” Zalait said.

Zalait said he found the imagery particularly poignant at a time when unemployment has skyrocketed and tens of thousands of families are struggling because of the coronavirus restrictions that have battered Israel’s economy.

The message resonated with Tel Aviv resident Sharon Toval.

“Everyone hopes that this is really Bibi’s last supper. The corruption and disgust are suggested by the disgusting abundance of so much food with meat and milk and cream and sweets, Toval said.

It’s not the first time Zalait has taken to life-size art to express his opinion. Two years ago, he erected a statue of Israel’s then-culture minister, Miri Regev, wearing a long white dress and staring into a full-length mirror. The depiction was meant to protest Regev’s calls for legislation requiring artists to show “loyalty” to the state.

Before that, he built a golden statue of Netanyahu to mock what he said was the idolatry of many Israelis toward the longtime leader.

Regev, currently the country’s transportation minister, called Zalait’s latest public exhibit incitement to violence.

“Is someone suggesting that the prime minister’s future be that of the diner at the Last Supper?” she wrote on Twitter. “It’s only a matter of time until there is an exhibit of the gallows and a rope.”

Lawmaker Tamar Zandberg of the leftist Meretz party responded to Regev and others by saying that rather than condemning a work of art, it would be more appropriate for them to denounce the violence their supporters have directed recently against peaceful protesters on the streets.

Islamic holiday Eid comes as families grieve virus victims

By MARIAM FAM Associated Press

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For Marwa Conelly, the upcoming Islamic Eid al-Adha holiday was supposed to be extra celebratory this year — she was looking forward to getting engaged around that time.

Then she lost her father to the coronavirus, and less than 24 hours later her mother, who died unaware her husband, whom she had known since childhood, was gone. Now the thought of spending Eid at their home without them fills Conelly with dread.

"I will miss them," Conelly said. "I just want to go to sleep and wake up to find that the Eid period has passed already."

With the coronavirus ravaging the world, Eid comes as the wounds of the bereaved are raw, and for Muslims in the throes of grief, it can amplify the pain. Many are wrestling with how to navigate its rituals without lost loved ones, as some seek ways to honor the departed during the holiday.

Eid al-Adha, or "Feast of the Sacrifice," commemorates the Quranic tale of the Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God. In Egypt, where the Conellys live, the first day of Eid will be on Friday.

Normally the family has a festive but laid-back routine for the first day of Eid. After Marwa Conelly returns home from the Eid prayer at the mosque, the family would breakfast and then nap before gathering again for more food and television.

There would be joking and teasing: Conelly, 30, would ask about her "Eidiya," the cash gift traditionally handed out to kids during the holiday. Her mom would playfully tell her she was too old for that now, even though they still give her and her sister "Eidiya."

This year she will miss all of it, even the battles over who washes the dishes, and is thinking of staying elsewhere.

Such struggles can ring true across faith communities.

"The holidays are a time we celebrate together and share our rituals and share our worship or our beliefs," said David Kessler, author of "Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief." "And if your loved one has died, their absence is extremely loud during a holiday."

In Iraq, Mohamed, who asked to be identified with just one name due to the sensitivity surrounding the virus, remembers planting kisses on his father's head and hand on Eid as he wished him a happy holiday.

His father died in May. Hospitalized and under quarantine, Mohamed was unable to say goodbye or attend his burial, shortly before the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

"Before, we felt joy during Eid," he said. "Not anymore, not like before."

For Eid al-Adha, Mohamed said, his family is thinking of baking date cookies — a favorite of his dad's — to bring to the neighbors while asking them to pray for him.

"Since my father died, people have been too afraid to visit because of the coronavirus," he said.

Indeed, Kessler said fears of contagion have denied many families the support they could otherwise count on in times of bereavement.

"People who would usually be coming over and bringing casseroles and, you know, sitting at your kitchen table with you didn't do that," he said.

Kessler, who in March launched an online grief support group that has attracted nearly 17,000 members, said religious and nonreligious holidays alike, from Easter and Passover to Mother's Day and Father's Day, have been "very, very intense" for the bereaved.

Besides the loss of loved ones, the pandemic has taken a toll on a sacred mainstay of Islam: the hajj pilgrimage, in which Muslims typically pour into Saudi Arabia before the start of Eid. One of the pillars of the faith, it is required once in the lifetime of each able Muslim, and many people around the globe spend years saving money to afford the journey.

This year the hajj is sharply curtailed due to the coronavirus, with only very limited numbers of those already residing in Saudi Arabia allowed to take part. In one of the rituals, the faithful circle the cube-shaped Kaaba building toward which Muslims around the world pray daily.

Heather Laird, president of the Center for Muslim Mental Health and Islamic Psychology in California, said the hajj has such deep spiritual meaning that losing access to it can be a cause for mourning.

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She cried when she realized she would not be able to make the hajj this year as she had hoped, and wondered if she may never get another chance. She has asked someone close to her to pray with her that the virus is gone by next year.

"I've actually been wanting to go for several years," she said. "I'm just hoping and praying that I have another opportunity."

Some see in Eid a chance for spiritual succor as they remember those lost.

Mostafa Omar of Egypt said his mother had been looking forward to performing the ritual sacrifice of an animal to feed the needy this Eid. After she was felled by COVID-19, the family will carry out that wish.

"It gives me comfort to do what she wanted," Omar said, "to make her happy."

And for Doaa el-Agoze, also in Egypt, it will be the first Eid without a cousin and an uncle lost to the virus and two other relatives who died of other causes. El-Agoze learned of her cousin's death as she was fighting the virus herself and dealing with questions about her own mortality.

For her family, Eid is normally a boisterous affair full of food, chatter, laughter and music: "It feels like we all are kids still."

She doesn't know exactly what this Eid will be like, but she and others want to go to the cemetery to pray through masked mouths for their loved ones.

"We want them to know that even while they are not with us, we will not forget them and that we love them," she said. "I pray that they are spending their Eid in heaven."

Fam reported from Winter Park, Florida

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US officials: Russia behind spread of virus disinformation

By ERIC TUCKER and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials say Russian intelligence officers are spreading disinformation about the coronavirus pandemic through English-language websites, trying to exploit a crisis that America is struggling to contain before the presidential election in November.

Two Russians who have held senior roles in Moscow's military intelligence service known as the GRU have been identified as responsible for a disinformation effort meant to reach American and Western audiences, according to U.S. government officials. They were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity Tuesday.

Russian officials on Wednesday rejected the accusations as "conspiracy theories" and a "persistent phobia." One of the sites singled out by the U.S. posted a response denouncing as "categorically false" the American assertions that it was linked to the Russian military intelligence service or was involved in propaganda.

The information had previously been classified, but U.S. officials said it had been downgraded so they could more freely discuss it. Officials said they were doing so now to sound the alarm about the particular websites and to expose what they say is a clear link between the sites and Russian intelligence.

Between late May and early July, one of the officials said, the websites published about 150 articles about the pandemic response, including coverage aimed either at propping up Russia or denigrating the U.S.

Among the headlines that caught the attention of U.S. officials were "Russia's Counter COVID-19 Aid to America Advances Case for Détente," which suggested that Russia had given urgent and substantial aid to the U.S. to fight the pandemic, and "Beijing Believes COVID-19 is a Biological Weapon," which amplified statements by the Chinese.

The spread of disinformation, including by Russia, is an urgent concern heading into the November vote. U.S. officials want to avoid a repeat of the 2016 contest, when a Russian troll farm launched a covert social media campaign to divide American public opinion and to favor then-candidate Donald Trump over

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Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The U.S. government's chief counterintelligence executive warned in a rare public statement Friday about Russia's continued use of internet trolls to advance their goals.

The pandemic and race relations and protests across the U.S. have offered fertile territory for misinformation or outright falsehoods. Trump himself has come under scrutiny for sharing misinformation about a disproved drug for treating the coronavirus in videos that were taken down by Twitter and Facebook.

Officials did not say whether the effort behind these particular websites was directly related to the November election, though some of the coverage appeared to denigrate Trump's Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, and called to mind Russian efforts in 2016 to exacerbate race relations in America and spread corruption allegations against U.S. political figures.

U.S. officials have warned before about the spread of disinformation tied to the pandemic. But on Tuesday, they went further by singling out a particular information agency that is registered in Russia, InfoRos. It operates a series of websites — InfoRos.ru, Infobrics.org and OneWorld.press — that have leveraged the pandemic to promote anti-Western objectives and to spread disinformation.

Officials say the sites promote their narratives in a sophisticated way that they liken to money laundering, where stories in well-written English — and often with pro-Russian sentiment — are cycled through other news sources to conceal their origin and enhance the legitimacy of the information.

The sites also amplify stories that originate elsewhere, the government officials said.

An email to InfoRos was not immediately returned Tuesday. OneWorld rejected the allegations as "categorically false" in a statement posted Wednesday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the allegations "some kind of a persistent phobia." He said the Russian press was continuing to cover the coronavirus and that there was "no need need to blame objective and quality work of the media."

A headline Tuesday on InfoRos.ru about the unrest roiling American cities read "Chaos in the Blue Cities," accompanying a story that lamented how New Yorkers who grew up under the tough-on-crime approach of former Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg "and have zero street smarts" must now "adapt to life in high-crime urban areas."

Another story carried the headline of "Ukrainian Trap for Biden," and claimed that "Ukraine-gate" — a reference to stories surrounding Biden's son Hunter and his former ties to a Ukraine gas company — "keeps unfolding with renewed vigor."

U.S. officials have identified two of the people believed to be behind the sites' operations. The men, Denis Valeryevich Tyurin and Aleksandr Gennadyevich Starunskiy, have previously held leadership roles at InfoRos but have also served in a GRU unit specializing in military psychological intelligence and maintain deep contacts there, the officials said.

InfoRos and One World's ties to the Russian state have attracted scrutiny in the past from European disinformation analysts.

In 2019, a European Union task force that studies disinformation campaigns identified One World as "a new addition to the pantheon of Moscow-based disinformation outlets." The task force noted that One World's content often parrots the Russian state agenda on issues including the war in Syria.

A report published last month by a second, nongovernmental organization, Brussels-based EU DisinfoLab, examined links between InfoRos and One World to Russian military intelligence. The researchers identified technical clues tying their websites to Russia and identified some financial connections between InfoRos and the government.

"InfoRos is evolving in a shady grey zone, where regular information activities are mixed with more controversial actions that could be quite possibly linked to the Russian state's information operations," the report's authors concluded.

On its English-language Facebook page, InfoRos describes itself as an "Information agency: world through the eyes of Russia."

Litvinova reported from Moscow. Associated Press writer David Klepper in Providence, Rhode Island,

contributed to this report.

VIRUS DIARY: For these kids, no adventures to choose

By BEN NUCKOLS AP Sports Writer

BURKE, Va. (AP) — On a recent car ride, my sons, Billy and Jimmy, were discussing an interactive “Minecraft” show on Netflix that allowed them to choose the direction of the story. I said it sounded like a “Choose Your Own Adventure” book, an artifact of my 1980s childhood.

Then Billy, who’s 10 years old, surprised me. He had heard of “Choose Your Own Adventure.”

“My friend had one. He said I could read it when he was done,” Billy said. He paused, long enough for me to know what he would say next.

“That was right before the virus,” he said.

For my kids, 2020 has been the opposite of a choose-your-own-adventure story. Their options have dwindled. Windows of opportunity have appeared to crack open, only to slam in their faces.

As the debate rages over whether U.S. schools should reopen amid the coronavirus pandemic, the way Billy learned about “Choose Your Own Adventure” demonstrates the intangible harm that comes with kids being away from school. A rising fifth-grader like him can learn the curriculum virtually, complete worksheets and projects, and take tests. But nothing can replace the knowledge and experience he gains from being around his peers five days a week and sharing their intellectual curiosity.

“I hate virtual school,” Billy said.

It’s not the school part he hates. It’s the virtual part.

Our school district, in Fairfax County, Virginia, was the first in the Washington area to commit to a hybrid model for the fall, allowing parents to choose between full-time virtual school or two days a week of in-person instruction. When I told Billy about the two-day-a-week plan, he was overjoyed — because he had assumed he wouldn’t get to go to school at all.

Ultimately, he was right. The school board abandoned the hybrid model last week. I told the boys at the breakfast table. Billy slapped his hand against his thigh and walked away in disgust.

It was the latest cruel twist in my kids’ pandemic lives, another adventure they can’t choose.

Little League baseball, their favorite sport, teased the possibility of a much-delayed spring season for months before announcing its cancellation. The fall season is supposed to start in August, with mask-wearing and social-distancing requirements similar to what we’ve seen in major league dugouts.

After I told the boys they could play, the league blindsided us with a new restriction: Kids have to be 7 years old by Aug. 31 to participate this year. No exceptions.

Jimmy turns 7 in mid-September. Most of his would-be teammates can play this fall, but he can’t. When I gave him the news, he sobbed uncontrollably.

This time last year, Billy was coming off the most exhilarating month of his life, his first time on a Little League All-Star team. Both boys were going to camp five days a week. Billy learned to fish. Jimmy played soccer and basketball and spotted bald eagles nesting above a lake.

This year, they wake up and go straight to the TV, their tablets or a video-game console while my wife and I work. Sometimes we can do something with them to break up the monotony. Sometimes we can’t.

The boys understand the need to sacrifice and be vigilant about preventing the spread of the virus. They have accepted disappointment while mostly maintaining their good cheer.

But the sacrifices are profound for them, much more so than me giving up live music, sports or travel for a year or two. They’ll never be in fourth and fifth grade, or kindergarten and first grade, again. They feel the losses more deeply, and the uncertainty gnaws at them in ways I can’t see. I know the pandemic will affect their mental health and their view of the world for years or decades to come, and I feel powerless.

If the only adventure they can choose is to push a button on a remote control, then we are failing them.

Virus Diary, an occasional feature, showcases the coronavirus pandemic through the eyes of AP journalists around the world. Ben Nuckols is a sports writer for The Associated Press based in Washington.

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Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/APBenNuckols>

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 30, the 212th day of 2020. There are 154 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 30, 1945, the Portland class heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis, having just delivered components of the atomic bomb to Tinian in the Mariana Islands, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine; only 317 out of nearly 1,200 men survived.

On this date:

In 1619, the first representative assembly in America convened in Jamestown in the Virginia Colony.

In 1792, the French national anthem "La Marseillaise" (lah mar-seh-YEHZ'), by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, was first sung in Paris by troops arriving from Marseille.

In 1844, the New York Yacht Club was founded.

In 1908, the first round-the-world automobile race, which had begun in New York in February, ended in Paris with the drivers of the American car, a Thomas Flyer, declared the winners over teams from Germany and Italy.

In 1916, German saboteurs blew up a munitions plant on Black Tom, an island near Jersey City, New Jersey, killing about a dozen people.

In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a measure making "In God We Trust" the national motto, replacing "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of many, one).

In 1960, the recently founded American Football League saw its first pre-season game, in which the Boston Patriots defeated the host Buffalo Bills 28-7.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a measure creating Medicare, which began operating the following year.

In 1975, former Teamsters union president Jimmy Hoffa disappeared in suburban Detroit; although presumed dead, his remains have never been found.

In 1980, Israel's Knesset passed a law reaffirming all of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state.

In 2001, Robert Mueller (MUHL'-ur), President George W. Bush's choice to head the FBI, promised the Senate Judiciary Committee that if confirmed, he would move forcefully to fix problems at the agency. (Mueller became FBI director on Sept. 4, 2001, a week before the 9/11 attacks.)

In 2003, President George W. Bush took personal responsibility for the first time for using discredited intelligence in his State of the Union address, but predicted he would be vindicated for going to war against Iraq.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama toured Chrysler and General Motors assembly plants, where he offered an upbeat assessment of the U.S. auto industry a year after the big government bailouts. A 12-year-old Florida girl was seriously injured when she plunged about 100 feet to the ground from an amusement park free-fall ride in Lake Delton, Wisconsin. (Nets and air bags that were supposed to catch Teagan Marti (TEE'-gehn MAHR'-tee) had not been deployed.)

Five years ago: The Associated Press released the results of a five-month independent study it had commissioned which found that athletes competing in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro would be swimming and boating in waters so rife with sewage bacteria and viruses, they faced the risk of becoming seriously ill. The Afghan Taliban confirmed the death of longtime leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and appointed his successor, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor. Singer Lynn Anderson, 67, whose strong, husky voice carried her to the top of the charts with "(I Never Promised You a) Rose Garden," died in Nashville, Tennessee.

One year ago: At a debate in Detroit, the "Medicare for All" proposal from the leading Democratic progressive candidates came under fire from moderates who warned that "wish list economics" would hurt the party's chances for winning the White House in 2020. President Donald Trump marked the 400th anniversary of American democracy at an event in Jamestown, Virginia; it was boycotted by Black Virginia

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lawmakers angered by Trump's continued disparagement of veteran Black congressman Elijah Cummings. Hall of Fame football middle linebacker Nick Buoniconti, who helped lead the Miami Dolphins to their unbeaten record in 1972, died at the age of 78.

Today's Birthdays: Former Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig is 86. Blues musician Buddy Guy is 84. Movie director Peter Bogdanovich is 81. Feminist activist Eleanor Smeal is 81. Former U.S. Rep. Patricia Schroeder is 80. Singer Paul Anka is 79. Jazz musician David Sanborn is 75. Former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is 73. Actor William Atherton is 73. Actor Jean Reno (zhahn rih-NOH') is 72. Blues singer-musician Otis Taylor is 72. Actor Frank Stallone is 70. Actor Ken Olin is 66. Actress Delta Burke is 64. Law professor Anita Hill is 64. Singer-songwriter Kate Bush is 62. Country singer Neal McCoy is 62. Actor Richard Burgi is 62. Movie director Richard Linklater is 60. Actor Laurence Fishburne is 59. Actress Lisa Kudrow is 57. Bluegrass musician Danny Roberts (The Grascals) is 57. Country musician Dwayne O'Brien is 57. Actress Vivica A. Fox is 56. Actor Terry Crews is 52. Actor Simon Baker is 51. Actor Donnie Kesha-warz is 51. Movie director Christopher Nolan is 50. Actor Tom Green is 49. Rock musician Brad Hargreaves (Third Eye Blind) is 49. Actress Christine Taylor is 49. Actor-comedian Dean Edwards is 47. Actress Hilary Swank is 46. Olympic gold medal beach volleyball player Misty May-Treanor is 43. Actress Jaime Pressly is 43. Alt-country singer-musician Seth Avett (AY'-veht) is 40. Actress April Bowlby is 40. Soccer player Hope Solo is 39. Actress Yvonne Strahovski is 38. Actor Martin Starr is 38. Actress Gina Rodriguez is 36. Actor Nico Tortorella is 32. Actress Joey King is 21.