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Carnival of Silver Skates Notice

On such hot days of summer it is hard to believe we are starting to plan for the 2021 Carnival of Silver Skates! With hopes that we will be able to hold the carnival, we will have the Registration and Costume Measurement days on Sunday, Sept 13 or Monday, Sept 14. If we are unable to hold the carnival due to COVID, we would refund all registration fees.

Please mark your calendars for SUNDAY, SEPT 13 from 11:00 to 3:00 or MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14 from 4:00 to 6:00 for registration and costume measurement.

- * It will be at the warming house.
- * Skaters MUST be present.
- * Masks are required.

Registration forms will be coming home from school with students, so please be watching for those forms. We are excited to be finalizing plans for this year's 2021 Carnival. Thanks for your help!

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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Programming and content subj. to change. Upon cancellation of your video service you may lose access to HBO Max. **Limits:** Access to one HBO Max account per AT&T account holder. May not be stackable w/other offers, credits or discounts. To learn more, visit att.com/hbomax. HBO Max is only accessible in the U.S. and certain U.S. territories where a high-speed broadband connection is available. Minimum 3G connection is required for viewing on mobile devices. HBO MAX is used under license. **SELECT ALL INCLUDED PACKAGE/ OTHER ELIG. SVC: Ends 8/31/20.** Available only in the U.S. (excludes Puerto Rico and U.S.V.I.). 1st & 2nd year Pricing: \$49.99/mo for first 12 mos. only. After 12 mos. or loss of eligibility, then prevailing rate applies (currently \$85/mo for SELECT All Included), unless cancelled or changed prior to end of the promo period. **Pricing subject to change. \$5/mo. discount:** Must enroll in autopay & paperless bill within 30 days of TV activation to receive bill credit starting in 1-3 bill cycles. First time credit will include all credits earned since meeting offer requirements. Must maintain autopay/paperless bill and valid email address to continue credits. No credits in 2nd year for autopay/paperless bill. **Includes: SELECT All Included TV Pkg.** monthly service & equipment fees for one Genie HD DVR, and standard pro installation. **Additional Fees & Taxes:** Price excludes Regional Sports Fee of up to \$9.99/mo. (which is extra & applies to CHOICE and/or MAS ULTRA and higher Pkgs.), applicable use tax expense surcharge on retail value of installation, custom installation, equipment upgrades/add-ons (min. \$99 one-time & \$7/mo. fees for each extra receiver/DIRECTV ReadyTV/Device), and certain other add'l fees & charges. See att.com/directv for additional details. Different offers may apply for eligible multi-dwelling unit and telco customers. **DIRECTV SVC TERMS: Subject to Equipment Lease & Customer Agreements.** Must maintain a min. base TV pkg of \$29.99/mo. Programming, pricing, terms and conditions subject to change at any time. Some offers may not be available through all channels and in select areas. Visit directv.com/legal or call for details. **GENERAL WIRELESS; Subj. to Wireless Customer Agmt (att.com/wca).** Credit approval req'd. **Deposit/Down Payment:** may apply. **Additional monthly fees & taxes:** Apply per line & include Regulatory Cost Recovery Fee (Up to \$1.50), Administrative Fee (\$1.99) & other fees which are not government-required surcharges as well as taxes. Additional one-time Fees may apply. See www.att.com/mobilityfees for more details. Usage, speed, coverage & other restr's apply. International and domestic off-net data may be at 2G speeds. AT&T service is subject to AT&T network management policies; see att.com/broadbandinfo for details. **GENIE HD DVR UPGRADE OFFER:** Includes instant rebates on one Genie HD DVR and up to three Genie Minis. Req's SELECT Pkg or above; OPTIMO MAS Pkg or above; or qual. int'l svc bundle with PREFERRED CHOICE. **\$99 fee applies for Wireless Genie Mini upgrade.** Whole-Home HD DVR functionality req's an HD DVR connected to one television and a Genie Mini, H25 HD Receiver(s) or a DIRECTV ReadyTV/Device in each additional room. Limit of three remote viewings per HD DVR at a time. Visit directv.com/genie for complete details. Offers may not be combined with other promotional offers on the same services and may be modified or discontinued at any time without notice. Other conditions apply to all offers. HBO, Cinemax and related channels and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc. STARZ and related channels and service marks are the property of Starz Entertainment, LLC. Visit starz.com for airdates/times. SHOWTIME is a registered trademark of Showtime Networks Inc., a CBS company. ©2019 EPIX Entertainment LLC. All Rights Reserved. EPIX is a registered trademark of EPIX Entertainment LLC. ©2020 AT&T Intellectual Property. All Rights Reserved. AT&T, Globe logo, DIRECTV, and all other DIRECTV marks contained herein are trademarks of AT&T Intellectual Property and/or AT&T affiliated companies. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.

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#172 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Things are not getting better very fast; while the steep growth in new-case reports has leveled off, it has leveled off at a very high number. That's not a good thing. Today 55,200 new cases were reported, putting us at a total of 5,260,900 cases, a 1.1% rate of growth. Our 46 worst days are the past 46 days. That's a streak we need to break, but honestly, breaking it would mean we're still in a lot of trouble. Hawaii and North Dakota set single-day records for new case reports, and California broke the 600,000 mark. Only four countries have more, and one of those is, of course, the US. The states with highest per capita case numbers over the past 14 days are California, Nevada, Idaho, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

We should note that the picture appears to be improving in California now; in the past two weeks, hospitalizations have declined by 19%, a very good sign. As mind-boggling as California's numbers have been, it helps to remember that it is our most populous state; per-capita, it ranks only #20 among states for cases and #28 in deaths. So as bad as things have been, this state is far from the hardest-hit. Now that they've rectified the issues in their case reporting system, we should have a clear picture of their progress going forward.

A worrisome place is South Texas. Four of the five metro areas with the country's worst death rates are in South Texas. The number of cases is approaching 600,000 and the number of deaths is approaching 10,000. For a state with three-quarters California's population, these are extremely high. More concerning is the positivity rate in the state; it was down to 12% at the end of July, but was at 25% Tuesday and 16% on Wednesday. We don't have the number yet for today. The governor says this is likely due to too little testing being done.

There have been 167,122 deaths in the US. Today's number is 1288, an 0.8% increase. California broke the 10,000-death mark today, joining New York and New Jersey.

We have a new alert from the FDA about unsafe hand sanitizers. This time, the culprit is 1-propanol, another toxic alcohol, not the same as isopropyl alcohol (or 2-propanol), which is safe and found in many approved and safe sanitizers. Most, but not all, of these dangerous products are imported. Symptoms of 1-propanol toxicity include confusion, decreased consciousness, and slowed pulse and breathing. Same story with these as with the methanol-contaminated ones: Immediately stop using and discard safely (not down the drain). You can find the FDA's searchable, updated list of unsafe products at this link: <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-updates-hand-sanitizers-consumers-should-not-use>.

As I contemplate people moving indoors soon for school and for most activities as summer draws to a close, I read a compilation of the research on the impact of ventilation systems on the spread of Covid-19 (and other respiratory infections). I dabbled in the several source papers as well. The implications are clear: We are spending far too much time and attention on what the author called "hygiene theater," all of the ostentatiously "infection-fighting" activities that make us feel better about infection risk without significantly addressing far more important issues like ventilation.

All of this surface decontamination that seems to be a major part of things like school reopening plans misses the point since we know for sure surfaces are not the primary route for transmission. Attention to high-touch surfaces and normal cleaning are likely sufficient. Temperature checks fail to screen a huge share of potential sources because virtually all infected people do not have fevers during their most infectious stages. While people with fevers can transmit the infection, huge numbers of people without fevers are also transmitting, and likely more efficiently. We have a fair amount of data indicating that the six-foot rule doesn't help much indoors, that keeping indoor encounters brief is far more useful; and of course, there's no way to keep encounters brief in schools and workplaces.

I read the report on an outbreak at a call center in South Korea where "being 50 feet apart with a low dose of the virus in the air, over a sustained period, was enough to cause infection and in some cases, death." This happened because the ventilation system pushed virus around the building. There was a

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similar report from a restaurant in Guangzhou, China, and that infamous choir practice in Washington.

We are more sure every day that airborne transmission is important. We know that proper filtration can capture viruses and prevent them circulating. We know the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in many public buildings, particularly schools, are inadequate to the task of sufficient air exchange or filtration. And we're doing little or nothing with that knowledge. Back in May, the journal, *Environment International*, published an article written by a group of 36 scientists; the subject was minimizing airborne transmission of Covid-19. They wrote, "Here, in the face of such uncertainty, we argue that the benefits of an effective ventilation system, possibly enhanced by particle filtration and air disinfection, for contributing to an overall reduction in the indoor airborne infection risk, are obvious." Suggested upgrades to existing HVAC systems have been published, key among them to increase the number of air exchanges per hour. I don't think this matter has received anything like the attention it needs. We just keep buying more disinfectant and thermometers.

First it was the Bard in the Yard; then it was the New York Philharmonic's tiny concerts in the park. Next up: the American Ballet Theatre. Dancers are traveling, separately and only a few at a time, to Tivoli, New York, in the Hudson Valley a couple of hours outside the city to perform solo on an outdoor stage in a field behind a barn. The venue is Kaatsbaan Cultural Park, long-time home to dance residencies and retreats, and the Park is planning weekend outdoor performances through the end of September. Dancers are tested before participation, and audiences are small, screened, and socially-distanced, sitting on blankets or benches, even watching from their cars.

This is Kaatsbaan Summer Festival 2020 with its motto, "Celebrating a Return to Movement and the Arts." It gives performers their first chance to work in public in six months and audiences a rare opportunity to enjoy the performing arts again. There's no money in this for anyone. Performers volunteer, tickets are free, and each evening's performance is limited to 30 minutes to discourage people from coming in from far away and to obviate the need for bathroom visits. Unsurprisingly, the entire season is sold out.

Soloist Calvin Royal III who was supposed to get his big break this season, starring in three ballets, watched that all evaporate in the pandemic; but he kept working and working out at home, building toward a future he couldn't know how soon would arrive or even if it would arrive. He said his invitation to perform at Kaatsbaan was "life-changing. To bring people together again for live performances, to see the energy—it's given us something to look forward to, a sense of purpose, even just a nugget of hope that we are going to get through this."

Courtney Lavine, also disappointed to lose her first chance at a principal role after a decade in the corps de ballet, said, "It was amazing to get back onstage. I could see everyone's faces. It felt really personal. Now it feels like leaving summer camp, where you've made all these new friends. I'm kind of sad. I want to go back and do it again." I hope she can. Soon. Meanwhile, she's sharing her gift in one of the few ways she can.

We should probably all be looking for ways to do that—share our gifts. It will do us as much good as it does the recipients, and we sorely need ways to connect and show our caring in these difficult days. Tell you what: Let's all do that just once between now and next time we talk.

Which will be tomorrow. Until then, take care—of someone else as well as yourself.

SDHSAA sets goals for new school year

By Dana Hess
S.D. Newspaper Association

BROOKINGS — A new school year means a new set of goals for the South Dakota High School Activities Association.

Goals for the coming year were approved by the SDHSAA's board of directors at its August meeting on Thursday. The Pierre meeting was preceded by a strategic planning session Wednesday where the goals were discussed at length. Both meetings were live streamed on the internet.

The goals include studying management fees for state events, exploring new sports and activities, examining the way in which schools' daily membership is counted and a review of the association's website.

As part of its study of management fees, the association will study new revenue sources that would help member schools deal with the costs of hosting state tournaments. The association has made a deal with a vendor for the sale of T-shirts and merchandise at state events. However, with the pandemic throwing schedules into disarray, SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said it didn't seem like the best time to be making changes to the management fees.

With the prospect of no fans at some events, Swartos said fees could be considerably lower. If state events are canceled again, there would be revenue losses from the television contract, merchandise sales and gate receipts.

Casey Meile of the Sioux Falls School District told the board that there has to be a change in the system. He said the Sioux Falls district lost \$30,000 when it hosted the state wrestling tournament.

"I don't think a school should have to lose that amount of money," Meile said.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director John Krogstrand said the current system for state tournaments is "backwards." In other states, community chambers of commerce bid on being able to host events.

"That's probably something we need to take a strong look at," Krogstrand said.

"Our model itself is a little bit backwards," said Swartos, noting that communities benefit from the tournaments while the schools are stuck with the costs.

According to Swartos, it's tough for school officials when they go to their school board and say, "We're hosting this for the association. Here's our bill for it."

The goal of exploring new sports to sponsor saw some success recently with the addition of girls' wrestling at the association's April meeting. Last year the association also made progress on judging interest in girls' softball and e-sports, but that effort will have to carry over into the new school year.

Swartos said he has fielded calls expressing interest in the association sanctioning hockey, swimming and diving, rodeo, trap shooting, bass fishing and boys' volleyball.

The association will also study the way average daily membership or ADM is counted in schools. That

number determines a school's classification for sports.

SDHSAA will study ADM modifiers like free and reduced lunches, a small school factor and a success factor. Swartos said he was interested in knowing more about a system that adjusts ADM based on the number of reduced and free lunches served at a school.

"ADM is kind of a touchy subject to start with," said board chairman Craig Cassens of Faulkton, as schools are protective of the process that determines who their opponents will be in sports.

Board member Randy Soma of Brookings said that students who qualify for free or reduced price lunches often have to work to help out their families and can't participate in sports or activities.

"A lot of times those kids are not out for anything," Soma said.

Another goal for the year is beginning the process of developing a new website. The current site is 12 years old, Swartos said, and a new one would likely cost as much as \$25,000.

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Effects of pandemic safety measures being felt as sports seasons begin

**By Dana Hess
For the S.D. Newspaper Association**

BROOKINGS — As high school sports practices start up across South Dakota, coaches, athletes and administrators are realizing that it's not business as usual during a pandemic.

The South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors heard reports about the start of fall sports Thursday at their August meeting in Pierre. The meeting was live streamed on the internet.

One safety measure in football has been particularly vexing.

The problem is "how the heck to keep each kid with their own water bottle," said SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director John Krogstrand. "That's required some creativity."

While it's important to keep players from sharing a water source, Krogstrand said most of the responsibility will fall to players. He said if they can each keep track of their own helmets, they can probably keep track of their own water bottles, too.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Jo Auch said she has cautioned volleyball officials to wear masks if the school district where the match is being played mandates masks.

"This is what's best for the sport right now," Auch said.

Looking forward to large cheer and dance competitions, Auch advised that teams should be brought into the facility three at a time. They should warm up, perform and leave.

Auch said she didn't know if fans could stay or should leave after the team they're rooting for leaves.

"I don't have a good answer for that," Auch said. "Those are some of the growing pains we're going to have to deal with."

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Fine arts feeling effects of pandemic

By Dana Hess
For the S.D. Newspaper Association

BROOKINGS — Just like high school sports, fine arts are feeling the effects of the pandemic as oral interp contests and the high school journalism convention have been moved online and All-State Chorus and Orchestra has been postponed to next year.

Those actions were taken Thursday as the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors met in Pierre.

According to a proposal from SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Brooks Bowman, 85 percent of journalism advisers preferred holding the journalism convention online.

"Virtual workshop sessions can be easily administered," Bowman's proposal said.

Oral interp coaches and activities directors were split 50-50 when asked if they preferred in-person or virtual oral interp contests. The association's speech advisory committee voted 6-1 to move the contests online.

The National Speech and Debate Association has developed a platform for virtual performances, according to Bowman's proposal. If it proves to be viable, district, region and state oral interp contests will be held there. If not, video-recorded performances may be used.

"Although we would all prefer to provide in-person activities, the ability to move some of our fine arts activities to a virtual format still allows us to provide performance and competitive opportunities to our member schools," Bowman said.

Just more than 50% of music directors and activities directors voted to postpone All-State Chorus and Orchestra. The Music Advisory Committee voted unanimously to postpone. The event will be held April 19-20, 2021, in Sioux Falls.

Chorus auditions will be held locally and vocal directors must submit their quartets by Oct. 9. Orchestra auditions will be video-recorded and must be submitted to SDHSAA by Oct. 15.

—30—

THINKING ABOUT HEALTH **What You Need To Know About Coronavirus Testing**

By Trudy Lieberman, Community Health News Service

Testing! Testing! Testing! That's what the experts say is necessary to move the country back to normalcy. Almost daily, local TV stations in New York City where I live run public service announcements urging viewers to get a test for COVID-19. Those announcements tell how to find a testing site, and most point out that the tests are free.

Many New Yorkers, as well as people in other states, are undoubtedly confused about the kinds of tests available, wonder about the delays in getting results, and worry about the tests' reliability. The recent experience of Gov. Mike DeWine of Ohio, who first tested positive for the virus and then negative on subsequent tests, illustrates the potential problems with the tests' accuracy.

To sort all this out, I contacted Teresa Carr, an independent health and science journalist I had worked with at Consumer Reports who had just written "A Consumer's Guide to Getting Tested for the Coronavirus."

The place to begin, she points out, is to distinguish between the two types of tests currently available, which people often confuse because the talking heads on television don't always make clear what they are talking about. Some tests are diagnostic and tell you whether you have an active viral infection that may require treatment or a quarantine. Others are antibody tests.

Antibody tests, which are not diagnostic tools, reveal whether your blood contains antibodies that can show that you were infected by the virus in the past. "These tests can't tell you if you're contagious or if the antibodies will cause you to be immune to future infections," Carr said. "This disease has only been around since February, and we have to do more research."

She explained that some people have COVID symptoms for a long time. They may go on for months and wax and wane. In those cases, are people exhibiting a long course of the same infection or several separate infections? "It's really not clear what the antibody tests means at this point."

Antibody tests are blood tests, unlike the more meaningful diagnostic tests that are recommended as an important way to fight the disease. Since the virus attacks the respiratory system, diagnostic tests – so called PCR tests – hunt for the virus that may be present in your nose and throat. A health care worker collects a sample by inserting a 6-inch swab through a nostril and obtaining some cells from the upper part of your throat.

Another, simpler test is less invasive. The swab reaches only an inch or so inside the nose and is more comfortable for the patient. Experts now believe the simpler test may work almost as well, but health care workers giving the test may also swab the back of your throat to obtain a more robust sample.

Carr told me that the FDA has now authorized do-it-yourself tests. "It's a shallower nasal swab test "but not quite as accurate." Another test requires users to spit in a test tube and send it to the lab. Both these kinds of tests are "probably pretty good," Carr says, and have been useful in places where testing materials have been in short supply.

Gov. DeWine reports that the first test he took, which gave a false positive result, was an antigen test. His later tests were PCR tests that, as I've explained, examine virus cells taken from a patient's nasal passages. DeWine called the PCR test "very, very, very reliable," and added, "People should not take away from my experience that testing is not reliable or doesn't really work."

In fact, testing and contact tracing, the practice of following up with people who have been in contact with a person who has tested positive for the disease, are major defenses against the spread of the virus. People identified through contact tracing are advised to self-isolate or get tested themselves.

Carr told me that the length of time people wait to get their test results "varies quite a lot" with some people waiting as long as two weeks to find out if they have the disease. In general, though, you can expect a test result within a week. But if you think you have COVID, "you really need to be quarantining the whole time" you are waiting for results.

Carr had a last piece of advice: "Nobody should have to pay for their tests." Under new laws passed this spring, COVID testing is now free with no cost sharing. Congress has made it possible for those without insurance to get free tests through their state Medicaid programs. Check with your state since a few states have not yet adopted that policy.

What has been your experience with testing? Write to Trudy at trudy.lieberman@gmail.com.

Goldstar Amusements to Return to the 2020 South Dakota State Fair

HURON, S.D. – Goldstar Amusements will return as the carnival company at the 2020 South Dakota State Fair. Three amusement ride companies who traditionally serve South Dakota venues have joined forces to ensure fairs in South Dakota have a complete fun and fabulous Midway.

Goldstar Amusements and partnering carnival companies will feature a full Midway including new rides, Vertigo 80 and Samba Balloons. The Vertigo 80 will take fairgoers on a ride up an 80' tower while swinging at 10 revolutions per minute. The Samba Balloons ride is like flying through the air in a hot air balloon; it's perfect for children and adults.

Daily ride wristbands will be available for purchase on grounds for \$25. The South Dakota State Fair has also partnered with various organizations to provide ride pass discounts. The Passport to Fun weekly ride pass can be purchased for \$52 at the Huron Chamber and Visitors Bureau located at 1725 Dakota Avenue South and will be available beginning August 11 through September 4. Cash or check will be accepted. If purchased at the carnival during the fair, the Passport to Fun is \$58.

Fairgoers may also pick up the Big Jim 93.3, \$3 off daily ride wristband coupon by visiting the State Fair Administration Office located in Nordby Exhibit Hall on the State Fairgrounds. This coupon is valid Thursday, Friday, and Monday during the fair.

On Wednesday, September 2, Channel Seeds Preview Day, Goldstar Amusements will run from 5 PM – 10 PM for \$1 rides. September 3-4, the carnival will run from Noon – Midnight and from 10 AM – Midnight on September 5-6. On the last day of the fair, Monday, September 7, the carnival will run from 10 AM – 8 PM.

Health and safety precautions will include hand sanitizer stations placed throughout the Midway and frequent cleaning and sanitizing of rides. All carnival employees will undergo daily self-symptom and temperature checks.

The 2020 South Dakota State Fair will run from Thursday, September 3 through Monday, September 7. Channel Seeds Preview Night will be Wednesday, September 2. Find information about all of the happenings at the South Dakota State Fair at www.sdstatefair.com.

South Dakota Unemployment Initial Weekly Claims Increase

PIERRE, S.D. – During the week of Aug. 2-8, a total of 911 initial weekly claims for state unemployment benefits were processed by the Department of Labor and Regulation. This is an increase of 136 claims from the prior week's total of 775.

A total of \$2.9 million was paid out in state benefits, in addition to \$7.8 million in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), \$941,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and \$112,000 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) benefits.

The Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund balance was \$123.8 million on Aug. 9.

The latest number of continued state claims is 15,464 for the week ending July 25, a decrease of 179 from the prior week's total of 15,643. This indicates the number of unemployed workers eligible for and receiving benefits after their initial claim.

Benefits paid since March 16:

Regular State = \$72.9 million

FPUC = \$195.0 million

PUA = \$9.7 million

PEUC = \$1.0 million

Total = Approximately \$278.6 million

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U8 Pee-Wees

Back Row: Jace Hofer, Gavin Hanten, Major Dolan, Axel Abeln, Logan Olson, Ryder Schwan, Eli Heilman, Connor Kroll, Trayce Schelle, Carter Boerger

Front Row: Brantley Belden, Boston Kurth, Deylon Johnson, Rylan Blackwood, Graham Rose, Ivan Schwan, Bentley Ehresmann, Haden Harder, Mason Locke, Hank Hill, Dawson Feist

Missing: Drew Fjeldheim, Asher Zimmerman, Brody Zimmerman

Coached by Matt Locke (not pictured) with help from Seth Erickson, groundskeepers and volunteer dads. (Photo by April Abeln)

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Aug. 12	Aug. 13	Aug. 14
Minnesota	61,839	62,303	62,993
Nebraska	29,030	29,244	29,660
Montana	5,104	5,268	5,407
Colorado	51,441	51,756	52,219
Wyoming	2,584	2,600	2,627
North Dakota	7885	7970	8171
South Dakota	9713	9815	9897
United States	5,141,879	5,197,749	5,248,172
US Deaths	164,545	166,038	167,092

Minnesota	+323	+464	+690
Nebraska	+334	+214	+416
Montana	+87	+164	+139
Colorado	+402	+315	+463
Wyoming	+19	+16	+27
North Dakota	+172	+85	+201
South Dakota	50	+102	+82
United States	+47,314	+55,870	+50,423
US Deaths	+1,080	+1,493	+1,054

	Aug. 5	Aug. 6	Aug. 7	Aug. 7	Aug. 9	Aug. 10	Aug. 11
Minnesota	57,162	57,779	58,640	59,185	60,101	60,898	61,516
Nebraska	27,178	27,489	27,821	28,104	28,245	28,432	28,696
Montana	4,314	4,429	4,602	4,757	4889	4,952	5,017
Colorado	48,394	48,988	49,436	49,893	50,324	50,660	51,039
Wyoming	2,392	2,424	2,449	2,490	2,498	2,533	2,565
North Dakota	6933	7057	7177	7327	7508	7596	7713
South Dakota	9,079	9168	9273	9371	9477	9605	9663
United States	4,768,083	4,818,328	4,883,657	4,945,795	4,998,802	5,045,564	5,094,565
US Deaths	156,753	157,930	160,104	161,456	162,430	162,938	163,465

Minnesota	+602	+617	+861	+545	+916	+797	+618
Nebraska	+222	+311	+332	+283	+141	+187	+264
Montana	+81	+115	+173	+155	+132	+63	+65
Colorado	+426	+594	+448	+457	+431	+336	+379
Wyoming	+28	+32	+25	+41	+8	+35	+32
North Dakota	+148	+124	+120	+150	+181	+88	+117
South Dakota	+59	+89	+105	+98	+106	+129	+59
United States	+49,834	+50,235	+65,329	+62,138	+53,007	+46,762	+49,001
US Deaths	+1,275	+1,177	+2,174	+1,352	+974	+508	+527

* 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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August 13th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

I guess the big news in South Dakota is Harding County. After being free from any infections, they have reported their first 2 positive cases, so now every county in South Dakota has been infected by COVID-19.

One male in the 50s from Hughes County is the latest casualty from COVID-19. That brings the death toll to 148 in South Dakota. North Dakota had no deaths recorded today so its total stands at 120. There were 201 positive cases in North Dakota and its positivity rate is 9.9 percent for today.

Bon Homme and Potter counties each recorded a new case so they fell from the fully recovered list. Sully has been added back on the fully recovered list.

Locally, Brown County had 4 positive cases, Marshall County had two and Day County had one. Spink County had two recoveries.

Brown County had six recovered. The positivity rate in Brown County is 5.1 percent for today while the state is at 5.0 percent. Active cases in Brown County dropped by two while the state dropped by four. South Dakota had 82 positive and 85 recovered cases.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +4 (456) Positivity Rate: 5.1%

Recovered: +6 (412)

Active Cases: -2 (41)

Total Tests: +78 (6100)

Ever Hospitalized: No Change (21)

Deaths: 0 (3)

Percent Recovered: 90.3% (+0.5)

South Dakota:

Positive: +82 (9897 total) Positivity Rates: 5.0%

Total Tests: 1,637 (158,396 total)

Hospitalized: +4 (896 total). 56 currently hospitalized (down 3 from yesterday)

Deaths: +1 (148 total)

Recovered: +85 (8691 total)

Active Cases: -4 (1,058)

Percent Recovered: 87.8 +0.1

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 2% Covid, 50% Non-Covid, 48% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 3% Covid, 64% Non-Covid, 33% Available

Ventilator Capacity: 5% Covid, 15% Non-Covid, 80% Available

Counties with no positive cases report the following negative tests: Harding (53)

Fully recovered from positive cases (Lost Bon Homme and Potter): Bennett 6-6, Jerauld 40-39-1, Jones 2-2, Haakon 1-1, Hyde 3-3, Perkins 4-4, Stanley 14-14, Sully 3-3, Tripp 20-20.

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, +1 recovered (22 active cases)

Bennett: Full Recovered

Bon Homme: +1 positive (1 active case)

Brookings (1): +1 positive, +1 recovered (14 active cases)

Brown (3): +4 positive, +6 recovered (41 active cases)

Brule (1): 6 active cases

Buffalo (3): 6 active cases

Butte: +1 recovered (5 active cases)

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Campbell: 2 active cases
 Charles Mix: 10 active cases
 Clark: +1 positive (3 active cases)
 Clay: +3 positive (19 active cases)
 Codington (1): +4 positive, +2 recovered (31 active cases)
 Corson: 11 active cases
 Custer: +1 recovered (9 active case)
 Davison (1): +3 positive, +2 recovered (12 active cases)
 Day: +1 positive (3 active cases)
 Deuel: +2 positive, +1 recovered (4 active cases)
 Dewey: 16 active cases
 Douglas: 3 active cases
 Edmunds: 5 active cases
 Fall River: 4 active cases
 Faulk (1): +1 positive (5 active cases)
 Grant: +1 Positive, +1 recovered (5 active cases)
 Gregory: 1 active case
 Haakon: Fully Recovered
 Hamlin: +1 positive, +1 recovered (10 active cases)
 Hand: +1 positive (3 active cases)
 Hanson: +1 positive (4 active cases)
 Harding: +2 positive (2 active cases)
 Hughes (3): 10 active cases
 Hutchinson: -1 positive, +1 recovered (3 active cases)
 Hyde: 1 active case
 Jackson (1): 2 active cases
 Jerauld (1): Fully Recovered
 Jones: Fully Recovered
 Kingsbury: +1 recovered (1 active case)
 Lake (2): +5 positive, +1 recovered (17 active cases)

Lawrence: +2 recovered (27 active cases)
 Lincoln (2): +5 positive, +11 recovered (92 active cases)
 Lyman (3): +1 positive (8 active cases)
 Marshall: +2 positive (5 active cases)
 McCook (1): +1 recovered (5 active cases)
 McPherson: 1 active case
 Meade (1): +1 positive, +3 recovered (20 active cases)
 Mellette: 1 active case
 Miner: 1 active cases
 Minnehaha (68): +23 positive, +29 recovered (376 active cases)
 Moody: 3 active cases
 Oglala Lakota (2): +1 positive (19 active cases)
 Pennington (32): +5 positive, +10 recovered (108 active cases)
 Perkins: 1 active cases
 Potter: +1 positive (1 active case)
 Roberts (1): 9 active cases
 Sanborn: Fully Recovered
 Spink: +2 recovered (5 active cases)
 Stanley: Fully Recovered
 Sully: +1 recovered (FULLY RECOVERED)
 Todd (5): +1 positive (7 active cases)
 Tripp: Fully Recovered
 Turner: +3 positive, +2 recovered (11 active cases)
 Union (4): +3 positive, +3 recovered (28 active cases)
 Walworth: 1 active cases
 Yankton (2): +3 positive, +1 recovered (28 active cases)
 Ziebach: 11 active cases

North Dakota Dept. of Health Report
 COVID-19 Daily Report, August 13:

- 7,182 tests (2,021)
- 8,171 positives (+201)
- 6,953 recovered (+138)
- 120 deaths (+0)
- 1,098 active cases (+63)

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-19 years	1250	0
20-29 years	2187	2
30-39 years	1929	6
40-49 years	1475	7
50-59 years	1458	18
60-69 years	879	26
70-79 years	388	24
80+ years	331	65

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	4884	76
Male	5013	72

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased
Aurora	38	36	381	0
Beadle	596	565	1895	9
Bennett	6	6	538	0
Bon Homme	14	13	772	0
Brookings	143	128	2765	1
Brown	456	412	4546	3
Brule	46	40	757	0
Buffalo	109	100	645	3
Butte	18	12	802	1
Campbell	3	1	98	0
Charles Mix	103	95	1358	0
Clark	17	14	389	0
Clay	135	116	1342	0
Codington	147	115	2899	1
Corson	37	26	455	0
Custer	36	27	807	0
Davison	99	88	2394	1
Day	24	21	640	0
Deuel	13	9	410	0
Dewey	49	33	2265	0
Douglas	19	16	403	0
Edmunds	18	13	415	0
Fall River	22	18	995	0
Faulk	29	23	191	1
Grant	28	23	727	0
Gregory	7	6	395	0
Haakon	2	2	293	0
Hamlin	25	15	655	0
Hand	10	7	292	0
Hanson	22	18	214	0
Harding	2	0	53	0
Hughes	93	80	1762	3
Hutchinson	29	26	902	0

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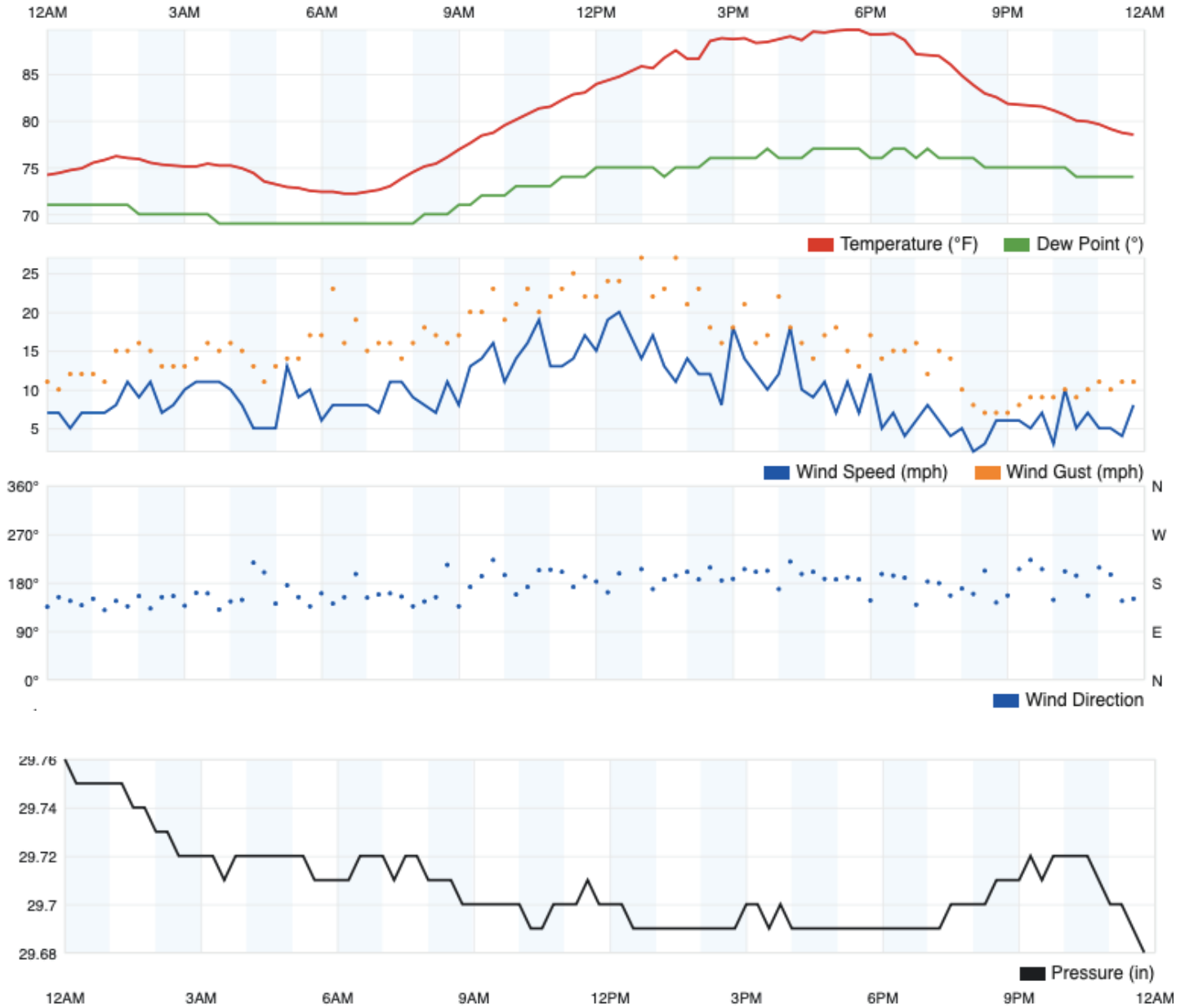
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Hyde	4	3	138	0
Jackson	11	8	482	1
Jerauld	39	38	272	1
Jones	2	2	60	0
Kingsbury	14	13	566	0
Lake	100	81	951	2
Lawrence	62	35	2136	0
Lincoln	672	578	6978	2
Lyman	91	80	969	3
Marshall	12	7	473	0
McCook	30	24	645	1
McPherson	8	7	219	0
Meade	98	77	2017	1
Mellette	24	23	389	0
Miner	15	14	256	0
Minnehaha	4521	4077	28015	68
Moody	32	29	637	0
Oglala Lakota	157	136	2951	2
Pennington	915	774	11160	32
Perkins	6	5	187	0
Potter	2	1	291	0
Roberts	80	70	1829	1
Sanborn	13	13	230	0
Spink	26	21	1159	0
Stanley	14	14	254	0
Sully	3	3	79	0
Todd	74	62	2164	5
Tripp	20	20	618	0
Turner	56	45	932	0
Union	220	188	1939	4
Walworth	18	17	712	0
Yankton	128	98	3107	2
Ziebach	35	24	313	0
Unassigned	0	0	8290	0

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Chance
T-storms and
Breezy

High: 83 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear
and Breezy
then Clear

Low: 54 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 82 °F

Saturday
Night



Partly Cloudy

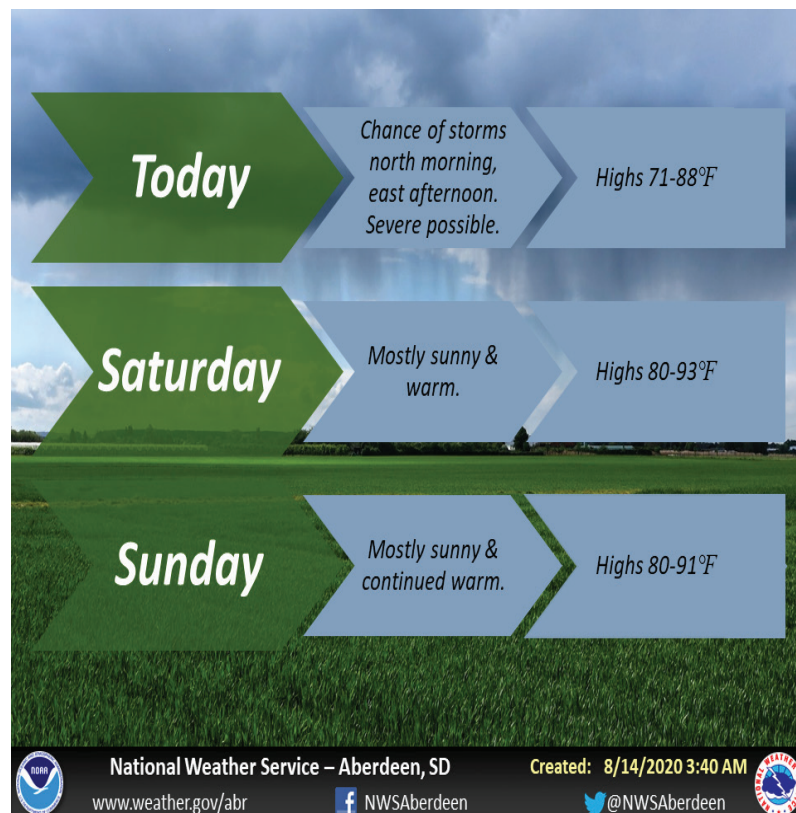
Low: 56 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 80 °F



A cold front will move across the area today, with showers and thunderstorms possible across the north this morning, and east this afternoon. A few severe storms are possible. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

August 14, 1898: A deadly, estimated F4 tornado moved southeast from 12 miles northwest of Clear Lake, passing 7 miles north of town and ending about 4 miles west of Gary. Deaths occurred on two farms. One man was killed when the kitchen of his farm house was torn off. Five members of one family were killed along with two labors on another farm as every building was swept away. Buildings suffered massive damage on eight farms. This tornado was one of the earliest, estimated F4 tornadoes on record for South Dakota.

August 14, 2008: Several severe thunderstorms developed along a cold front across parts of central and northeast South Dakota. Large hail, some flash flooding, and a couple of weak tornadoes occurred with these storms. An EF0 tornado touched down briefly at the Brown County Fairgrounds, blowing over several tents and awnings. Another EF0 tornado touched down briefly in an open field causing no damage north of Stephan in Hyde County.

August 14, 2009: A warm front brought severe thunderstorms with large hail up to the size of golf balls along with sixty mph winds to parts of north central and northeast South Dakota. Also, very heavy rain fell across western Brown County with 2 to 4 inches of rain reported. This heavy rain brought flash flooding conditions. Numerous county roads and area fields were overrun with flowing water. The water level on Richmond Lake rose nearly a foot the next day after the event from high inflows. This rapid rise in the lake level resulted in numerous boat and fishing docks being submerged. Several boats were also trapped under lift canopies due to the high water. There were reports of several boats breaking free of their mooring and floating toward the spillway.

1953: Hurricane Barbara hits North Carolina as a Category 2 hurricane. Damage from the storm was relatively minor, totaling around \$1.3 million (1953 USD). Most of it occurred in North Carolina and Virginia from crop damage. The hurricane left several injuries, some traffic accidents, as well as seven fatalities in the eastern United States; at least two were due to electrocution from downed power lines. Offshore Atlantic Canada, a small boat sunk, killing its crew of two.

1969: Hurricane Camille, a powerful, deadly, and destructive hurricane formed just west of the Cayman Islands on this day. It rapidly intensified, and by the time it reached western Cuba the next day, it was a Category 3 hurricane. Hurricane Camille was spawned on August 5th by a tropical wave off the coast of Africa. The storm became a tropical disturbance four days later on the 9th and a tropical storm on the 14th with a 999-millibar pressure center and 55 mph surface winds.

1975: In London, England, a localized torrential downpour known as The Hampstead Storm, drops 6.72 inches of rain in 155 minutes at Hampstead Heath. One died in the storm. The water floods the Underground and forces sewer covers up.

1936 - Temperatures across much of eastern Kansas soared above 110 degrees. Kansas City MO hit an all-time record high of 113 degrees. It was one of sixteen consecutive days of 100 degree heat for Kansas City. During that summer there were a record 53 days of 100 degree heat, and during the three summer months Kansas City received just 1.12 inches of rain. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1987 - Slow moving thunderstorms deluged northern and western suburbs of Chicago IL with torrential rains. O'Hare Airport reported 9.35 inches in 18 hours, easily exceeding the previous 24 hour record of 6.24 inches. Flooding over a five day period resulted in 221 million dollars damage. It was Chicago's worst flash flood event, particularly for northern and western sections of the city. Kennedy Expressway became a footpath for thousands of travelers to O'Hare Airport as roads were closed. The heavy rains swelled the Des Plaines River above flood stage, and many persons had to be rescued from stalled vehicles on flooded roads. (13th- 14th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - Eighteen cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, and the water temperature at Lake Erie reached a record 80 degrees. Portland ME reported a record fourteen straight days of 80 degree weather. Milwaukee WI reported a record 34 days of 90 degree heat for the year. Afternoon and evening thunderstorms resulted in about fifty reports of severe weather in the northeastern U.S. One person was killed at Stockbridge MI when a tornado knocked a tree onto their camper. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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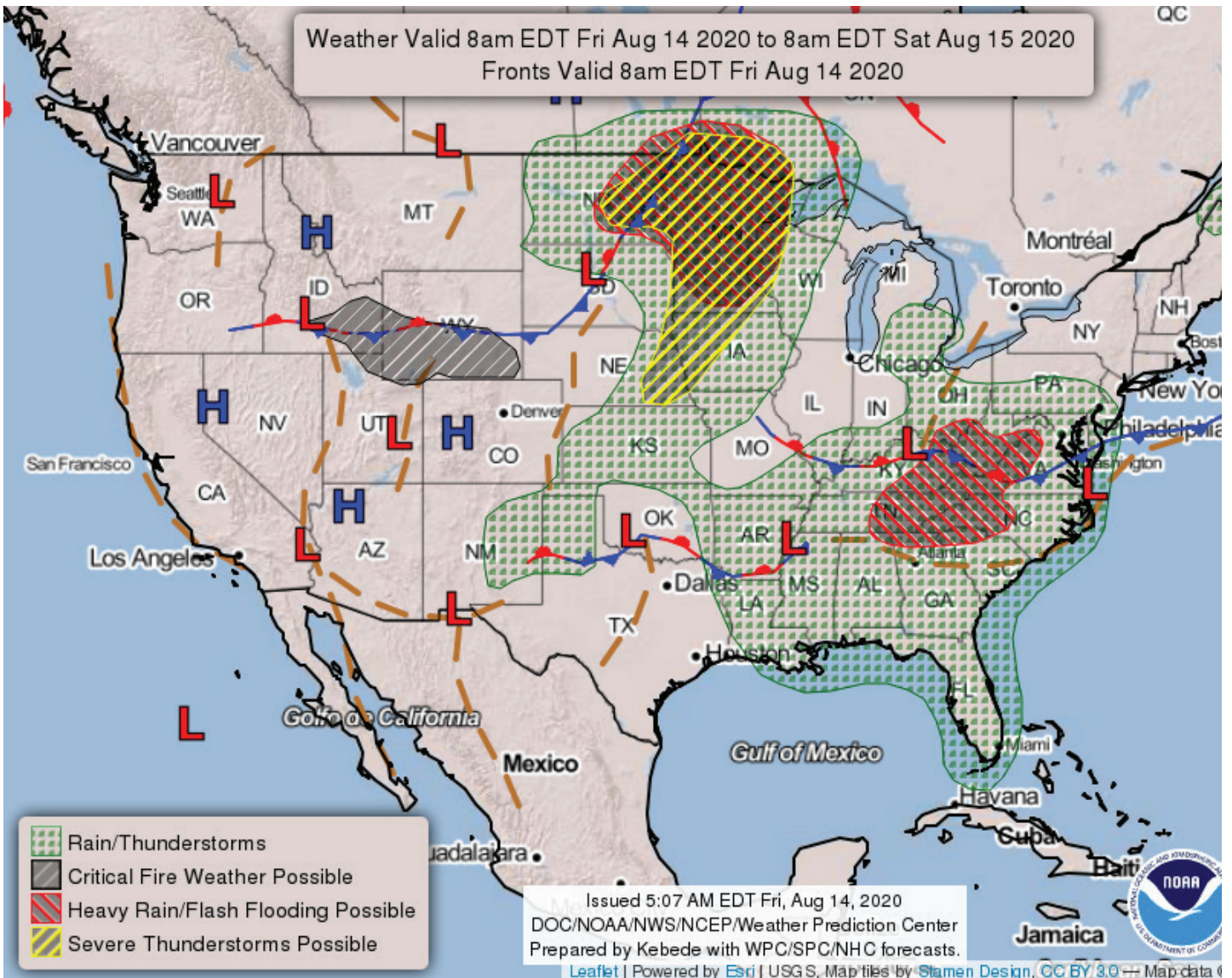
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 90 °F at 5:16 PM
Low Temp: 72 °F at 6:48 AM
Wind: 29 mph at 12:32 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 104° in 1952, 1935
Record Low: 38° in 1968
Average High: 83°F
Average Low: 57°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 1.02
Precip to date in Aug.: 1.24
Average Precip to date: 14.88
Precip Year to Date: 11.75
Sunset Tonight: 8:42 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:35 a.m.



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A PICTURE OF CHRIST

It was the first day in art class, and the professor wanted to challenge his students to do something creative. Standing before them, he suggested that they draw a picture that had meaning and significance. Pausing for a moment, he turned to one student and said, "And what, William, are you going to draw?"

"I believe that I will draw a picture of Christ," he replied.

"But," said the professor, "no one knows what He looks like."

"They will know what He looks like when I'm through," said William.

People may see a representation of Christ on canvas, paper, or cloth, but God expects them to see Christ in us - by the way we live. Scripture clearly explains, time and time again, that the Christian is the one, not an artist, who is to provide a "picture of what Christ looks like."

Those around us who know we are Christians develop their understanding and image of Christ by watching us: what we do, how we live, what we say. They "read" about Christ in how we act and react to the events that come into our lives. They "see" Christ in what we do and how we do things for others. Simply stated, we are responsible for showing those around us His love.

A Christian is to have a "mind" that thinks as Jesus thought, a "heart" that breaks when the ravages of sin are visible, a "hand" that reaches out to those in need, and a "voice" through which He speaks to share His message.

Prayer: Our Father, You have given us a tremendous responsibility to represent You to others. We admit we are unable to do this unless we allow You to live through us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did. 1 John 2:4-6

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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
- 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

News from the Associated Press

Police: Man's death in Rapid City was homicide

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Rapid City police said Thursday they are now investigating a man's unattended death as a homicide after getting preliminary autopsy results.

Police were called Tuesday night about an unconscious man. Police found the man dead inside the home. An autopsy was conducted Thursday, and police say that there was enough trauma to the man's body to indicate his death was not self-inflicted. That led police to now investigate the death as a homicide.

The victim is identified as Joseph Bradford, 63, of Rapid City.

The Rapid City Police Department and Pennington County Sheriff's Office are jointly investigating the death.

South Dakota avoids mass COVID-19 testing to avoid delays

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota will adhere to recommendations that only people with COVID-19 symptoms or exposure to the coronavirus be tested because an increase in testing nationwide is delaying test results, state health officials said Thursday.

As large gatherings such as the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally and the state fair get underway, local officials were planning to conduct mass testing to screen for outbreaks. But the Department of Health is balancing calls for mass testing with ensuring they can get the results quickly.

"That time to getting those test results is a very important part of our ability to respond," said state epidemiologist Josh Clayton. "If we're not hearing and learning of an individual who is a positive case until seven to 10 days after their specimen was collected, that is problematic."

The state's public health lab currently produces test results within one or two days, according to Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon. But the large commercial labs that receive tests from multiple states have struggled to keep up with a surge.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported Thursday that the average turnaround time for labs is three days or less, Malsam-Rysdon said.

Health experts have said widespread testing is important to prevent large outbreaks of the coronavirus. South Dakota is trying to conduct 44,233 tests every month, which is 5% of the population, though some people are tested more than once. So far this month, the Department of Health is 38% of the way to its monthly goal.

The state tallied 82 new cases on Thursday, along with one death. Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has increased by about 12, an increase of 15%.

Over the course of the pandemic, the state has reported that 9,897 people have tested positive for COVID-19. About 88% of them have recovered, but 148 have died and 1,058 still have active infections.

Firefighters rescue two people trapped in burning home

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls firefighters have rescued two people who were trapped in a burning home.

Firefighters used their ladders to bring one person trapped on the roof of the home to safety early Thursday.

Another person, a man, was trapped on the first floor of the house. Two firefighters went in through a bay window and rescued the man. Both people were taken to the hospital, according to fire officials.

Also, two police officers were taken to the hospital to be treated for smoke inhalation.

Authorities said firefighters also brought a dog out of the home. The fire was contained mainly to the living room with heat and smoke damage throughout the house.

Fire officials said the home did not have working smoke detectors. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

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State lawmaker sued by man who worked on possible campaign

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota legislator is facing a lawsuit filed by a man who claims he was never paid for working on the lawmaker's possible campaign for Congress.

Jaedon Kroger says state Rep. Michael Saba owes him \$12,000 for work on a campaign that never came to fruition. Saba considered challenging U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, but decided against it, in part due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In his lawsuit, Kroger said he and Saba agreed in January that Kroger would work as an independent contractor on Saba's campaign for a salary of \$4,875 per month from January to November, the Argus Leader reported. Kroger lists two witnesses to the agreement.

Saba said he isn't liable for the claim because "no agreement was reached between the parties regarding services the plaintiff (Kroger) claims to have provided, and no contract exists."

Saba requested and was granted the transfer of the case from small claims court to the regular civil docket for a jury trial. A status hearing is set for Aug. 31.

The Latest: Paris, Marseille declared at-risk zones

By The Associated Press undefined

PARIS — The head of France's national health service says Paris and Marseille have been declared at-risk zones for the coronavirus as authorities observe a sharp increase in infections.

Jerome Salomon, speaking on France Inter radio, warned "the situation is deteriorating from week to week" in the country. He says virus clusters emerge every day following family reunions, big parties and other gatherings amid summer holidays.

A government decree issued Friday allows authorities to impose stricter measures in the Paris and Marseille areas.

Salomon says there are "more and more people who tested positive, more and more people arriving in hospitals... we need to react before counting new deaths."

The national health agency reported 2,669 new infections across on Thursday, putting France's infection rate per 100,000 people to above 30.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- North Korea lifts lockdown in Kaesong, says virus situation there is stable
- Bolivia 's political crisis threatens hospitals and patients
- New Zealand extends lockdown in its largest city as new outbreak grows
- Spain is facing another surge in coronavirus infections not even two months after beating back the first wave
- False claims and conspiracy theories have dogged efforts to control the pandemic from the beginning. The bad information can pose a particular threat to communities of people of color who already face worse health outcomes.
- Indonesia' s only vaccine production company has injected the first volunteers with Chinese firm Sinovac's vaccine candidate in so-called phase 3 clinical trials.
- Follow AP's pandemic coverage at <http://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

LONDON — Britain has secured 90 million doses of two vaccines being developed to fight COVID-19. The deals with Novavax, an American biotech company, and Janssen, a Belgian company owned by Johnson & Johnson, mean the U.K. has now acquired the rights to 340 million doses of six different experimental vaccines as the government seeks to hedge its bets on products that are still being tested to see if they are safe and effective.

Kate Bingham, chair of the government's Vaccines Taskforce, told ITV there was no guarantee any of

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the vaccines would work "because there have been no vaccines against any human coronavirus.

"So what we're doing is we've chosen six of the most promising vaccines across four different vaccine types and we're hoping that one of those will work."

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Denmark has added Belgium and Malta to its list of European nations where non-essential travels are not recommended as the Scandinavian country has seen a flare-up of coronavirus cases.

The Scandinavian country's reason for doing so is that both nations have seen more than 30 cases of coronavirus per 100,000 inhabitants. Danish health officials say the number is 32.5 for Belgium and 31.5 for Malta.

As of Friday midnight, people who travel from Belgium or Malta must self-quarantine upon return.

Denmark earlier has listed Spain, Andorra, Bulgaria, Luxemburg and Romania as countries where non-essential travels are not recommended.

Danes also don't recommend trips to countries outside Europe with the exception of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, Georgia, Japan, Thailand, Tunisia and Uruguay.

BERLIN — German authorities in the western state of Baden-Wuerttemberg have established a new coronavirus testing station at a highway rest stop by the French border after noting a strong increase in cases in the neighboring country.

The dpa news agency reported Friday that the center has started testing travelers at the Neuenburg-Ost rest stop, across the border from the French town of Chalampe. Travelers from designated risk areas are required to be tested upon return to Germany, and the center will also test any others who want to be checked.

France reported more than 10,000 new confirmed cases over the past week.

Baden-Wuerttemberg already has test centers at airports in Stuttgart, Friedrichshafen and Baden-Baden, as well as the Stuttgart main train station.

The Neuenburg rest stop center is the first such station outside Bavaria, which has had roadside testing since the end of July. They have generated so much interest that Bavarian officials have reported a backlog of cases, with about 44,000 people not yet informed of their results, including more than 900 who tested positive for COVID-19.

Baden-Wuerttemberg says it expects to be able to inform people within four days of their tests.

SYDNEY — A man in his 20s has become the youngest person to die of the coronavirus in Australia.

He was among 14 new deaths and 372 new infections reported by Victoria state health officials Friday in an outbreak centered in Melbourne, the second-largest city.

And Prime Minister Scott Morrison said 188 elderly people had died over the past week as the virus ripped through aged-care homes in Melbourne. Officials say about 70% of Australia's 375 virus deaths have been at aged-care facilities.

Morrison said that Australians had high expectations of the services and standards at nursing homes and other facilities like hospitals and schools.

He says, "On the days that the system falls short, on the days that expectations are not met, I'm deeply sorry about that, of course I am."

He said the country was moving heaven and earth to defeat the virus and it would eventually win.

NEW DELHI — India's coronavirus death toll overtook Britain to become the fourth-highest in the world with another single-day record increase in cases Friday.

According to the Health Ministry, India reported 1,007 deaths in the past 24 hours. Its total rose to 48,040 deaths, behind the United States, Brazil and Mexico.

India's confirmed cases reached 2,461,190 with a single-day spike of 64,553 in the past 24 hours. More

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than 70% of people infected in India have recovered.

The daily increase in newly reported infections was around 15,000 in the first week of July but jumped to more than 50,000 in the first week of August. The ministry cited its testing efforts, with more than 800,000 tests in a single day, taking cumulative tests to more than 26 million.

Health experts say it needs to be higher, given India's population of 1.4 billion.

India's two-month lockdown imposed nationwide in late March kept infections low. But it has eased and is now largely being enforced in high-risk areas. The new cases spiked after India reopened shops and manufacturing and allowed hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to return to their homes from coronavirus-hit regions.

Subways, schools and movie theaters remain closed.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea is reporting 103 new coronavirus cases. It is one of the country's biggest daily jumps in months, and officials are expressing concern that infections are getting out of control in the capital of Seoul and other major cities as Koreans increasingly venture out in public.

The figures released by the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday brought the national caseload to 14,873 cases, including 305 deaths.

Eighty-three of the new cases were in the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area, where authorities have struggled to stem transmissions. Infections were also reported in other major cities such as Busan, Gwangju and Ulsan.

Friday's jump was driven by local transmissions, which health authorities said could worsen because of the increase in travelers during the summer vacation season.

FRESNO, Calif. — A private school in California has been ordered to close after it reopened classrooms in violation of a state health order aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

Fresno County issued a health order Thursday against Immanuel Schools in Reedley. The K-12 school was told to close its classrooms until the county is removed from a state monitoring list for two weeks.

The school has about 600 students and it allowed students into classes Thursday without masks or social distancing. The school's trustees and superintendent say they believe students' development will suffer if they can't be taught on campus.

BEIJING — China has reported another eight cases of locally transmitted coronavirus infections, all in the northwestern region of Xinjiang where the country's last major outbreak has been largely contained.

Officials said Friday that 22 other new cases were brought from outside the country by Chinese travelers returning home. China has reported a total of 4,634 deaths from COVID-19 among 84,786 cases.

Hong Kong reported 69 new confirmed cases and three deaths over the past 24 hours. The semi-autonomous Chinese city has required masks be worn in all public settings, restricted indoor dining and enacted other social distancing measures to bring down transmissions that now total 4,312 with 66 deaths.

MEXICO CITY — Mexico has passed the half-million mark in confirmed coronavirus cases.

The Health Department reported 7,371 newly confirmed cases Thursday, bringing the country's total for the pandemic to 505,751. The department reported 627 more confirmed COVID-19 deaths, giving Mexico a total of 55,293.

Experts agree that due to Mexico's extremely low testing rates, those numbers are undercounts and that the real figures may be two to three times higher. With only about 1.15 million tests conducted to date in a country of almost 130 million people, less than 1% of Mexicans have been tested.

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas is reporting fewer than 7,000 hospitalized coronavirus patients for the first time in six weeks.

That encouraging sign Thursday was clouded by questions over testing as students return to school and

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college football teams push ahead with playing this fall. Testing has dropped off in Texas, a trend seen across the U.S as health experts worry that patients without symptoms aren't bothering because of long lines and waiting days to get results.

Numbers from Texas health officials this week offer a hazy picture of how much testing has fallen. At one point this week, the infection rate in Texas was as high as 24%, only to suddenly drop Thursday to 16%. Officials have not offered explanations about the wild swing in infection rates.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California will resume eviction and foreclosure proceedings Sept. 2, stoking fears of a wave of evictions during the coronavirus pandemic unless the governor and state Legislature can agree on a proposal to extend protections.

The Judicial Council of California voted 19-1 Thursday to end the temporary rules blocking such proceedings that had been in place since April 6.

Since the pandemic began in March, more than 9.7 million people have filed for unemployment benefits in California. A survey from the U.S. Census shows more than 1.7 million renters in the state could not pay their rent on time last month.

California Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye has been reluctant to let the rules stay in place much longer, saying it is the job of the judicial branch to interpret the laws, not make them.

LONDON — Britain will require all people arriving from France to isolate for 14 days -- an announcement that throws the plans of tens of thousands of holidaymakers into chaos.

The government said late Thursday that France is being removed from the list of nations exempted from quarantine requirements because of a rising number of coronavirus infections, which have surged by 66% in the past week. The Netherlands, Malta, Monaco and the Caribbean islands of Aruba and Turks & Caicos also were added to the quarantine list.

France is one of the top holiday destinations for British travelers, who now have until 4 a.m. Saturday to get home if they want to avoid two weeks in isolation.

The number of new infections in Britain is also rising.

Harris bringing energy, dollars and more to Biden's campaign

BY ALEXANDRA JAFFE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — In her first two days as Joe Biden's running mate, Kamala Harris has fired off the campaign's sharpest criticism of President Donald Trump's shortcomings. She has vouched for Biden's character on race and more. And the enthusiasm surrounding her historic candidacy has brought in a record \$36 million, including contributions from 150,000 new donors.

The campaign hopes it is just the beginning.

With less than three months before the election, Harris is rapidly embracing her new role. Democratic operatives and Harris allies believe she'll energize what has been a relatively quiet campaign that has often preferred to keep the attention on the turbulence of Trump's White House. She's already making a vigorous case for Trump's defeat, allowing Biden to focus more on his own policy prescriptions and less on direct attacks.

"We always look for surrogates and validators that help close the deal and can speak to voters who needed another reason to say, 'Yes, I'm gonna support Joe Biden,'" said Donna Brazile, a former Democratic National Committee chair who also ran Al Gore's 2000 campaign. "She fills in the gap."

Harris was known during the Democratic presidential primary for wearing Converse sneakers and dancing with staff and supporters in unscripted moments. Biden allies expect her to deliver enthusiasm among some Democrats who oppose Trump but aren't yet energized to vote for a candidate they feel may be out of touch with their concerns.

Harris' "ability to connect" is part of what California Rep. Barbara Lee, who served as one of her campaign chairs, believes will help her deliver the campaign message to voters who may be otherwise tuned out.

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"She loves to dance. She loves to cook. She's a person who does normal things that everybody does. They can relate to her," Lee said.

Still, Harris, the first Black woman selected for a national ticket, has faced her own criticism from young voters and progressives in the past, namely over her record on police misconduct as a district attorney and later California's attorney general. Critics say she opposed key criminal justice reform measures, including police body cameras statewide, and didn't address a number of wrongful convictions on her watch.

But during her time in Congress she's embraced greater reforms to law enforcement, particularly in recent months in the nationwide reckoning over racism sparked by the police killing of George Floyd. She has been a leading Democratic voice on the issue.

Some progressives still point to Biden's past support for the 1994 crime bill as reason to doubt his commitment to criminal justice reform. And Harris herself was a critic of Biden's record on race, notably assailing him during a primary debate for previously opposing federally mandated busing. But Harris signaled Wednesday that she'll offer a strong defense of Biden's record on race.

During her first appearance with the former vice president, she said Biden "takes his place in the ongoing story of America's march towards equality and justice" as the only person "who's served alongside the first Black president and has chosen the first Black woman as his running mate."

Biden campaign officials see her as a strong messenger against Trump, pointing to both her vigorous criticism of the Republican president during her primary campaign, when her pledge to "prosecute the case" against Trump won her support, as well as her sharp comments Wednesday. She said Trump "cares more about himself than the people who elected him" and accused him of "making every challenge we face even more difficult to solve."

Brian Brokaw, who ran Harris' campaign for attorney general in 2010, said her questioning of Trump officials during Senate Judiciary Committee hearings hints at the case she'll make against him on the campaign trail and during the vice presidential debate with Mike Pence.

"No one should forget that she had cut her teeth in the courtroom," he said. "Anybody who has been on the receiving end of the Kamala Harris cross-examination, whether it's a witness on the stand or Jeff Sessions or Bill Barr knows that if you're in her crosshairs, it's an uncomfortable place to be."

Biden's allies believe a main Harris advantage is demonstrated by the Republicans' struggle to settle on a line of attack against her. In the short time since she was announced, Trump has called her everything from "extraordinarily nasty" to "a madwoman," from "phony" to "radical left." On Thursday he said he had "heard" rumors that she is ineligible to run for national office because her parents are immigrants. She was born in Oakland, California, and there is no doubt she is eligible.

Harris is already delivering for the campaign in a tangible way: with a record-breaking fundraising haul.

While fundraising is traditionally one of the running mate's top priorities, a number of donors said her presence would be particularly helpful for Democrats because of her connections in California and beyond. Through her nearly two decades in California politics, Harris built a network of deep-pocketed donors in Hollywood and the state's legal circles.

Andrew Byrnes, a California donor who supported Harris, then moved to Biden in the presidential primary, said he got about 50 messages from donors wanting to get involved after Biden selected her.

Michel Kraut, a Los Angeles lawyer and major Harris contributor, said he's already had donors asking him about putting together events in the area.

"It allows Kamala's nationwide fundraising machine to get reinvigorated," said Kraut, who has already been raising money for Biden.

"There's this new energy that the person we wanted to be president and now is on the presidential ticket has created. It's not just, 'I'll raise money,' but, 'I'll be dedicated to do this.'"

Associated Press writer Kathleen Ronayne contributed to this report from Sacramento, Calif.

Iran, Turkey lash out at UAE over agreement with Israel

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Iran and Turkey lashed out at their regional rival the United Arab Emirates on Friday over its decision to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel, accusing it of betraying the Palestinian cause, even as much of the international community welcomed the move.

Iran's Foreign Ministry called the U.S.-brokered deal a "dagger that was unjustly struck by the UAE in the backs of the Palestinian people and all Muslims." Turkey said the peoples of the region "will never forget and will never forgive this hypocritical behavior" by the UAE.

The UAE, which has never fought Israel and has quietly been improving ties for years, said the agreement put a hold on Israel's plans to unilaterally annex parts of the occupied West Bank, which the Palestinians view as the heartland of their future state.

But the Turkish Foreign Ministry said the UAE had no authority to negotiate with Israel on behalf of the Palestinians or "to make concessions on matters vital to Palestine."

The agreement would make the UAE the first Gulf Arab state — and the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan — to have full diplomatic ties with Israel. The Palestinians say the deal amounts to "treason" and have called on Arab and Muslim countries to oppose it.

The historic deal delivered a key foreign policy victory for U.S. President Donald Trump as he seeks re-election and reflected a changing Middle East in which shared concerns about archenemy Iran have largely overtaken traditional Arab support for the Palestinians. Trump has predicted that other countries in the region will follow the UAE's lead.

Israel, the UAE and other Gulf countries that view Iran as a regional menace have been cultivating closer ties in recent years. Turkey has had diplomatic relations with Israel for decades, but under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has positioned itself as a champion of the Palestinians. Turkey and the UAE support rival camps in the conflict in Libya.

Later on Friday, Erdogan said he was considering downgrading Turkey's relations with the UAE and recalling its ambassador.

Oman, a Gulf country that has cultivated closer ties with Israel in recent years, even hosting a visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last year, meanwhile welcomed the agreement. The Foreign Ministry statement, carried by the state-run Oman News Agency, did not say if the sultanate would make a similar move.

Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas welcomed both the agreement and the decision to suspend annexation, and called to congratulate his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi on "this historic step."

"We stand by our position that only a negotiated two-state solution can bring lasting peace to the Middle East," Maas said in a statement. "Together with our European partners and the region we have campaigned intensively in past months against an annexation and for the resumption of direct negotiations."

Italy said the normalization of relations was an "important step that can contribute to peace and stability in the Middle East." It said it hoped the "positive" suspension of Israel's annexation plans would help restart direct peace negotiations.

China meanwhile said it welcomes "any measure that helps in easing tensions between Middle Eastern countries and promotes regional peace and stability."

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said Beijing will "continue to firmly support the Palestinian people's just cause of restoring their legitimate national rights and building national independence."

Associated Press writers Amir Vahdat in Tehran, Iran; Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey; David Rising in Berlin, Nicole Winfield in Rome and Christopher Bodeen in Beijing contributed.

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Trump admits he's blocking postal cash to stop mail-in votes

By DEB RIECHMANN and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump frankly acknowledged that he's starving the U.S. Postal Service of money to make it harder to process an expected surge of mail-in ballots, which he worries could cost him reelection.

In an interview on Fox Business Network, Trump explicitly noted two funding provisions that Democrats are seeking in a relief package that has stalled on Capitol Hill. Without the additional money, he said, the Postal Service won't have the resources to handle a flood of ballots from voters who are seeking to avoid polling places during the coronavirus pandemic.

"If we don't make a deal, that means they don't get the money," Trump told host Maria Bartiromo on Thursday. "That means they can't have universal mail-in voting; they just can't have it."

Trump's statements, including the false claim that Democrats are seeking universal mail-in voting, come as he is searching for a strategy to gain an advantage in his November matchup against Joe Biden. He's pairing the tough Postal Service stance in congressional negotiations with an increasingly robust mail-in-voting legal fight in states that could decide the election.

In Iowa, which Trump won handily in 2016 but is more competitive this year, his campaign joined a lawsuit Wednesday against two Democratic-leaning counties in an effort to invalidate tens of thousands of voters' absentee ballot applications. That followed legal maneuvers in battleground Pennsylvania, where the campaign hopes to force changes to how the state collects and counts mail-in ballots. And in Nevada, Trump is challenging a law sending ballots to all active voters.

His efforts could face limits. The U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday rebuffed Republicans who challenged an agreement in Rhode Island allowing residents to vote by mail through November's general election without getting signatures from two witnesses or a notary.

For Democrats, Trump's new remarks were a clear admission that the president is attempting to restrict voting rights.

Biden said it was "Pure Trump. He doesn't want an election."

Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold said it was "voter suppression to undermine the safest method to vote during a pandemic, and force Americans to risk their lives to vote."

Negotiations over a big new virus relief package have all but ended, with the White House and congressional leaders far apart on the size, scope and approach for shoring up households, reopening schools and launching a national strategy to contain the coronavirus.

While there is some common ground over \$100 billion for schools and new funds for virus testing, Democrats also want other emergency funds that Trump rejects.

"They want \$3.5 billion for something that will turn out to be fraudulent. That's election money, basically," Trump said during Thursday's call-in interview.

Democrats have pushed for a total of \$10 billion for the Postal Service in talks with Republicans on the COVID-19 response bill. That figure, which would include money to help with election mail, is down from a \$25 billion plan in a House-passed coronavirus measure.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has said that the agency is in a financially untenable position, but he maintains it can handle this year's election mail. A major donor to Trump and other Republicans, DeJoy is the first postmaster general in nearly two decades who is not a career postal employee.

"Although there will likely be an unprecedented increase in election mail volume due to the pandemic, the Postal Service has ample capacity to deliver all election mail securely and on-time in accordance with our delivery standards, and we will do so," he told the Postal Service's governing board last week.

Memos obtained by The Associated Press show that Postal Service leadership has pushed to eliminate overtime and halt late delivery trips that are sometimes needed to ensure mail arrives on time, measures that postal workers and union officials say are delaying service. Additional records detail cuts to hours at post offices, including reductions on Saturdays and during lunch hours.

Democrats, and a handful of Republicans, have sent DeJoy several letters asking him to reverse his changes and criticizing what they say is a lack of openness by the agency. Late Wednesday, Senate

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Democrats again wrote DeJoy, this time saying postal leadership is pushing state election officials to opt for pricier first-class postage for mail-in ballots to be prioritized.

"Instead of taking steps to increase your agency's ability to deliver for the American people, you are implementing policy changes that make matters worse, and the Postal Service is reportedly considering changes that would increase costs for states at a time when millions of Americans are relying on voting by mail to exercise their right to vote," the Democrats wrote.

Separately, in a letter last month, the Postal Service warned Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson that the agency might not be able to deliver ballots in time to be counted under the state's deadlines for casting mail-in votes.

Postal Service spokesman David Partenheimer said in a statement that "certain deadlines concerning mail-in ballots, may be incompatible with the Postal Service's delivery standards," especially if election officials don't pay more for first-class postage.

"To the extent that states choose to use the mail as part of their elections, they should do so in a manner that realistically reflects how the mail works," he said.

In a memo to staff Thursday, DeJoy said his policies have brought "unintended consequences that impacted our overall service levels," but added that the Postal Service "must make a number of significant changes which will not be easy, but which are necessary."

"This will increase our performance for the election and upcoming peak season and maintain the high level of public trust we have earned for dedication and commitment to our customers throughout our history," DeJoy wrote, according to the memo obtained by the AP.

Judy Beard, legislative and political director for the American Postal Workers Union, said postal workers are up to the task of delivering mail-in ballots this year.

"We definitely know that the president is absolutely wrong concerning vote-by-mail," she said.

Rep. Gerry Connolly, D-Va., chair of the House subcommittee on government operations, said Trump is acknowledging that he wants to hold up funding for the U.S. Postal Service to hinder Americans from voting.

"The president admits his motive for holding USPS funding hostage is that he doesn't want Americans to vote by mail," Connolly said in a statement Thursday. "Why? It hurts his electoral chances. He's putting self-preservation ahead of public safety, for an election he deserves to lose."

Trump has requested a mail-in ballot for Florida's primary election Tuesday. Ballots were mailed Wednesday to both the president and first lady Melania Trump at the Mar-a-Lago resort, which Trump lists as his legal address, according to online Palm Beach County elections records. Both voted by mail in the presidential preference primary in March, according to records.

Izaguirre reported from Charleston, West Virginia. The Associated Press produced this coverage with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

5 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. UAE FACES BACKLASH FOR ISRAELI PACT Iran and Turkey strongly criticize their regional rival over its decision to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel in a U.S.-brokered deal, accusing it of betraying the Palestinian cause.

2. TRUMP GIVES CREDENCE TO CONSPIRACY The president adds fuel to an online misinformation campaign about Kamala Harris' eligibility to be vice president that parallels the one he used against Barack Obama to power his rise into politics.

3. LEBANESE DESPERATE FOR TRUTH AFTER EXPLOSION For many in Beirut, their greatest hope for credible answers about the deadly port blast that wrecked their capital may lie with outside investigators.

4. 'THEY JUST CAN'T HAVE IT' Trump acknowledges he's starving the U.S. Postal Service of funding to

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make it harder to process an expected surge in mail-in ballots that he worries could cost him reelection.

5. BELARUS FREES DETAINEES AMID PRESSURE Belarusian authorities release about 1,000 people detained during demonstrations contesting the results of the presidential election as anger mounts against a brutal crackdown on protesters.

Asia Today: India's virus death toll rises, Seoul cases jump

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's coronavirus death toll overtook Britain's to become the fourth-highest in the world with another single-day record increase in cases Friday.

According to the Health Ministry, India reported 1,007 deaths in the past 24 hours. Its total rose to 48,040 deaths, behind the United States, Brazil and Mexico.

India's confirmed cases reached 2,461,190 with a single-day spike of 64,553 cases reported in the past 24 hours, the ministry said. India is behind the United States and Brazil in total positive cases. More than 70% of people infected in India have recovered.

The daily increase in newly reported infections was around 15,000 in the first week of July but jumped to more than 50,000 in the first week of August. The ministry cited its testing efforts, with more than 800,000 tests in a single day, taking cumulative tests to more than 26 million.

Health experts say it needs to be higher, given India's population of 1.4 billion.

India's two-month lockdown imposed nationwide in late March kept infections low. But it has eased and is now largely being enforced in high-risk areas. The new cases spiked after India reopened shops and manufacturing and allowed hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to return to their homes from coronavirus-hit regions.

Subways, schools and movie theaters remain closed.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region:

— South Korea reported 103 new virus cases, one of its biggest daily jumps in months, as officials express concern that infections are getting out of control in cities. Eighty-three of the new cases were from the Seoul area, and infections were also reported in Busan, Gwangju and Ulsan. Lee Jae-myung, governor of Gyeonggi province near Seoul, issued an administrative order to shut down the province's 15,779 religious facilities, mostly Christian churches, for two weeks to slow the spread of the virus. Churches have emerged as major sources of infections after many of them failed to require worshipers to wear masks or allowed them to sing in choirs or eat together in diners. Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said authorities will be forced to consider elevating social distancing measures if transmissions continue to rise. That may include bans on large gatherings, shutting "high-risk" facilities such as karaoke bars and again banning spectators from sports stadiums.

— North Korean leader Kim Jong Un lifted a lockdown at a major city near the border with South Korea where thousands had been quarantined for weeks over coronavirus worries. But Kim also at a ruling party meeting insisted the North will keep its borders shut. State media reported Kim said the virus situation in Kaesong was stable and expressed gratitude to residents for cooperating with the lockdown. The lockdown was based on a suspected virus case but North Korea later said the person's test results were inconclusive.

— New Zealand's government has extended a lockdown of its largest city Auckland for another 12 days as it tries to stamp out its first domestic coronavirus outbreak in more than three months. The outbreak has grown to 30 people and extended beyond Auckland for the first time. Until the cluster was discovered Tuesday, New Zealand had gone 102 days without infections spreading in the community, with the only known cases travelers quarantined after arriving from abroad. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern says extending the lockdown will give health authorities time to get a handle on the cluster and isolate those infected.

— A man in his 20s has become the youngest person to die of the coronavirus in Australia. He was among 14 new deaths and 372 new infections reported by Victoria state health officials Friday in an outbreak centered in Melbourne, the second-largest city. And Prime Minister Scott Morrison said 188 elderly people had died over the past week as the virus ripped through aged-care homes in Melbourne. Officials say about 70% of Australia's 375 virus deaths have been at aged-care facilities. Morrison said that Australians had

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high expectations of the services and standards at aged-care homes and other facilities like hospitals and schools. "On the days that the system falls short, on the days that expectations are not met, I'm deeply sorry about that, of course I am," Morrison said.

— China reported eight new cases in the northwestern region of Xinjiang where the country's latest major outbreak has been largely contained. Another 22 new cases reported Friday by the National Health Commission were Chinese travelers returning home. Hong Kong reported another 69 cases and three deaths over the past 24 hours. The semi-autonomous Chinese city has required masks be worn in all public settings, restricted indoor dining and enacted other social distancing measures to bring down transmissions.

Lebanese have little hope blast probe will lead to truth

By ZEINA KARAM and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon's judicial investigation of the Beirut port explosion started with political wrangling over the naming of a lead investigator, military threats to jail leakers and doubts over whether a panel appointed along sectarian lines could be fully impartial.

So for many Lebanese, their greatest hope for credible answers about the blast that wrecked much of their capital may lie with outsiders: the French forensic police who have joined the probe and FBI investigators are expected to take part.

French teams have pressed ahead at their work, sending divers into the underwater crater, taking explosives samples and preparing recommendations for both French and Lebanese magistrates. Among the French judicial police on the case are men and women who responded after the 2004 tsunami in Japan, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and the November 2015 and Bastille Day 2016 terror attacks in France.

The Beirut explosion lies at the crossroads of a disastrous accident and a crime scene. It still was not known what sparked the fire that ignited nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate that were stored for years in Beirut's port next to densely populated residential areas. Documents have emerged that show the country's top leadership and security officials were aware of the stockpile.

Search and rescue crews flew in from around the world in the immediate aftermath and found themselves looking at a scene that was both familiar and yet strangely alien.

"In an earthquake, it's easier because we can understand ... how it moves. But in this case, we didn't have enough elements to understand what happened," said Alberto Boanini, a member of the Italian rescue team. The team has seen its share of quakes and forest fires, but nothing quite like the port in Beirut, where he said it was hard to fathom what could level it so completely.

Many Lebanese want the probe taken out of the hands of their own government, having learned from past experience that the long-entrenched political factions, notorious for corruption, won't allow any results damaging to their leadership to come to light. The explosion killed more than 175 people, injured at least 6,000, and left tens of thousands homeless.

Paris sent judicial police because a French architect was among the dead, and French law gives jurisdiction for an investigation if a citizen dies abroad under questionable circumstances.

But the French investigators work only at the invitation of the Lebanese, and their orders are confidential.

French officials say they have the access they need but will not say whether their inquiry can extend to questioning witnesses or requesting documents. They hand over their findings to the Lebanese, but keep a mirror copy for a French inquiry. The FBI is also joining at Lebanese authorities' invitation.

Top Lebanese officials, including President Michel Aoun, have rejected calls for an independent probe, describing it as "a waste of time" and suggesting it would be politicized.

In its last decision before resigning under pressure, six days after the explosion, Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government referred the port explosion case to the Higher Judicial Council, Lebanon's highest justice authority, to carry out the investigation.

An argument then ensued with the outgoing justice minister over the investigation's lead judge. The outgoing minister proposed a figure whom the panel rejected as too close to Aoun's party. After wrangling back and forth, they settled on a compromise, Judge Fadi Sawwan, a former military investigating judge.

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The Council itself is made up of 10 people, eight of whom are appointed according to the interests of the various political factions and religious sects in line with Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system.

The authorities have so far arrested at least 19 people in connection to the blast, including the head of the Customs Department and his predecessor, as well as the head of the port.

Lebanese say they want to see top officials who knew about the existence of the ammonium nitrate being investigated.

"They will blame the small guys while the ones who are really responsible will get away with their crime, that's what will happen," said Jad, a 38-year-old computer engineer who declined to give his full name in line with his company's regulations not to discuss politics.

"Look, it's simple. If this time there is no credible, serious investigation that will lead to the punishment of everyone responsible for this disaster, it is goodbye Lebanon. No one will ever want to live in this country again," he said, standing on a bridge overlooking the decimated port. He had come to inspect the damage.

Lebanese forensics expert Omar Nachabe said the public infighting about the name of the lead investigator is a bad sign that casts doubt on the credibility of any local investigation.

"If I am a Lebanese citizen, my capital (city) has been destroyed. I want a quick and serious investigation, yet the government has not shown until now that it is up to the task," he told the local channel LBCI. He lamented the time wasted before the explosion was referred to the HJC and the bickering that continues till now.

Explosions have marked a grim timeline in Lebanon's modern history and have killed presidents, prime ministers and countless journalists and activists during the country's 1975-90 civil war and beyond.

Almost none of the perpetrators were ever arrested or tried, and the truth was invariably buried. Lebanese had high hopes that the U.N.-backed tribunal investigating the 2005 killing of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri would be a chance to end impunity in Lebanon. But it took 15 years and was marred by doubts, politics and more deaths. The tribunal is to issue verdicts Tuesday.

International involvement in the investigation might bring some truth, but bringing justice is more complicated. Dov Jacobs, an international legal scholar based in the Netherlands, said the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine six years ago might be the closest analogy.

In that case, international experts had full access to the site, and international prosecutors charged three Russians and a Ukrainian with involvement in bringing down the plane and the murder of all on board. The men are on trial in a Dutch court in absentia, since none have been extradited.

But in Lebanon, Jacobs said, "the investigation itself is a tool of political influence. It's one of those frustrating moments where immediate calls for justice are faced with a wall which is the political reality on the ground."

Hinnant reported from Paris. Sylvie Corbet contributed from Paris.

For Harris, memories of mother guide bid for vice president

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Speaking from the Senate floor for the first time, Kamala Harris expressed gratitude for a woman on whose shoulders she said she stood. In her autobiography, Harris interspersed the well-worn details of her resume with an extended ode to the one she calls "the reason for everything." And taking the stage to announce her presidential candidacy, she framed it as a race grounded in the compassion and values of the person she credits for her fighting spirit.

Though more than a decade has passed since Shyamala Gopalan died, she remains a force in her daughter's life as she takes a historic spot on the Democratic ticket besides former Vice President Joe Biden. Those who know the California senator expect her campaign for the vice presidency to bring repeated mentions of the woman she calls her single greatest influence.

"She's always told the same story," said friend Mimi Silbert. "Kamala had one important role model, and it was her mother."

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Her mother gave her an early grounding in the civil rights movement and injected in her a duty not to complain but rather to act. And that no-nonsense demeanor on display in Senate hearings over special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh and more? Onlookers can credit, or blame, Gopalan, a crusader who raised her daughter in the same mold.

"She'd tell us: 'Don't sit around and complain about things. Do something.' So I did something," Harris said Wednesday in her first appearance with Biden as his running mate.

Harris' parents met as doctoral students at the University of California, Berkeley, at the dawn of the 1960s. Her father, a Jamaican named Donald Harris, came to study economics. Her mother studied nutrition and endocrinology.

For two freethinking young people drawn to activism, they landed on campus from opposite sides of the world just as protests exploded around civil rights, the Vietnam War and voting rights. Their paths crossed in those movements, and they fell in love.

At the heart of their activism was a small group of students who met every Sunday to discuss the books of Black authors and grassroots activity around the world, from the anti-apartheid Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa to liberation movements in Latin America to the Black separatist preaching of Malcolm X in the U.S.

A member of the group, Aubrey Labrie, said the weekly gathering was one in which figures such as Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro were admired, and would later provide some inspiration to the founders of the Black Panther Party. Gopalan was the only one in the group who wasn't Black, but she immersed herself in the issues, Labrie said. She and Harris wowed him with their intellect.

"I was in awe of the knowledge that they seemed to demonstrate," said Labrie, who grew so close to the family that the senator calls him "Uncle Aubrey."

The couple married, and Gopalan Harris gave birth to Kamala and then Maya two years later. Even with young children, the duo continued their advocacy.

As a little girl, Harris says she remembers an energetic sea of moving legs and the cacophony of chants as her parents made their way to marches. She writes of her parents being sprayed with police hoses, confronted by Hells Angels and once, with the future senator in a stroller, forced to run to safety when violence broke out.

Sharon McGaffie, a family friend whose mother, Regina Shelton, was a caregiver for the girls, remembers Gopalan Harris speaking to her daughters as if they were adults and exposing them to worlds often walled off to children, whether a civil rights march or a visit to mom's laboratory or a seminar where the mother was delivering a speech.

"She would take the girls and they would pull out their little backpacks and they would be in that environment," said McGaffie.

A few years into the marriage, Harris' parents divorced. The senator gives the pain of the parting only a few words in her biography. Those who are close to her describe her childhood as happy, the smells of her mother's cooking filling the kitchen and the sound of constant chatter and laughter buffeting the air.

The mother's influence on her girls grew even greater, and those who know Harris say they see it reflected throughout her life.

"You can't know who @KamalaHarris is without knowing who our mother was," her sister Maya tweeted Tuesday after Biden announced his pick. "Missing her terribly, but know she and the ancestors are smiling today."

As a kindergartner, Stacey Johnson-Batiste remembers Harris coming to her aid when a classroom bully grabbed her craft project and threw it to the floor, which brought retaliation from the boy. He hit the future politician in the head with something that caused enough bleeding to necessitate a hospital visit, cementing for Johnson-Batiste a lifelong friendship with Harris and a view of her as a woman who embodies the ethics of her mother.

"Even back then," Johnson-Batiste said, "she has always stood up for what she thought was right."

As a teenager, after her mother got a job that prompted a family move to Montreal, Harris began seeing

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how she could achieve change in ways small and large. Outside her family's apartment, she and her sister protested a prohibition against soccer on the building's lawn, which Harris said resulted in the rule being overturned. As high school wound down, she homed in on a career goal of being a lawyer.

Sophie Maxwell, a former member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, said Harris wasn't choosing to eschew activism but rather to incorporate it into a life in law: "Those two things go hand in hand."

In college, at Howard University in Washington, D.C., Shelley Young Thompkins recalls a classmate who was certain of what she wanted to do in life, who was serious about her studies and who put off the fun of joining a sorority until her final year even as she made time for sit-ins and protests. Thompkins and Harris both won student council posts.

In her new friend, Young Thompkins saw a young woman intent on not squandering all that her mother had worked to give her.

"We were these two freshmen girls who want to save the world," she said.

From there, Harris' story is much better known: a return to California for law school; a failed first attempt at the bar; jobs in prosecutor's offices in Oakland and San Francisco; a brazen and successful run at unseating her former boss as district attorney; election as state attorney general and U.S. senator; and a run for president that launched with fanfare but dissolved before the first votes were cast.

Each step of the way, friends point to the influence of Gopalan Harris as a constant.

Andrea Dew Steele remembers it being apparent from the moment they sat down to craft the very first flyer for Harris' first campaign for public office.

"She always talked about her mother," Dew Steele said. "When she was alive she was a force, and since she's passed away she's still a force."

Dew Steele remembers when she finally met Gopalan Harris at a campaign event. It immediately struck her: "Oh, this is where Kamala gets it from."

As much as mother and daughter shared, Gopalan Harris believed the world would see them differently. Those who knew her say she was dismayed by racial inequality in the U.S. Understanding her girls would be seen as Black despite their mixed heritage, she surrounded them with Black role models and immersed them in Black culture. They sang in the children's choir at a Black church and regularly visited Rainbow Sign, a former Berkeley funeral home that was transformed into a vibrant Black cultural center.

Though the senator talks of attending anti-apartheid protests in college and frames her life story as being in the same mold as her mother, she opted to pursue change by seeking a seat at the table.

"I knew part of making change was what I'd seen all my life, surrounded by adults shouting and marching and demanding justice from the outside. But I also knew there was an important role on the inside," she wrote in "The Truths We Hold."

To launch her political career, Harris had to unseat a man of her mother's generation — a liberal prosecutor who was the product of a left-wing family, who was active in the civil rights movement and who became a hero to other activists whom he defended in court. To win, Harris ran as a tougher-on-crime alternative.

Once in office, bound by the parameters of the law and the realities of politics, Harris' choices stirred some to dismiss her claims of progressivism even as many others fiercely defend her. She frames her philosophy in the example of her mother — concentrating on overarching goals through smaller daily steps.

"She wasn't fixated on that distant dream. She focused on the work right in front of her," the senator wrote.

Gopalan Harris defied generations of tradition by not returning to southern India after getting her doctorate, tossing aside expectations of an arranged marriage. Her daughter portrays her mother's spirit of activism as being in her blood. Gopalan Harris' mother took in victims of domestic abuse and educated women about contraception. Her father was active in India's independence movement and became a diplomat. The couple spent time living in Zambia after the end of British rule there, working to settle refugees.

Joe Gray, who was Gopalan Harris' boss after she returned from Canada to the Bay Area to work at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, struggles to describe how a 5-foot-1-inch woman managed to fill a room with her commanding presence.

Gray, now a professor at Oregon Health and Science University, didn't see Gopalan Harris as a "crusader

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in the workplace” but said she insisted on racial and gender equity, would make known her disapproval to an insensitive comment and was assertive in defending her work in cancer research.

Even from a distance, he’s struck by how much Harris reminds him of her.

“I just get the TV persona, but a lot of Shyamala’s directness and sense of social justice, those seem to come through,” he said. “I sense the same spirit.”

Lateefah Simon sensed it, too. She was a high school dropout-turned-MacArthur fellow Harris hired to join the San Francisco DA’s office to head a program for first-time offenders. Simon was skeptical of taking a role in a criminal justice system she saw as broken and biased, but Harris impressed her, and soon she had a glimpse of her mother as well.

At campaign events, Simon would watch Gopalan Harris, always in the front row, always beaming with pride. She saw how both mother and daughter were meticulous about tiny details, how they were hard workers but maintained a sense of joy in the labors, how their laugh would echo in the room.

One time, Simon said Gopalan Harris sent her away from a fundraiser because she was wearing tennis shoes, gently reminding her, “We always show up excellent.”

Years later, she heard echoes of the same message when Harris took a break from her Senate race to support her run for a seat on the Bay Area Rapid Transit District board. Descending from her campaign bus, Harris was quick with some words of advice for her friend: “Girl, clean your glasses.”

“It’s her saying, ‘I believe in you and I want people to see what I see in you,’” Simon said. Remembering her brush with the senator’s mother, Simon said, “If I got that from Shyamala just in that one moment, can you imagine the many jewels Kamala got from her growing up?”

It’s an influence that far outweighed that of Harris’ father. He and her mother separated when she was 5 before ultimately divorcing. She writes of seeing him on weekends and over summers after he became a professor at Stanford University.

In a piece he wrote for the Jamaica Global website, Harris said he never gave up his love for his daughters, and the senator trumpeted her father as a superhero in her children’s book. But the iciness of their relationship was on display last year when she jokingly linked her use of marijuana to her Jamaican heritage. Her father labeled the comment a “travesty” and a shameful soiling of the family reputation “in the pursuit of identity politics.”

The senator is curt in responding to questions about him, saying they have “off and on” contact. Labrie said though the father attended his daughter’s Senate swearing-in, he wasn’t at her campaign kickoff. He thinks the marijuana hubbub worsened their relationship. “I think that was the straw that really broke the camel’s back,” he said.

The singularity of her mother’s role in her life made her death even harder for Harris. Gopalan Harris relished roles in her daughter’s early campaigns but was gone before seeing her advance beyond a local office. The senator says she still thinks of her constantly.

“It can still get me choked up,” she said in an interview last year. “It doesn’t matter how many years have passed.”

The senator still uses pots and wooden spoons from her mother and thinks of her when she is back home and able to cook. Her mother’s amethyst ring sparkles from her hand. She finds herself asking her mother for advice or remembering one of her oft-repeated lines.

“I dearly wish she were here with us this week,” Harris tweeted Thursday.

She pictures the pride her mother wore as she stood beside her when she was sworn in as district attorney. She remembers worrying about staying composed as she uttered her mother’s name in her inaugural address as attorney general. She thinks of her mother asking a hospice nurse if her daughters would be OK as cancer drew her final day closer.

“There is no title or honor on earth I’ll treasure more than to say I am Shyamala Gopalan Harris’ daughter,” she wrote. “That is the truth I hold dearest of all.”

Trump gives credence to false, racist Harris conspiracy

By AAMER MADHANI, SARA BURNETT, AMANDA SEITZ and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday gave credence to a false and racist conspiracy theory about Kamala Harris' eligibility to be vice president, fueling an online misinformation campaign that parallels the one he used to power his rise into politics.

Asked about the matter at the White House, Trump told reporters he had "heard" rumors that Harris, a Black woman and U.S.-born citizen whose parents were immigrants, does not meet the requirement to serve in the White House. The president said he considered the rumors "very serious."

The conspiracy theory is false. Harris, who was tapped this week by Joe Biden to serve as his running mate on the Democratic ticket, was born in Oakland, California, and is eligible for both the vice presidency and presidency under the constitutional requirements. The question is not even considered complex, according to constitution lawyers.

"Full stop, end of story, period, exclamation point," said Jessica Levinson, a professor at Loyola Law School.

Trump built his political career on questioning a political opponent's legitimacy. He was a high-profile force behind the so-called "birther movement" — the lie that questioned whether President Barack Obama, the nation's first Black president, was eligible to serve. Only after mounting pressure during his 2016 campaign did Trump disavow the claims.

Trump's comments landed in a blizzard of other untrue, racist or sexist claims unleashed across social media and conservative websites after Biden picked Harris, the first Black woman and the first Asian American woman on a major party ticket. The misinformation campaign is built on falsehoods that have been circulating less noticeably for months, propelled by Trump supporters, and now the president himself.

"I have no idea if that's right," said Trump, who said he had read a column on the subject earlier Thursday. "I would have thought, I would have assumed, that the Democrats would have checked that out before she gets chosen to run for vice president."

Trump made the comments in answer to a reporter's question and appeared to be referencing an op-ed written by John Eastman, a conservative attorney who argues that the U.S. Constitution doesn't grant birthright citizenship. Eastman sowed doubt about Harris' eligibility based on her parents' immigration status. Harris' mother was born in India and her father was born in Jamaica.

But constitutional law experts say Harris' parents are beside the point. The 14th Amendment grants citizenship to all people born in the U.S. and Article II Section 1 of the Constitution says that to be eligible for the vice presidency and presidency a candidate must be natural-born U.S. citizen, at least 35, and a resident of the United States for a minimum of 14 years.

"No, there's no question about it," said Christopher Kelley, a political science professor at Miami University in Ohio. "It's been recognized since the people drafted it back in the 39th Congress that (the 14th) amendment would cover people not just born to American citizens but born on American soil."

The president's reelection campaign's senior lawyer, Jenna Ellis, shared the controversial Eastman column on Thursday morning, hours before Trump was asked about it at a White House news conference. Trump noted that the column was written by a "very highly qualified and very talented lawyer."

After Trump's remarks, Republican National Committee spokesman Michael Ahrens said the national party has no plans to challenge Harris' eligibility for the Democratic ticket.

Eastman, the former dean of Chapman University's Fowler School of Law, where he is a professor, is also a senior fellow at the conservative Claremont Institute. According to his bio on the institute's website, he also served as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

He also ran in the Republican primary to serve as California's attorney general in 2010. Eastman was defeated by a candidate who went on to lose to Harris.

Newsweek, which published the controversial Eastman op-ed questioning Harris' birthright qualification, defended the piece, arguing that Eastman "was focusing on a long-standing, somewhat arcane legal debate" about the 14th Amendment and not trying to "ignite a racist conspiracy theory around Kamala Harris' candidacy."

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Online rumor and conjecture that Harris is ineligible to serve first surfaced when she announced her campaign for the White House in 2019. A viral post with the misleading information was revived again, days before she was announced as Biden's running mate, as pro-Trump Facebook users spread the message in groups and on their pages.

Harris has been a top target of misinformation since launching her own bid for the White House last year. Women's groups, which have banded together to call out sexism, racism and misinformation about Harris and other female candidates, pointed to other examples of conservative figures focusing on her race and gender in recent days.

Fox News host Tucker Carlson mispronounced Harris' first name multiple times during a segment Tuesday night, and grew agitated when a guest corrected him, telling Carlson it was a matter of respect. Carlson responded, "So what?" and then mispronounced her name again, twice.

"That is certainly a slight," said Amanda Harrington, vice president of Time's Up, which works to stop workplace harassment. It's a type of disrespect often shown to people of color in the workplace, she said, adding that on the national stage "it asserts a false narrative about who belongs in leadership today."

Minutes after Biden announced his pick, conservative commentator Candace Owens posted a false attack on her Facebook page, claiming Harris had only started identifying as Black in the run-up to the presidential election. Until then Harris had solely described herself as Indian-American, Owens wrote, inaccurately.

Within 24 hours, nearly 200,000 users had liked the post — raking in more attention than Biden's own Facebook post announcing his pick.

Harris has been accused of reaching her position in politics due to sexual relationships, a sexist claim pushed on social media and elsewhere — including an article in *The American Spectator*, a conservative online magazine, that referred to her as "the mattress." On Wednesday, Eric Trump, the president's son, liked a tweet that referred to her as "whorendous."

"These are not the kinds of things Mike Pence experienced, or Tim Kaine for that matter," Harrington said, referring to the vice president and the 2016 Democratic vice presidential nominee.

But Trump has questioned other rivals' eligibility to serve in the White House. In 2016, the Republican nomination fight raised questions about whether rival Sen. Ted Cruz met "natural-born" citizen requirements. Cruz was born in Canada, but his mother was born in the United States.

Similarly, in 2008, questions arose about whether Sen. John McCain qualified as a "natural-born citizen" because he was born in the Panama Canal Zone, where his father was stationed. Questions about McCain's qualification spurred bipartisan outrage and the Senate passed a nonbinding resolution declaring McCain, who became the GOP presidential nominee, a natural-born citizen. Obama, who beat McCain in the 2008 race for the White House, was even a co-sponsor of the McCain resolution.

US prosecutor in Miami targeting Venezuela graft is leaving

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A federal prosecutor who has jailed some of Venezuela's biggest crooks is stepping down, The Associated Press has learned, leaving a void that could dampen U.S. efforts to expose criminal activity in the South American country amid rising tensions with the Trump administration.

Michael Nadler, an assistant U.S. attorney, is leaving to enter private practice next month at the Miami firm Stumphauzer & Sloman, said a person familiar with the move who insisted on speaking anonymously because it hadn't been made public.

Nadler, 48, has indicted multiple Venezuelan Cabinet ministers, businessmen and Swiss bankers as part of a sustained effort by investigators in the Southern District of Florida to recover some of the \$300 billion estimated to have been stolen from Venezuela in two decades of socialist rule.

Much of that allegedly ill-gotten wealth has been plowed into Miami's booming luxury real estate market. That has angered the city's Latino residents — many of them Venezuelan and Cuban exiles — for whom the Trump administration's hard-line focus on exposing corruption in Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government is a major draw in the battleground state ahead of the U.S. presidential election.

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"There may well be a collective sigh of relief in Venezuela from those he targeted," said Michael Diaz, a Miami defense attorney who has litigated against Nadler on behalf of Venezuelan clients. "Certainly some will be toasting his untimely departure."

Nadler in 2018 secured what is so far the largest judgment to date against a Venezuelan insider when Alejandro Andrade, the former national treasurer, pleaded guilty to his role in a foreign currency conspiracy that siphoned off hundreds of millions from state coffers. As part of his plea agreement, Andrade forfeited to the U.S. government \$1 billion in cash and assets, including an oceanfront Palm Beach mansion, luxury vehicles, show-jumping horses and several Rolex and Hublot watches. He's currently serving a 10-year sentence.

Nadler leaves one politically sensitive case unfinished. In June, he secured the arrest in Cape Verde of Colombian businessman Alex Saab as Maduro's alleged front man was en route to Iran. In a one-two punch, the Trump administration last year sanctioned Saab on the same day that Nadler charged the businessman with money laundering in connection with an alleged bribery scheme to develop low-income housing for Venezuela's government that was never built.

Saab's extradition is still pending and being fought vigorously by a team of lawyers that includes former Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzon, who is famous for indicting former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Maduro's government said the businessman, who also has a Venezuelan passport, was on a "humanitarian mission" to Iran to buy food and medical supplies.

Saab was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department for allegedly running a scheme that included Maduro's stepsons and allegedly stole hundreds of millions in dollars from food import contracts at a time of widespread hunger in the crisis-wracked OPEC nation. Nadler, who still has a few weeks on the job, has not indicted Saab for the alleged food corruption.

Nadler began working Venezuela cases in 2017, and Diaz said he quickly won a reputation as an aggressive prosecutor who had a good rapport with agents.

Diaz also credits Nadler with clawing hard to keep cases away from prosecutors in other high-profile federal districts who were all competing to sign up as government witnesses the many Venezuelans fleeing their homeland. Prosecutors in New York and Washington in March charged Maduro and other high-level officials with conspiracy to traffic cocaine, while Houston has the lead in a probe into alleged corruption at Venezuela's state-run oil giant PDVSA.

Nadler's boss, Ariana Fajardo-Orshan, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Florida, created a special money laundering unit in March 2019 that focused on financial crimes, giving even more impetus to that effort.

Venezuela is ranked the most-corrupt country in Latin America, and tied with Sudan, Afghanistan and Equatorial Guinea as the seventh-worst among 180 countries in the latest annual ranking by Berlin-based Transparency International.

Dick Gregorie, the retired assistant U.S. attorney in Miami who indicted Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega in the 1980s, said Nadler is the nation's most knowledgeable and experienced litigator working on Venezuela. He said his exit will leave a major void that won't be easily filled by other prosecutors, who will need time to capture the complexities and nuances of corruption in the country.

"Venezuela is a kleptocracy and to understand how they move the money and stolen from Venezuelan people takes years," said Gregorie, who is now a consultant for Berkeley Research Group. "Nadler's departure will certainly be felt."

Fajardo-Orshan's wouldn't confirm or deny Nadler's plans to depart but reaffirmed the commitment to go after corrupt officials from Venezuela and elsewhere "who callously steal money from their own citizens, then try to hide it in U.S. banks and through U.S. real estate transactions."

"The experienced, talented, and committed prosecutors in our Money Laundering section work as a team to combat this illegal activity," her office said in a statement.

75 years later, Japan war orphans tell of pain, recovery

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — For years, orphans in Japan were punished just for surviving the war.

They were bullied. They were called trash and left to fend for themselves on the street. Police rounded them up and threw them in jail. They were sent to orphanages or sold for labor. They were abandoned by their government, abused and discriminated against.

Now, 75 years after the end of the Pacific War, some have broken decades of silence to describe for a fast-forgetting world their sagas of recovery, survival, suffering — and their calls for justice.

The stories told to The Associated Press ahead of Saturday's anniversary of the war's end underscore both the lingering pain of the now-grown children who lived through those tumultuous years and what activists describe as Japan's broader failure to face up to its past.

Kisako Motoki was 10 when U.S. cluster bombs rained down on her downtown Tokyo neighborhood. For decades she kept silent about the misery that followed.

On March 10, 1945, as the napalm-equipped bombs turned eastern Tokyo into a smoldering field of rubble, Motoki and her little brother hid inside a shelter her father had dug behind the family home.

She eventually fled with her brother. She never saw her parents again.

The children walked together by heaps of charred bodies. They saw people with severe burns slumped on the roadside, people with intestines hanging from their stomachs. She blamed herself for not waiting for her parents. She believed she'd caused their deaths.

Motoki went to her uncle's home, and this marked the beginning of her yearslong ordeal as a war orphan.

She'd survived what's considered the deadliest conventional air raid ever. More than 105,000 people were estimated killed in a single night, but the devastation was largely eclipsed by the two nuclear bomb attacks and then forgotten during Japan's postwar rush to rebuild.

As a schoolgirl, Motoki worked as a maid for her uncle's family of 12; they paid for her schooling in return. She was verbally abused, and her cousins repeatedly beat her brothers until their cheeks were swollen and bruised. They all ate only once a day.

Motoki says her relatives, like tens of thousands of others, were struggling to rebuild their lives. They had little time to spend on orphans, even blood relatives. The government gave them no support.

"It's very painful for me to tell my story," she said. "But I still have to keep speaking out because I feel strongly that no children should have to live as war orphans as I did."

Many other orphans don't talk because of intense shame.

"How could we, as children, have spoken up against the government?" she said. "They abandoned us, and acted as if we never existed."

After years of pain, Motoki entered college to pursue her dream of studying music. She was 60.

Mitsuyo Hoshino, 86, recalls the explosion of nationalism in November 1940, when Japan's wartime government staged a massive imperial celebration.

During the war, Japanese schoolchildren were taught to revere the emperor as a god and devote their lives to him.

On that November day, Hoshino stepped out of her parents' noodle shop in Tokyo's downtown Asakusa neighborhood and watched as huge crowds of people waved Rising Sun flags. A decorated street car clanged by, with banners glorifying the emperor and celebrating Japan's prosperity and expansion.

A year later, on Dec. 8, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

She remembers playing with her little sister outside of the now-vanished noodle shop. She remembers a family excursion to a department store. These were her last happy childhood memories.

She was 13.

Hoshino and her classmates evacuated to a temple in Chiba, outside Tokyo, in 1944, when U.S. firebombings escalated. She later learned from her uncle that her parents and two siblings died in the March 10,

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1945, firebombing.

Hoshino and her two younger siblings were sent to a succession of relatives. She escaped one time with her siblings from an aunt's house, afraid they were going to be sold to people needing workers and went to their grandmother's home.

She later lived with another uncle's family, helping out on their farm while finishing high school. When she was grown, she returned to Tokyo, but she struggled with discrimination in getting jobs. She heard her husband's relatives hissing about her "dubious background" at their wedding ceremony.

Much later, she decided to share her experiences by drawing for children, eventually compiling a book of 11 orphans' stories, including her own.

One of those orphans, when asked what she'd wish for if she could use magic, simply says: "I want to see my mother."

A 1948 government survey found there were more than 123,500 war orphans nationwide. But orphanages were built for only for 12,000, leaving many homeless.

Many children escaped from abusive relatives or orphanages and lived at train stations, earning money by polishing shoes, collecting cigarette butts or pick-pocketing. Street children were often rounded up by police, sent to orphanages or sometimes caught by brokers and sold to farms desperate for workers, experts say.

The stories of the war orphans highlight Japan's consistent lack of respect for human rights, even after the war, said Haruo Asai, a Rikkyo University historian and an expert on war orphans. U.S. forces during their seven-year occupation of Japan also looked the other way on orphans, Asai said.

More than 2,500 children of about 400,000 Japanese — many of them families of Imperial Army soldiers, Manchurian railway employees and farmers who had emigrated to northern China, where Japan established a wartime puppet state — were displaced or orphaned.

Xi Jingbo's parents were Japanese, but he had no official record of his place and date of birth. Villagers told him he was left behind when the Japanese fled after the surrender. He and his adoptive parents didn't discuss the sensitive issue.

"We are the victims of the war," he said. "All Chinese are victims, and so are the Japanese civilians."

A retired middle school math teacher and principal, Xi says he was well cared for by his Chinese parents and suffered no discrimination. He took care of them as they aged. After the last one died in 2009, Xi started making annual short visits to Japan.

Survivors of the firebombings and orphans feel they were forgotten by history and by their leaders.

Postwar governments have provided an accumulated total of 60 trillion yen (\$565 billion) in welfare support for veterans and their bereaved families, but nothing for civilian victims of firebombings, although Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors receive medical support.

Mari Kaneda, 85, says the firebombing changed her life, forcing her to live under harsh conditions with relatives. She suffered lifelong pain and stigma for being an orphan, and had to abandon her childhood dream of becoming a school teacher.

Kaneda was 9 when she stepped off a night train in Tokyo after riding from Miyagi, in northern Japan, where she evacuated with her class. She had missed by hours the attack that killed her mother and two sisters and destroyed the family store.

Japan's government has rejected redress for civilian victims of firebombings. But Kaneda, in her search for justice, has dug up postwar government records, interviewed dozens of her peers and published a prize-winning book on war orphans.

"I haven't seen anything resolved," Kaneda said. "To me, the war has not ended yet."

Associated Press researcher Chen Si in Shanghai contributed to this report.

Follow Mari Yamaguchi on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/mariyamaguchi>

Trump admits he's blocking postal cash to stop mail-in votes

By DEB RIECHMANN and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump frankly acknowledged Thursday that he's starving the U.S. Postal Service of money in order to make it harder to process an expected surge of mail-in ballots, which he worries could cost him the election.

In an interview on Fox Business Network, Trump explicitly noted two funding provisions that Democrats are seeking in a relief package that has stalled on Capitol Hill. Without the additional money, he said, the Postal Service won't have the resources to handle a flood of ballots from voters who are seeking to avoid polling places during the coronavirus pandemic.

"If we don't make a deal, that means they don't get the money," Trump told host Maria Bartiromo. "That means they can't have universal mail-in voting; they just can't have it."

Trump's statements, including the false claim that Democrats are seeking universal mail-in voting, come as he is searching for a strategy to gain an advantage in his November matchup against Joe Biden. He's pairing the tough Postal Service stance in congressional negotiations with an increasingly robust mail-in-voting legal fight in states that could decide the election.

In Iowa, which Trump won handily in 2016 but is more competitive this year, his campaign joined a lawsuit Wednesday against two Democratic-leaning counties in an effort to invalidate tens of thousands of voters' absentee ballot applications. That followed legal maneuvers in battleground Pennsylvania, where the campaign hopes to force changes to how the state collects and counts mail-in ballots. And in Nevada, Trump is challenging a law sending ballots to all active voters.

His efforts could face limits. The U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday rebuffed Republicans who challenged an agreement in Rhode Island allowing residents to vote by mail through November's general election without getting signatures from two witnesses or a notary.

For Democrats, Trump's new remarks were a clear admission that the president is attempting to restrict voting rights.

Biden said it was "Pure Trump. He doesn't want an election."

Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold said it was "voter suppression to undermine the safest method to vote during a pandemic, and force Americans to risk their lives to vote."

Negotiations over a big new virus relief package have all but ended, with the White House and congressional leaders far apart on the size, scope and approach for shoring up households, reopening schools and launching a national strategy to contain the coronavirus.

While there is some common ground over \$100 billion for schools and new funds for virus testing, Democrats also want other emergency funds that Trump rejects.

"They want \$3.5 billion for something that will turn out to be fraudulent. That's election money, basically," Trump said during Thursday's call-in interview.

Democrats have pushed for a total of \$10 billion for the Postal Service in talks with Republicans on the COVID-19 response bill. That figure, which would include money to help with election mail, is down from a \$25 billion plan in a House-passed coronavirus measure.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has said that the agency is in a financially untenable position, but he maintains it can handle this year's election mail. A major donor to Trump and other Republicans, DeJoy is the first postmaster general in nearly two decades who is not a career postal employee.

"Although there will likely be an unprecedented increase in election mail volume due to the pandemic, the Postal Service has ample capacity to deliver all election mail securely and on-time in accordance with our delivery standards, and we will do so," he told the Postal Service's governing board last week.

Memos obtained by The Associated Press show that Postal Service leadership has pushed to eliminate overtime and halt late delivery trips that are sometimes needed to ensure mail arrives on time, measures

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that postal workers and union officials say are delaying service. Additional records detail cuts to hours at post offices, including reductions on Saturdays and during lunch hours.

Democrats, and a handful of Republicans, have sent DeJoy several letters asking him to reverse his changes and criticizing what they say is a lack of openness by the agency. Late Wednesday, Senate Democrats again wrote DeJoy, this time saying postal leadership is pushing state election officials to opt for pricier first-class postage for mail-in ballots to be prioritized.

"Instead of taking steps to increase your agency's ability to deliver for the American people, you are implementing policy changes that make matters worse, and the Postal Service is reportedly considering changes that would increase costs for states at a time when millions of Americans are relying on voting by mail to exercise their right to vote," the Democrats wrote.

Separately, in a letter last month, the Postal Service warned Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson that the agency might not be able to deliver ballots in time to be counted under the state's deadlines for casting mail-in votes.

Postal Service spokesman David Partenheimer said in a statement that "certain deadlines concerning mail-in ballots, may be incompatible with the Postal Service's delivery standards," especially if election officials don't pay more for first-class postage.

"To the extent that states choose to use the mail as part of their elections, they should do so in a manner that realistically reflects how the mail works," he said.

In a memo to staff Thursday, DeJoy said his policies have brought "unintended consequences that impacted our overall service levels," but added that the Postal Service "must make a number of significant changes which will not be easy, but which are necessary."

"This will increase our performance for the election and upcoming peak season and maintain the high level of public trust we have earned for dedication and commitment to our customers throughout our history," DeJoy wrote, according to the memo obtained by the AP.

Judy Beard, legislative and political director for the American Postal Workers Union, said postal workers are up to the task of delivering mail-in ballots this year.

"We definitely know that the president is absolutely wrong concerning vote-by-mail," she said.

Rep. Gerry Connolly, D-Va., chair of the House subcommittee on government operations, said Trump is acknowledging that he wants to hold up funding for the U.S. Postal Service to hinder Americans from voting.

"The president admits his motive for holding USPS funding hostage is that he doesn't want Americans to vote by mail," Connolly said in a statement Thursday. "Why? It hurts his electoral chances. He's putting self-preservation ahead of public safety, for an election he deserves to lose."

Trump has requested a mail-in ballot for Florida's primary election Tuesday. Ballots were mailed Wednesday to both the president and first lady Melania Trump at the Mar-a-Lago resort, which Trump lists as his legal address, according to online Palm Beach County elections records. Both voted by mail in the presidential preference primary in March, according to records.

Izaguirre reported from Charleston, West Virginia. The Associated Press produced this coverage with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Harris bringing energy, dollars and more to Biden's campaign

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — In her first two days as Joe Biden's running mate, Kamala Harris has fired off the campaign's sharpest criticism of President Donald Trump's shortcomings. She has vouched for Biden's character on race and more. And the enthusiasm surrounding her historic candidacy has brought in a record \$36 million, including contributions from 150,000 new donors.

The campaign hopes it is just the beginning.

With less than three months before the election, Harris is rapidly embracing her new role. Democratic operatives and Harris allies believe she'll energize what has been a relatively quiet campaign that has

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often preferred to keep the attention on the turbulence of Trump's White House. She's already making a vigorous case for Trump's defeat, allowing Biden to focus more on his own policy prescriptions and less on direct attacks.

"We always look for surrogates and validators that help close the deal and can speak to voters who needed another reason to say, 'Yes, I'm gonna support Joe Biden,'" said Donna Brazile, a former Democratic National Committee chair who also ran Al Gore's 2000 campaign. "She fills in the gap."

Harris was known during the Democratic presidential primary for wearing Converse sneakers and dancing with staff and supporters in unscripted moments. Biden allies expect her to deliver enthusiasm among some Democrats who oppose Trump but aren't yet energized to vote by a candidate they feel may be out of touch with their concerns.

Harris' "ability to connect" is part of what California Rep. Barbara Lee, who served as one of her campaign chairs, believes will help her deliver the campaign message to voters who may be otherwise tuned out.

"She loves to dance, she loves to cook. She's a person who does normal things that everybody does. They can relate to her," Lee said.

Still, Harris, the first Black woman selected for a national ticket, has faced her own criticism from young voters and progressives in the past, namely over her record on police misconduct as a district attorney and later California's attorney general. Critics say she opposed key criminal justice reform measures, including police body cameras statewide, and didn't address a number of wrongful convictions on her watch.

But during her time in Congress she's embraced greater reforms to law enforcement, particularly in recent months in the nationwide reckoning over racism sparked by the police killing of George Floyd. She has been a leading Democratic voice on the issue.

Some progressives still point to Biden's past support for the 1994 Crime Bill as reason to doubt his commitment to criminal justice reform. And Harris herself was a critic of Biden's record on race, notably assailing him during a primary debate for previously opposing federally mandated busing. But Harris signaled Wednesday that she'll offer a strong defense of Biden's record on race.

During her first appearance with the former vice president, she said Biden "takes his place in the ongoing story of America's march towards equality and justice" as the only person "who's served alongside the first Black president and has chosen the first Black woman as his running mate."

Biden campaign officials see her as a strong messenger against Trump, pointing to both her vigorous criticism of the president during her primary campaign, when her pledge to "prosecute the case" against Trump won her support, as well as her sharp comments Wednesday. She said Trump "cares more about himself than the people who elected him" and accused him of "making every challenge we face even more difficult to solve."

Brian Brokaw, who ran Harris' campaign for attorney general in 2010, said her questioning of Trump officials during Senate Judiciary Committee hearings hints at the case she'll make against him on the campaign trail and during the vice presidential debate with Mike Pence.

"No one should forget that she had cut her teeth in the courtroom," Brokaw said. "Anybody who has been on the receiving end of the Kamala Harris cross examination, whether it's a witness on the stand or Jeff Sessions or Bill Barr knows that if you're in her crosshairs, it's an uncomfortable place to be."

Biden's allies believe a main Harris advantage is demonstrated by the Republicans' struggle to settle on a line of attack against her. In the short time since she was announced, Trump has called her everything from "extraordinarily nasty" to "a madwoman," from "phony" to "radical left." On Thursday he said he had "heard" rumors that she is ineligible to run for national office because her parents are immigrants. She was born in Oakland, and there is no doubt she is eligible.

Harris is already delivering for the campaign in a tangible way: With a record-breaking fundraising haul.

While fundraising is traditionally one of the running mate's top priorities, a number of donors said her presence would be particularly helpful for Democrats because of her connections in California and beyond. Through her nearly two decades in California politics, Harris built a network of deep-pocketed donors in Hollywood and the state's legal circles.

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Andrew Byrnes, a California donor who supported Harris then moved to Biden in the presidential primary, said he got about 50 messages from donors wanting to get involved after Biden selected her.

Michel Kraut, a Los Angeles lawyer and major Harris contributor, said he's already had donors asking him about putting together events in the area.

"It allows Kamala's nationwide fundraising machine to get reinvigorated," said Kraut, who has already been raising money for Biden.

"There's this new energy, that the person we wanted to be president and now is on the presidential ticket has created. It's not just, 'I'll raise money,' but, 'I'll be dedicated to do this.'"

AP writer Kathleen Ronayne contributed from Sacramento, California.

Cohen's book foreword: Trump 'wouldn't mind if I was dead'

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Cohen's memoir about President Donald Trump will be released Sept. 8 by Skyhorse Publishing, which confirmed the news Thursday to The Associated Press. The book is called "Disloyal: The True Story of the Former Personal Attorney to President Donald J. Trump."

"Disloyal' is the most devastating business and political horror story of the century," according to a Skyhorse statement shared with the AP. "It is a story that you haven't read in newspapers, or on social media, or watched on television. These are accounts that only someone who worked for Trump around the clock for a decade — not a few months or even a couple of years — could know."

Earlier in the day, Cohen had released the book's foreword, writing of his estranged former boss, "He wouldn't mind if I was dead." He did not list a publisher for the book and, as of midday Thursday, it was not listed on Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble.com.

Cohen is completing the last two years of a three-year prison sentence at home after pleading guilty to campaign finance charges and lying to Congress. He was released from prison in May amid coronavirus fears, only to be returned in July after making it known that he planned to publish "Disloyal." The U.S. government dropped its effort to silence Cohen late last month after an agreement was reached between government lawyers and Cohen attorney Danya Perry that lifted a ban on Cohen speaking publicly.

Cohen's charges stemmed from his efforts to arrange payouts during the 2016 presidential race to keep the porn actress Stormy Daniels and model Karen McDougal from speaking out about their alleged extramarital affairs with Trump, who has denied the affairs. He has said that Trump directed him to make the payments.

Skyhorse has a history of taking on books by controversial public figures, including a memoir this spring by Woody Allen that had been dropped by Hachette Book Group.

Chicago convenience store ransacked twice since May

Security cameras captured the pillaging of a West Side Chicago convenience store hours after Mayor Lori Lightfoot warned vandals that the city would hold them accountable for ransacking downtown retailers.

Walid Mouhammad, owner of African Food & Liquor, watched surveillance video helplessly from home on Monday as thieves destroyed his ATM, safe and cash register, stealing money and ripping the store apart in the process.

Mouhammad has worked there for 33 years, the last 20 as its owner. He says he knows his customers by name and they rely on his market for produce and meat.

That's why he spent around \$300,000 to reopen after being vandalized in late May during violence sparked by anger after George Floyd died in police custody in Minneapolis. He's not sure if he'll be able to rebuild again.

Mouhammad says police were just a block away when his landlord and several workers called 911 to report that people were trying to break into the store. He says Chicago police officers arrived about a half hour after the store had already been emptied.

North Korea lifts lockdown in city, rejects flood, virus aid

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un lifted a lockdown in a major city near the border with South Korea where thousands had been quarantined for weeks over coronavirus worries, state media said Friday.

But Kim, during a key ruling party meeting on Thursday, also insisted the North will keep its borders shut and rejected any outside help as the country carries out an aggressive anti-virus campaign and rebuilds thousands of houses, roads and bridges damaged by heavy rain and floods in recent weeks.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency also said Kim replaced Kim Jae Ryong as premier following an evaluation of the Cabinet's economic performance and appointed Kim Tok Hun as his successor.

Entering the last year of an ambitious five-year national development plan, Kim Jong Un in December declared a "frontal breakthrough" against international sanctions while urging his nation to stay resilient in a struggle for economic self-reliance.

But experts say the COVID-19 crisis likely thwarted some of Kim's major economic goals by forcing the country into a lockdown that shut the border with China — the North's major ally and economic lifeline — and potentially hampered his ability to mobilize people for labor.

During Thursday's meeting, Kim said it was clear after three weeks of isolation measures and "scientific verification" that the virus situation in Kaesong was stable and expressed gratitude to residents for cooperating with the lockdown, KCNA reported.

Kim said his country now faces a dual challenge of fending off COVID-19 amid a worsening global pandemic and repairing damage from torrential rain that lashed the country in past weeks.

KCNA said 39,296 hectares (97,100 acres) of crops were ruined nationwide and 16,680 homes and 630 public buildings destroyed or flooded. It said many roads, bridges and railway sections were damaged and a dam of an unspecified power station gave way. There was no mention of any information related to injuries or deaths.

Kim expressed sympathy with people who were at temporary facilities after losing their houses to floods and called for swift recovery efforts so that none is "homeless" by the time the country celebrates the 75th anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party's founding on Oct. 10.

"The situation, in which the spread of the worldwide malignant virus has become worse, requires us not to allow any outside aid for the flood damage but shut the border tighter and carry out strict anti-epidemic work," KCNA paraphrased Kim as saying.

Kim's public rejection of international aid for flood recovery and his decision to release Kaesong from quarantine are negative indicators for inter-Korean cooperation as South Korea had hoped to restart diplomatic engagement by providing support in these areas, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

Cho Hey-sil, spokesperson of Seoul's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said the South remains willing to provide humanitarian assistance to the North.

North Korea in past months has severed virtually all cooperation with the South amid a stalemate in larger nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang, which faltered over disagreements in exchanging sanctions relief and disarmament steps.

The North in June blew up an inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong, following months of frustration over Seoul's unwillingness to defy U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons program and restart joint economic projects that would help the North's broken economy.

"The North Korean economy, while touting self-reliance, is increasingly dependent on China and will struggle to balance sanctions-busting efforts and COVID-19 prevention," Easley said. "The job of North Korea's new premier will be to show the country has recovered from recent flooding and has upgraded public health facilities" by the October party anniversary, he said.

In late July, Kim ordered a total lockdown of Kaesong and had the nation shift into a "maximum emergency system" after the North reported it found a person with COVID-19 symptoms.

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The North's state media said the suspected case was a North Korean who had earlier fled to the South before slipping back into Kaesong. But South Korean health authorities say the 24-year-old hadn't tested positive in South Korea and never had contact with any known virus carrier.

North Korea later said the person's test results were inconclusive and still maintains it is virus-free, a status widely doubted by outsiders. Some experts said the North was likely trying to shift the blame over a possible spread of the virus to South Korea.

In an email to The Associated Press last week, Dr. Edwin Salvador, the World Health Organization's representative to North Korea, said the North has told the U.N. agency it quarantined 64 first contacts of the suspected Kaesong case and 3,571 secondary contacts in state-run facilities for 40 days.

Since the end of December, North Korea has quarantined and released 25,905 people, 382 of them foreigners, Salvador said.

UAE and Israel to establish full diplomatic ties

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, MATTHEW LEE and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel and the United Arab Emirates announced Thursday they are establishing full diplomatic relations in a U.S.-brokered deal that required Israel to halt its contentious plan to annex occupied West Bank land sought by the Palestinians.

The historic deal delivered a key foreign policy victory to President Donald Trump as he seeks re-election and reflected a changing Middle East in which shared concerns about archenemy Iran have largely overtaken traditional Arab support for the Palestinians.

A spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the deal amounts to "treason," and should be reversed.

The agreement makes the UAE the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan, to have full diplomatic ties with Israel. They announced it in a joint statement, saying deals between Israel and the UAE were expected in the coming weeks in such areas as tourism, direct flights and embassies.

Trump called the deal "a truly historic moment."

"Now that the ice has been broken I expect more Arab and Muslim countries will follow the United Arab Emirates," he told reporters in the Oval Office.

In a nationally televised news conference, Netanyahu echoed Trump's remarks.

"Today we usher in a new era of peace between Israel and the Arab world," he said. "There is a good chance we will soon see more Arab countries joining this expanding circle of peace."

But Netanyahu said the annexation plan was on "temporary hold," appearing to contradict statements from Emirati officials who said it was off the table.

Emirati officials described the deal in pragmatic terms. Anwar Gargash, a top Emirati official, said they had dealt a "death blow" to an aggressive Israeli move and hoped to help reshape the region.

"Is it perfect? Nothing is perfect in a very difficult region," Gargash added. "But I think we used our political chips right."

Omar Ghobash, assistant minister for culture and public diplomacy, told The Associated Press: "I don't think anything was written in stone. We are opening a door. We are hoping the Israelis will see the benefits to this step."

"I would assume that this is political maneuvering within a very complex political society," he added.

Israel and the UAE do not share a border and have never fought a war. But the UAE, like most of the Arab world, long rejected diplomatic ties with Israel in the absence of a peace deal establishing a Palestinian state on lands captured by Israel in 1967.

That steadfast support for the Palestinians, however, has begun to weaken in recent years, in large part because of the shared enmity toward Iran and Iranian proxies in the region. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the day-to-day ruler of the UAE, also shares Israel's distrust of Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Gaza Strip's ruling Hamas militant group.

Netanyahu has long boasted about fostering closer behind-the-scenes ties with Arab countries than

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publicly acknowledged. The UAE has made little secret of those budding ties, allowing Israeli businessmen to enter the country on foreign passports and welcoming Israeli officials and sporting figures. Next year, Israel will take part in the UAE's delayed Expo 2020, the world's fair being hosted by Dubai. A secret synagogue also draws practicing Jews in Dubai.

Still, the timing of the deal was unexpected, and perhaps tied to the upcoming U.S. election.

For Trump, it gave an important boost to a president trailing in opinion polls and facing heavy criticism for his handling of the coronavirus crisis. It was also a rare achievement for his Mideast team, led by adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner, whose Mideast plan has made little headway since it was unveiled early this year.

Israel and the UAE are among Trump's few close international allies, and Thursday's deal may have been seen as an election gift.

U.S.-Israeli author Joel Rosenberg, who met with the crown prince in 2018 alongside fellow evangelical Christians, said the announcement could influence religious voters who may "struggle to decide" between Trump and presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

Thursday's agreement offers "a feel that this is historic" and a change for Trump to "have a series of big moments in the months ahead."

In a statement, Biden praised Israel for freezing the annexation plan.

"The United Arab Emirates and Israel have pointed a path toward a more peaceful, stable Middle East," he said, adding that a Biden presidency "will seek to build on this progress."

Netanyahu chalked up a diplomatic victory at a time when his shaky coalition government has been plagued by infighting and faces the possibility of early elections. He also faces a corruption trial over charges stemming from a series of scandals.

But even his rivals praised the deal.

Netanyahu has seen his popularity plummet as the country grapples with a renewed coronavirus outbreak, mass street protests and skyrocketing unemployment as the result of earlier lockdown measures.

For the UAE, home to skyscraper-studded Dubai and the rolling, oil-rich sand dunes of Abu Dhabi, it further burnishes its international campaign to be seen as a beacon of tolerance in the Middle East despite being governed by autocratic rulers. It also removes the stigma of recognizing Israel and could open the door for neighboring countries to follow suit.

The Gulf state of Bahrain welcomed the deal.

All in all, Netanyahu paid a relatively minor price. Although the hoped-for annexation plan is on hold, a half-century status quo remains in place in which Israel maintains its occupation of the West Bank and continues to expand its scores of settlements while Palestinians live in small autonomous enclaves. Those settlements are now home to some 500,000 Israelis.

The Palestinians claim all of the West Bank, captured in the 1967 Mideast war, as the heartland of a future state. The Trump Mideast plan envisions granting Israel permanent control over 30% of that territory, while offering the Palestinians limited autonomy in the remainder. After embracing the plan, Netanyahu backed away from moving forward with annexation last month in the face of fierce international opposition and misgivings by White House officials.

The Palestinians have rejected Trump's Mideast plan out of hand.

Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, convened a meeting of his top leadership Thursday night, and afterward his spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeneh, said the agreement amounted to "treason." He added that the UAE must reverse the decision and urged other Arab countries not to follow suit "at the expense of Palestinian rights."

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said the Palestinian ambassador to the UAE was being recalled.

In Gaza, Hamas called the deal a "stabbing in the back of our people."

Moving to head off the Palestinian criticism, UAE officials said the deal had prevented the annexation and kept hopes alive for Palestinian statehood.

"The UAE is using its gravitas and promise of a relationship to unscrew a time bomb that is threatening

a two-state solution," Gargash said.

Israeli hard-liners accused Netanyahu of missing an opportunity to annex parts of the biblical land of Israel. Naftali Bennett, a pro-settler lawmaker, welcomed the agreement but said it was "tragic that Netanyahu did not seize the moment."

Netanyahu insisted there was "no change" to his annexation plans. He said Israel would "wait temporarily" at the request of Trump.

Still, Netanyahu may be hedging his bets ahead of a possible change in the White House. Biden has made clear that he would oppose any annexation.

Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at the Tel Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies, said the deal would solidify Netanyahu's legacy among Israel's greatest leaders.

"There's Rabin with Jordan, Begin with Egypt," he said, referring to the prime ministers who reached Israel's other peace deals. "Now there's Benjamin Netanyahu. He's going to be in the history books."

Lee reported from Bled, Slovenia, and Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Associated Press writers Tia Goldenberg in Jerusalem, Elana Schor and Amer Madhani in Washington, and Aya Batrawy in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed.

Artist creates origami crane memorial for COVID-19 victims

LOS ANGELES undefined

An artist in Los Angeles is memorializing each of the thousands of people who have died from COVID-19 in the United States with a delicate origami crane.

Karla Funderburk started making the cranes three months ago, stringing the paper swans in pink, blue, yellow and many other colors together and hanging them in her art gallery.

"I was feeling the loss, and one way to process that was I started folding cranes. Cranes are a traditional Japanese symbol of carrying the soul to heaven," she said.

She tried making 10 cranes each night but when on May 14 the number of deaths ticked to 88,000 she realized it would take her 24 years to complete them and she asked for help.

Now volunteers drop off scores of the elegantly made paper swans daily.

"I started receiving boxes and bags. Sometimes I would get one crane with one name on it, some boxes had 300," she said.

Hundreds now hang from the ceiling of her Matter Studio with others sitting on tables and stacked in boxes waiting to be added to the sad reminder of the virus' toll. The gallery's website also lists hundreds of names of virus victims.

"I feel like this space is holding, holding the place, for the remembrances of the souls we are losing," she said.

Funderburk had 9,300 cranes as of Thursday. More than 165,000 people in the U.S. have died of COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Feds say Yale discriminates against Asian, white applicants

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Justice Department investigation has found Yale University is illegally discriminating against Asian American and white applicants, in violation of federal civil rights law, officials said Thursday.

Yale denied the allegation, calling it "meritless" and "hasty."

The findings detailed in a letter to the college's attorneys Thursday mark the latest action by the Trump administration aimed at rooting out discrimination in the college application process, following complaints from students about the application process at some Ivy League colleges. The Justice Department had previously filed court papers siding with Asian American groups who had levied similar allegations against Harvard University.

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The two-year investigation concluded that Yale "rejects scores of Asian American and white applicants each year based on their race, whom it otherwise would admit," the Justice Department said. The investigation stemmed from a 2016 complaint against Yale, Brown and Dartmouth.

"Yale's race discrimination imposes undue and unlawful penalties on racially-disfavored applicants, including in particular Asian American and White applicants," Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband, who heads the department's civil rights division, wrote in a letter to the college's attorneys.

Prosecutors found that Yale has been discriminating against applicants to its undergraduate program based on their race and national origin and "that race is the determinative factor in hundreds of admissions decisions each year." The investigation concluded that Asian American and white students have "only one-tenth to one-fourth of the likelihood of admission as African American applicants with comparable academic credentials," the Justice Department said.

"Unlawfully dividing Americans into racial and ethnic blocs fosters stereotypes, bitterness, and division," Dreiband said in a statement. "It is past time for American institutions to recognize that all people should be treated with decency and respect and without unlawful regard to the color of their skin."

The investigation also found that Yale uses race as a factor in multiple steps of the admissions process and that Yale "racially balances its classes."

The Supreme Court has ruled colleges and universities may consider race in admissions decisions but has said that must be done in a narrowly tailored way to promote diversity and should be limited in time. Schools also bear the burden of showing why their consideration of race is appropriate.

In a statement, Yale said it "categorically denies this allegation," has cooperated fully with the investigation and has been continually turning over "a substantial amount of information and data."

"Given our commitment to complying with federal law, we are dismayed that the DOJ has made its determination before allowing Yale to provide all the information the Department has requested thus far," the university said in a statement. "Had the Department fully received and fairly weighed this information, it would have concluded that Yale's practices absolutely comply with decades of Supreme Court precedent."

The university said it considers a multitude of factors and looks at "the whole person when selecting whom to admit among the many thousands of highly qualified applicants."

"We are proud of Yale's admissions practices, and we will not change them on the basis of such a meritless, hasty accusation," the statement said.

The Justice Department has demanded that Yale immediately stop and agree not to use race or national origin for upcoming admissions. The government also says that if Yale proposes that it will continue to use race or national origin as a factor in future admission cycles, the college must first submit a plan to the Justice Department "demonstrating its proposal is narrowly tailored as required by law, including by identifying a date for the end of race discrimination."

The Justice Department has also previously raised similar concerns about Harvard University, which prosecutors accused of "engaging in outright racial balancing," siding with Asian American students in a lawsuit who allege the Ivy League school discriminated against them.

A federal judge in 2019 cleared Harvard of discriminating against Asian American applicants in a ruling that was seen as a major victory for supporters of affirmative action in college admissions across the U.S. That ruling has been appealed and arguments are scheduled for next month.

In the Harvard case, the Justice Department had argued that the university went too far in its use of race, but the judge disagreed. Though the Supreme Court has ruled that colleges' use of race in admissions must be "narrowly tailored" and can be only a "plus factor," past rulings still give colleges wide latitude in considering a wide range of factors, including race, as they build their classes.

Associated Press writer Collin Binkley in Boston contributed to this report.

Bolivia's political crisis threatens hospitals and patients

By CARLOS VALDEZ Associated Press

LA PAZ, Bolivia (AP) — Hooked up to ventilators, 11 prematurely born infants struggled for survival Thursday in the intensive care ward of a Bolivian maternity hospital.

The babies' supply of oxygen is in peril, doctors say, because of nationwide blockades by supporters of the party of former President Evo Morales who object to the recent postponement of elections. Bolivia's political crisis adds to the burden on its health care system, which was already grappling with the coronavirus as it continues to spread across one of Latin America's poorest countries.

Street unrest erupted after the Supreme Electoral Tribunal moved the planned vote from Sept. 6 to Oct. 18 following warnings from medical experts that it would be unsafe to hold the election while the pandemic was not yet under control. It was the third time the vote has been delayed, angering protesters who accuse the government of interim President Jeanine Áñez of simply trying to hang on to power.

Now, after about 10 days of blockades, supplies are threatened in some hospitals that are also dealing with an escalating number of COVID-19 patients, according to officials.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres appealed to Bolivian institutions to negotiate solutions to the country's multiple problems, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"He calls on the organizers of the protests to ensure the safe passage of ambulances, oxygen and medicines and allow the delivery of goods and services essential to the population," Dujarric said Tuesday.

The struggle for control of Bolivia threatens its most vulnerable people. At the public Women's Hospital in La Paz, pediatrician Dr. Hugo Tejerina said oxygen reserves for the infants were almost exhausted last weekend, but supplies arrived by plane at the last minute.

The smallest baby weighed just 950 grams (2 pounds) at birth, and the lives of the infants in intensive care "hang by a thread," Tejerina said.

No newborn at the hospital has died because of the oxygen shortage, and some relief was on the way, the doctor said. A convoy with 66 tons of liquid oxygen was expected Thursday in La Paz after three days of getting past barricades and angry protesters.

Even so, the blockades are having a wider impact on Bolivia's beleaguered health system. Ambulances are sometimes prevented from reaching hospitals. The Health Ministry said 31 adults with COVID-19 have died since last Friday because of a lack of oxygen.

The government has described the situation as inhumane, blaming Morales supporters for causing even more misery at a time when the pandemic is inflicting a heavy toll on the country. But authorities are reluctant to use force to break up the blockades, recalling widespread bloodshed in clashes last year around the time when Morales resigned after an election marred by irregularities.

Morales, who had ruled for 14 years, left Bolivia after resigning and could face sedition and other charges if he returns. He was Bolivia's first Indigenous president and remains a powerful influence in the country. His party, the Movement Toward Socialism, controls the congress.

Bolivia has reported nearly 4,000 deaths from COVID-19, though the real number is believed to be much higher. Last month, police in major cities said they had recovered the bodies of hundreds of suspected victims of the coronavirus from homes, vehicles and, in some instances, the streets. Hospitals filled up with patients, and funeral homes were besieged by grieving relatives looking to bury their dead.

About 60% of the medical workers at the Women's Hospital became infected with the coronavirus and had to leave work, and many pregnant mothers have had to go from hospital to hospital, hoping to find space where they can give birth, Tejerina said.

On Thursday, 39-year-old Yola Quispe stood outside the gates of the hospital. She was heavily pregnant with twins. Quispe said the hospital had not yet confirmed whether a bed was available.

"I am already in pain and afraid that they will be born with low weight," she said. Even so, "I don't want my babies to stay in the hospital. There is no oxygen."

Trump's EPA dumps methane emissions rule for oil, gas fields

By MARC LEVY and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration is undoing Obama-era rules designed to limit potent greenhouse gas emissions from oil and gas fields and pipelines, formalizing the changes Thursday in the heart of the nation's most prolific natural gas reservoir and in the premier presidential battleground state of Pennsylvania.

Andrew Wheeler, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, signed the rollback of the 2016 methane emissions rule in Pittsburgh as the agency touted the Trump administration's efforts to "strengthen and promote American energy."

The EPA first proposed the rollback last year, accusing the Obama administration of enacting a legally flawed rule, and agency officials said it would save companies tens of millions of dollars a year in compliance requirements without changing the trajectory of methane emissions.

But states, including California, and a coalition of environmental advocacy groups warned that the changes are illegal — not to mention a setback in the fight against climate change — and expect to quickly sue to block it.

"It's not only negligent, it's unlawful," California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a statement. "We won't sit silently while the EPA allows this super pollutant to rapidly warm our atmosphere."

The White House took the event to Pittsburgh, the headquarters for many companies exploring the Marcellus Shale, the booming reservoir that vaulted Pennsylvania to the nation's No. 2 natural gas state, behind Texas.

"EPA has been working hard to fulfill President Trump's promise to cut burdensome and ineffective regulations for our domestic energy industry," Wheeler said in a statement.

Reflecting the pervasive politics of the presidential campaign, Wheeler cast blame onto the presumptive Democratic nominee, former Vice President Joe Biden, saying "regulatory burdens put into place by the Obama-Biden Administration fell heavily on small and medium-sized energy businesses."

Pennsylvania is of prime importance in November's presidential election, and the natural gas industry is playing a central role in TV attack ads being aired in the state by Trump's allies.

In recent years, preventing methane leaks from well-site equipment and pipelines has become important for regulators because methane is a potent greenhouse gas.

The oil and gas industry was responsible for nearly 30% of the nation's methane emissions in 2018, and methane accounted for 10% of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions, according to the EPA.

The Trump administration is eliminating the twice-yearly requirement for companies to inspect for methane leaks on equipment installed after 2015 at well sites and downstream segments, such as pipelines, compressor stations and storage tanks. Leaks must be fixed.

Supporters of the rule maintained that, based on reports the companies file, it seemed to be helping reduce methane emissions. They also pointed to the EPA's acknowledgment in its technical analysis that its rule changes will increase emissions of methane and smog-forming compounds.

Operators will still have to check equipment for leaks of smog-forming compounds at some higher-producing well sites, but Thursday's changes relaxed those standards and producers won't have to inspect pipelines or downstream equipment anymore.

Any leaks they fix help capture methane, and companies say they have a financial incentive to voluntarily fix leaks to ensure that methane gets to customers, rather than going into the atmosphere.

But, far more importantly, killing the methane emissions rule also blocks a legal requirement for the EPA to extend the rule to cover many more pieces of equipment installed before 2015, environmental advocates say.

"We'll see them in court because this is blatantly illegal," said David Doniger, senior strategic director of the climate and clean energy program at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Robert Howarth, an ecology professor at Cornell University, estimated that shale oil and gas production in North America accounted for one-third of the total global increase in methane emissions over the past year.

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Rolling back methane measures now is “dangerously reckless,” Howarth said. “Methane emissions are increasing rapidly, and the oil and gas industry is clearly part of the problem.”

Peter Zalzal, an attorney for the Environmental Defense Fund, said that, without federal leadership, stronger state regulation will be even more important.

Some states — such as California, Colorado, Pennsylvania and Wyoming — have methane standards that are comparable or stronger than the EPA’s 2016 rule. But many big oil and gas states — such as Texas — do not, Zalzal said.

Oil and gas industry representatives pushed for the methane rollbacks, fearing more expensive rules covering emissions from older equipment. Smaller, independent operators hailed the changes as important to their survival.

“The issue for producers has never been whether regulations were necessary; it has always been whether the regulations were sound and cost effective,” the Independent Petroleum Association of America said.

Still, some companies opposed a rollback, noting they had pledged to reduce emissions or pointing out that they were already exceeding the rule’s requirements.

Some oil majors including BP, Shell and ExxonMobil have called on Trump to strengthen efforts to cap methane emissions. The Trump administration’s move is “frustrating and disappointing,” Shell’s U.S. president, Gretchen Watkins, said in a statement.

In 2016’s election, Trump eked out a win in Pennsylvania — the first Republican presidential candidate to capture it since 1988 — by piling up support with Pennsylvania’s rural areas and working-class whites.

Since then, Trump has eagerly promoted the state’s gas industry, underscoring his focus on shoring up his base as his appointees have moved to expand extraction on federal lands, boost the export of liquefied natural gas and restrict the ability of states to block pipelines.

Meanwhile, a pro-Trump super PAC, America First Action, is running TV ads in Pennsylvania accusing Biden of wanting to ban “fracking,” the process that along with horizontal drilling has unlocked a torrent of oil and natural gas across the United States in the past decade.

Biden’s campaign counters that that is flatly untrue.

Biden would only ban new gas-drilling permits on public lands, his campaign said, pointing out that about 90% of fracking is on private land.

And while Trump often ridicules the science behind increasingly urgent warnings for immediate action to stave off the worst of climate damage by cutting fossil fuel emissions, Biden’s campaign said it recognizes that “climate change is an urgent problem and that all Americans have the right to clean air and clean water.”

Ellen Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City.

Follow Marc Levy on Twitter at www.twitter.com/timelywriter. Follow Ellen Knickmeyer at www.twitter.com/KnickmeyerEllen.

Officials: U.S. seizes Iranian gas heading for Venezuela

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The Trump administration has seized the cargo of four tankers it was targeting for transporting Iranian fuel to Venezuela, U.S. officials said Thursday, as it steps up its campaign of maximum pressure against the two heavily sanctioned allies.

Last month, federal prosecutors in Washington filed a civil forfeiture complaint alleging that the sale was arranged by a businessman, Mahmoud Madanipour, with ties to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization. At the time, sanctions experts thought it would be impossible to enforce the U.S. court order in international waters.

A senior U.S. official told The Associated Press that no military force was used in the seizures and that the ships weren’t physically confiscated. Rather, U.S. officials threatened ship owners, insurers and captains with sanction to force them to hand over their cargo, which now becomes U.S. property, the official said.

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Prosecutors alleged the four ships were transporting to Venezuela 1.1 million barrels of gasoline. But the tankers never arrived at the South American country and then went missing. Two of the ships later reappeared near Cape Verde, a second U.S. official said.

Both officials agreed to discuss the sensitive diplomatic and judicial offensive only if granted anonymity. Iran's ambassador to Venezuela, Hojad Soltani, pushed back on what would appear a victory for the U.S. sanctions campaign, saying Thursday on Twitter that neither the ships nor their owners were Iranian. "This is another lie and act of psychological warfare perpetrated by the U.S. propaganda machine," Soltani said. "The terrorist #Trump cannot compensate for his humiliation and defeat by Iran using false propaganda."

It is not clear where the vessels — the Bella, Bering, Pandi and Luna — or their cargoes currently are. But the ship captains weeks ago turned off their tracking devices to hide their locations, said Russ Dallen, a Miami-based partner at brokerage Caracas Capital Markets, who follows ship movements.

The Bering went dark on May 11 in the Mediterranean near Greece and has not turned on its transponder since, while the Bella did the same July 2 in the Philippines, Dallen said. The Luna and Pandi were last spotted when they were together in the Gulf of Oman on July 10 when the U.S. seizure order came. Shipping data shows that the Pandi, which also goes by Andy, is reporting that it has been "broken up," or sold as scrap, Dallen said.

As commercial traders increasingly shun Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro's socialist government has been increasingly turning to Iran.

In May, Maduro celebrated the arrival of five Iranian tankers delivering badly needed fuel to alleviate shortages that have led to days-long gas lines even in the capital, Caracas, which is normally spared such hardships.

Despite sitting atop the world's largest crude reserves, Venezuela doesn't produce enough domestically refined gasoline and has seen its overall crude production plunge to the lowest in over seven decades amid its economic crisis and fallout from U.S. sanctions.

The Trump administration has been stepping up pressure on ship owners to abide by sanctions against U.S. adversaries like Iran, Venezuela and North Korea. In May, it issued an advisory urging the global maritime industry to be on the lookout for tactics to evade sanctions like dangerous ship-to-ship transfers and the turning off of mandatory tracking devices — both techniques used in recent oil deliveries to and from both Iran and Venezuela.

One of the companies involved in the shipment to Venezuela, the Avantgarde Group, was previously linked to the Revolutionary Guard and attempts to evade U.S. sanctions, according to prosecutors.

An affiliate of Avantgarde facilitated the purchase for the Revolutionary Guard of the Grace 1, a ship seized last year by Britain on U.S. accusations that it was transporting oil to Syria. Iran denied the charges and the Grace 1 was eventually released. But the seizure nonetheless triggered an international standoff in which Iran retaliated by seizing a British-flagged vessel.

According to the asset forfeiture complaint, an unnamed company in February invoiced Avantgarde for a \$14.9 million cash payment for the sale of the gasoline aboard the Pandi. Nonetheless, a text message between Madanipour and an unnamed co-conspirator suggest the voyage had encountered difficulties.

"The ship owner doesn't want to go because of the American threat, but we want him to go, and we even agreed We will also buy the ship," according to the message, an excerpt of which was included in the complaint.

Joshua Goodman on Twitter: @APJoshGoodman

Associated Press writer Scott Smith in Caracas, Venezuela, contributed to this report.

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Trump's suggestion to eliminate payroll tax doesn't add up

By AAMER MADHANI, JOSH BOAK and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's push to cut Social Security payroll taxes for the rest of the year — and even arguing for a permanent cut — would do little to bolster the coronavirus-battered economy in the short term and could destabilize long-term funding for benefits that millions of Americans depend on.

Trump this week said that he could eliminate the tax if he is reelected without undercutting the retirement program or greatly adding to the deficit, arguing that economic growth would offset the revenue losses.

"At the end of the year, the assumption that I win, I'm going to terminate the payroll tax, which is another thing that some of the great economists would like to see done," Trump told reporters on Wednesday, adding that "tremendous growth" in the U.S. will cover the costs of Social Security. "We'll be paying into Social Security through the general fund."

But aides to the president on Thursday sought to walk back Trump's comments. White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said Trump meant to say he would seek forgiveness of employee payroll tax payments that he had already ordered deferred for the rest of the year.

Employers are pressing the Trump administration to walk back even more parts of the plan. They want Treasury to make it voluntary, letting companies decide if they want to offer their workers the option of deferring payroll taxes. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce says it has "serious concerns" whether the tax deferral would be workable.

In comments Wednesday to reporters, Trump said at least four times that he would end the payroll tax.

The president added that the tax would be eliminated after the "beginning of the New Year," while the deferral only applies to the closing months of 2020. Trump said his planned payroll tax reduction would be a "number that's bigger than any of the numbers we talked about." A typical family would get back \$5,000 or more, Trump said, an average economists said would not be achieved.

When pressed Wednesday about how the U.S. government would then pay for Social Security after the payroll tax is "permanently" rescinded, the president did not revise his previous comments. Instead, he insisted that economic growth would surge to cover the mammoth expense that would exceed \$1 trillion.

The 12.4% payroll tax split between employers and workers funds Social Security. The tax raised roughly \$1 trillion last year, according to U.S. government data. Over a 10-year period, Trump's idea could slice \$13 trillion from U.S. budget that is already laden with rising debt loads.

It is highly unlikely that economic growth would be enough to offset the loss of the payroll tax. Indeed, Trump suggested that his 2017 income tax cuts would propel economic growth as high as 6% annually. That never happened.

"If you permanently roll it back, how are you going to fund Social Security?" said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Grant Thornton. "The numbers just don't add up."

Some economists also questioned the utility of even a short-term payroll tax cut — something Trump has been pushing for months despite facing opposition among some fellow Republicans — would have on helping the economy.

Payroll tax cuts are among the least effective ways to promote growth during a recession, said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody Analytics. The money is going to people who are working — not the unemployed — and is most likely to be saved rather than pushed back into the economy, he said.

Deferral of the payroll tax, if it's not forgiven at the end of the year, amounts to a four-month, interest free loan for workers who are still collecting a paycheck and could leave employers on the line to claw back money retroactively.

"The idea that it would pay for itself through growth is just not right. It won't," said Zandi. "It's just a dream."

Even tinkering with Social Security funding comes freighted with political risk for Trump, who as a candidate in 2016 set himself apart from much of the GOP primary field as he vowed to oppose cuts to Social Security and Medicare, while also ensuring every American had health coverage. Trump has yet to

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propose a health care plan.

Thursday evening, AARP sent off what amounts to a warning letter to the president, saying he needs to provide Americans with "a more complete explanation" of his plan.

"Suspending, reducing, or eliminating the contributions to Social Security made through the payroll tax will interfere with Social Security's long-term funding stream," wrote Jo Ann Jenkins, CEO of the seniors' lobby. "The American public deserves to hear your plan on how you would replace that funding, and how people can count on receiving their hard-earned Social Security benefits."

McEnany, said Thursday that Trump maintains an "unwavering commitment to Social Security that is fully funded, and that seniors are taken care of."

But former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee, said Trump's comments on should be a red flag about how the president would approach benefit programs in a second term.

"When Donald Trump continually says that he wants to take action to defund Social Security...we should take him literally and seriously," said Biden spokesman TJ Ducklo.

Whether or not voters will punish Trump for his Social Security gambit, the president's idea seems an unlikely fix for the long-term financial shortfall the program faces. When Social Security's reserves are exhausted in 2035, the program will only be able to pay 79% of benefits at that time, according to government estimates.

"Everybody uses and abuses Social Security in the political discourse," said Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee For A Responsible Federal Budget, which advocates for lowering the federal deficit. "What we should be doing is fixing the imbalance in the trust fund."

"What the president is suggesting would make the finances worse," she added.

Associated Press writer Bill Barrow in Atlanta contributed reporting.

'One of us': South Asians celebrate Harris as VP choice

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Two words summed up Tamani Jayasinghe's exuberance for the first Indian American and Black woman to run for vice president: "Kamala Aunty."

That title of respect that goes beyond family in Asian circles immediately came to mind when Joe Biden announced Kamala Harris as his running mate. So the 27-year-old with Sri Lankan roots tweeted it as a wink to others who understood the significance of the term.

"The fact that she is both Black and brown is what makes this so exciting. The Asian American experience is one that is complicated and nuanced and robust," said Jayasinghe, who works in financial communications in New York. "I feel connected to that."

Harris, the daughter of a Jamaican father and an Indian mother, often focuses on her identity as a Black woman. At times during her political career, as she ran for California attorney general and senator, some didn't realize she was of Indian descent. In her first remarks as Biden's running mate on Wednesday, she spoke of her mother's roots but described herself as the "first Black woman" to be nominated for the vice presidency on a major party ticket.

Still, the possibility she would be the U.S. vice president, which has already triggered sexist and racist commentary, created instantaneous glee among South Asians worldwide and put the spotlight on her as the first person of Asian descent on a major party presidential ticket.

Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group of eligible voters. More than 11 million Asian Americans will be able to vote in November, according to a May report by the Pew Research Center.

The choice — Biden and Harris made their debut Wednesday — inspired social media musings of celebrating the Hindu festival Diwali at the White House and drawing room talks about the U.S. senator's mother's journey from Chennai to California. Indian government officials of all parties noted the choice as historic, while actress Mindy Kaling — she once made masala dosa with Harris — deemed it "thrilling." A top headline in The Times of India, one of the world's most widely read English-language newspapers,

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read, "A daughter of Chennai, Kamala blooms in US."

"She is one of us," said Aleyamma Keny, a retired nurse in suburban Chicago.

The 74-year-old woman, who immigrated from southern India to the U.S. in the 1970s, said Harris joining the ticket felt like a family member had accomplished something. Like many others, Keny saw her own immigration story in the candidate's mother.

Harris has called her late mother, Shyamala Gopalan, her biggest influence and frequently invoked stories about the cancer researcher and civil rights activist who died in 2009. Gopalan first came to America in 1958. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, where she met and married Jamaican immigrant Donald Harris and had Kamala and her sister before the couple divorced.

Gopalan took the sisters to India to visit relatives and gave both, Kamala Devi Harris and Maya Lakshmi Harris, names rooted in Indian culture. (Kamala means lotus, Devi means goddess. Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess of wealth.)

Harris' mother came to the U.S. at a time when Indians were scarce and raised her biracial daughters with the understanding that the larger American society would see them as Black. She took them to civil rights protests, and wanted them to become "confident, proud Black women," Harris wrote in her 2019 book, "The Truths We Hold: An American Journey."

A graduate of Howard University, Harris has made clear that she is both confident and proud of her Black identity. In a March 2019 radio interview, she answered a question about her identity by saying: "I'm Black, and I'm proud of being Black. I was born Black. I will die Black, and I'm not going to make excuses for anybody because they don't understand."

She did take steps during her presidential campaign, before she dropped out in December, to talk about her Indian heritage. Without much fanfare, she released a video via social media featuring photos of her Indian grandfather and talked of her visits as a child to see him.

In her speech Wednesday, Harris noted her parents' heritages but ended with saying Biden is the only person "who's served alongside the first Black president and has chosen the first Black woman as his running mate."

President Donald Trump struggled Wednesday to define her candidacy, repeatedly calling her "nasty." She's already been the subject of the false notion that she's ineligible to run because her parents were not born in America.

Harris was elected to the Senate in 2016, the same year three other Indian Americans won their first House terms including Pramila Jayapal of Washington. The first Indian American congresswoman, she said Asians also celebrated Harris as a Black woman.

"It isn't just that we want her to be an Asian American sister for us. She really is representative, this biracial piece is representative of the experiences that so many immigrant communities have had, learning from the leadership of Black communities," she said. "So we want her to claim all of us and we will all claim her."

Madhuri Patel, who immigrated from Gujrat, India, at the age of 6 and grew up in predominantly white Iowa, said Harris' multi-layered identity would make her a more effective leader. She hoped Harris could unify the country.

"For me, it's always been really important that you have someone who understands the experience of being marginalized within our communities," said the 45-year-old Chicago attorney.

Zafar Bokhari, a Chicago State University professor who immigrated from Pakistan in the 1980s, said Harris was a role model for his children.

Despite skepticism about her foreign policy if elected, he said seeing a woman from the Indian subcontinent as a possible vice president was inspiring.

"This is quite an achievement and I really admire the way she has presented herself," he said. "She has earned this position and I respect that."

Associated Press writers Deepti Hajela in New York and Padmananda Rama in Washington contributed to this report.

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Biden calls for nationwide mask mandate

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) —

Joe Biden is calling for a nationwide protective mask mandate, citing health experts' predictions that it could save 40,000 lives from coronavirus over the next three months.

"Wearing the mask is less about you contracting the virus," Biden said. "It's about preventing other people from getting sick."

The Democratic presidential candidate also responded to those who push back against such mandates.

"This is America. Be a patriot. Protect your fellow citizens. Step up, do the right thing."

"Every single American should be wearing a mask when they're outside for the next three months at a minimum — every governor should mandate mandatory mask wearing," Biden declared.

President Donald Trump on Wednesday said at a press briefing that his administration was sending 125 million reusable masks to school districts across the nation. He urges Americans to wear masks but has opposed the idea of a national requirement and declined to wear one for months. He has worn one on occasion more recently.

On Thursday he again dismissed critics who say he was too slow to react to the pandemic in the U.S., saying on Fox Business Network that "nobody blames me."

"Look, we got hit by the China plague and we're not going to forget it. We got hit by the China plague," he said.

On Wednesday, when the U.S. reported 1,499 new coronavirus deaths, the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in a single day since May, Trump pushed for schools and businesses to continue opening, and called for college football to go on despite several leading leagues' leaders deciding to cancel this year's season.

Biden and running mate California Sen. Kamala Harris spoke briefly Thursday in the same Wilmington hotel ballroom where they held a virtual fundraiser after appearing together as running mates for the first time Wednesday. They were briefed by public health and economic experts on the coronavirus pandemic, which has caused the deaths of more than 166,000 Americans and plunged the global economy into the worst economic recession since World War II.

Thousands in Belarus form 'lines of solidarity' in protest

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

MINSK, Belarus (AP) — Crowds of protesters in Belarus swarmed the streets and thousands of workers rallied outside industrial plants Thursday to denounce a police crackdown on demonstrations over a disputed election that extended the 26-year rule of authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Beginning in the morning, hundreds of women formed long "lines of solidarity" in several areas of the capital, Minsk. Many were dressed in white and carried flowers and portraits of loved ones who have been detained during protests that began shortly after Sunday's vote, which they said was rigged.

The human chains grew throughout the day, filling the main central squares and avenues as motorists honked in support. In Minsk and many other cities, thousands of factory workers also rallied against the police violence, raising the prospect of strikes in a new challenge to the government.

Amid growing public dismay, dozens of military and police veterans posted videos in which they dumped their uniforms and insignia in the trash. Several popular anchors at Belarus' state TV stations have quit.

Nearly 7,000 people have been detained and hundreds injured in the clampdown on demonstrators protesting the official results that said Lukashenko won 80% of the vote and his top opposition challenger got only 10%. Police have broken up protests with stun grenades, tear gas, rubber bullets and severe beatings.

"Belarusians have seen the villainous face of this government. I argued with my husband and voted for Lukashenko. And this is what I got in the end — I can't find my relatives in prisons," said Valentina Chailytko, 49, whose husband and son were detained in protests Sunday. She has been unable to get any information on their whereabouts.

One protester died Monday in Minsk after, the Interior Ministry says, an explosive device he tried to throw at police blew up in his hand. Some media reports have challenged that official version. Neither the

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ministry nor the media outlets have provided evidence.

Thousands of people converged Thursday on the place where he died, many carrying flowers. European ambassadors also laid flowers at the site earlier in the day.

The authorities also confirmed that a detainee died in the southeastern city of Gomel, but the circumstances of his death weren't immediately clear.

Hundreds of medical workers joined the demonstrations Thursday in Minsk and many other cities.

"There is a feeling that a war is going on, but it's a war against us," said Mikhail Portnov, a 33-year old general practitioner. "We, doctors, see the price of this war as no one else. We were ready for violence, but the brutality of it has crossed all limits."

The unprecedented public opposition and unrest has been driven by the painful economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic and Lukashenko's swaggering dismissal of the outbreak as a "psychosis." The vote and the brutality of the subsequent crackdown — remarkable even for Lukashenko's iron-fisted rule — have made the anger boil over. The 65-year-old former state farm director has been in power since 1994 and was nicknamed "Europe's last dictator" by the West for his suppression of dissent.

"You can see the election result in the streets," said 32-year old engineer Andrei Gubarevich, who joined a demonstration in Minsk. "Lukashenko has already lost."

Belarus' Investigative Committee launched a criminal probe into the organization of mass rioting — an indication authorities may start leveling those charges against some detainees. The charges could carry prison terms of up to 15 years for those found guilty.

The ministry said 103 police officers have been injured since Sunday, and 28 of them were hospitalized. In Minsk and the western city of Baranovichi, people ran over traffic police with their vehicles on Wednesday before being detained.

The brutal suppression of protests drew harsh criticism in the West.

The European Union foreign ministers are set to meet Friday to discuss a response, and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said the 27-nation bloc would "increase the pressure" on Belarus. "The brutal actions and the arrest of peaceful protesters and even journalists in Belarus isn't acceptable in Europe in the 21st century," he told reporters in Berlin.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the election wasn't free or fair and urged the government to refrain from violence against peaceful protesters.

"I'm confident that EU and the United States fully share the same concerns about what has taken place and what is taking place in Belarus and I'm very hopeful that we can collectively work in a way that gets a better outcome for the people of Belarus," Pompeo said Thursday on a visit to Slovenia.

Police appeared to scale back their response on Wednesday. In many parts of Minsk, the all-female "lines of solidarity" stood unchallenged for some time before police dispersed some of them without violence. Similar peaceful demonstrations were seen across the capital and other cities Thursday, but police refrained from dispersing them immediately.

Also Thursday, hundreds of workers at plants across the country, including the huge truck factories in Minsk and Zhodino, held rallies to protest the clampdown and demand a recount of the vote. Many shouted "Go away!" to demand Lukashenko's resignation.

During a meeting with workers of a plant in Grodno, near the border with Poland, the local police chief apologized for the violent crackdown, according to tut.by news portal.

The demonstrations have spread even though the protest lacks leaders. The top opposition challenger in the vote, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, suddenly emerged Tuesday in neighboring Lithuania and called on her supporters to stop protests in a video that her associates said was recorded under pressure from law enforcement officials before she left. The 37-year-old former teacher joined the race to replace her husband, an opposition blogger, who has been jailed since May.

Lukashenko has derided the political opposition as "sheep" manipulated by foreign masters and vowed to continue taking a tough position on protests.

But that has not deterred many.

"Protests will only grow," said 25-year-old demonstrator Anna Shestakova in Minsk. "They can cheat some, but they can't cheat the entire people."

Associated Press writers Daria Litvinova and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow, Matthew Lee in Bled, Slovenia and Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed.

Federal appeals court: Male-only draft is constitutional

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal appeals court in New Orleans upheld the constitutionality of the all-male military draft system Thursday, citing a 1981 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

In a decision that overturned a 2019 ruling by a Texas-based federal judge, a panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans said "only the Supreme Court may revise its precedent."

The case was argued in March and was the result of a lawsuit by the National Coalition for Men and two men challenging the male-only draft. They argued that the 1981 case was decided at a time when women were largely absent from combat.

Thursday's unanimous ruling from the three-judge panel acknowledged that "the factual underpinning of the controlling Supreme Court decision has changed. However, the judges noted, "that does not grant a court of appeals license to disregard or overrule that precedent."

Plaintiffs in the case could seek a rehearing before the full 17-judge appeals court or go to the Supreme Court. Harry Crouch, president of the National Coalition for Men, said organization leaders will discuss their next move with attorneys. "All I can tell you is we will be moving the case forward," he said.

The U.S. government stopped drafting young men into the military in 1973. But every male must still register for the draft when he turns 18.

Earlier this year — after the arguments before the 5th Circuit — a federal commission recommended including women in the military draft system.

"The Commission concluded that the time is right to extend Selective Service System registration to include men and women, between the ages of 18 and 26. This is a necessary and fair step, making it possible to draw on the talent of a unified Nation in a time of national emergency," the commission's final report said.

The 2019 district court decision declaring the male-only draft unconstitutional had been appealed by the Selective Service System, the federal agency that administers the draft. The appeal was argued during a series of 5th Circuit hearings at Tulane University. The judges were Carl Stewart, Don Willett and Jacques Weiner.

Arguing for the National Coalition for men was Marc Angelucci, an attorney who was shot to death in July. Authorities later linked the killing of Angelucci in California to Roy Den Hollander, 72, who was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound on July 20, the day after an ambush shooting in New Jersey that killed U.S. District Judge Esther Salas' 20-year-old son and wounded her husband.

Private prison industry backs Trump, prepares if Biden wins

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Executives at the nation's two largest private prison companies have been donating large sums to President Donald Trump and Republican candidates with an eye toward the November elections that one of the corporations believes will lead to a rebound in its stock price.

The fortunes of private prison companies have become increasingly intertwined with the nation's politics in an era when the Trump administration has been detaining tens of thousands of immigrants and asylum seekers at their facilities. Together, CoreCivic and GEO Group made about \$1.3 billion last year in contracts with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Each company relies on ICE for around 30% of its revenue.

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Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has committed to ending the use of private prisons for detention after facing pressure from Bernie Sanders and other liberals, who argue for-profit detention is tied to racial injustice and policies that lead to more incarceration.

Biden's pledge would be a major change from when he was vice president during President Barack Obama's administration, which opened family detention centers in Texas operated by both companies and deported more than 3 million people.

Positioning themselves for the future, GEO and CoreCivic recently agreed to long-term contracts with the Trump administration for several immigration detention centers in Texas and California. Those agreements would be difficult to unwind if Biden wins.

They are also spending heavily to help Republicans win.

George Zoley, GEO Group's founder and CEO, has given \$514,800 to Republicans and just \$10,000 to Democrats during the current election cycle, campaign finance records show. According to the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics, people and groups linked to GEO have given more than \$1.7 million, mostly to Republicans.

CoreCivic CEO Damon Hininger has donated \$26,300 during this election to Republicans. People and groups linked to CoreCivic have given \$228,000 so far, primarily to the GOP.

"Any questions or inferences about whether or not CoreCivic prefers the Republican Party, because it is better for our business, are misleading and portrays our company in a false light," said Ryan Gustin, a spokesman for the company.

GEO Group spokesman Pablo Paez said any political contributions "should not be construed as an endorsement of all policies or positions adopted by any individual candidate."

"The services we provide today are in no way different from the high quality, professional services we provided for eight years under President Obama's administration," Paez said.

Speaking to investors last week, Zoley predicted that GEO's stock — which has plummeted this year after surging at the start of Trump's term — would bounce back following the November election. GEO Group says Zoley was not predicting a specific winner, but rather that the election would give the company and investors much-valued certainty as to the government's future direction.

CoreCivic and GEO told shareholders last week that they have renewed 10-year contracts for three detention centers in Texas, one in Houston and the others outside Austin and San Antonio. Both companies previously reached agreements in December to keep open detention centers in California and for GEO Group to open three new immigration jails.

In both states, ICE and the companies side-stepped local opposition, including a California law banning new private prisons. The California agreements were reached days before the effective date of the law, which GEO and the Trump administration are now challenging in court.

In discussing CoreCivic's contracts, Hininger told investors that ICE and the U.S. Marshals Service were preparing for the future "with not only the pandemic but also going into 2021 and maybe some outcomes in Congress and the White House."

"So they're preparing, and with that, working with us to prepare," he said.

ICE did not respond to requests for comment.

Most of the U.S. government's 200 immigration detention centers are run by private contractors holding asylum seekers and other immigrants accused of administrative violations or awaiting deportation. According to the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch, private prison companies operate about 80% of beds in the immigration system. GEO Group and CoreCivic are the two biggest contractors.

The private immigration system has grown under presidents of both parties over the last four decades. But as Democrats have largely moved away from supporting private prisons, the industry has aligned itself more with Republicans.

GEO Group officials gave six-figure donations to Trump's election campaign and inaugural committee, have spent millions on lobbying the administration, and held one company retreat at the Trump resort in Doral, Florida.

CoreCivic and GEO stocks surged around Trump's inauguration based on expectations that his adminis-

tration would ramp up immigrant detention — which it did. ICE was detaining a record 50,000 immigrants for much of last year. Trump also rescinded an Obama-era plan to phase out the use of private prisons.

But the stocks of both companies have lost two-thirds of their value since 2017, Trump's first year in office. The companies have been accused of mistreating detainees and employees — particularly during the coronavirus pandemic — and relying on low-paid or unpaid detainee labor to reduce costs, allegations they have denied.

A divestment campaign led by activists pushed six major banks last year to stop lending to the companies. And after hitting record highs, ICE's detainee population has fallen to just over 20,000 now because the Trump administration is quickly expelling most immigrants under an emergency coronavirus declaration.

Experts say the divestment campaign has restricted the private prison companies' ability to borrow and invest money. Both companies announced last week they would reduce the dividends paid to shareholders to pay down debt, one through a corporate restructuring.

But Joe Gomes, an analyst at Noble Capital Markets, said both companies were still critical to federal and state governments that don't have the capacity to run detention centers themselves. The companies' contracts with the federal government also generally pay minimum amounts even if they are used well below capacity.

"The actual history is different than what people's perceptions would be," Gomes said. "Under the Obama administration, both CoreCivic and GEO did fine."

'Impossible': School boards are at heart of reopening debate

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

ROCK HILL, S.C. (AP) — Helena Miller listened to teachers, terrified to reenter classrooms, and parents, exhausted from trying to make virtual learning work at home. She heard from school officials who spent hundreds of hours on thousands of details — buses, classrooms, football, arts, special education. She spent countless nights, eyes wide open, her mind wrestling over the safety and education of the 17,000 children she swore to protect.

She thought of her own kids, two in high school and one middle-schooler — the reasons she ran for Rock Hill's school board six years ago.

And she made the hardest decision of her life: a vote to reopen schools amid the coronavirus pandemic, splitting students into two groups that would each spend two days a week in classrooms, with virtual learning the other school days.

"We have an impossible decision to make. And we still have to make it," Miller said from a tiny box on Zoom at the board's July meeting.

This Board of Trustees in suburban South Carolina is like thousands of school boards nationwide, where members are tackling a simple but hefty question — do we return to school amid a pandemic? — with no right or even good answers, in the face of inconsistent testing and a near-constant increase in confirmed coronavirus cases.

Behind that question is pressure. Pressure from teachers and bus drivers and janitors, scared to return to work but in need of a paycheck. Pressure from parents and guardians, who need to return to their own jobs but fear for their children's safety. Pressure from a president who declares on Twitter "OPEN THE SCHOOLS!!!" but whose administration provides little tangible guidance for doing so.

In Rock Hill, everyone has an opinion. The district has more than 17,000 students, and that means about 17,000 proposals on how to go back to school, trustees say, only half-joking.

And in South Carolina, with some of the country's worst virus numbers, even state leaders can't agree. Gov. Henry McMaster contradicted his education superintendent and said schools must allow a five-days-a-week option for working parents. School boards were left to untangle the mess - Rock Hill called an emergency meeting and ultimately kept its staggered plan.

There's been plenty more to resolve: Should classes be delayed until after Labor Day? How do kids get to school with buses at half-capacity for social distancing? What about masks and protective equipment?

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Should students have drama or orchestra if there are no public performances? What will student athletes do in a place like Rock Hill, known for sending football stars Jadeveon Clowney and Stephon Gilmore to the NFL?

School boards represent democracy at its local core: the backbone of communities, a check on superintendents, and the most direct way to influence education policy. And Rock Hill's strategy was very democratic. The board officially listened to eight committees, some made up of dozens of parents and business or community leaders. Each member spent dozens of hours in emails and informal discussions with people in and around their city of about 75,000 people.

There were teachers to consider. Susan Fields told the board last month, in its first in-person meeting since the pandemic, that she has lupus and must protect herself: "I love my kids, and for 25 years I have always put my students first. This is very odd for me ... for once I am standing up as an educator."

Special education teacher Shannon Gonzalez reminded the board that it promised extra face shields and gloves for those like her who work with students with significant developmental delays.

"It is impossible to teach a class like mine without constant physical contact," Gonzalez said. "They need hand-over-hand assistance for most everything they do. And for the last eight years, it has been my hand over their hand. It has been my face level with theirs calming them as they come out of a seizure."

And there were parents. At a July meeting, Emily Bell thanked the board for their careful, thoughtful work and told them she wasn't sure what she would do with her daughter in elementary school.

"In the morning, I'm ready for virtual school," Bell said. "And in the afternoon, I'm ready for my child to be back in the classroom."

Nearly every issue hinged on policy in the school manual, which staffers and board members pored through for hours. Changes had to be passed: Widened circumstances allowing for virtual classes, the end of open-door hours for parents eating lunch with kids, permitting athletes to practice or play if they weren't physically in school that day.

The board didn't agree on everything, from big matters to small. Trustee Brent Faulkenberry initially didn't favor the plan for in-person class only two days a week. He wanted five, to help working parents, with online school available for anyone worried about safety.

"If families can't work, they can't provide for these kids," he said.

Board member Robin Owens told him he made good points, especially about her fear of young children left at home while parents work. The two-day-a-week plan, she said, "falls squarely in the middle, which means that it is probably not going to make anyone happy. Hopefully it will make some people satisfied."

Faulkenberry's five-day proposal lost 5-2. The board then unanimously agreed to the staggered schedule and delaying the first day of school to Sept. 8, the latest allowed by state law.

There was no shouting, no claims of fake science, no accusations that trustees didn't care for kids. At a time when such arguments erupt everywhere from talk shows to Facebook, from the White House to the corner store, this board prides itself on civil discourse.

"I am so thankful to serve on a board where professionalism is put on the forefront," said Miller, who moved to the United States from Sweden in 1997, became a U.S. citizen in 2006, and has set out since becoming board chairman in 2018 to create a deliberative body that disagrees amiably.

Trustees' ties are forged through regular meetings, trips for training, and school visits together. Even as they met through Zoom, Miller kept some in-person routine. Trustees stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance as video of a waving flag played. Miller plunked her gavel on a tiny wood box after votes and to end meetings.

This month, Miller is gently directing the group back to in-person meetings. If trustees are sending children into schools, she said, the board should physically meet, too. Meetings look much like school, with seats spaced 6 feet (2 meters) apart and everyone in masks.

Mask policy was on trustees' agenda Monday night. Before the pandemic, masks — as face coverings similar to bandanas — could be considered gang attire. Now, students must wear one to enter the building. District officials suggested allowing a classroom "mask break" once teachers and students are settled and socially distanced. Trustees weren't sure.

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"We have very small classrooms in very old schools," Faulkenberry, who'd opted to participate virtually, said from a video screen placed in his seat. "That air is still recirculating."

And what about doors? District policy requires that teachers lock doors during class. But health officials recommend open doors for air circulation.

The board approved a preliminary mask policy but agreed to fine-tune it. The issue of doors was left to a future meeting, with only a few weeks until the first day of school.

The trustees agree that their work during the pandemic — for which they're paid their usual salary of \$600 monthly, unlike the 62% of school board members nationwide who get no compensation, according to 2018 National School Boards Association figures — has been the hardest of their tenure.

"We want what's best for our children," said trustee Windy Cole, who's had her own tears and sleepless nights. "I've been in all the meetings, I've listened to everything I can, and I trust our district is doing the best possible under these horrible circumstances. We have to just keep praying."

And they've been able to find moments of joy. During a long virtual meeting largely focused on the district's \$175 million budget, a school employee announced a summer program where every student from pre-K to grade eight would get a box of books delivered to their home.

The trustees cheered. "This makes my heart so happy," Cole said.

After all the talk of taxes, missed celebrations for employees, and the logistics of school amid the virus outbreak, Miller reminded her colleagues: It's not just "doom and gloom."

And she offered them all a virtual hug.

Follow Jeffrey Collins on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JSCollinsAP>.

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

Talk of Harris successor sets off California guessing game

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The possible election of U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris as vice president has set off a fierce competition in California to replace her, with contenders already pressuring Gov. Gavin Newsom for what could be a once-in-a-lifetime appointment.

Joe Biden tapped Harris this week to join him on the Democratic presidential ticket. Should they win in November, it would fall to the Democratic governor to appoint Harris' replacement for a term that runs through January 2023. Newsom said Wednesday aspiring candidates are already needling him about the potential vacancy.

For Newsom, the list of choices is long and the political risks many, especially with a national reckoning on racial injustice underway. Theoretically, Newsom could even select himself.

"It's an earthquake kind of appointment," said longtime Democratic National Committee member Bob Mulholland.

In making a selection, Newsom would face considerations from gender to geography to demographics.

There would be pressure to select a woman, especially a Black woman, to replace Harris, who is the first Black woman to run on a major party's presidential ticket. She's one of just two Black women who have ever served in the Senate, and the daughter of immigrants from Jamaica and India.

Rep. Karen Bass, who was on Biden's vice presidential short list and heads the Congressional Black Caucus, would likely get consideration, along with Rep. Barbara Lee, another Black member of Congress with progressive credentials.

Rep. Katie Porter of Orange County has established a national reputation in her short time in Washington and is a prolific fundraiser. Then there is Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis, who served as ambassador to Hungary under President Barack Obama.

In diverse California, others would advocate for a Hispanic person, giving the governor an opportunity

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to appoint the first Latino senator in a state with more Hispanic people than white.

Newsom is likely to look at possibilities across the spectrum but there's another option. The governor — to avoid potentially offending different factions within the party — could choose a caretaker from among party elders to hold the seat until the 2022 election — someone with a profile like former Gov. Jerry Brown. Under that scenario, the appointee would step aside after a new senator is elected.

"It's an old joke in politics: Every time you make an appointment, you make 20 enemies and one ingrate," said Claremont McKenna College political scientist Jack Pitney.

One name rising is early speculation is Newsom's longtime friend, Secretary of State Alex Padilla. He's Hispanic and has proven his electability statewide. He's 47 and has emerged as a nationally recognized voice on voting security. Being based in Southern California could also be a plus for Padilla in balancing statewide political power, since Newsom, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein and Harris all have San Francisco-area roots.

There are other prominent Hispanic politicians likely to be considered, including Attorney General Xavier Becerra, the face of the state's Trump resistance, and Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia, the city's first openly gay mayor who recently lost his mother and stepfather to COVID-19.

Former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a one-time Newsom rival for governor who considered running for Senate in 2015, also has a national profile, though his past friction with Newsom wouldn't bolster his chances.

Several mayors would be possible picks, including San Francisco Mayor London Breed, who in Black and has ties to Harris, and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who flirted with a presidential run and has Mexican-Jewish-Italian roots.

With the nation struggling with racial tensions, it's appears unlikely the governor would turn to someone like himself, a middle-aged white man, said Thad Kousser, a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego.

For that same reason, Rep. Adam Schiff, who made a national name during the Trump impeachment hearings, probably wouldn't get the nod, either, Kousser said.

There's a "huge number of qualified, history-making candidates" for the governor to consider, Kousser added. "This pick can't be someone who fits the same demographic profile as Gov. Newsom."

The appointment would inevitably make an imprint on Newsom's legacy and could shape state politics for decades to come. In strongly Democratic California, the appointee could hold the seat for a generation. Feinstein — at 87 the oldest member of the Senate — has been in office since 1992.

On Wednesday, Newsom declined to offer his thoughts when asked about a potential replacement for Harris, saying he is focused on the coronavirus outbreak, restarting the economy and getting students back to school.

But when a reporter asked whether any would-be candidates have begun lobbying him, Newsom quipped: "Well you may be the only one that hasn't, unless you just did. And that is only slight exaggeration."

Associated Press Writer Adam Beam contributed from Sacramento.

US jobless claims fall below 1 million but remain high

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment dropped below 1 million last week for the first time since the coronavirus outbreak took hold in the U.S. five months ago, but layoffs are still running extraordinarily high.

The figures show that the crisis continues to throw people out of work just as the expiration of an extra \$600 a week in federal jobless benefits has deepened the hardship for many — and posed another threat to the U.S. economy.

Applications for jobless benefits declined to 963,000, the second straight drop, from 1.2 million the previous week, the government said Thursday. That signals layoffs are slowing, though the weekly figure still

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far exceeds the pre-outbreak record of just under 700,000, set in 1982.

The virus is blamed for more than 166,000 deaths and 5.2 million confirmed infections in the U.S. — easily the highest totals in the world. The average number of new cases per day is on the rise in eight states, and deaths per day are climbing in 26, according to an Associated Press analysis.

Worldwide, the scourge has claimed more than 750,000 lives and caused over 20 million known infections.

The virus, the shutdowns meant to fight it and the reluctance or inability of many people to shop, travel or eat out continue to undermine the economy and force companies to cut staff. Over the past few months, 23 states have paused or reversed their business re-openings because of a resurgence of the virus.

Overall, fewer people are collecting unemployment, a sign that some employers are hiring. The total declined last week to 15.5 million, from 16.1 million the previous week.

"Another larger-than-expected decline in jobless claims suggests that the jobs recovery is regaining some momentum, but ... much labor market progress remains to be done," said Lydia Boussour, senior economist at Oxford Economics.

Hiring is believed to have slowed since the spring, when states reopened and millions of workers at bars, restaurants and stores were rehired. The job gain in August will probably fall short of the 1.8 million added in July, analysts say.

For months, on top of their state benefit, unemployed Americans also collected the \$600 a week in federal jobless aid. But that expired at the end of July, and negotiations in Congress to extend it, probably at a lower level, have collapsed in rancor.

Last week, President Donald Trump issued an executive order that would provide \$300 a week to replace the expired \$600. But experts say it could take weeks for the states to reprogram their computers and process and dispense the payments.

A crush of benefit applications earlier in the outbreak resulted in huge backlogs that left millions of the unemployed waiting. Washington state went so far as to call in the National Guard to help process applications.

Some economists say they believe the end of the \$600 has contributed to the drop in unemployment claims of late. Some of the unemployed may feel less incentive to apply.

The supplemental federal aid had enabled many jobless Americans to afford rent, food and utilities, and its expiration threatens to weaken consumer spending.

Michelle Meyer, an economist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, said the loss of the additional aid will reduce Americans' incomes by \$18 billion a week.

"That's a big hit to purchasing power," she said.

In addition to people who applied last week for state benefits, nearly 489,000 others sought jobless aid under a new federal program that has made self-employed and gig workers eligible for the first time. That figure isn't adjusted for seasonal trends, so it is reported separately.

Counting those receiving aid under the new program would bring to 28.2 million — roughly 18% of the U.S. workforce — the number of Americans now receiving some form of unemployment benefits.

With confirmed virus cases still high, it's not clear when business owners will be able to reopen or will have enough customers to rehire.

Grace Della is one of them. She opened her food tour business in Miami a decade ago with \$300 from her mother. On weekends, she led the tours herself and eventually built up a business with 13 guides, averaging 10 tours a day through culinary hot spots in South Beach and Little Havana.

With scant customer demand, it has been more than four months since Miami Culinary Tours has taken out guests. Della, 46, said she hopes to reopen later this month but isn't sure she can, given the state's high level of confirmed infections.

Della said she tries to stay positive but confesses to moments of crippling fear. At one point, hyperventilating with anxiety, she contacted firefighters.

"There's no money coming in," Della said. "We're all scared."

AP writer Kelli Kennedy in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, contributed to this report.

Distrust of authority fuels virus misinformation for Latinos

By DAVID KLEPPER, ADRIAN SAINZ and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — When Claudia Guzman suspected she had caught the coronavirus, her friends and family were full of advice: Don't quarantine. Don't get tested. A homemade tea will help cure you.

"They were saying, 'Don't go to the hospital,' because supposedly, if you are admitted into the hospital, they administer the virus into your body," said Guzman, who was born in Chicago to parents from Mexico and now lives in Memphis, Tennessee.

False claims and conspiracy theories, ranging from bogus cures to the idea that the virus is a hoax, have dogged efforts to control the pandemic from the beginning. While bad information about the virus is a problem for everyone, it can pose a particular threat to communities of people of color who already face worse outcomes from the virus.

Among Latinos in the U.S., misinformation around the coronavirus has found fertile ground because many in their communities have higher levels of distrust in government, less access to medical care and may need to be reached by Spanish-language public health resources. It's a dangerous mix that could discourage people from taking precautions, participating in contact-tracing efforts, or getting treatment.

"There isn't much evidence-based information in Spanish for them. And this is a new disease, so the science is evolving every day," said William Calo, a Pennsylvania State University researcher who studies Hispanics and public health. "We are struggling with providing good information in English — just imagine adding a second language."

With a population of 60 million, Hispanic people in the U.S. are now four times more likely than non-Hispanic white people to be hospitalized because of COVID-19, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other studies also show Latinos in some areas are also twice as likely to die from the illness. (Native Americans and Black people face similarly stark disparities.)

These vulnerabilities have many causes. Among them are the fact that many Latinos are less likely to have health insurance or access to quality health care — sometimes because they can't afford it and sometimes because of their immigration status. Many work in industries that are deemed essential and cannot be performed remotely, such as food service, sanitation, meat packing, construction and retail. And many live in larger, multigenerational households where social distancing is difficult.

Added to this already dangerous mix is a higher level of distrust in authority among Latinos — as is the case for other minority communities — that is helping fuel the spread of misinformation about the virus.

"If I'm hearing something from the government, from people who I, for a variety of reasons, don't trust, then I'm not going to do anything," said Monica Feliú-Mójer a Puerto Rican native and Harvard-trained neurobiologist who works to encourage Latinos to pursue science careers. "But if I hear this from my friend who I believe in, and who I trust, then it's more likely that I'm going to act on that information."

For many, the reluctance to get tested or seek treatment stems from fear of deportation in a community with a significant percentage of immigrants. That may be particularly true under President Donald Trump, said New York State Sen. Gustavo Rivera, a Democrat who represents a largely Hispanic district in the Bronx. Trump ran on promises to crack down on both illegal and legal immigration and has repeatedly painted immigrants — especially nonwhites — as posing a public health and safety danger.

That distrust could discourage people from getting treatment or from cooperating with government contact tracers trying to identify who an infected person had come into contact with.

"It's a real concern," Rivera said of the worries some Latinos have about contact tracing. "We need to secure that information, and there needs to be a guarantee of its privacy."

Language barriers make the situation even worse. Many areas face a shortage of Spanish-speaking health care workers, and most of the accurate online information about the virus in the U.S. is in English. That forces some Latinos who need information in Spanish to rely on less-trusted sources like social media. And while a growing number of fact-checking organizations are trying to identify and correct false claims spreading online, very few publish their work in Spanish. The Associated Press publishes some of its fact checks in Spanish.

All of this means Latinos may not receive good information about how to slow the spread of the virus

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— and may not act on it if they do. Guzman, for instance, thinks she contracted the virus at a vigil last month for her grandfather, who died of cancer soon after. Many of the people there either weren't wearing facial masks or didn't have them on correctly. About 10 family members subsequently were diagnosed with the coronavirus.

Guzman, who is a medical assistant, knew to push back when friends and relatives passed along false claims and theories. For example, her parents suggested she wouldn't have to quarantine if she drank a homemade tea of lemon, honey and ginger.

"I had to tell them, 'No, that's not true. In order to stop spreading it, you have to stay home,'" said the 27-year-old, who had mild symptoms that lasted a few days. She spent time in quarantine before returning to work.

Her boss, Venezuela-born Dr. Pedro Velasquez-Mieyer, is the chief medical officer of two clinics in Memphis that serve mainly Latino and Black patients. He said he's heard from patients who won't wear masks, or who liken COVID-19 to the chicken pox and say they want to get infected so they'll develop immunity.

"They are part of their own network of misinformation, and nobody is actually saying, 'This is false, this is not reliable,'" he said. "They keep sending the message."

Feliú-Mójer says it's just as important to control rumors as it is to control the virus.

"Just like people can stay home and wear masks and wash their hands and keep their physical distance to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, people can also take simple steps to prevent the spread of misinformation," she said.

Klepper reported from Providence, Rhode Island, and Garcia Cano from Washington.

VIRUS DIARY: Have toilet seat, will travel

By MICHAEL WARREN Associated Press

BOYNTON BEACH, Fla. (AP) — People said we were crazy. We said we'd be careful.

Maybe so, my doctor-uncle warned, but it would only take one moment of carelessness to get infected — one time finding ourselves too close to unmasked people.

Others raised eyebrows in Zoom calls, silently judging our desire to spend a nonessential week at the beach in South Florida, the U.S. epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic.

Then I pointed out that we'd be traveling from Georgia, where Gov. Brian Kemp has steadfastly refused to order mask-wearing, just like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. Only Kemp has gone further, saying most coronavirus infections are just like "a stomach bug or a flu or anything else," and forbidding mayors from doing more than he would to preserve public health.

When it comes to deaths from COVID-19, Georgia is winning this awful contest, with a rate of 36 per 100,000 people, compared to 33 in Florida, during the vacation week I'd signed up for.

My family is incredibly privileged to be able to hunker down in a home with a backyard big enough for chickens, a vegetable garden and a berry patch. And in a world where so much is beyond our control, we remain determined to be the last ones to get sick from COVID-19.

So we've hardly left since March, working and studying from home, buying veggies at open-air markets and ordering meat and milk delivered. We've kept up with friends by using "outdoor voices" heard from a distance or through three layers of cotton. As rewards, we've indulged in an occasional carry-out meal or ice cream cone.

But our sanctuary had become stifling.

As Georgia's sweltering summer deepened, with schools going online and the pandemic's horizon stretching, our family was on edge. To summon the stamina required to endure this thing, we needed a change of scenery.

After weeks of comparing Georgia and Florida's infection ratios, we decided to make the 9-hour drive to a friend's mother's apartment. It's perched just one floor up, so we could avoid using an elevator, and has 270-degree ocean views. The beach outside is usually uncrowded, just steps away. No one had been staying there for weeks.

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Boynton Beach is hardly remote, but our plan was to maintain isolation while reading, napping, preparing great meals and sticking our feet in the sand. We packed a huge cooler with provisions and got two more contraptions that proved essential to pandemic travel: a fold-out toilet seat and a pop-up changing tent, wide as a hula hoop and eight feet tall.

I wondered how the family's shyer bladders would cope with putting on a roadside show. As it turned out, unfolding the seat and tent was easy, as was depositing the carefully sealed results in a nearby trash can.

Once we arrived, we didn't use the car. We tried new recipes our kids had chosen, swam in the warm Atlantic, conquered a puzzle, binge-watched movies. As the ocean's endlessly calming blues and greens washed off months of accumulated anxiety, we took mental notes, hoping to recall these feelings when the pandemic's second wave crashes over us.

A Florida travelers advisory warned that "travel increases your chances of getting and spreading COVID-19," and noted that "the CDC recommends you stay home as much as possible, especially if your trip is not essential." Palm Beach County declared in its "state of emergency" that \$25 fines were possible if we appeared unmasked closer than six feet to a stranger.

As it turned out, we made no contact with other humans for an entire week. Aside from tax on two tanks of gas, we contributed nothing to the Florida economy, and Tropical Storm Isaias sent us packing a day early. But as we look back this winter on our Florida getaway, I suspect we're going to remember it fondly — as essential to our mental health.

Virus Diary, an occasional feature, showcases the coronavirus pandemic through the eyes of Associated Press journalists around the world. Follow Atlanta-based AP editor Michael Warren on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/mwarrenap>

Pompeo, in Slovenia, pushes 5G security, warns about China

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BLLED, Slovenia (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Slovenia on Thursday to make the case for high-speed wireless networks that bar Chinese companies like Huawei.

On the second leg of a four-nation tour of central and eastern Europe, Pompeo met with Slovenian officials in the mountain lake town of Bled and signed a joint declaration on "5G Clean Network Security" that aims to keep untrusted telecommunications vendors out of Slovenia.

"Free nations must work together to confront authoritarian threats," he said. "It is absolutely critical that every nation makes a good sovereign decision about how the private information of its citizens is going to be handled."

Pompeo has led a U.S. campaign across Europe and elsewhere against Huawei and other Chinese companies that the Trump administration accuses of sharing sensitive data and personal information with China's security apparatus. The campaign has had mixed results, but NATO ally Slovenia is on board.

"Protecting communications networks from disruption or manipulation, and ensuring the privacy and individual liberties of the citizens of the United States and Slovenia are vital to ensuring that our people are able to take advantage of the tremendous economic opportunities 5G will enable," the declaration says.

Slovenia last month rolled out a nationwide commercial 5G network with the Swedish telecoms giant Ericsson, which Pompeo and other U.S. officials frequently mention as a "trusted" alternative to Huawei.

"The tide is turning against the Chinese Communist Party and its efforts to control information," Pompeo said.

Besides the 5G declaration, Pompeo discussed energy security with Slovenia's president and prime minister. The United States is keen to wean Europe from its dependence on Russian oil and gas and has launched numerous initiatives throughout the continent to diversify European energy sources. It has offered to sell U.S. fuel to Europe and has been promoting nuclear energy.

Pompeo arrived in Slovenia from the Czech Republic, where he called upon the young democracies in the region to embrace hard-won freedoms and counter threats from Russia and particularly China, which

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he said is in many ways more dangerous than the former Soviet Union.

"The CCP is already enmeshed in our economies, in our politics, in our societies in ways the Soviet Union never was," he told Czech lawmakers, referring to the Chinese Communist Party.

Pompeo, however, said that "even more of a threat is the Chinese Communist Party and its campaigns of coercion and control."

"In your country alone," he said, "we see influence campaigns against your politicians and security forces, the theft of industrial data that you have created through your innovation and creativity, and we've seen the use of economic leverage to stifle freedom itself."

Pompeo said they should continue to resist Chinese attempts to assert economic and political leverage over them. He noted several recent developments in which China has threatened Czech officials with retaliation for showing support for Taiwan, Tibet and Hong Kong.

China has accused the United States of "oppressing Chinese companies" through its declarations about telecom equipment suppliers Huawei and ZTE being national security threats.

Abandoned by state after explosion, Lebanese help each other

By HEND KORTAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — In the southern Lebanese town of Haris, a newlywed couple is living in one of Safy Faqeeh's apartments for free. He's never met them before, and they aren't on a honeymoon. Their apartment in Beirut was wrecked when last week's massive explosion wreaked destruction across the capital.

Faqeeh is one of hundreds of Lebanese who have opened their homes to survivors of the Aug. 4 blast.

The explosion, which was centered on Beirut's port and ripped across the capital, left around a quarter of a million people with homes unfit to live in. But they have not had to crowd into collective shelters or sleep in public parks.

That's because in the absence of the state, Lebanese have stepped up to help each other.

Some have let relatives, friends and neighbors stay with them. Others like Faqeeh extended a helping hand even farther, taking to social media to spread the word that they have a room to host people free of charge.

The couple saw Faqeeh's offer on Facebook for a free apartment he owns in Haris, some 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Beirut. They can stay as long as they need to, the 29-year-old Faqeeh said, and he has a second apartment available for anyone else in need. "This is not help, it is a duty," he said.

When he was a teenager, Faqeeh's family home was damaged in the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, and they had to stay in a house in Tripoli, clear on the other end of Lebanon. Now he's paying it forward. "We have experienced several wars and they (people) hosted us," Faqeeh said.

The help that Lebanese are giving goes beyond a place to stay. Armed with helmets and brooms, hundreds of volunteers have circulated through Beirut's heavily damaged neighborhoods, cleaning up people's homes and doing free basic repairs, often enough to enable the residents to stay there.

The explosion left entire blocks in shambles, with streets blanketed in broken glass, twisted metal, broken brickwork. Yet within days, some streets were clean, the debris neatly sorted in piles. That was thanks to volunteers, often using social media to organize where to target.

In some places, they were sweeping streets and hauling away wreckage while security forces or soldiers stood nearby, watching.

That has only reinforced for Lebanese their government's failure to provide basic services, much less respond to the disaster. Many already blame the government and the broader ruling elite's incompetence, mismanagement and corruption for the explosion. Authorities allowed 2,750 tons of explosive ammonium nitrate to sit in a warehouse at the port unmonitored for seven years, despite multiple warnings of the danger, until it exploded when touched off by a fire. The blast killed more than 170 people, injured thousands and wreaked chaos across the city.

The government almost completely left the public on its own to deal with the aftermath. Outside the demolished port, there have been no government clean-up crews in the streets and little outreach from

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officials to help beyond promises of compensation to those whose homes or businesses were damaged.

The list of services people are offering keeps expanding. It now includes free glass for cars damaged in the blast, free maintenance of electrical appliances and free cosmetic surgery for people with face injuries. On Facebook, a group called Rebuild Beirut quickly sprung up. Its volunteers are working at full speed, helping clean up homes and link survivors with donors who will cover the expenses of repairs.

The individual acts of solidarity have been even more striking because Lebanon was already in the middle of a worsening economic crisis that has thrown hundreds of thousands into poverty and left households and businesses with little or no excess cash.

"I am so proud of the Lebanese people," said Kim Sacy, a 19-year-old university student. "There is no state, there is nobody, there is nothing ... we are the ones doing everything in the field."

Sacy is studying at a French university and was supposed to be on a program in Sweden this year but the coronavirus pandemic grounded her in Lebanon. She was outside Beirut driving home when the blast took place. She didn't feel the explosion but when she reached her neighborhood of Achrafieh, she found it shattered. "This is where I lived my whole life," she said.

Sacy's family home was damaged, but she still wanted to help others. "It is not important. I consider myself lucky," she said. "It is the people who make the home." She said some of her family members were injured in the blast but are doing fine now.

Sacy began collecting food and other items to give to those in need. Around 25 families have reached out to her to donate, some she knows, but half are strangers. For the past week, she has been circulating around Beirut in her car to pick up donated furniture, first aid kits, bed sheets and kitchen utensils that she gives to a local non-governmental organization to distribute. When not doing that, she has been cleaning in the streets, including cleaning a fire station.

The self-help spirit has roots in the long civil war, when central authority collapsed and Lebanese had to depend on themselves to get by. In more recent years, waves of anti-government protests have emphasized volunteerism and civic duty — boosted by social media that made connections bypassing the state easier.

The shock of the explosion and the trauma of seeing loved ones injured or a home wrecked has exacted an emotional burden on Beirutis — especially with financial woes already weighing on people.

The Beit Insan well-being center is offering free services to help people overcome the trauma that the blast may have caused. It is also encouraging people with money to "pay it forward" and cover costs for people to get psychological help.

"We know since all the events that have been happening, that less and less people have money for mental health," said Dr. Samar Zebian, co-founder and co-director of the center. "We are a social business."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Aug. 14, the 227th day of 2020. There are 139 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On August 14, 1997, an unrepentant Timothy McVeigh was formally sentenced to death for the Oklahoma City bombing. (McVeigh was executed by lethal injection in 2001.)

On this date:

In 1900, international forces, including U.S. Marines, entered Beijing to put down the Boxer Rebellion, which was aimed at purging China of foreign influence.

In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter, a statement of principles that renounced aggression.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced that Imperial Japan had surrendered unconditionally, ending World War II.

In 1948, the Summer Olympics in London ended; they were the first Olympic games held since 1936.

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In 1973, U.S. bombing of Cambodia came to a halt.

In 1980, workers went on strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk (guh-DANSK'), Poland, in a job action that resulted in creation of the Solidarity labor movement.

In 1992, the White House announced that the Pentagon would begin emergency airlifts of food to Somalia to alleviate mass deaths by starvation.

In 1995, Shannon Faulkner officially became the first female cadet in the history of The Citadel, South Carolina's state military college. (However, Faulkner quit the school less than a week later, citing the stress of her court fight, and her isolation among the male cadets.)

In 2008, President George W. Bush signed consumer-safety legislation that banned lead from children's toys, imposing the toughest standard in the world.

In 2009, Charles Manson follower Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, 60, convicted of trying to assassinate President Gerald Ford in 1975, was released from a Texas prison hospital after more than three decades behind bars.

In 2018, a highway bridge collapsed in the Italian city of Genoa during a storm, sending vehicles plunging nearly 150 feet and leaving 43 people dead.

Ten years ago: A day after weighing in on the issue, President Barack Obama repeated that Muslims had the right to build a mosque near New York's ground zero, but said he was not commenting on the "wisdom" of such a choice. Eight people leaving a party at a downtown Buffalo, New York, restaurant were shot, four fatally, including a Texas man who'd returned to his hometown to celebrate his first wedding anniversary. (Former gang member Riccardo McCray was later convicted of first-degree murder and attempted murder, and sentenced to life without parole.) A truck overturned during an off-road race in the Mojave Desert, killing eight spectators.

Five years ago: The Stars and Stripes rose over the newly reopened U.S. Embassy in Cuba after a half century of often-hostile relations; U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry celebrated the day, but also made an extraordinary, nationally broadcast call for democratic change on the island.

One year ago: Thousands of people packed a baseball stadium in El Paso, Texas, to mourn the 22 victims of a shooting at a Walmart by a man who told police that he was targeting Mexicans. American rapper A\$AP Rocky was found guilty of assault by a Swedish court, six weeks after a street brawl in Stockholm that had attracted the attention of President Donald Trump, but the court gave "conditional sentences" to the rapper and his two bodyguards, sparing them prison time unless they were to commit a similar offense in Sweden again. A former Blackwater security contractor, Nicholas Slatten, was sentenced in Washington to life in prison after a retrial for his role in the 2007 shooting of unarmed civilians in Iraq that left 14 people dead.

Today's Birthdays: Broadway lyricist Lee Adams ("Bye Bye Birdie") is 96. College Football Hall of Famer John Brodie is 85. Singer Dash Crofts is 82. Rock singer David Crosby is 79. Country singer Connie Smith is 79. Comedian-actor Steve Martin is 75. Movie director Wim Wenders is 75. Actor Antonio Fargas is 74. Singer-musician Larry Graham is 74. Actor Susan Saint James is 74. Author Danielle Steel is 73. Rock singer-musician Terry Adams (NRBQ) is 72. "Far Side" cartoonist Gary Larson is 70. Actor Carl Lumbly is 69. Olympic gold medal swimmer Debbie Meyer is 68. Actor Jackee Harry is 64. Actor Marcia Gay Harden is 61. Basketball Hall of Famer Earvin "Magic" Johnson is 61. Singer Sarah Brightman is 60. Actor Susan Olsen is 59. Actor-turned-fashion/interior designer Cristi Conaway is 56. Rock musician Keith Howland (Chicago) is 56. Actor Halle Berry is 54. Actor Ben Bass is 52. Actor Catherine Bell is 52. Rock musician Kevin Cadogan is 50. Actor Scott Michael Campbell is 49. Actor Lalanya Masters is 48. Actor Christopher Gorham is 46. Actor Mila Kunis is 37. Actor Lamorne Morris is 37. TV personality Spencer Pratt is 37. NFL quarterback-turned-baseball player Tim Tebow is 33. Actor Marsai Martin is 16.