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Coming up on

GDILIVE.COM

Thursday, Aug. 27th: Volleyball at Britton sponsored by Ed and Connie Stauch

Friday, Aug. 28th: Football vs. EEK - Sponsored by Big Iron, Delbert Hinkelman

Saturday, Aug. 29th: Girls Soccer vs. Vermillion (sponsors being secured)

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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The Minnesota Vikings are ramping up their practices as training camp rolls on and week one (Sept. 13) is rapidly approaching. With no preseason games this season we are able to focus on training camp more, bringing you better information about your favorite team and players. Let's jump right into some news and notes coming out of Minnesota this past week, starting with the transaction wire.

The Vikings waived undrafted rookie offensive lineman Brady Aiello, making room for second-year running back Tony Brooks-James. The RB had been waived by the Vikings on August 8, but was brought back to help give the team some flexibility in the backfield.

The Vikings have also claimed safety Steven Parker off the waivers. Parker is a third-year player out of Oklahoma who was waived by the Miami Dolphins. He started four games for the Dolphins last season and provides the Vikings with some experience at safety.

The Vikings and star running back Dalvin Cook appear to be at an impasse again, according to NFL Network. The two sides have had an interesting offseason so far, with the RB saying he was not going to report to training camp without a new deal, then showing up because he felt a deal was close to being completed. Now, however, the two sides appear nowhere close to getting a deal done. It remains to be seen if Dalvin will play in 2020 without a contract extension. He has been participating in training camp, albeit on a limited snap count.

The team has been trying new offensive line combinations in training camp, but as of now, it seems they will likely go with the same lineup as last season (minus Josh Kline). Riley Reiff, Garrett Bradbury, and Brian O'Neill are locked in at left tackle, center, and right tackle respectively. Pat Elflein is the only wildcard, as he has been playing both left and right guard, but he has the inside track on one of those spots.

Unlike the offensive line, the defensive line has undergone some major changes this offseason. Linval Joseph is gone, his replacement Michael Pierce has opted out of the season, and Everson Griffen will be playing in Dallas this year. Danielle Hunter is still here thankfully, but he has sat out the last seven practices with an undisclosed injury. At defensive tackle, the Vikings have asked Shamar Stephen to play the nose tackle spot (Linval's spot last season), and by all accounts he seems to be excelling in that role. The Vikings still need to find a DT to play next to Stephen and find another starting defensive end.

The cornerback was perhaps the biggest question mark heading into the season, but the rookies are out to show the world they have what it takes to start immediately. The biggest surprise has been Cameron Dantzler, who was a third-round pick just a few months ago. Speaking of the cornerbacks, we'll be having a guest writer next week who will be focusing on that position. Make sure to check it out!

If you have any questions or comments, reach out to me on Twitter (@JordanWrightNFL). Skol!



By Jordan Wright

Plan Ahead for Fall Mold Allergies

Summer and fall are prime seasons for mold allergy problems. Mold spores are smaller than pollen grains allowing them to not only effect the eyes and nose of allergy sufferers, but they can infiltrate the bronchial tubes and cause asthma. If the allergy or asthma is combined with participation in sports or a rhinovirus cold at the start of school, it could result in asthma attack.



By Dr. Mark Bubak, M.D. ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

Sudden asphyxic asthma is a condition during peak mold time in which younger patients with alternaria mold allergy can go from breathing well on their own to severe asthma on a ventilator in an afternoon. There are methods to be prepared and take steps to avert this situation.

Most mold spores originate outdoors. Staying indoors and keeping the house, office, and car closed is the main avoidance method. The air conditioner with its filter and dehumidification can help a bit more. Additional filters receive some anecdotal praise but are rarely proven clinically helpful.

We cannot stay indoors all the time. For most sufferers, topical corticosteroid nasal or inhaler preventative (controller) sprays must be started prior to the season. And always keep rescue antihistamines and bronchodilators on hand. Oral or injections of steroids may be needed. Allergy shots (immunotherapy) can be immensely helpful if avoidances and medications do not work well. Shots are the only treatment that makes the patient less allergic to the mold and thus reduce symptoms. Unfortunately, under the tongue immunotherapy has not been highly effective for mold allergy. More recently, new medications call biologics have arrived on the market and may be necessary.

Mold is a major contributor to fall allergy and asthma suffering, but the worst reactions are typically brought on by a combination of triggers. Getting your flu shot can make the flares of allergic asthma far less likely to happen. Washing your hands helps prevent colds and other infections which can exacerbate the problem. And, using your albuterol before sports activity can help.

If you suspect you may have a mold allergy, talk to your primary care physician first. Mold allergies can best be diagnosed with a thorough patient history and physical examination. If allergies are suspected, your doctor can refer you to an allergy specialist who can confirm the diagnosis with allergy testing. If confirmed, you and your doctor can work together to create an allergy and asthma action plan.

In the end, much of the responsibility for staying well is up to each of us. The best way to manage mold allergies is to be proactive, ask for help, then follow the prescribed action plan.

Mark E. Bubak, M.D. practicing in Sioux Falls, South Dakota is a contributing Prairie Doc® columnist. He is certified by the American Board of Allergy and Immunology to care for adults and children with asthma and allergies. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPTV most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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#182 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I have the two-week Sunday summary, and the news is looking pretty good. Growth in new cases is slowing down and growth in deaths is also slowing down. We have even fewer states with large growth rates and still more showing declines. I have some hope we've turned a corner again; I hope, although I don't believe, this is going to last. I am very concerned with the opening of schools and the onset of the flu season in a couple of months; but let's take the respite for what it is and do what we can to make those concerns moot.

With the usual caveats about Sunday (and Monday) numbers, things look a whole lot better today. We've dropped below 40,000 new cases on the day for the first time in eight long weeks, and we're not just below, but well below at that. Current total is 5,713,500, which means only 33,800 new cases were reported today, a 0.6% increase. This is still a whole lot worse than what we thought was a peak in the spring, but we're moving in a good direction. I will note that Florida has joined the 600,000-case club, the third state to do so behind California and Texas and the highest per capita number of cases in the nation. Since Florida recently also passed the 10,000-death mark, the fifth state to do that, they're moving in some pretty scary territory.

The increases continue, but the pace is slowing even more, and now it's for a fifth week, so there's a definite pattern. One week increase in total cases was 360,800 (7.1%) last week and is 300,600 (5.6%) this week. Two-week increase was 737,000 (15.8%) last week and is 661,400 (13.1%) this week. I'll be pleased to report further declines next week; I hope I can do that. Threatening all of this progress is what's happening on college campuses; there are too many outbreaks to list here, and the academic year is just getting underway.

New Jersey, an early hot spot, has reported its lowest number of hospitalizations since late March. This is a real sign of progress in that state. New York, the worst-case state for weeks in the spring, has its lowest number of hospitalizations since mid-March and has had a positivity rate below 1% for over two weeks.

I track 55 states and US territories, including the District of Columbia; and once again, five of these showed two-week rates of increase greater than 30%. Here are the states with the greatest rate of growth in cases over 14 days with their percentage increase in that time: Hawaii (89.27% - big decrease), US Virgin Islands (86.36% - increase), Puerto Rico (35.15%), Montana (30.12% - big decrease), and North Dakota (30.00%). New to the list this week is North Dakota; coming off the list was Missouri.

I am showing ten states and territories with 14-day trends that are increasing: Guam, Hawaii, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Missouri, Maine, Vermont, and the US Virgin Islands. This is two more than last week as we see the outbreaks spread out around the country, especially to some less populous states. I have 20 showing not much change: Alaska, Washington, California, Montana, Kansas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, West Virginia, North Carolina, and Puerto Rico. And I have 24 declining: Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Nebraska, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Mississippi, Alabama, New Hampshire, Maryland, District of Columbia, Delaware, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. These lists are quite fluid with a handful of states moving back and forth between them from day to day. I would say there's not much change in the overall trend here.

New deaths today are about half of those yesterday at 464, a 0.3% increase to 176,693. This is a typical low Sunday count, so I wouldn't put much weight on it until we see the trend continue on Tuesday and beyond. Total weekly deaths are a bit below last week and averaging just under 1000 per day. With the decline in the past few weeks in new cases, I would expect this number to continue to decline.

There are still some dark spots on the horizon. Universities in at least 19 states have had outbreaks; the factor here seems to be large group gatherings, something we can expect from college-age people. I don't know that you can legislate away that desire for social gatherings. We're also up to 26 cases in three states associated with the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally; and that's only the ones we know about. No one expects we'll track anywhere near all of those.

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The FDA has issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for convalescent plasma. This is an approval which requires far less evidence of efficacy than the standard approval process. This therapy has been available on expanded access for some time and appears it may have some efficacy in shortening the course of infection. While the EUA reduces the paperwork needed to make the therapy available to patients, it does make it considerably more difficult to enroll patients in the kinds of clinical trials which can produce definitive evidence of efficacy. The EUA was likely coming one day this week anyway, but the days-earlier announcement creates some concerns that politics is interfering with the science here; that would be very worrisome because we need solid science in order to discover just what actually works.

Cratier Carey, a rising sixth-grader, "has always been involved in the community," according to his dad, Anthony Carey. He says his son is "always looking to help other people." And like a lot of kids, Cartier's spent the summer running a lemonade stand. It helps that his house is near a busy intersection, so it does a brisk business. The twist is that the profits from his stand are not being used to buy a skateboard or a new iPad; instead, Cartier's mom, Britney Stewart, takes him to Walmart every few days to buy supplies—mostly diapers, 27,500 of them so far—for single moms.

Although his parents are together, Cartier has a lot of friends with single moms, and he sees how difficult their struggles can be; so he stuck a sign on his lemonade stand that says, "Raising Money for Single Mothers," and rakes in the cash, some \$7500 so far this summer. He explains about single moms, "It's just one of them, and they're doing everything on their own," so he wants to lend a hand. The lemonade stand, which also sells candy and chips, is staffed by Cartier, his four siblings, and a bunch of neighborhood kids; and all of the profits go toward purchases for single mothers who can stop by to pick up what they need from a table stationed next to the lemonade stand. Stewart also helps him to deliver the supplies he purchases to local shelters and churches.

This isn't the first time Cartier's tried to help people. In the early days of the pandemic, his mom helped him to create care packages to distribute to the homeless. The packages included hand sanitizer, hand warmers, soap, tissues, snacks, and water. He has founded a nonprofit called Kids 4 Change 757 that encourages children to get involved and support communities in need, so he's an old hand at soliciting donations and getting kids involved in helping others. He has a neighborhood network of kids who help run the lemonade stand and organize supplies for the mothers.

Jasmine Ballard, who lives in the neighborhood and helps Cartier says, "It fills my heart to help these people. They cry when they hug us, and it feels good to know that we can help them and their families." One grateful single mom says, "It has been really helpful because I truly can't afford all of this on my own." And another told him, "You are helping so many people, you have no idea. You're an amazing young man, and you're going to go far." I have to agree with her.

What did you do on your summer vacation when you were 11? Not as much as Cartier, right? Me neither. I guess we can try to catch up any time, but we might want to get started pretty soon.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Aug. 12	Aug. 13	Aug. 14	Aug. 15	Aug. 16	Aug. 17	Aug. 18
Minnesota	61,839	62,303	62,993	63,723	64,413	65,152	65,716
Nebraska	29,030	29,244	29,660	29,988	30,241	30,372	30,563
Montana	5,104	5,268	5,407	5,541	5,659	5,750	5,792
Colorado	51,441	51,756	52,219	52,538	52,838	53,176	53,370
Wyoming	2,584	2,600	2,627	2,694	2,730	2,789	2,829
North Dakota	7885	7970	8171	8322	8444	8587	8647
South Dakota	9713	9815	9897	10,024	10,118	10,274	10,360
United States	5,141,879	5,197,749	5,248,172	5,314,116	5,357,396	5,403,218	5,444,115
US Deaths	164,545	166,038	167,092	168,458	169,432	170,052	170,559
Minnesota	+323	+464	+690	+730	+690	+739	+564
Nebraska	+334	+214	+416	+328	+253	+131	+191
Montana	+87	+164	+139	+134	+118	+91	+42
Colorado	+402	+315	+463	+319	+300	+338	+194
Wyoming	+19	+16	+27	+67	+36	+59	+40
North Dakota	+172	+85	+201	+151	+122	+143	+60
South Dakota	50	+102	+82	+127	+94	+156	+86
United States	+47,314	+55,870	+50,423	+65,944	+43,280	45,822	+40,897
US Deaths	+1,080	+1,493	+1,054	+1,366	+974	+620	+507
	Aug. 19	Aug. 20	Aug. 21	Aug. 22	Aug. 23	Aug. 24	
Minnesota	66,061	66,618	67,308	68,133	68,867	69,584	
Nebraska	30,825	31,040	31,348	31,626	31,780	31,889	
Montana	5,846	5,956	6,072	6,216	6,376	6,429	
Colorado	53,631	53,901	54,230	54,586	54,883	55,143	
Wyoming	2,850	2,909	2,940	3009	3009	3,046	
North Dakota	8782	8968	9242	9504	9736	9876	
South Dakota	10,443	10,566	10,691	10,884	11,135	11,276	
United States	5,482,823	5,530,247	5,576,089	5,628,070	5,668,564	5,701,557	
US Deaths	171,833	173,193	174,290	175,467	176,371	176,797	
Minnesota	+345	+557	+690	+825	+734	+717	
Nebraska	+262	+215	+308	+278	+154	+109	
Montana	+54	+110	+116	+144	+160	+53	
Colorado	+261	+270	+329	+356	+297	+270	
Wyoming	+21	+59	+31	+69	---	+37	
North Dakota	+135	+186	+274	+262	+232	+140	
South Dakota	+83	+123	+125	+193	+251	+141	
United States	+38,708	+47,424	+45,842	+51,981	+40,494	+32,993	
US Deaths	+1,274	+1,360	+1,097	+1,177	+904	+426	

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August 23rd COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent
from State Health Lab Reports

Bon Homme County experienced its first death. The male was in the 80+ age group. North Dakota also had one death.

Lawrence County seen an increase of 12 cases today, boosting their active number to 47. Edmunds had one positive and one recovered so its active number remains unchanged at six. Marshall County had two positive cases and its active number is now six. Minnehaha County had 21 positive tests, but had 40 recovered list so its active number dropped to 482. One thing to keep in mind and that in two weeks, we should see our recovered numbers dramatically rise as the current positive cases should be recovering at that time. Spink County had a positive case and its active number is now 11.

Let's look at the positivity numbers. Brown County is down to 2.9 percent, which is really good considering the high numbers recently. South Dakota dropped from 9.4 percent yesterday to 8.2 percent today. North Dakota remains high at 10.9 percent.

Here are a couple of numbers to mull over. In South Dakota, 90 percent of the deaths have occurred among those 50 and older. Meanwhile 69 percent of the positive cases in South Dakota are those under the age of 50. There have been no deaths among those under 20. One more stat - there is a 96 percent chance you will survive if you get COVID-19 and are age 50 and older. For those under 50, your survival rate is 99.8 percent.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +12 (549) Positivity Rate: 2.9%
Recovered: +6 (458)
Active Cases: +6 (88)
Total Tests: 412 (6528)
Ever Hospitalized: +1 (24)
Deaths: 0 (3)
Percent Recovered: 83.4% (-0.7)

South Dakota:

Positive: +141 (11,276 total) Positivity Rates: 8.2%
Total Tests: 1717 (175,126 total)
Hospitalized: +8 (959 total). 62 currently hospitalized (down 4 from yesterday)
Deaths: +1 (161 total)
Recovered: +129 (9,564 total)
Active Cases: +11 (1,551)
Percent Recovered: 84.8 +0.1

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 3% Covid, 50% Non-Covid, 48% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 5% Covid, 65% Non-Covid, 30% Available

Ventilator Capacity: 5% Covid, 11% Non-Covid, 84% Available

Fully recovered from positive cases:: Bennett 6-6, Harding 2-2, Jackosn 12-11-1, Hyde 3-3, Mellette 24-24, Miner 15-15, Perkins 4-4, 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: +1 positive (3 active case)

Beadle (9): +2 positive, +2 recovered (27 active cases)

Bennett: Full Recovered

Bon Homme: +2 recovered, 1 death (19 active cases)

Brookings (1): +8 positive (35 active cases)

Brown (3): +12 positive, +6 recovered (88 active cases)

Brule: 5 active cases

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Buffalo (3): 4 active cases
 Butte (1): +1 positive, +2 recovered (9 active cases)
 Campbell: 1 active case
 Charles Mix: +1 positive, +1 recovered (18 active cases)
 Clark: +1 recovered (1 active case)
 Clay (1): +6 positive (31 active cases)
 Codington (1): +10 positive, +5 recovered (71 active cases)
 Corson: +6 recovered (15 active cases)
 Custer: +8 positive (45 active case)
 Davison (2): +2 positive (10 active cases)
 Day: +1 positive, +1 recovered (6 active cases)
 Deuel: +5 positive, +4 recovered (10 active cases)
 Dewey: +1 positive, +5 recovered (24 active cases)
 Douglas: +1 recovered (3 active cases)
 Edmunds: +1 recovered (6 active cases)
 Fall River: 2 active cases
 Faulk (1): 1 active case
 Grant: 9 active cases
 Gregory: 1 active case
 Haakon: 1 active case
 Hamlin: +1 positive, +1 recovered (18 active cases)
 Hand: 3 active cases
 Hanson: +1 recovered (2 active cases)
 Harding: Fully Recovered
 Hughes (3): +3 positive, +1 recovered (15 active cases)
 Hutchinson (1): 6 active cases
 Hyde: +1 positive, +1 recovered (1 active case)
 Jackson (1): Fully Recovered
 Jerauld (1): 1 active case
 Jones: 1 active case

Kingsbury: +1 positive (4 active cases)
 Lake (6): +1 positive, +1 recovered (5 active cases)
 Lawrence (1): +12 positive (47 active cases)
 Lincoln (2): +6 positive, +11 recovered (114 active cases)
 Lyman (3): +1 positive (8 active cases)
 Marshall: +2 positive (6 active cases)
 McCook (1): 3 active cases
 Meade (1): +12 positive, +2 recovered (65 active cases)
 Mellette: Fully Recovered
 Miner: Fully Recovered
 Minnehaha (69): +21 positive, +40 recovered (482 active cases)
 Moody: +1 positive (7 active cases)
 Oglala Lakota (2): +2 recovered (17 active cases)
 Pennington (33): +14 positive, +13 recovered (152 active cases)
 Perkins: 1 active cases
 Potter: 3 active cases
 Roberts (1): +1 recovered (10 active cases)
 Sanborn: Fully Recovered
 Spink: +1 positive (11 active cases)
 Stanley: +1 recovered (3 active cases)
 Sully: +1 recovered (3 active cases)
 Todd (5): +1 recovered (3 active cases)
 Tripp: Fully Recovered
 Turner: +1 recovered (15 active cases)
 Union (4): 21 active cases
 Walworth: +1 positive (14 active cases)
 Yankton (3): +4 positive, +7 recovered (47 active cases)
 Ziebach: +1 positive, +7 recovered (11 active cases)

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	400	0
10-19 years	1020	0
20-29 years	2555	2
30-39 years	2196	6
40-49 years	1659	7
50-59 years	1647	18
60-69 years	988	29
70-79 years	434	26
80+ years	377	73

North Dakota Dept. of Health Report COVID-19 Daily Report, August 23:

- 4,517 tests (1,847)
- 9,876 positives (+140)
- 8,064 recovered (+96)
- 136 deaths (+1)
- 1,676 active cases (+43)

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	5611	82
Male	5665	79

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread
Aurora	42	39	408	0	Minimal
Beadle	614	578	1971	9	Moderate
Bennett	6	6	551	0	None
Bon Homme	38	18	893	1	Substantial
Brookings	182	146	3028	1	Moderate
Brown	549	458	4985	3	Substantial
Brule	50	45	789	0	Minimal
Buffalo	109	102	666	3	None
Butte	27	17	858	1	Minimal
Campbell	4	3	105	0	None
Charles Mix	116	98	1561	0	Substantial
Clark	17	16	420	0	Minimal
Clay	158	126	1517	1	Moderate
Codington	217	145	3152	1	Substantial
Corson	52	37	594	0	Substantial
Custer	82	37	848	0	Substantial
Davison	108	96	2545	2	Moderate
Day	31	25	689	0	Moderate
Deuel	33	23	458	0	Substantial
Dewey	65	41	2402	0	Substantial
Douglas	20	17	432	0	Minimal
Edmunds	25	19	442	0	Minimal
Fall River	23	21	1048	0	Minimal
Faulk	29	27	211	1	Minimal
Grant	39	30	785	0	Moderate
Gregory	8	7	420	0	Minimal
Haakon	3	2	306	0	None
Hamlin	41	23	708	0	Substantial
Hand	13	10	323	0	Moderate
Hanson	21	19	234	0	Minimal
Harding	2	2	59	0	Minimal
Hughes	108	90	1956	3	Moderate
Hutchinson	35	28	958	1	Minimal

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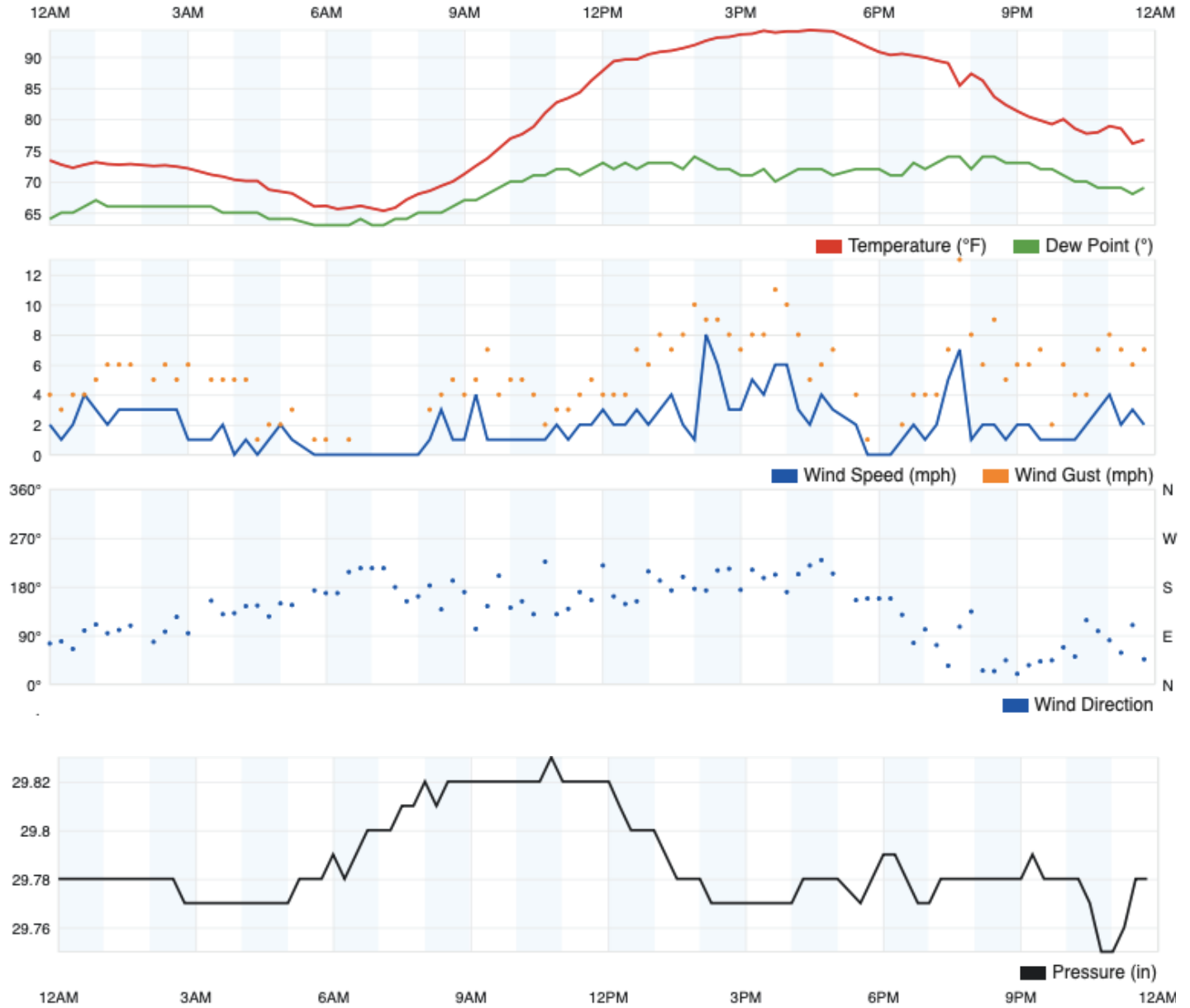
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Hyde	5	4	151	0	Minimal
Jackson	12	11	489	1	Minimal
Jerauld	40	38	280	1	None
Jones	3	2	63	0	None
Kingsbury	18	14	607	0	Minimal
Lake	108	97	1012	6	Moderate
Lawrence	112	64	2285	1	Moderate
Lincoln	787	671	7587	2	Substantial
Lyman	94	83	1015	3	Minimal
Marshall	15	9	493	0	Minimal
McCook	39	31	688	1	Moderate
McPherson	10	7	232	0	None
Meade	164	98	2193	1	Moderate
Mellette	24	24	399	0	None
Miner	15	15	265	0	None
Minnehaha	4896	4344	30156	70	Substantial
Moody	37	30	689	0	Minimal
Oglala Lakota	163	144	3010	2	Minimal
Pennington	1042	857	11775	33	Moderate
Perkins	6	5	200	0	None
Potter	4	1	317	0	Minimal
Roberts	89	78	1971	1	Moderate
Sanborn	13	13	244	0	None
Spink	35	24	1237	0	Minimal
Stanley	20	17	289	0	Minimal
Sully	7	4	96	0	Minimal
Todd	76	68	2360	5	Moderate
Tripp	20	20	633	0	None
Turner	68	53	1001	0	Moderate
Union	232	207	2110	4	Moderate
Walworth	31	17	830	0	None
Yankton	179	129	3394	3	Substantial
Ziebach	45	34	384	0	None
Unassigned	0	0	10707	0	

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 88 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 66 °F

Tuesday



Hot

High: 95 °F

Tuesday
Night



Mostly Clear
then Slight
Chance
T-storms

Low: 69 °F

Wednesday

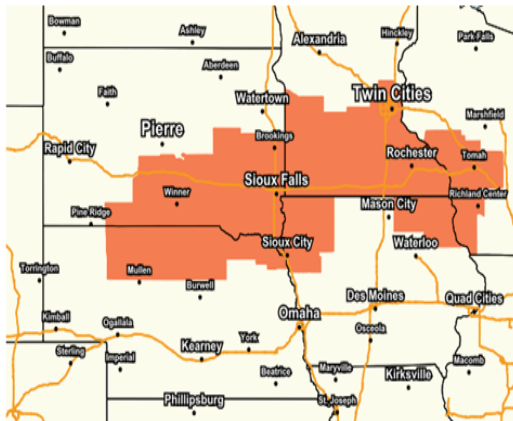


Hot

High: 90 °F

Hot and Hazy!

HEAT ADVISORY this afternoon



Today

Highs in the upper 80s to upper 90s, highest over south central South Dakota. Dewpoints 65 to 70 degrees.

Heat Index Values: upper 90s to near 102 degrees over portions of south central South Dakota.

Preparedness and Precaution

- ✓ Wear light, loose-fitting clothing.
- ✓ Drink water often. Don't wait until you are thirsty.
- ✓ Avoid unnecessary hard work or activities outdoors, or in a building without air conditioning. Take extra breaks.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

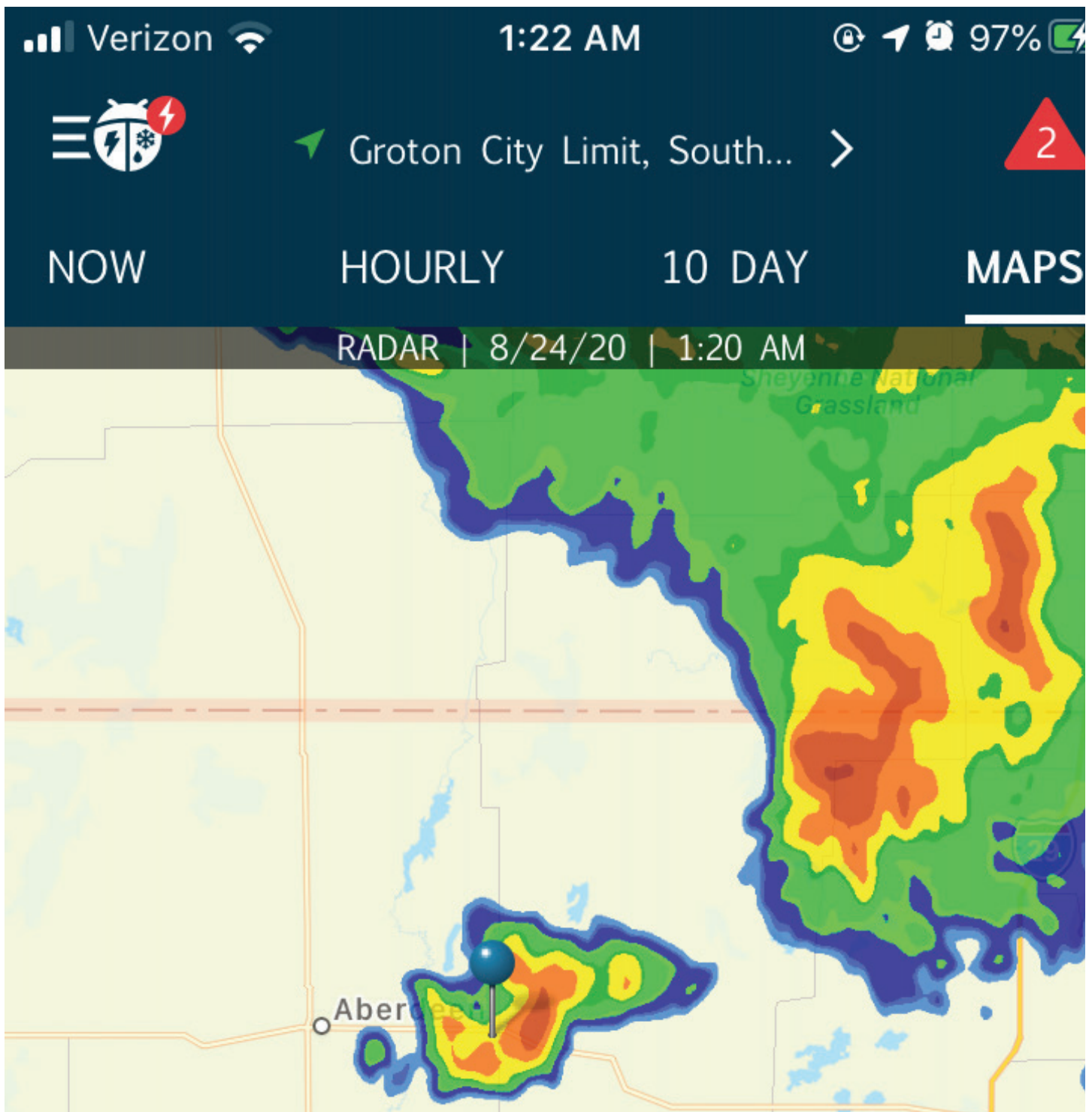


Updated: 8/24/2020 5:35 AM Central

Expect highs in the upper 80s to upper 90s, highest over south central South Dakota. Dewpoints in the 65 to 70 degree range will combine with the warm air to create Heat Index Values in the upper 90s to near 102 degrees over portions of south central South Dakota. What can you do during this period of very hot and muggy conditions? Wear light, loose-fitting clothing. Drink water often. Don't wait until you are thirsty. Avoid unnecessary hard work or activities outdoors, or in a building without air conditioning. Take extra breaks.

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The big system missed Groton; however, about 1 a.m. a small storm cell developed right over Groton. We were greeted with a big flash of lightning and then a big boom, almost as if announcing that rain was coming. The northern part of the city got .43 while the southern was around .31

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Today in Weather History

August 24, 1960: A man was injured when a barn was blown over by an F2 tornado that touched down near Hayes, in Stanley County. Hail, up to golf ball size accompanied the storm as well as about three inches of rain, causing some damage to crops and a farmhouse. The sky color in a westerly direction shortly before the tornado hit was described as a distinct shade of green. Evidence suggests that the tornado may have touched down again in northeast Sully County, destroying a barn, a chicken coop, and haystacks on two farms. Also, precipitation more than 3 inches and locally 6 to 8 inches was accompanied by severe hail, causing damage to buildings and crops. Hail damage was most substantial in Stanly County. The wind carried away an estimated 400 tons of baled hay in Haakon County. A measured rainfall amount of 5.1 inches in less than six hours occurred in Onida, causing extensive flooding of basements, streets, and cropland. Additional rainfall amounts include 5.58 inches 4 NW of Onida, 4.50 inches 23 N of Highmore, 3.05 inches 2N of Onaka, 3.42 inches in Clear Lake, 3.11 inches in Miller, 3.02 inches in Eureka, 2.55 inches 1 NW of Faulkton, 2.40 inches in Gettysburg, 2.22 inches in Blunt, 2.20 inches at Oahe Dam, and 2.16 inches in Clark.

August 24, 1998: A line of severe thunderstorms raced southeast across Sully, Hyde, and Hand counties during the morning hours, producing destructive winds up to 100 mph and hail up to the size of baseballs. The winds and hail damaged or destroyed a wide swath of sunflowers and corn. Four power poles south of Highmore on Highway 47 were snapped off. The school in Highmore had twenty screens shredded by the hail and the winds. On a farm northeast of Onida, a grain bin was blown over a distance of 200 yards.

August 24, 2006: Up to 4.25" diameter hail and 9 tornadoes developed across central and northeastern South Dakota between 4:30 pm and 8:00 pm, two of which were rated as F3 intensity. The first of these F3 tornadoes developed in McPherson County west of Hillsview at 5:03 pm, and tracked 24.5 miles southeast to just north of Hosmer before lifting at 5:30 pm. Numerous livestock and deer were killed. Devastating damage was observed to farm equipment, homes, barns, grain bins, and vehicles. A well-anchored mobile home was completely destroyed. Debris from each site was observed up to 3 miles away. One person received minor scrapes and bruises. The second F3 tornado of the event was spawned by a long-track supercell, and this supercell produced the other 7 tornadoes of the day (two F2, an F1, and four F0 roughly from Onida to De Smet). It touched down just south of Wessington in Beadle County at 6:37 pm, and tracked 19.5 miles southeast to just southwest of Huron before lifting at 7:18 pm. This tornado destroyed 8 houses and numerous farm buildings and damaged at least 7 other houses. Five large high-voltage transmission towers were blown down about 3 miles southeast of Wessington. A woman was cut on the neck at a farm southwest of Wolsey where the house and all other buildings were destroyed (non-life threatening). One other injury occurred southeast of Wolsey.

79: Stratovolcano, Mount Vesuvius erupted on this day, burying the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

1456: Machiavelli wrote, "On the 24th of August, about an hour before day-break there arose from the Adriatic near Ancona, a whirlwind, which crossing Italy from east to west, again reached the sea near Pisa, accompanied by thick clouds, and the most intense and impenetrable darkness."

1992: Hurricane Andrew made landfall in southern Florida at 4:30 AM on this day. The high winds caused catastrophic damage in Florida, with Miami-Dade County cities of Florida City, Homestead, and Cutler Ridge receiving the brunt of the storm. About 63,000 homes were destroyed, and over 101,000 others were damaged. This storm left roughly 175,000 people homeless. As many as 1.4 million people were left without electricity at the height of the storm. In the Everglades, 70,000 acres (280 km²) of trees were knocked down. Additionally, rainfall in Florida was substantial, peaking at 13.98 in (355 mm) in western Miami-Dade County. About \$25 billion in damage and 44 fatalities were reported in Florida.

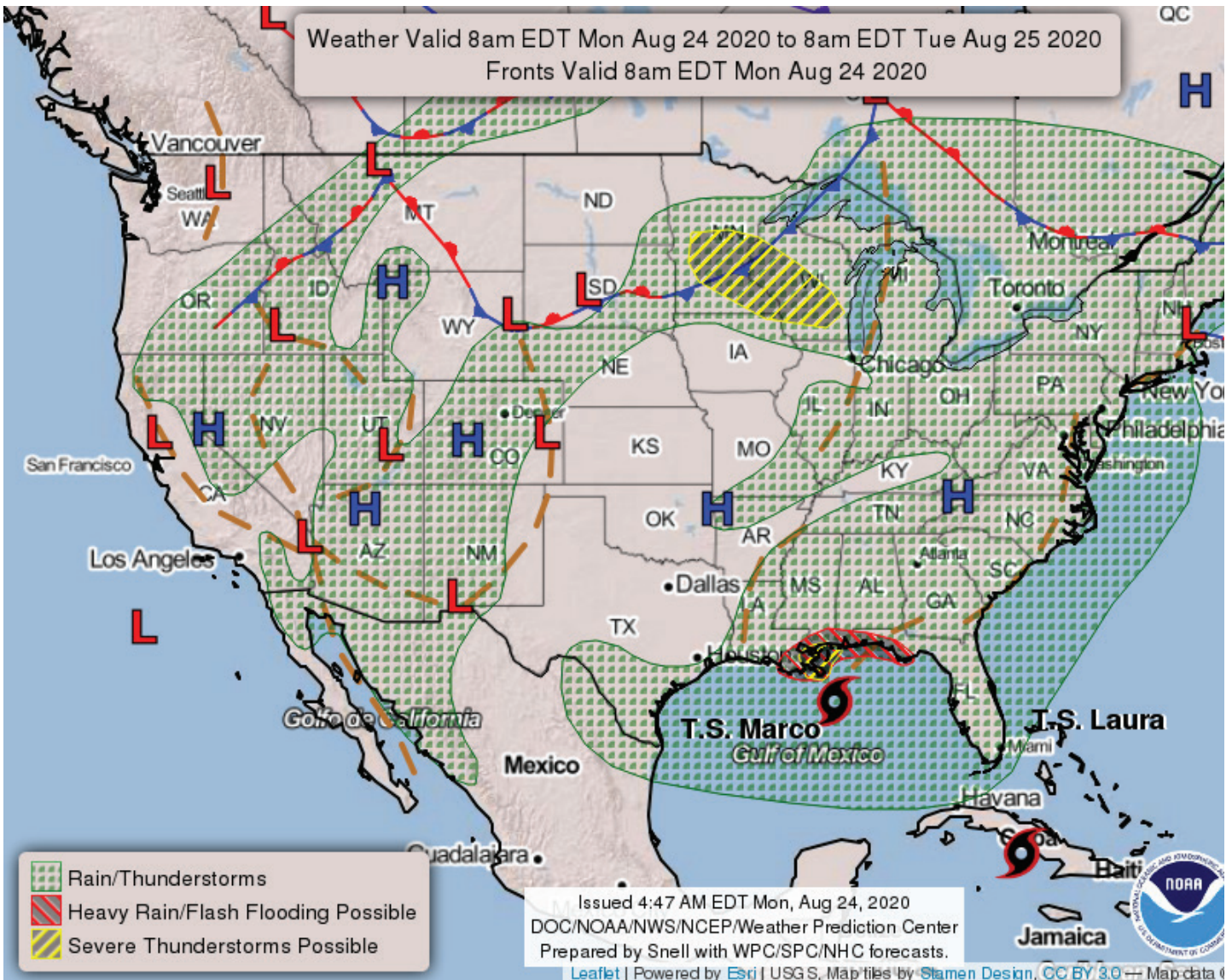
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 94 °F at 4:25 PM
Low Temp: 65 °F at 7:16 AM
Wind: 13 mph at 7:33 PM
Precip: .00

Record High: 103° in 1929
Record Low: 38° in 1934
Average High: 81°F
Average Low: 55°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 1.80
Precip to date in Aug.: 1.24
Average Precip to date: 15.66
Precip Year to Date: 11.75
Sunset Tonight: 8:25 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:47 a.m.



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WHERE'S THE PICCOLO?

Sir Michael Costa was a celebrated and successful conductor in England. He was recognized by others for the demands he placed on musicians to be accurate and to perform with excellence. In fact, many resented him for his adherence to high musical standards.

On one occasion, during a rehearsal of a large choir and orchestra, he brought the music to an abrupt stop. The musicians were puzzled until he shouted, "Where's the piccolo? I can't hear the piccolo."

With all of the musicians playing as loudly as they could, and the choir singing as loudly as it could, the piccolo player thought to himself, "My instrument is so small, and the sound it makes is so insignificant, it won't be missed." But to Costa, the sound of one small, seemingly insignificant instrument, was essential to complete the harmony for the concert to be acceptable.

Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, said, "Now, all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it." Here we find him emphasizing the significance, obligation, and responsibility that each of us has to use our talents and skills to do the work of Christ through our church and its various activities.

One of the dangers of comparing ourselves to others is that we come out looking as small as a piccolo. Remember, the Conductor needs us to play our part to complete His concert.

Prayer: Lord, we each play our part in Your symphony of grace. May we realize that if we do not play our role and play it well, Your Kingdom will be incomplete. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27

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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
- 09/12-13/2020 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In at the Groton Airport north of Groton
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
- 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/31/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
- 11/14/2020 Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
- 12/05/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
- 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

News from the Associated Press

Marching band has to find its rhythm with virus in the way

By ERIN BORMETT Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Washington High School marching band spends months each year turning dozens of individual musicians into a singular, lock-step performing unit. How, then, can you achieve that same result when a pandemic forces virtual practices and sectional rehearsals only?

Band director Kiley Coyne wrestled with this problem all summer, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported. Students would submit videos of their musical, marching and conditioning exercises. She and the assistant director would then spend 12 hours at Howard Wood Field teaching the same marching formations to each section – brass, woodwind, percussion and color guard respectively – hoping their positions would later line up without issue. .

Finally, on Aug. 8, the band came together for their first rehearsal in full, a step that usually takes place in June. The students stood on their marks in formation, masks around their chins or poking out of pockets while they played their instruments in unison at last.

“It was incredible to hear them all,” said Coyne. “I was shocked when they all started playing for the first time. Every day before this was stress, anxiety and nightmares about how this was going to go.”

Coyne did her best to prepare the band through their small group rehearsals, but the transition to the full band came with its own challenges. Specifically, the color guard integrates their movements by passing through the band, and the formations didn’t line up the way she had hoped.

“It presented some problems, I’m not going to lie,” she said. “When we finally came together, it was a bit stressful, because we had to identify the problems the drills had created.”

The students are finding their rhythm as a cohesive band, but their opportunities to perform are getting slim. Two of their five annual performances have been canceled, and audience members, such as parents or even other competing marching bands, may be severely limited or prohibited altogether.

Coyne said that marching band is a communal activity, in both the relationships within each band and in the camaraderie and support they give between schools. If competitions continue to be canceled, the opportunity to create music and see their friends is enough for many Washington band students to carry on, even if they have to remain socially distant off the field.

“This could all be canceled tomorrow, but we need and want to do what we love in the time that we have,” Coyne said. “They wouldn’t spend this amount of time learning a show in 90-degree weather with wind if they didn’t like the activity of performing with their friends and putting on a show that will intrigue an audience.”

North Trail lead keeper cares for, trains many zoo animals

By ELOISE OGDEN Minot Daily News

MINOT, N.D. (AP) — Ryan Pederson, North Trail lead keeper at Minot’s Roosevelt Park Zoo, has a special knack for training the animals in that area of the zoo.

Originally from Devils Lake, Pederson has been with the zoo for about five years.

“We train a lot of the animals over there and that’s really just so we can do medical procedures,” said Pederson.

There’s Sisco, a camel who will let them do hand vaccinations on him. The camel will come up to Pederson and let him put a halter on him, let’s Pederson brush him... “Everything,” Pederson said.

“With the bobcat too, he’ll go in the kennel for me, he’ll sit, he’ll jump on a scale for me,” Pederson told the Minot Daily News.

“They’re all very smart. Like the otters, they do a lot. They go into a tube – that’s how we give them their vaccinations – they like reach out their paws,” he said.

“Noah, the sheep over there, he was the first animal that I started training. He does so much. He’s so

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excited about training," Pederson said. "I hold the halter and he sticks his face into the halter – he wants it, he wants it on. He'll follow me around wherever I ask him. Then we started this new thing where we have guests hold up stars. We have one person hold up a star and I say 'star' and he goes and finds it, and comes back to me. And then I say 'star' and he goes and finds that one. He's very smart," Pederson said.

As a kid, Pederson liked the outdoors and wildlife.

"We had a slough in my backyard so I would catch frogs and snakes all the time. I always liked being outside. It was always fun for me. And, of course, you always watched Steve Irwin all the time," Pederson said. The late Irwin, of Australia, was a wildlife expert, zookeeper, conservationist, environmentalist and television personality.

"I remember as a kid we would always go to zoos," he added.

Pederson went to the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, where he majored in fisheries and wildlife biology."

"I had to do an internship and it was really hard finding a zoo internship. I found one in Minot and did it. It was like the best experience ever," he said.

At that time he said Mitch Thompson was the lead keeper for the North Trail and as an intern Pederson shadowed Thompson. Thompson now is with the North Dakota Forest Service at Bottineau.

Coincidentally, he said Thompson also is from Devils Lake, attended UND and conducted FrogWatch classes at the zoo. Pederson now does the FrogWatch classes.

Pederson was among the first group of interns at the Minot zoo after the 2011 flood.

Once he graduated from UND, he said he was contacted by the Minot zoo and asked to apply for the seasonal position. He applied and was hired on as a seasonal keeper.

"At that time I was a floater and I really liked the North Trail," he said. He worked in other areas of the zoo but two or three months later began working at the North Trail. He had the number two position at the North Trail and then became lead keeper.

Two other keepers for the North Trail are Baleigh Seeber, year-round keeper, and Bobbi Van Dyke, seasonal keeper.

Pederson said the North Trail keepers are responsible for husbandry and medical care of the animals along with the zoo's full-time veterinarian Dr. Logan Wood.

He said they also assess the North Trail inhabitants' diets, making sure they are getting the right diets as well as all their other needs throughout the seasons.

On that side of the zoo, he said they like to do guest interactions.

"We have keeper chat every day and we do goat encounter which volunteers help us out with," he said. "There's one (goat) over there – he's named Erik – you could pet him all day," he said.

He said the keeper chats are about a different animal each day. Wednesday's keeper chat was with the great horned owl.

"Another big part of the job is just making it look nice over there like sweeping up the pathways, bathrooms and the enrichment for the animals too," Pederson said. He said the enrichment can be purchased but sometimes they also put it together themselves.

The North Trail has around 30 animals including bison, reindeer, bobcat, Scottish Highland cattle, wolves, goats, sheep, otters, camels, owls, eagles, tortoises, black-footed ferrets, prairie dogs and others.

"We call ourselves North Trail like a brand so we deal with the most variety of animals – we have our carnivores, our hoofed stock and our reptiles, and we have small animals to large animals," Pederson said.

The North Trail also has honey bees.

"Five Star Farms brings them and we just take care of them – they really take care of themselves," he said.

The bees have a hive enclosed in a case in the North Trail Discovery Barn. The honey bees can leave the area through a tube to gather pollen and return the same way.

"I find them all the way over by the tiger. They go all the way on the other side of the zoo," Pederson said.

Of all the North Trail animals, Pederson said the bison are his favorites. "I really like the bison. If any animal is made for North Dakota, it's the bison."

This year two bison calves were born at the zoo. "Huck and Tucker," said Pederson, giving their names.

He said names were picked for the calves, then the names were put on Facebook and people could vote on them.

The North Trail continues to make improvements.

"The biggest new addition we had a couple years ago and that was the bison/camel barn. The goat bridge too was a big one," he said.

What's next for him?

"Just keep doing what I'm doing," Pederson said. He said he'd also like to get more involved in conservation.

Roosevelt Park Zoo and the Greater Minot Zoological Society, a nonprofit support organization for the zoo, are extensively involved in conservation – local and worldwide.

Pederson and others have gone to Wall, South Dakota, to count black-footed ferrets. The ferrets that are caught are checked, and if not already tagged, are tagged and then released back to their homes. North Dakota no longer has black-footed ferrets.

"That's the whole reason we decided to get these jobs- for conservation," Pederson said of the keepers. He said the keeper chats and talking to people does quit a bit for conservation.

"The idea is you teach people about the animals and they're going to tell like 10 other people but once they leave, they're going to know about these animals and care about the animals and they're going to want to keep them around," Pederson said.

South Dakota reports 141 new COVID-19 cases, 1 death

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials are reporting 141 newly confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the state and one new death.

The state has now had a total of 11,276 cases of COVID-19 as of Sunday. There were a record 1,551 cases still active.

The South Dakota Department of Health reports 9,564 recoveries from the disease, and a total of 62 people are currently hospitalized.

With the new death reported Sunday, South Dakota's death toll from the disease has risen to 161.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

Mount Rushmore protest leader wants case to go to trial

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A leader of a July 3 protest before President Donald Trump's visit to Mount Rushmore wants his his case to go to trial after a judge found probable cause for his felony charges.

"We're going to trial, we're not taking any plea deals, these charges are all unfounded," Nick Tilsen said after his preliminary hearing at the Pennington County Court on Friday.

The Rapid City Journal reports Magistrate Judge Todd Hyronimus said he found probable cause after he watched police body camera footage and heard from four witnesses.

Evidence in court included a video that showed Tilsen taking a shield from a National Guard soldier.

Tilsen is charged with second-degree robbery and grand theft in the alternative, meaning Tilsen could only be convicted of one — not both — of those charges in relation to the shield. He's also charged with two counts of simple assault against law enforcement.

Tilsen faces up to 16 years in prison.

Former South Dakota U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson is one of Tilsen's defense lawyers.

Protest erupts after Wisconsin police shoot man from behind

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — Officers deployed tear gas early Monday to disperse hundreds of people who took to the streets following a police shooting in Kenosha that also drew a harsh rebuke from the governor after a video posted on social media appeared to show officers shoot at a Black man's back seven times

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as he leaned into a vehicle.

A person was hospitalized in serious condition following a shooting by officers about 5 p.m. Sunday as officers were responding to a "domestic incident," the Kenosha Police Department said in a news release. Police in the city, which is in the southeastern corner of Wisconsin about 40 miles (64 kilometers) south of Milwaukee and 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of Chicago, did not provide details about what led to the shooting, but said the person was transported to a hospital in Milwaukee for treatment.

By late Sunday, multiple vehicles were set ablaze and windows were smashed along city thoroughfares as crowds faced off with law enforcement. Officers in riot gear stood in lines and SWAT vehicles remained on the streets to move people away from city buildings despite the declaration of an overnight curfew. Tear gas was used to disperse groups of people, according to reporters at the scene.

In video posted on social media that appeared to show the shooting from across a street, three officers could be seen shouting and pointing their weapons at the man as he walked around the front of a parked SUV. As the man opened the driver's side door and leaned inside, one officer grabbed his shirt from behind and then fired into the vehicle. Seven shots could be heard on the video, though it was unclear if more than one officer fired.

Gov. Tony Evers on Sunday night condemned the shooting of the man, whom he identified as Jacob Blake, saying in a statement that "while we do not have all of the details yet, what we know for certain is that he is not the first Black man or person to have been shot or injured or mercilessly killed at the hands of individuals in law enforcement in our state or our country."

The Wisconsin Department of Justice, which is investigating the shooting, did not release any details about the officers who were involved except to say they had been placed on administrative leave.

Following the shooting, social media posts showed neighbors gathering in the surrounding streets and shouting at police. Some could be heard chanting "no justice, no peace" while others appeared to throw objects at officers and damage police vehicles.

Later Sunday, in a scene that mirrored the widespread protests over the police shootings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black people, marchers headed to the Kenosha County Public Safety Building, which houses the police and county sheriff's departments. Authorities mostly blocked off the building, and some officers were positioned on the roof as protesters marched beside lines of honking cars as they made their way to the building.

Outside the station, protesters clashed with officers dressed in riot gear, including plastic face masks, who occasionally used their shields and batons to push people back.

Meanwhile, Evers indicated that he intends to take further action over the shooting.

"I have said all along that although we must offer our empathy, equally important is our action," he said. "In the coming days, we will demand just that of elected officials in our state who have failed to recognize the racism in our state and our country for far too long."

Families confront New Zealand mosque shooter at sentencing

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand (AP) — Families and survivors had their first chance to confront the white supremacist who slaughtered 51 worshippers in a mass shooting at two New Zealand mosques as his four-day sentencing hearing began Monday.

"You killed your own humanity, and I don't think the world will forgive you for your horrible crime," said a tearful Maysoon Salama, the mother of 33-year-old Atta Elayyan, who was killed in March 2019 attacks. "You thought you can break us. You failed miserably."

The gunman, 29-year-old Australian Brenton Harrison Tarrant, pleaded guilty in March to 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one count of terrorism — the first terrorism conviction in New Zealand's history. He could become the first person in New Zealand to be sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, the toughest sentence available.

Tarrant was brought into the Christchurch High Court shackled and wearing a gray prison outfit. In the

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dock, unshackled and surrounded by five officers, he showed little emotion throughout the hearing. He occasionally looked around the room, tapped his fingers, and watched the survivors as they spoke.

The courtroom was only half full due to coronavirus distancing requirements, while many others watched from adjacent courtrooms where the hearing was streamed. Survivors and family members occasionally wept and comforted each other.

Two dozen victims and family members told the court about the pain of losing husbands, wives, sons and brothers. Some had family members around them for support, others spoke through translators or on pre-recorded videos from abroad.

One of those was grandmother Saira Patel, who spoke from Melbourne in Australia and described the moment she thought she would die in the Linwood mosque.

"I stretched both my arms toward my husband so we would die together," she said.

But it was her husband of 36 years, Musa, who was shot in the back. When paramedics arrived, she said, they told her to push on the bullet hole to lessen the bleeding, but her hands kept slipping with all the blood. When they took over, she said, she held her husband's warm hands until they dropped. He had died.

"I'm still searching for my husband's beautiful face in the crowds, but he's nowhere to be seen," she said.

Some speakers raised their voices in anger when they addressed the gunman. One said nothing less than the death penalty would be fair. Janna Ezat, whose son Hussein Al-Umari was killed, looked at Tarrant and spoke softly.

"I forgive you," she said. "The damage is done, Hussein will never be here. I only have one choice and that is to forgive."

Monday's hearing began with prosecutors outlining the attacks in a 26-page summary of facts, the first detailed account by authorities about what happened that day, including the revelation that Tarrant had intended to burn down the mosques.

Crown prosecutor Barnaby Hawes said Tarrant moved to New Zealand in 2017 and began buying an arsenal of high-powered weapons, as well as 7,000 rounds of ammunition.

Two months before the attacks, Tarrant flew a drone directly over the Al Noor mosque, recording an aerial view of the grounds and buildings and taking note of the entry and exit doors, Hawes said.

Hawes said the gunman planned his attacks for when the maximum number of worshippers were present, and that 190 people were in the Al Noor mosque for Friday prayers on the day of the attacks.

In his car, the gunman had six guns — two AR-15 rifles, two other rifles, and two shotguns, the court heard. He also brought with him four modified gas containers that he planned to use to burn down the mosques after he finished shooting, Hawes said. The gunman later told police he wished he had used them and that he wished he'd shot more people.

Hawes also detailed the bravery of Naeem Rashid, who was killed at the Al Noor mosque.

"He ran at the defendant from the southeastern corner of the room. When Mr. Rashid was approximately 1 meter from the defendant, the defendant swung the AR-15 around and fired four shots at point-blank range," Hawes said.

"Mr. Rashid crashed into the defendant and the defendant went down on one knee," Hawes said, adding that Tarrant was able to get back up and shoot Rashid again.

At the second mosque, Abdul Aziz chased Tarrant down the driveway screaming at him, prosecutors said, and threw a discarded rifle at his car, shattering a window. Aziz was not injured.

Tarrant has dismissed his lawyers and is representing himself during the sentencing, raising fears he could try to use the occasion as a platform to promote his racist views. He can choose to speak once the survivors have spoken, although the judge will likely shut down any attempts he makes to grandstand.

New Zealand abolished the death penalty for murder in 1961, and the longest sentence imposed since then has been life imprisonment with a minimum 30-year non-parole period. Justice Cameron Mander will decide on the gunman's sentence at the end of the hearing.

The attacks targeting people praying at the Al Noor and Linwood mosques shocked New Zealand and prompted new laws banning the deadliest types of semi-automatic weapons. They also prompted global

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changes to social media protocols after the gunman livestreamed his attack on Facebook, where it was viewed by hundreds of thousands of people.

Prosecutors said that after Tarrant left the Linwood mosque he planned to drive to the town of Ashburton and attack a third mosque. But he was rammed by two police officers, dragged out of his car and arrested.

Gamal Fouda, the imam of the Al Noor mosque who survived the shooting, told the court that the gunman's actions were misguided.

"We are a peaceful and loving community who did not deserve your actions," Fouda said. "Your hatred is unnecessary. If you have done anything, you have brought the world community closer with your evil actions."

5 things to know 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. TRUMP ANNOUNCES EMERGENCY COVID-19 TREATMENT The president announced an emergency authorization for a "breakthrough" to treat virus patients with convalescent plasma.

2. PROTESTS ERUPT AFTER BLACK MAN SHOT BY POLICE Officers worked to disperse crowds of protesters in a Wisconsin city over a video appearing to show an officer shoot a Black man as he leaned into a car.

3. 1 DEAD IN MASSIVE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES Authorities say a 70-year-old man has died in one of the three giant wildfires burning around the San Francisco Bay Area. The man had been reported missing.

4. REPUBLICANS READY TO RENOMINATE THE PRESIDENT Despite the ongoing pandemic, delegates will hold an in-person roll-call vote in Charlotte to formally nominate Donald Trump.

5. TOP PRESIDENTIAL AIDE SET TO LEAVE OFFICE Kellyanne Conway, one of President Trump's most influential and longest serving advisers, announced she would be leaving the White House at the end of the month.

Massive Northern California wildfires rage on; 1 man dead

By MARTHA MENDOZA and FRANK BAKER Associated Press

SCOTTS VALLEY, Calif. (AP) — Three massive wildfires chewed through parched Northern California landscape Sunday as firefighters raced to dig breaks and make other preparations ahead of a frightening weather system packing high winds and more of the lightning that sparked the huge blazes and scores of other fires around the state, putting nearly a quarter-million people under evacuation orders and warnings.

At the CZU Lightning Complex fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains, south of San Francisco, authorities announced the discovery of the body of a 70-year-old man in a remote area called Last Chance. The man had been reported missing and police had to use a helicopter to reach the area, which is a string of about 40 off-the-grid homes at the end of a windy, steep dirt road north of the city of Santa Cruz.

The area was under an evacuation order and Santa Cruz Sheriff's Department Chief Deputy Chris Clark said it was a stark reminder of the need for residents to leave the area.

"This is one of the darkest periods we've been in with this fire," he said.

The fatality was the first for the CZU fire and seventh fire victim in the state in the last week that has seen 650 wildfires across California, many of them sparked by the more than 12,000 lightning strikes recorded since Aug. 15. There are 14,000 firefighters, 2,400 engines and 95 aircraft battling the fires.

The Santa Cruz fire is one of three "complexes," or groups of fires, burning on all sides of the San Francisco Bay Area.. All were started by lightning.

Fire crew made progress during the weekend, which saw a welcome break in the unseasonably warm weather and little wind. that allowed firefighters to increase what had been precious little containment.

But the forecast late Sunday was ominous — the National Weather Service issued a "red flag" warning through Monday afternoon for the drought-stricken area, meaning extreme fire conditions including high temperatures, low humidity, lightning and wind gusts up to 65 mph (105 kph) that "may result in danger-

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ous and unpredictable fire behavior.”

Mark Brunton, a battalion chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), said while he’s confident firefighters did the most with the time they had to prepare, he’s not sure what to expect.

“There’s a lot of potential for things to really go crazy out there,” he said.

The LNU Lightning Complex fire in wine country north of San Francisco and SCU Lightning Complex southeast of the city have within a week grown to be two of the three largest fires in state history, with both burning more than 500 square miles (1,295 square kilometers). The LNU fire has been the most deadly and destructive blaze, accounting for five deaths and 845 destroyed homes and other buildings. Three of the victims were in a home that was under an evacuation order.

Officials surveying maps at command centers are astonished by the sheer size of the fires, Cal Fire spokesman Brice Bennett said.

“You could overlay half of one of these fires and it covers the entire city of San Francisco,” Bennett said Sunday.

In Southern California, an 11-day-old blaze held steady at just under 50 square miles (106 square kilometers) near Lake Hughes in northern Los Angeles County mountains. Rough terrain, hot weather and the potential for thunderstorms with lightning strikes challenged firefighters on Sunday.

Authorities said their firefighting effort in Santa Cruz was hindered by people who refused to evacuate and those who were using the chaos to steal. Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart said 100 officers were patrolling and anyone not authorized to be in an evacuation zone would be arrested.

“What we’re hearing from the community is that there’s a lot of looting going on,” Hart said.

He and county District Attorney Jeff Rosell expressed anger at what Rosell called the “absolutely soulless” people who seek to victimize those already victimized by the fire. Among the victims was a fire commander who was robbed when he left his fire vehicle to help direct direct operations.

Someone entered the vehicle and stole personal items, including a wallet and “drained his bank account,” said Chief Mark Brunton, a battalion chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

“I can’t imagine a bigger low-life,” Hart said, promising to catch him and vowing “the DA is going to hammer him.”

Holly Hansen, who fled the LNU fire, was among evacuees from the community of Angwin allowed Sunday to go back to their homes for one hour to retrieve belongings. She and her three dogs waited five hours in her SUV for their turn. Among the items she took with her were photos of her pets.

“It’s horrible, I lived in Sonoma during the (2017) Tubbs Fire, so this is time No. 2 for me. It’s horrible when you have to think about what to take,” she said. “I think it’s a very raw human base emotion to have fear of fire and losing everything. It’s frightening.”

Baker reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press journalists Christopher Weber and Aron Ranen contributed, respectively, from Los Angeles and Angwin, California.

3 years after Harvey, some in Houston still waiting for help

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Some Houston residents say they endured difficult, often hazardous living conditions while waiting months, even years for help from the city to fix flood-damaged homes after Hurricane Harvey.

Sleeping in a closet because it was the only space that didn’t reek of mold. Dealing with rodents and roaches that would come in through warped or rotted flooring. Couch surfing at 67 years old until patchwork repairs made a home temporarily habitable.

Those were just some of the things people dealt with as they waited for help they say never came, despite submitting — and resubmitting — paperwork.

Three years after Harvey, some Houston residents feel angry and abandoned as their repair efforts

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were bogged down by a city program they described as slow and bureaucratic. The program has finished rebuilding less than 70 homes since it started January 2019.

Some residents, like 70-year-old Doris Brown, turned to nonprofits and the state. They also formed a group — the Harvey Forgotten Survivors Caucus — to bring attention to their plight.

“We have a right to be angry. We past angry now. We mad as hell,” said Brown, whose home had to be rebuilt because of mold.

City officials admit the repair program’s progress has been slow but blame this partly on the Texas General Land Office, or GLO, which oversees the funding. The city accused the land office of providing muddled guidance, resulting in rejection of homeowners’ applications.

“The state GLO has not been a good partner with us,” said Mayor Sylvester Turner.

The land office said the city was unprepared to run the program and rejected help.

“The city of Houston’s lack of progress is unacceptable,” said GLO spokesperson Brittany Eck.

The city sued the GLO to stop it from taking over the funding. The GLO also began its own repair program in Houston, adding to residents’ confusion.

“The government is bickering over funding as far as who it belongs to, but it really belongs to the residents and the residents are still here waiting with hands empty,” said Julia Orduña, with Texas Housers, a nonprofit that works on housing issues.

Harvey dumped up to 50 inches (1.3 meters) of rain in the Houston area after making landfall on Aug. 25, 2017. It killed 68 people and caused about \$125 billion in damage in Texas.

The city received nearly \$1.3 billion in federal funding to repair and rebuild homes, provide rental assistance and create new affordable housing. A third of the funding — nearly \$428 million — went to a program for home repair and reconstruction.

As of the end of July, the program had fixed 68 homes and reimbursed 73 people who did their own repairs. The land office had fixed nearly 1,800 homes across Texas as of Aug. 13.

In the Houston area, Harvey flooded more than 150,000 homes, with more than 16,000 residents identified as potentially needing repair help.

About 50% of Houston households impacted by Harvey were low- and moderate-income, according to the city. Community advocates say many damaged homes were in Black and Latino neighborhoods that have lacked economic investment and proper infrastructure to keep them from flooding.

“They’re still in the double digits of homes repaired. No matter how you slice it, that’s a failure,” said Ben Hirsch, with West Street Recovery, a local nonprofit that rebuilt Brown’s home and that of 59-year-old Lawrence Hester.

For nearly 2½ years after Harvey, Hester lived with three relatives in a home that became overrun by black mold, rodents, roaches and sometimes snakes. He used buckets bought at a dollar store to collect water leaking from the Harvey-damaged roof.

“Living in those conditions for so long, I felt like it was normal,” Hester said.

Hester’s home has mostly been rebuilt with a few minor repairs on hold because West Street Recovery stopped construction due to the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic also forced the Harvey Forgotten Survivors Caucus to move its advocacy efforts online.

Unable to get help from the city, Lloyd Nelms, 41, accepted an offer from the GLO. Every morning during the 17-day construction process, Nelms traveled from his hotel to watch and reassure himself it wasn’t a dream. On June 2, he got the keys to his rebuilt home.

“I lost hope in the city, but I didn’t lose hope in God,” said Nelms.

Houston officials say critics are focusing only on the number of finished home repairs and ignoring their other projects, including developing over 3,500 new affordable rental homes and so far helping 136 families through a homebuyer assistance program.

Tom McCasland, director of Houston’s Housing and Community Development Department, which runs the repair program, declined an interview request, citing the lawsuit. In a statement, he said his agency’s focus remains on helping residents recover.

Residents and advocates say while the GLO has been more responsive than the city, they still have

concerns. The biggest one is a rule limiting the number of bedrooms in a rebuilt home. The GLO says this allows more homes to be fixed.

Brown said she and the caucus will continue pushing for change in how disaster victims get help. She's been inspired in part by recent protests for racial justice.

"We are resilient people," Brown said. "We're going to continue to fight and we're not going to quit because this is our right."

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/juanlozano70>

Thousands allowed to bypass environmental rules in pandemic

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, CATHY BUSSEWITZ, JOHN FLESHER, MATTHEW BROWN and MICHAEL CASEY
Associated Press

Thousands of oil and gas operations, government facilities and other sites won permission to stop monitoring for hazardous emissions or otherwise bypass rules intended to protect health and the environment because of the coronavirus outbreak, The Associated Press has found.

The result: approval for less environmental monitoring at some Texas refineries and at an army depot dismantling warheads armed with nerve gas in Kentucky, manure piling up and the mass disposal of livestock carcasses at farms in Iowa and Minnesota, and other risks to communities as governments eased enforcement over smokestacks, medical waste shipments, sewage plants, oilfields and chemical plants.

The Trump administration paved the way for the reduced monitoring on March 26 after being pressured by the oil and gas industry, which said lockdowns and social distancing during the pandemic made it difficult to comply with anti-pollution rules. States are responsible for much of the oversight of federal environmental laws, and many followed with leniency policies of their own.

AP's two-month review found that waivers were granted in more than 3,000 cases, representing the overwhelming majority of requests citing the outbreak. Hundreds of requests were approved for oil and gas companies. AP reached out to all 50 states citing open-records laws; all but one, New York, provided at least partial information, reporting the data in differing ways and with varying level of detail.

Almost all those requesting waivers told regulators they did so to minimize risks for workers and the public during a pandemic — although a handful reported they were trying to cut costs.

The Environmental Protection Agency says the waivers do not authorize recipients to exceed pollution limits. Regulators will continue pursuing those who "did not act responsibly under the circumstances," EPA spokesman James Hewitt said in an email.

But environmentalists and public health experts say it may be impossible to fully determine the impact of the country's first extended, national environmental enforcement clemency because monitoring oversight was relaxed. "The harm from this policy is already done," said Cynthia Giles, EPA's former assistant administrator under the Obama administration.

EPA has said it will end the COVID enforcement clemency this month.

Refinery giant Marathon Petroleum, already struggling financially before the pandemic, was one of the most aggressive in seeking to dial back its environmental monitoring. On the same day EPA announced its new policy, the Ohio-based company asked Indiana officials for relief from its leak detection, groundwater sampling, spill prevention, emissions testing and hazardous waste responsibilities at its facilities statewide.

"We believe that by taking these measures, we can do our part to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus," Tim Peterkoski, environmental auditing and processes manager for Marathon Petroleum, told the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

Marathon also pushed for and was granted permission to skip environmental tests at many of its refineries and gas stations in California, Michigan, North Dakota and Texas.

Spokesman Jamal Kheiry said Marathon sought broad regulatory relief early in the pandemic, when it was uncertain how long lockdowns would last or how its operations would be affected. But the company

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continued emissions monitoring and other activities and usually met deadlines, he said.

Penny Aucoin, a resident of New Mexico's oil-rich Permian Basin, said since the pandemic, she and her husband have spent days begging regulators to investigate surges of noxious gas or hisses that they feared could signal a dangerous leak from one of the many oil and gas companies operating near their mobile home.

"There's nobody watching," Aucoin said. "A lot of stuff is going wrong. And there's nobody to fix it."

Maddy Hayden, New Mexico's environmental spokesperson, said her agency stopped in-person investigations of citizen air-quality complaints from March to May to protect staff and the public but stood ready to respond to emergencies.

Almost every state reported fielding requests from industries and local governments to cut back on compliance. Many were for activities like delaying in-person training or submitting records by email rather than paper. Others, however, were requests for temporary exemptions or extensions on monitoring and repairs to stop the flow of harmful soot, toxic compounds, disease-carrying contaminants or heavy metals, AP found.

Regulators, for example, waived in-person inspections at parts of a former nuclear test site in Nevada, switching to drive-by checks.

North Carolina allowed Chemours Co., which is cleaning up dangerous PFAS industrial compounds in drinking water, to pause sampling of residential wells because it would require entering elderly residents' homes.

Saint-Gobain, whose New Hampshire plant has been linked by the state to water contaminated with PFAS chemicals, has requested delaying smokestack upgrades that would address the problem. The company says the delays are necessary partly due to problems the company's suppliers and contractors have faced because of the coronavirus.

State Rep. Rosemarie Rung, a Democrat who uses bottled water due to the PFAS contamination, said the company was "just dragging their feet."

The AP's findings run counter to statements in late June by Susan Bodine, EPA's assistant administrator for enforcement, who told lawmakers the pandemic was not causing "a significant impact on routine compliance, monitoring and reporting" and that industry wasn't widely seeking relief from monitoring.

A separate analysis of EPA enforcement data shows 40% fewer tests of smokestacks were conducted in March and April compared with the same period last year, according to the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative, a network of academics and non-profits.

Hewitt, the EPA spokesman, said the agency did not know why there were fewer tests but pointed to the plunge in economic activity accompanying the pandemic, and said closed facilities would have been unable to test smokestacks.

Oil and gas companies received a green light to skip dozens of scheduled tests and inspections critical for ensuring safe operations, such as temporarily halting or delaying tests for leaks or checking on tank seals, flare stacks, emissions monitoring systems or engine performance, which could raise the risk of explosions.

Taken together, the missed inspections for leaks could add hundreds or thousands of tons of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, and could be making refinery work more dangerous, said Coyne Gibson, a former oil and gas engineer and a member of the Big Bend Conservation Alliance in Texas.

"The whole point of leak detection is to avoid people being harmed from a leak of toxic material," said Victor Flatt, environmental law professor at the University of Houston. "If you suspend leak detection, you don't even know if it's happening."

Monitoring and other pollution regulations often are depicted as legally mandated paperwork requirements, said Philip J. Landrigan, a biology professor and director of the Program for Global Public Health and the Common Good at Boston College. But air pollution alone increases risks of heart disease, stroke, lung disease and premature births, and when environmental standards are not held to, "as surely as night follows day there are going to be an increased number of deaths from those causes," Landrigan said.

EPA's policy was "primarily related to record keeping, training and flexibility in the timing of routine inspections where there may have been limited personnel or capabilities due to COVID-19," said Frank

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Macchiarola, senior vice president at The American Petroleum Institute, which pushed for the policy. He maintained the industry's pollution control equipment continues to operate.

In North Dakota, regulators granted Oklahoma-based ONEOK's request to bypass groundwater sampling at its natural gas liquids processing plant in Garden Creek, where regulators said at least 837,000 gallons of natural gas liquids have spilled from a leak since 2015.

ONEOK skipped sampling because of safety concerns about third-party contractors traveling during the pandemic, and the company resumed sampling in June, spokesman Brad Borrer said.

Some states were generous with exemptions. Arkansas granted a blanket, months-long waiver to oil and gas companies for safety testing of temporarily abandoned wells and other activities.

Alaska authorized delayed inspections at dozens of massive tanks used to store petroleum, and let companies defer drills designed to ensure they can quickly respond to major oil spills. It also said the state would take no action against companies for not complying with some air pollution regulations in instances related to COVID-19.

In Wyoming, regulators gave breaks on air emissions rules in about 300 cases, mostly for oil and gas companies, including ExxonMobil and Sinclair.

It wasn't just huge industry that requested the exemptions.

As supply chains broke down at the start of the outbreak, Minnesota granted more than 90 waivers on how many animals could be stuffed into feedlots, potentially raising risks of water contamination from manure. Farms and landfills in Iowa received variances on animal disposal regulations to allow for the mass burial and composting of livestock.

Michigan approved or was reviewing requests from several cities to delay replacing lead water pipes or testing for lead, spurred in some instances by the Flint water crisis.

Eric Schaeffer, a former director of EPA's office of civil enforcement under President George W. Bush, dismissed assurances from governments that reducing monitoring during the outbreak wouldn't lead to a surge in pollutants.

"It's like saying we're going to remove the radar guns and remove speedometers, but you still have to comply with the speed limit," said Schaeffer, now head of the Environmental Integrity Project advocacy group. "That doesn't make sense."

Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City, Bussewitz from New York City, Flesher from Traverse City, Michigan, Brown from Billings, Montana, and Casey from Boston.

Top Trump aide Kellyanne Conway to leave White House

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kellyanne Conway, one of President Donald Trump's most influential and longest serving advisers, announced Sunday that she would be leaving the White House at the end of the month.

Conway, Trump's campaign manager during the stretch run of the 2016 race, was the first woman to successfully steer a White House bid, then became a senior counselor to the president. She informed Trump of her decision in the Oval Office.

Conway cited a need to spend time with her four children in a resignation letter she posted Sunday night. Her husband, George, had become an outspoken Trump critic and her family a subject of Washington's rumor mill.

"We disagree about plenty but we are united on what matters most: the kids," she wrote. "For now, and for my beloved children, it will be less drama, more mama."

She is still slated to speak at the Republican National Convention this week. Her husband, an attorney who renounced Trump after the 2016 campaign, had become a member of the Lincoln Project, an outside group of Republicans devoted to defeating Trump.

The politically adversarial marriage generated much speculation in the Beltway and online. George Conway also announced Sunday that he was taking a leave of absence from both Twitter and the Lincoln Project.

Kellyanne Conway worked for years as a Republican pollster and operative and originally supported Sen. Ted Cruz in the 2016 Republican primary. She moved over to the Trump campaign and that August became campaign manager as Stephen Bannon became campaign chairman; Bannon was indicted two days ago for fraud.

Conway cited a need to help her children's remote learning during the coronavirus pandemic as a need to step away from her position. She had remained a trusted voice within the West Wing and spearheaded several initiatives, including on combating opioid abuse.

She was also known for her robust defense of the president in media appearances, at times delivering dizzying rebuttals while once extolling the virtues of "alternative facts" to support her case. Conway was also an informal adviser to the president's reelection effort but resisted moving over to the campaign.

Her departure comes at an inopportune time for Trump, who faces a deficit in the polls as the Republican National Convention begins on Monday. Her exit was first reported by The Washington Post.

Trump announces plasma treatment authorized for COVID-19

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced emergency authorization to treat COVID-19 patients with convalescent plasma — a move he called "a breakthrough," one of his top health officials called "promising" and other health experts said needs more study before it's celebrated.

The announcement Sunday came after White House officials complained there were politically motivated delays by the Food and Drug Administration in approving a vaccine and therapeutics for the disease that has upended Trump's reelection chances.

On the eve of the Republican National Convention, Trump put himself at the center of the FDA's announcement of the authorization at a news conference Sunday evening. The authorization makes it easier for some patients to obtain the treatment but is not the same as full FDA approval.

The blood plasma, taken from patients who have recovered from the coronavirus and rich in antibodies, may provide benefits to those battling the disease. But the evidence so far has not been conclusive about whether it works, when to administer it and what dose is needed.

In a letter describing the emergency authorization, the chief scientist for the FDA, Denise Hinton, said: "COVID-19 convalescent plasma should not be considered a new standard of care for the treatment of patients with COVID-19. Additional data will be forthcoming from other analyses and ongoing, well-controlled clinical trials in the coming months."

But Trump had made clear to aides that he was eager to showcase good news in the battle against the virus, and the timing allowed him to head into his convention with momentum. He and aides billed it as a "major" development and used the White House briefing room to make the announcement.

Trump also displayed some rare discipline in the evening news conference, sticking to his talking points, deferring to the head of the FDA, Stephen Hahn, and only taking three questions from reporters.

The White House had grown agitated with the pace of the plasma approval. The accusations of an FDA slowdown, which were presented without evidence, were just the latest assault from Trump's team on what he refers to as the "deep state" bureaucracy. White House chief of staff Mark Meadows did not deal in specifics, but said that "we've looked at a number of people that are not being as diligent as they should be in terms of getting to the bottom of it."

"This president is about cutting red tape," Meadows said in an interview Sunday on "This Week" on ABC. "He had to make sure that they felt the heat. If they don't see the light, they need to feel the heat because the American people are suffering."

During Sunday's 18-minute press conference, Trump said he thought there had been a "logjam" at the FDA over granting the emergency authorization. He alleged there are people at the FDA "that can see things being held up ... and that's for political reasons."

Dr. Joshua Sharfstein said the statement, and Hahn's silence while Trump said it, "was disgraceful."

"The FDA commissioner basically allowed the president to mischaracterize the decision and attack the

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integrity of FDA employees. I was horrified," said Sharfstein, a vice dean at John Hopkins University's school of public health who was a top FDA official during the Obama administration.

"This is a promising therapy that has not been fully established," he said

The push on Sunday came a day after Trump tweeted sharp criticism on the process to treat the virus, which has killed more than 175,000 Americans and imperiled his reelection chances. The White House has sunk vast resources into an expedited process to develop a vaccine, and Trump aides have been banking on it being an "October surprise" that could help the president make up ground in the polls.

"The deep state, or whoever, over at the FDA is making it very difficult for drug companies to get people in order to test the vaccines and therapeutics," Trump tweeted. "Obviously, they are hoping to delay the answer until after November 3rd. Must focus on speed, and saving lives!"

Earlier this month, Mayo Clinic researchers reported a strong hint that blood plasma from COVID-19 survivors helps other infected patients recover. But it wasn't considered proof.

More than 70,000 patients in the U.S. have been given convalescent plasma, a century-old approach to fend off flu and measles before vaccines. It's a go-to tactic when new diseases come along, and history suggests it works against some, but not all, infections.

The Mayo Clinic reported preliminary data from 35,000 coronavirus patients treated with plasma, and said there were fewer deaths among people given plasma within three days of diagnosis, and also among those given plasma containing the highest levels of virus-fighting antibodies.

But it wasn't a formal study. The patients were treated in different ways in hospitals around the country as part of an FDA program designed to speed access to the experimental therapy. That "expanded access" program tracks what happens to the recipients, but it cannot prove the plasma — and not other care they received — was the real reason for improvement.

Administration officials, in a call with reporters Sunday, discussed a benefit for patients who were within three days of admission to a hospital and were not on a respirator, and were given 'high-titer' convalescent plasma containing higher concentrations of antibodies. They were then compared to similar patients who were given lower-titer plasma. The findings suggest deaths were 35% lower in the high-titer group.

There's been little data on how effective it is or whether it must be administered fairly early in an illness to make a significant difference, said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious diseases expert at Vanderbilt University.

Aiming to ward off a possible a run on convalescent plasma after the announcement, government officials have been working to obtain plasma and to team with corporate partners and nonprofit organizations to generate interest among previously infected patients to donate.

Hahn, who called the development "promising," said Trump did not speak to him about the timing of the announcement. He said "this has been in the works for several weeks."

But some health experts were skeptical. Benjamin Corb, of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, called it "conspicuous timing."

"President Trump is once again putting his political goals ahead of the health and well-being of the American public," Corb said.

Rigorous studies are under way around the country, comparing similar patients randomly assigned to get plasma or a dummy infusion in addition to regular care. But those studies have been difficult to finish as the virus waxes and wanes in different cities. Also, some patients have requested plasma rather than agreeing to a study that might give them a placebo instead.

Former FDA commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb dismissed the suggestion of a slowdown.

"I firmly reject the idea they would slow-walk anything or accelerate anything based on any political consideration or any consideration other than what is best for the public health and a real sense of mission to patients," Gottlieb told CBS's "Face the Nation."

Trump, in news conferences, "has made all kinds of therapeutic suggestions" that have not proven to be supported by science — and are even dangerous, Schaffner said. That includes statements about the possible value of treating COVID-19 patients with ultraviolet light and disinfectant. Trump reportedly also

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recently became enthusiastic about oleandrin, a plant extract derived from a toxic shrub that scientists immediately warned against.

But the president is perhaps best known for his early and ardent embrace of the malaria drugs hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine.

Earlier this month, Hahn emphasized that routine evaluation procedures will remain in place to evaluate COVID vaccine candidates.

"I think this administration has put more pressure on the Food and Drug Administration than I can remember" ever happening in the past, Schaffner said.

"Everybody is just a little bit nervous," he said.

Stobbe reported from New York.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire> and Stobbe at <http://twitter.com/@mikestobbe>

Residents flee as Gulf Coast sees possible tandem hurricanes

By REBECCA SANTANA, JEFF MARTIN and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Gulf Coast braced Sunday for a potentially devastating hit from twin hurricanes as two dangerous storms swirled toward the U.S from the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. Officials feared a history-making onslaught of life-threatening winds and flooding along the coast, stretching from Texas to Alabama.

A storm dubbed Marco grew into a hurricane Sunday as it churned up the Gulf of Mexico toward Louisiana. But, Marco's intensity was fluctuating, forecasters said, and the system was downgraded to a tropical storm Sunday night.

Another potential hurricane, Tropical Storm Laura, lashed the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and was tracking toward the same region of the U.S. coast, carrying the risk of growing into a far more powerful storm.

Experts said computer models show Laura could make landfall with winds exceeding 110 mph (177 kph), and rain bands from both storms could bring a combined total of 2 feet (0.6 meters) of rain to parts of Louisiana and several feet of potentially deadly storm surge.

"There has never been anything we've seen like this before, where you can have possibly two hurricanes hitting within miles of each other over a 48-hour period," said Benjamin Schott, meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service's Slidell, Louisiana, office.

The combination of the rain and storm surge in a day or two means "you're looking at a potential for a major flood event that lasts for some time," said weather service tropical program coordinator Joel Cline. "And that's not even talking about the wind."

Where precisely Marco was headed — and when the storm might arrive — remained elusive Sunday.

President Donald Trump approved Louisiana's request for federal help related to the pair of storms, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said in a news release Sunday.

He had submitted the request to Trump and the Federal Emergency Management Agency on Saturday.

Trump also approved an emergency declaration for Mississippi, according to a White House news release late Sunday.

Marco was initially expected to make landfall Monday, but the National Hurricane Center said that "a major shift" in a majority of their computer models now show the storm stalling off the Louisiana coast for a few days before landing west of New Orleans — and likely weakening before hitting the state. However, skeptical meteorologists at the center were waiting to see if the trends continue before making a dramatic revision in their forecast.

Marco is a small storm that may be pushed westward along the Louisiana coast, delaying landfall but worsening storm surge, Cline said.

The prospect of piggybacked hurricanes was reviving all-too-fresh memories of damage caused by Hur-

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ricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, 2005. The storm has been blamed for as many as 1,800 deaths and levee breaches in New Orleans led to catastrophic flooding.

"What we know is there's going to be storm surge from Marco, we know that that water is not going to recede hardly at all before Laura hits, and so we've not seen this before and that's why people need to be paying particular attention," Edwards warned at a Sunday briefing.

Along the main drag on the barrier island of Grand Isle, south of New Orleans, Starfish Restaurant manager Nicole Fantiny could see an exodus of people driving off the island.

"They are all packing up and leaving," she said.

Fantiny wasn't planning to leave, at least for Marco, but she was anxious about the possible one-two punch from both storms. Her husband works with the town's fire and police departments, so she said they are always among the last ones to leave.

"My house was built in 1938 so I think we're good," she said hopefully.

Marco had been expected to dance above and below hurricane status after hitting the 75 mph-wind mark Sunday afternoon.

"The central Gulf could be really under the gun between Marco and Laura in back-to-back succession," said Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach. "Certainly both of these storms can impact New Orleans significantly. It just remains to be seen if the track for Laura tracks a bit to the west."

University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy warned that anyone in New Orleans should be alarmed by the threat. At issue from possible dual hits: whether the levee system can withstand the stress, he said.

In New Orleans, the city's aging drainage system has been a particular point of concern in recent years after an intense 2017 storm flooded streets and raised questions about the system's viability.

Because the city is surrounded by levees and parts are below sea level, rainwater must be pumped out to prevent flooding. Any storm system that sits over the city and dumps rain for extended periods of time, or bands of rain that come in rapid succession, is a cause for concern.

New Orleans resident Matthew Meloy and two friends loaded a van with cases of bottled water in the parking lot of a New Orleans Walmart Sunday. He said they still have a lot of storm preparations ahead.

"Check the batteries, flashlights, stocking up on food and trying to park the car on the highest point possible we can find," he said. "I already spent like 40 minutes this morning filling up the tanks in the cars."

Tourists were strolling through the New Orleans French Quarter under overcast skies as workers boarded up shop windows. Louisiana corrections officials were evacuating 500 inmates from a jail in Plaquemines Parish, near the coast, to another facility in preparation for the storms.

In Kenner, just outside New Orleans, resident P.J. Hahn said checkout lines in a Sam's Club reached to the back of the store, while authorities said 114 oil and gas producing platforms in the Gulf have been evacuated as the storms churn toward the Louisiana coast.

Because of strong winds from the southwest, Marco may attain and then lose hurricane status before it hits land, meteorologists said. But those winds could be gone when Laura ventures to the central Gulf, where the usually bathtub-warm water is a degree or 2 (0.5 to 1 degree Celsius) warmer than normal, Klotzbach said.

The warmer the water, the stronger the fuel for a hurricane.

"It, unfortunately, might peak in intensity about landfall. That's the one thing I worry about with this one," MIT meteorology professor Kerry Emanuel said of Laura. His multiple computer simulations show a decent chance of winds of more than 110 mph (177 kph) for Laura at landfall, as do other computer models.

The key for Laura's future is how it survives Cuba. Originally forecast to rake over almost the entire length of the island and potentially weaken, the storm late Sunday moved further south, skirting the island. If that continues, it is more likely to come out strong enough to power up over the favorable environment of the Gulf of Mexico, Klotzbach said.

If that continues, Laura could hit further west in the Gulf, possibly into Texas instead of Louisiana, he said. If it hits Louisiana that would break the record for two named storms hitting the state so close to-

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gether. The current record is five days apart in 1885, Klotzbach said.

And there's one long-term possibility that adds to the risk. As Laura moves north after landfall into Oklahoma, there's a chance it will be caught up into the jet stream, travel east and emerge over North Carolina and return to tropical storm status, McNoldy and Klotzbach said.

By Sunday night, Laura was 125 miles (200 kilometers) southeast of Camaguey, Cuba, with 60 mph (95 kph) winds moving west-northwest at 21 mph (33 kph). Marco was 185 miles (295 kilometers) south-southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River, with 70 mph (110 kph) winds, moving north-northwest at 12 mph (19 kph).

In Empire, Louisiana, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of New Orleans near the mouth of the Mississippi River, shrimp, oyster and fishing boats line the docks. It was eerily quiet Sunday evening, as most fishermen had already secured their boats. Mike Bartholemey was putting extra blocks of wood under his recently dry docked 50-foot (15-meter) shrimp boat "Big Mike," out of his concern that hurricane winds might topple his boat to the ground.

In Venice, a fishing town on the Mississippi River, shrimper Acy Cooper was up early Sunday to move his three shrimp boats from the harbor into the bayous nearby to ride out the storm. It's the same area where he moored his boat during Hurricane Katrina.

The boat survived; his house in Venice did not.

Martin reported from Marietta, Georgia. Borenstein reported from Kensington, Maryland. AP reporter Stacey Plaisance in New Orleans; and photojournalist Gerald Herbert in Empire, Louisiana, also contributed.

Takuma Sato wins his second Indianapolis 500 at empty track

By JENNA FRYER AP Auto Racing Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — At an eerily empty Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Takuma Sato snatched a second Indianapolis 500 victory in an odd and unsatisfying finish to "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing."

Sato held off Scott Dixon and won under caution after teammate Spencer Pigot crashed with five laps remaining in Sunday's race, held in front of empty grandstands for the first time in 104 runnings because of the pandemic.

Pigot needed medical attention on the track, the crash scene was a massive debris field and the cleanup time would have been lengthy. There were also just four laps left in the race, not enough time to allow for a proper restart.

If it had been a NASCAR race, a stoppage would have been immediate to set up a final shootout. IndyCar tends to avoid gimmicks and a late red-flag in the 2014 Indy 500 incensed purists.

Dixon, the five-time IndyCar champion who had dominated the race, asked on his radio if IndyCar was going to give the drivers a final shootout.

"Are they going red?" Dixon asked. "They've got to go red. There's no way they can clean that up."

The answer was no, turning the end of the race into a game of what-ifs.

"It is a little silly to predict what might have happened. The reality is Takuma won," said winning car owner Bobby Rahal. "This isn't the first 500 to be flagged under yellow and there was a hell of a mess out there."

IndyCar said in a statement after the finish "there were too few laps remaining to gather the field behind the pace car, issue a red flag and then restart for a green-flag finish."

Dixon was visibly disappointed after leading 111 of the 200 laps in pursuit of his own second Indy win.

"Definitely a hard one to swallow for sure. We had such a great day," Dixon said. "First time I've seen them let it run out like that. I thought they'd throw a red."

Dixon had figured he would ultimately run down Sato as Sato worked through lapped traffic, and he believed Sato's team was cutting it close on fuel. Rahal said his driver had enough gas to get to the end.

None of it mattered in the end as Sato was able to coast around the speedway then ride the lift new track owner Roger Penske installed to take the winner to an elevated victory circle. Along for the ride were Rahal, the 1986 Indy 500 winner, and David Letterman, his mask buried in an unruly gray beard as

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the longtime comedian and TV host greeted Sato.

"Let me just say, if someone said to me this morning at the end of the Indianapolis 500 that Takuma Sato and Scott Dixon and Graham Rahal would be racing for the lead, I would say that's a dream, that's a dream come true," Letterman said. "And I woke up and it turned out we won the Indianapolis 500."

Sato became the first Japanese winner of the Indy 500 in 2017. Graham Rahal, Sato's teammate at Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, was third behind Dixon.

Sato knew Dixon was going to be tough to beat under green.

"I know Scott was coming right through, out of turn four, he was screaming coming," Sato said. "I had to hold him off."

The celebration was somewhat muted as the RLL team had a socially distanced winner's circle. Penske was forced to host his first 500 as owner of the iconic speedway without fans and it made the largest venue in the world was still. The speedway typically draws more than 300,000 spectators on race day; Penske said there would be only 2,500 in attendance Sunday.

"It's not a happy place," Sato said. "It's tough on everyone, not only for us. It was just fortunate, so fortunate, to be able to perform as a sport, be able to show millions of people watching TV today at home, get some energy on it."

Sato did not get the traditional ride around the speedway in the back of a convertible, being interviewed over the public address system with the crowd cheering the winner. He briefly removed his mask to kiss the yard of bricks; when the entire RLL team lined up for the smooch, the group did it wearing masks.

"It's eerie. It's weird. Nobody likes it," said Rahal. "I feel bad. I hope our fans who watched it on TV really enjoyed the race. I know its not the same thing as being there, but I think everybody understands the situation."

It was Pigot, the third Rahal driver, whose crash set up the controversial finish. His nasty hit destroyed his car and he was prone on the track being treated before he was taken to a hospital for further examination. IndyCar said he was awake and alert.

The Sato win helped Honda snap Chevrolet's two-year Indy 500 winning streak. Santino Ferrucci finished fourth as Honda took the fist four spots.

Reigning series champion Josef Newgarden was fifth, the highest-finishing Chevrolet driver and best of the four-car Team Penske group. Chevrolet lagged behind Honda in speed the entire buildup to the 500 and had just one driver start in the front nine.

Mired in traffic, the Chevy group never contended.

No one did, really, as Dixon seemed to have it under control after casually passing pole-sitter Marco Andretti in the first turn of the first lap and pulling away. Andretti was seeking to end the 51-year losing streak for his famous family and had a shot with the first Andretti pole in 33 years. After Dixon took command, Andretti slid back into the field and ultimately finished 13th.

"We had high hopes coming into the race ... but we didn't have it," Andretti said. "We didn't have the pickup we needed on the restarts, that left us a sitting duck and we weren't able to gain ground on pit stops to make up for anything. Everything combined left us 13th."

Fernando Alonso, attempting to win the final leg of motorsports' version of the Triple Crown, was 21st and never contended. This was his third attempt at winning Indy and the two-time Formula One champion is returning to that series in 2021.

"We didn't have one lap of kindness," Alonso said. "I'm happy to finish the race, cross the line and have one 500 miles in the pocket. We tried to race but luck was not with us."

NFL has 77 apparently false positive COVID-19 tests from lab

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL had 77 positive COVID-19 tests from 11 teams re-examined by a New Jersey lab after false positives, and all those tests came back negative.

The league asked the New Jersey lab BioReference to investigate the results, and those 77 tests are

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being re-tested once more to make sure they were false positives.

Among teams reporting false positives, the Minnesota Vikings said they had 12, the New York Jets 10 and the Chicago Bears nine.

The Jets canceled a walk-through Saturday night but had a full practice Sunday morning after the previously positive tests came back negative. The Bears moved their practice scheduled for Sunday morning to the afternoon.

The Detroit Lions had a player with a false positive test from the same lab in New Jersey and he was held out of practice Sunday, a league source told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the league and team were not disclosing test results.

The Pittsburgh Steelers said they had six false positives and those players will be back at practice Monday. The Philadelphia Eagles held out four players from working out Sunday. The Cleveland Browns initially canceled practice, but after re-testing turned up negative tests they decided to have their workout.

There are five labs nationwide that service the 32 teams, with only the New Jersey facility having the false positives this weekend.

The number of positive COVID-19 tests from a specific facility that might actually be false demonstrates the precarious position the NFL is in less than three weeks from the regular-season opener.

"Definitely probably better that this happened now than three weeks from now," said Buffalo Bills general manager Brandon Beane, whose club had some of those positive results. "But it seems like every few weeks, or even every week, something's going on. Who know what the next curveball will be?"

Beane said tests in the Northeast had gone "haywire," and called it "a lab issue and not a true issue with our guys currently" after several Bills were held out of practice.

Anyone testing positive for COVID-19 — even a false positive upon a retest — is required to have two more negative tests before being cleared to return.

The NFL uses BioReference for all of its COVID-19 testing, though tests are handled by labs throughout the nation to ensure teams get results quickly — hopefully within 24 hours. Heading into this weekend, there had been four confirmed positive tests for players who were at training camps.

"Clubs are taking immediate precautionary measures as outlined in the NFL-NFLPA's health and safety protocols to include contact tracing, isolation of individuals and temporarily adjusting the schedule, where appropriate," the NFL said in a statement. "The other laboratories used for NFL testing have not had similar results."

Jets offensive lineman Leo Koloamatangi, who opted out of playing this season because of family health concerns, tweeted: "Wishing nothing but safety and great health over my brothers and their families right now. As it turns out, testing isn't as reliable as we'd all hoped."

The Bears were alerted Sunday morning about the test findings.

"That's where I was really excited for the way we went about communicating with the coordinators, the coaches, the players early, just letting them know, 'Hold on for the now. We're gonna delay this thing. Let us work through this a little bit,'" Bears coach Matt Nagy said.

"And then we were able to get those players and everybody involved in the positive test, we were able to get them in and obviously get re-tested and come back with the second test, and it came back all negative. So now we had to go to, 'Now, what do we do?' That's when we went ahead and figured we were able to move forward with practice. We delayed it."

Beane stressed the need for transparency throughout the Bills' organization and said some players were on a conference call with the NFL's chief medical officer, Dr. Allen Sills.

"We had an open dialogue with our players," he explained. "We even had some of our leadership crew of players on with Dr. Sills this morning just hearing directly with him, who's aware of all these tests that have gone a little bit haywire here in the Northeast.

"And I think that was good for them to hear, because naturally, if you're going to be out there tackling and blocking and things like that, passing the ball around, people might be unnerved if we got some guys missing."

The Browns said initial results from the lab indicated multiple "presumptive positive cases" that included

coaches, players and staff. The team did not disclose the number of positive tests and had resumed the scheduled practice about four hours after calling it off.

The team also did a thorough cleaning of the facility in Berea, Ohio.

"We've concluded our re-testing of each initial presumptive positive result from yesterday among players, coaches and staff," a team spokesperson said.

"All have come back as negative, which is consistent with the irregularities across the league from multiple teams. As a result, we are reopening our building and will resume football activities this afternoon. As per protocol, the individuals with test results in question may not re-enter the building until they receive another negative test result tomorrow."

AP Pro Football Writer Dennis Waszak Jr. and Sports Writers John Wawrow, Stephen Whyno, Larry Lage, Tom Canavan, Tom Withers and Andrew Seligman contributed to this report.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

'End of the world': Countdown to Beirut's devastating blast

By BASSEM MROUE, SARAH EL DEEB and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The 10 firefighters who received the call shortly before 6 p.m. — a big fire at the nearby port of Beirut — could not know what awaited them.

The brigade of nine men and one woman could not know about the stockpile of ammonium nitrate warehoused since 2013 along a busy motorway, in the heart of a densely populated residential area — a danger that had only grown with every passing year.

They and nearly all the population of Beirut were simply unaware. They were not privy to the warnings authorities had received, again and again, and ignored: ammonium nitrate is highly explosive, used in fertilizer and sometimes to build bombs. The stockpile was degrading; something must be done.

They knew, of course, that they lived in a dysfunctional country, its government rife with corruption, factionalism and negligence that caused so much pain and heartbreak. But they could not know that it would lead to the worst single-day catastrophe in Lebanon's tragic history.

Across the city, residents who noticed the grey smoke billowing over the facility Aug. 4 were drawn to streets, balconies and windows, watching curiously as the fire grew larger. Phones were pulled out of pockets and pointed toward the flames.

The firefighters piled into a fire engine and an ambulance and raced to the scene — and to their doom.

Seven years ago, a ship named the Rhosus set out from the Georgian Black Sea port of Batumi carrying 2,755.5 tons of ammonium nitrate destined for an explosives company in Mozambique.

It made an unscheduled detour, stopping in Beirut on Nov. 19, 2013. The ship's Russian owner said he struggled with debts and hoped to earn extra cash by taking on pieces of heavy machinery in Lebanon. That additional cargo proved too heavy for the Rhosus and the crew refused to take it on.

The Rhosus was soon impounded by Lebanese authorities for failing to pay port fees. It never left the port; it sank there in February 2018, according to Lebanese official documents.

The Port of Beirut is considered one of the most corrupt institutions in a country where nearly every public institution is riddled with corruption. Port officials are notorious for taking bribes. A bribe from an importer, for example, will ensure an incoming shipment is mislabeled to get lower customs duties — or escapes duties and taxes completely. Confiscated goods are sometimes sold off on the sly for a profit.

For years, Lebanon's ruling political factions have divvied up positions at the port and handed them out to supporters — as they have ministries, public companies and other facilities nationwide.

The longtime head of customs is known to be a loyalist of President Michel Aoun, for example, while the head of the port is in the camp of Saad Hariri, the Sunni leader who has repeatedly served as prime minister. The Hezbollah militant group and, even more, its Shiite ally the Amal faction headed by Parliament

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Speaker Nabih Berri, also have loyalists at the port, though Hezbollah doesn't have the same influence as it does at, for example, the airport, which it controls and uses to ferry in cash from Iran.

The result is a port divided into factional fiefdoms that don't necessarily work together and are sometimes outright rivals. Individual port authorities are sometimes more concerned with their scams than with proper functioning. And government officials avoid looking too closely at goings-on at the port to protect their loyalists.

The first known warning came on Feb. 21, 2014, three months after the ship docked at the port.

In a letter to the customs authority's anti-smuggling department, senior customs official Col. Joseph Skaff wrote that the material on board was "extremely dangerous and endangers public safety."

It is not known if Skaff ever received a response or if he sent other letters. He was found dead outside his house near Beirut under mysterious circumstances, shortly after he retired in March 2017. At least one medical report suggested he might have been murdered.

Skaff's son, Michel, said he was killed by a blow to the head. He said his father dealt with other sensitive matters, including drug trafficking. "Someone maybe was trying to hide what is happening at the port," he said by telephone from his home in New York City.

In the years that followed, Skaff's letter was followed by other correspondence that went back and forth between top customs and port officials and members of the judiciary and the army.

On June 27, 2014, with the ammonium nitrate still aboard the Rhosus, Jad Maalouf, a judge for urgent matters, warned the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation in correspondence that the ship was carrying dangerous material and could sink. He said the ministry should deal with the ship, remove the ammonium nitrate and "place it in a suitable place that it (the ministry) chooses, and it should be under its protection."

It is not clear if there was ever a reply. Ministry officials did not respond to requests from The Associated Press asking for comment.

In October 2014, the ammonium nitrate was moved into the port's Warehouse 12, which holds impounded materials.

A chemical forensic expert, commissioned by the courts and the owners of the ammonium nitrate, got a look at the stockpile soon after. It was "in terrible shape," she said in her February 2015 report. Most of the sacks — she estimated more than 1,900 of the 2,750 sacks— were torn open, their contents spilling out. Some of the crystals had darkened, a sign of decomposition. The sacks were piled so haphazardly that she could not count them to be sure all were still there.

The inspector recommended the chemicals be disposed of according to environmental guidelines. Her report was uncovered by Riad Kobaissi, an investigative reporter with Al Jadeed TV who has followed corruption at the port and within the customs authorities since 2012.

On Oct. 26, 2015, the army command asked customs to sample the material and check the level of nitrogen "and based on that we can give a suggestion regarding them."

The then-head of the customs department, Shafeeq Merhi, wrote back in February 2016, saying an expert found the nitrogen level was 34.7%, a very high and dangerous level, well above the acceptable concentration of around 11%.

The army command responded the following April, saying it didn't need the ammonium nitrate. It asked customs to contact Lebanese Explosives Co. — a maker of explosives for construction of roads and tunnels and for imploding structures — to see if that private company could use it.

If not, the material should be exported at the expense of the ship owner who brought it to Lebanon, the army said in its letter.

An administrator at Lebanese Explosives told the AP that it was "not interested in buying confiscated material because we did not know where they were brought from, what is the quality nor its expiry."

Merhi and his successor as customs chief, Badri Daher, sent multiple letters in the following years to the Courts of Urgent Matters, warning of the danger and seeking permission to sell the material or a ruling

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on another way to get rid of it.

Daher told the AP and other media that he never received any reply from the court. But Kobaissi, the investigative reporter, found documents showing the court responded each time that it didn't have jurisdiction and that the Public Works Ministry had to decide.

Over the years, Lebanese built and bought luxury property opposite the port, a nearby Beirut Marina including restaurants, cafes and retail shops was built up, concerts were held, children rode their bicycles and workers went about their daily business, oblivious to the massive "bomb" waiting to explode.

At some point, someone battered open a door to Warehouse 12 and knocked a hole in one of its walls. When is not known. It was reported when State Security inspected the site this summer. In a July 20 report, it warned that the warehouse's "Door Number 9 has suffered a blow in the middle, knocking it away from the wall enough to allow anyone to enter and steal the ammonium nitrate." It also noted the hole in the wall and pointed out that there was no guard at the warehouse, "making theft even easier."

The report to President Michel Aoun and then-Prime Minister Hassan Diab warned that thieves could steal the material to make explosives. Or, it said, the mass of material could cause an explosion "that would practically destroy the port." Kobaissi shared the report with the AP.

Aoun has been in office since 2016. After the explosion, he said the State Security report was the first time he'd heard of the dangerous stockpile. He said he immediately ordered military and security agencies to do "what was needed" — though he added he had no authority over the port.

After being criticized by rival politicians and on social media for not doing more, Aoun's office issued a further statement saying that his military adviser had immediately forwarded the State Security report to the Higher Defense Council, the top defense body in the country.

But a government official said security agencies had repeatedly sent warnings directly to the government. "The same memo was sent roughly every year basically since that ship arrived, and it became clear the stuff wasn't moving. So, it was like a tradition and it wasn't marked as priority," the official told AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media.

Kobaissi, the investigative reporter, said all political factions in the country benefited from using the port for patronage, and most overlooked dubious dealings. He said many people knew about the initial warning by Skaff, including Hezbollah's former point man at the port.

Port and customs officials "are a gang, a mafia, appointed by a mafia gang that has come to office through an election process," Kobaissi told the AP.

He believes officials at the port were trying to find a legal cover to sell off the ammonium nitrate and skim off some of the money. He noted a similar scheme was run in the past when containers of confiscated asbestos were auctioned off. He said there were many instances of port officials profiting off impounded shipments, even keeping some goods — like Mini Coopers — for themselves.

Both the customs chief Daher and the head of the port, Hassan Koraytem, are among those detained in the wake of the explosion.

On the afternoon of Aug. 4, security officials say, three metalworkers who had been working for several days to weld the broken Door Number 9 of Warehouse 12 finished work and left the facility.

The cause of the original fire has still not been determined and is at the heart of the current investigation. Some have questioned whether the welding may have sparked stocks of flammable liquids used in making detergents, as well as tons of fireworks that were also being kept in Warehouse 12. Other possibilities such as sabotage are also being investigated. The metalworkers, who were hired to fix the door by the port authorities in response to the security report, have been detained for questioning, according to security officials.

Shortly after the 10 firefighters arrived at the port, they sent an urgent call back to headquarters, asking for reinforcements. Photos they sent from their mobile phones to their colleagues showed them trying to open the gate of Warehouse 12.

"When they called us, they said they are hearing the sound of fireworks," Beirut fire chief Nabil Khankarli

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told the AP.

No one told the emergency responders that dangerous material was stored in the warehouse. No port officials were even there to help them open the gate, Khankarli said.

A second team jumped into their vehicles and headed toward the port. All across the city, flames and the pillar of black smoke could be seen pouring into the sky, lit up by popping fireworks. Many residents would later report hearing a jet or a drone and presuming it was Israeli, since Israel sends reconnaissance flights over Lebanon on an almost daily basis. No evidence has yet emerged of warplanes.

There was an initial explosion, sending shredded debris into the air. That first blast, survivors would recount later, sent some who had been watching the fire scurrying for cover.

Twelve seconds later, at 6:08 p.m., the ammonium nitrate detonated in one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded.

In an instant, a blast with the force of hundreds of tons of TNT sucked in the air — one video showed a luxury store window exploding outward from the suction, spraying a bride and groom taking their wedding video on the sidewalk outside — and then unleashed its power across the city.

It blew a crater nearly 200 meters (yards) wide out of the port where Warehouse 12 once stood, and seawater poured in to fill it. The port was leveled. A grain silo right next to the warehouse was shredded and sheared in half — though its massive bulk partially shielded sections of the city from the blast. For miles around, in people's homes and in shops and hospitals, windows were shattered, doors knocked off their hinges, ceilings or walls blown in a vicious whirlwind onto those inside.

Alaa Saad and his friends were out diving, about 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) off the coast of Beirut, when they started hearing noises from the direction of the port and saw the smoke. Was it fireworks? Ammunition?

"There were lots of flashes going off inside the smoke," he said. He heard some kind of eruption, like a volcano. "Something that was boiling very much," he said.

"Five seconds passed, and this is when I saw the cloud or the wave that was coming toward us at very high speed," he said. "It was insane speed. I could not even think if I wanted to jump in the water or stay on the boat."

Saad fell on the deck. A friend tumbled into the water.

"After that," he said, "I thought it was the end of Beirut or the end of the world or the war has started."

More than 6,000 people were injured, and at least 180 were killed — among them the 10 first responders. It would take days of searching before colleagues found all their bodies in the rubble.

Nearly three weeks later, theories abound. In the deeply polarized country, some have turned their suspicion to Hezbollah, which maintains a huge weapons stockpile in the country and dominates its politics. A member of the militant group was sentenced to six years in prison after he was arrested in Cyprus in 2015 in connection with the seizure of nine tons of ammonium nitrate at a house where he was staying.

An investigative team that includes Kobaissi, working with The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, found that the shadow owner of the Rhosus was actually a Cypriot who owed money to a Lebanese bank linked to Hezbollah — raising speculation that he brought in the ammonium nitrate for the group. The businessman, Charalambos Manoli, denied the report, insisting to the AP that he sold the ship in May 2012.

Others have peddled a theory that rivals of the group had sought to accrue the fertilizer for use as explosives in the war in neighboring Syria.

The documents show clear negligence and failure; the question of whether something more triggered the blast depends on an investigation that so far has seemed predictably slow and ineffectual.

The fire chief, Khankarli, is furious. So much destruction. So much bloodshed. All of it avoidable.

"We are waiting for the investigation," he said. "But what is gone cannot be recovered."

Trump announces plasma treatment authorized for COVID-19

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Sunday announced emergency authorization to treat

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COVID-19 patients with convalescent plasma — a move he called “a breakthrough,” one of his top health officials called “promising” and other health experts said needs more study before it’s celebrated.

The announcement came after White House officials complained there were politically motivated delays by the Food and Drug Administration in approving a vaccine and therapeutics for the disease that has upended Trump’s reelection chances.

On the eve of the Republican National Convention, Trump put himself at the center of the FDA’s announcement of the authorization at a news conference Sunday evening. The authorization makes it easier for some patients to obtain the treatment but is not the same as full FDA approval.

The blood plasma, taken from patients who have recovered from the coronavirus and rich in antibodies, may provide benefits to those battling the disease. But the evidence so far has not been conclusive about whether it works, when to administer it and what dose is needed.

In a letter describing the emergency authorization, the chief scientist for the FDA, Denise Hinton, said: “COVID-19 convalescent plasma should not be considered a new standard of care for the treatment of patients with COVID-19. Additional data will be forthcoming from other analyses and ongoing, well-controlled clinical trials in the coming months.”

But Trump had made clear to aides that he was eager to showcase good news in the battle against the virus, and the timing allowed him to head into his convention with momentum. He and aides billed it as a “major” development and used the White House briefing room to make the announcement.

Trump also displayed some rare discipline in the evening news conference, sticking to his talking points, deferring to the head of the FDA, Stephen Hahn, and only taking three questions from reporters.

The White House had grown agitated with the pace of the plasma approval. The accusations of an FDA slowdown, which were presented without evidence, were just the latest assault from Trump’s team on what he refers to as the “deep state” bureaucracy. White House chief of staff Mark Meadows did not deal in specifics, but said that “we’ve looked at a number of people that are not being as diligent as they should be in terms of getting to the bottom of it.”

“This president is about cutting red tape,” Meadows said in an interview Sunday on “This Week” on ABC. “He had to make sure that they felt the heat. If they don’t see the light, they need to feel the heat because the American people are suffering.”

During Sunday’s 18-minute press conference, Trump said he thought there had been a “logjam” at the FDA over granting the emergency authorization. He alleged there are people at the FDA “that can see things being held up ... and that’s for political reasons.”

Dr. Joshua Sharfstein said the statement, and Hahn’s silence while Trump said it, “was disgraceful.”

“The FDA commissioner basically allowed the president to mischaracterize the decision and attack the integrity of FDA employees. I was horrified,” said Sharfstein, a vice dean at John Hopkins University’s school of public health who was a top FDA official during the Obama administration.

“This is a promising therapy that has not been fully established,” he said

The push on Sunday came a day after Trump tweeted sharp criticism on the process to treat the virus, which has killed more than 175,000 Americans and imperiled his reelection chances. The White House has sunk vast resources into an expedited process to develop a vaccine, and Trump aides have been banking on it being an “October surprise” that could help the president make up ground in the polls.

“The deep state, or whoever, over at the FDA is making it very difficult for drug companies to get people in order to test the vaccines and therapeutics,” Trump tweeted. “Obviously, they are hoping to delay the answer until after November 3rd. Must focus on speed, and saving lives!”

Earlier this month, Mayo Clinic researchers reported a strong hint that blood plasma from COVID-19 survivors helps other infected patients recover. But it wasn’t considered proof.

More than 70,000 patients in the U.S. have been given convalescent plasma, a century-old approach to fend off flu and measles before vaccines. It’s a go-to tactic when new diseases come along, and history suggests it works against some, but not all, infections.

The Mayo Clinic reported preliminary data from 35,000 coronavirus patients treated with plasma, and

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said there were fewer deaths among people given plasma within three days of diagnosis, and also among those given plasma containing the highest levels of virus-fighting antibodies.

But it wasn't a formal study. The patients were treated in different ways in hospitals around the country as part of an FDA program designed to speed access to the experimental therapy. That "expanded access" program tracks what happens to the recipients, but it cannot prove the plasma — and not other care they received — was the real reason for improvement.

Administration officials, in a call with reporters Sunday, discussed a benefit for patients who were within three days of admission to a hospital and were not on a respirator, and were given 'high-titer' convalescent plasma containing higher concentrations of antibodies. They were then compared to similar patients who were given lower-titer plasma. The findings suggest deaths were 35% lower in the high-titer group.

There's been little data on how effective it is or whether it must be administered fairly early in an illness to make a significant difference, said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious diseases expert at Vanderbilt University.

Aiming to ward off a possible a run on convalescent plasma after the announcement, government officials have been working to obtain plasma and to team with corporate partners and nonprofit organizations to generate interest among previously infected patients to donate.

Hahn, who called the development "promising," said Trump did not speak to him about the timing of the announcement. He said "this has been in the works for several weeks."

But some health experts were skeptical. Benjamin Corb, of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, called it "conspicuous timing."

"President Trump is once again putting his political goals ahead of the health and well-being of the American public," Corb said.

Rigorous studies are under way around the country, comparing similar patients randomly assigned to get plasma or a dummy infusion in addition to regular care. But those studies have been difficult to finish as the virus waxes and wanes in different cities. Also, some patients have requested plasma rather than agreeing to a study that might give them a placebo instead.

Former FDA commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb dismissed the suggestion of a slowdown.

"I firmly reject the idea they would slow-walk anything or accelerate anything based on any political consideration or any consideration other than what is best for the public health and a real sense of mission to patients," Gottlieb told CBS's "Face the Nation."

Trump, in news conferences, "has made all kinds of therapeutic suggestions" that have not proven to be supported by science — and are even dangerous, Schaffner said. That includes statements about the possible value of treating COVID-19 patients with ultraviolet light and disinfectant. Trump reportedly also recently became enthusiastic about oleandrin, a plant extract derived from a toxic shrub that scientists immediately warned against.

But the president is perhaps best known for his early and ardent embrace of the malaria drugs hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine.

Earlier this month, Hahn emphasized that routine evaluation procedures will remain in place to evaluate COVID vaccine candidates.

"I think this administration has put more pressure on the Food and Drug Administration than I can remember" ever happening in the past, Schaffner said.

"Everybody is just a little bit nervous," he said.

Stobbe reported from New York.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire> and Stobbe at <http://twitter.com/@mikestobbe>

The Latest: As virus spikes, S. Korea tightens restrictions

By The Associated Press undefined

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea counted its 11th straight day of triple-digit daily jumps in coronavirus cases as officials tighten social distancing restrictions nationwide to combat what they describe as the biggest crisis since the emergence of COVID-19.

The 266 cases reported by the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Monday came after three consecutive days of over-300 increases, although infection numbers tend to be lower at the start of the week due to the lesser number of tests in weekends.

The KCDC said 202 of the new cases came from the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area, home to half of the country's 51 million population, where health workers have struggled to track transmissions linked to various sources, including churches, restaurants, schools and workers.

Infections were also reported in major cities throughout the country, including Busan, Daejeon and Sejong. KCDC director Jeong Eun-kyeong said it's likely the country will continue to report huge infection numbers in coming days as health workers scramble to trace and test contacts of virus carriers.

The country since Sunday has banned larger gatherings, shut down nightspots and churches and removed fans from professional sports nationwide.

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

- Emails show businesses held sway over state reopening plans
- As shoppers stay away, small stores seek refuge online
- Returning vacationers drive Italy's surge in COVID cases
- Pushing for breakthroughs in treatments for the coronavirus, White House officials are suggesting there are politically motivated delays by the Food and Drug Administration in approving a vaccine and therapeutics for the disease.
- Florida slashed local health department staffing as its population grew over the last decade. Now it's a microcosm and a cautionary tale for America.
- India's use of cheaper, faster but less accurate tests for the coronavirus highlights some of the inherent pitfalls of a strategy that the U.S. is now considering to scale up testing.

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

IOWA CITY, Iowa — A young child died due to complications from coronavirus in June, the first confirmed death of a minor in Iowa during the pandemic, the state health department belatedly announced Sunday evening.

The Iowa Department of Public Health said the state medical examiner's office concluded its case investigation Aug. 6 into the death of the child, who was under the age of 5. But the death wasn't reported in the state's statistics until Saturday, more than two weeks later.

"The child's death was publicly reported this weekend after ensuring the individual's identity would remain protected and notifying the family," the department said in a statement. "We have made every effort to protect the identity of this child, while the family grieves this devastating loss. Again, we send our sincerest condolences."

The confirmation of the state's first child death comes one day before dozens of school districts are prepared to begin the school year on Monday — a development that has many educators and parents already on edge.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds has ordered schools to reopen for at least 50 percent in-person instruction, despite a pandemic that has already killed 1,036 people and seen infections soar in recent days.

MELBOURNE, Australia — Australia's hard-hit Victoria state on Monday recorded its lowest tally of new

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coronavirus cases in eight weeks with the state capital Melbourne half way through a six-week lockdown.

Victoria reported 116 new cases and 15 deaths. That is the lowest daily tall of new cases since 87 were reported on July 5. The daily count has been as high as 725 news cases in early August.

The state recorded 208 new cases on Sunday and 182 on Saturday.

Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton had predicted on Sunday that numbers could dip below 150 this week.

He added although the daily case numbers had been "jumping around," he expected they were on a downward trajectory.

But health authorities have warned that the daily tally would need to fall to single digits or low double digits before the Melbourne lockdown was relaxed.

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump says the Food and Drug Administration has issued an emergency use authorization for convalescent plasma to treat COVID-19 patients.

Trump, announcing the decision Sunday at the White House, called convalescent plasma a "powerful therapy." He says the FDA's action will expand access to the treatment, which is already being used. The treatment involves transferring antibodies from recovered COVID-19 patients to patients suffering from the disease.

The announcement follows days of suggestions by White House officials of politically motivated delays by the FDA in approving a vaccine and treatments for the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Trump made the announcement on the eve of the Republican National Convention that will nominate him to run against Democrat Joe Biden.

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — Pakistani authorities have closed about two dozen hotels in a scenic tourist destination in the country's northwest after dozens of hotel employees tested positive for the coronavirus.

According to Maqbool Hussain, a district government official, Sunday's move to place high-risk areas of Shogran, Naran and Kaghan under lockdown was aimed at containing the spread of the virus.

He said as many as 47 hotel employees who tested positive for COVID-19 were quarantined at the hotels where they worked.

The measures came hours after Pakistan reported only four new COVID-19 fatalities in the past 24 hours, the fewest deaths reported in a day since March. That announcement raised hopes that Pakistan is on the right path to fully containing the new virus despite having a fragile health system.

Pakistan has confirmed more than 275,000 coronavirus infections and nearly 6,300 deaths since reporting its first case in February.

ATHENS, Greece — Greek health authorities announced a daily record 284 new coronavirus cases Sunday. There were also two new deaths.

The total number of confirmed cases is now 8,664, with 242 deaths. The average age of people getting sick from the virus is 39, while the average age of people dying of the disease is 77.

The government, alarmed by the fact that half of all coronavirus cases have been confirmed in the first three weeks of August, has imposed restrictions on social gatherings and the opening hours of restaurants, cafes and bars in 20 localities, including the capital Athens, until the end of the month.

It is also monitoring for violations more closely, and imposing fines. In the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest, a groom was fined 3,000 euros (\$3,540) Saturday for having 80 guests at his wedding reception instead of the maximum of 50 allowed at social gatherings. A 52-year-old Bulgarian citizen was fined 5,000 euros (\$5,900) for leaving a designated quarantine hotel in the same city, after testing positive for the virus. He was arrested while engaging in contraband trade of toys, police said.

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida broke the 600,000 mark for confirmed coronavirus cases Sunday but reported one of its lowest daily totals in two months, continuing a downward trend that began five weeks ago.

Florida reported 2,974 new cases on Sunday, only the second time since June 22 that fewer than 3,000

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new cases have been tallied in a day. The other time was Monday, when 2,678 cases were reported. Sundays and Mondays often have a low number of reports as not all hospitals report on the weekend.

The daily total peaked July 15 when more than 15,000 cases were reported, but has been declining since. Hospitalizations due to COVID-19 have also been declining. Late Sunday morning, 4,578 patients were being treated for the disease in Florida hospitals compared to Saturday's 4,773. It is a drop of almost 800 since Thursday. Hospitalizations peaked at above 9,500 on July 23.

Overall, the state has now reported 600,571 confirmed cases.

ROME — The day-to-day number of new coronavirus cases in Italy climbed for a seventh straight day, when 1,210 confirmed infections were registered on Sunday, the highest daily increase since May 12.

With airports testing many arriving travelers, two regions with busy airports – Lombardy, which includes Milan, and Lazio which includes Rome — led the day's new caseload numbers, according to Health Ministry figures.

Lombardy, where some 40% of the nation's known cases have occurred in the pandemic, registered 239 new infections since Saturday, while Lazio counted 184.

Italy has tallied 259,345 COVID-19 infections, including 35,437 deaths.

LONDON — The EU's trade commissioner is coming under intense pressure to step down after attending a golf event despite a ban on public gatherings during the pandemic.

The job of Phil Hogan, an Irishman who is expected to play a key role in trade talks with the U.K., is under threat amid a growing crisis stemming from a golf society dinner in the west of Ireland that was attended by more than 80 people. A surge in coronavirus cases recently prompted Ireland to reimpose restrictions on public gatherings that were eased in early summer.

The agriculture minister and deputy speaker of the Senate resigned last week after confirming they were at the event.

Hogan offered a "fulsome and profound apology" over the incident.

The deputy head of government, Leo Varadkar, said he shared the public's anger at the golf event, but said the apology helps. He told RTE that Hogan may not have been as familiar with the coronavirus situation in Ireland because he was not based in the country.

Varadkar said that "he also needs to account for himself and explain and answer any questions that might arise, not just in relation to the dinner but also his movements around the country."

"If he cannot do that, he needs to consider his position," he said.

LONDON — Britain's top medical officers say children are more likely to be harmed by staying away from school than from being exposed to the coronavirus.

England's chief medical officer on Sunday joined his counterparts in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in saying that children are less likely to contract the virus than adults and have "an exceptionally low risk" of dying from COVID-19.

By contrast, they said studies show that not going to school limits children's ability to succeed in life and may worsen physical and mental health problems.

"Very few, if any, children or teenagers will come to long-term harm from COVID-19 due solely to attending school," they said in a statement. "This has to be set against a certainty of long-term harm to many children and young people from not attending school."

The statement comes as parents and teachers express concern about reopening schools next month amid fears that social distancing measures won't keep children safe.

ISLAMABAD — Pakistani authorities on Sunday reported only four new COVID-19 fatalities in the past 24 hours, the fewest deaths since March.

The announcement raises hopes that Pakistan is on the right path to fully containing the coronavirus

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despite having a fragile health system.

The National Command and Control Center also reported 591 new cases, increasing the country's case-load to 275,836, including 6,275 deaths.

Pakistan witnessed a sudden spike in infections and deaths in June, but confirmed cases and fatalities have gradually declined since then. The latest development comes days after Pakistan's drug regulatory agency approved final-phase testing of a Chinese-made coronavirus vaccine.

Pakistan hopes it will get the vaccine on priority from neighboring China if its clinical trials show success.

ROME — Sicily's governor is ordering all migrants who reach the island by sea be transferred from the Mediterranean island as part of measures to combat the spread of COVID-19.

The ordinance, signed by Gov. Nello Musumeci, went into effect Sunday and stipulates that all centers housing migrants awaiting processing of asylum applications be shut down by the end of Monday.

His order, effective through Sept. 10, also forbids any boat, including charity vessels, to bring migrants to the island.

While in past years the great majority of migrants reaching Italy were rescued at sea by humanitarian groups, cargo ships or military vessels, this year, nearly 80% of arrivals reached Italian shores autonomously, most setting sail from Tunisia instead of Libya, where human traffickers are based.

Many come ashore on tiny Lampedusa island, but its migrant center is dangerously overcrowded. So Italy has taken to quarantining the latest arrivals aboard chartered ferries offshore Sicily. On Saturday, one-third of Sicily's 48 one-day total of new confirmed coronavirus infections occurred in migrants.

MOSCOW — Yulia Tymoshenko, the former Ukrainian prime minister and a key figure in the 2004 Orange Revolution protests, has contracted COVID-19.

Her spokeswoman Marina Soroka said in a Sunday post on Facebook that Tymoshenko is in serious condition with a fever of 39 C (102 F), but did not specify if she has been hospitalized.

Tymoshenko captured attention worldwide for her speeches to huge crowds of protesters in the 2004 demonstrations that forced the rerun of a disputed presidential election.

After Viktor Yushchenko won the election rerun, Tymoshenko became prime minister, but was dismissed amid quarrels and then returned to the office. Under subsequent President Viktor Yanukovich, she was imprisoned for three years on a conviction of abuse of power.

Emails show businesses held sway over state reopening plans

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

As South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster prepared to announce the end of a coronavirus stay-at-home order, his top staff received an email from the state health department.

The message, highlighted in bold, was clear: Wait longer before allowing customers back inside restaurants, hair salons and other businesses where people will be in close contact.

Instead, McMaster pressed ahead with a plan written by the state restaurant association to resume inside dining on May 11. The guidelines made masks optional for employees and allowed more customers inside than the health agency had advised.

A few days later, the Republican governor opened the doors to salons, fitness centers and swimming pools. He did not wait to gauge the effect of the restaurant reopening on the virus, as public health officials had suggested. Like many states, South Carolina later experienced a surge in infections that forced McMaster to dial back his reopening plan.

He was hardly alone. Thousands of pages of emails provided to The Associated Press under open-records laws show that governors across the U.S. were inundated with reopening advice from a wide range of industries — from campgrounds in New Hampshire to car washes in Washington. Some governors put economic interests ahead of public health guidance, and certain businesses were allowed to write the rules that would govern their own operations.

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As job losses accelerated, the pressure to reopen intensified.

"Attraction folks are on me like white on rice," McMaster's tourism director wrote to the head of the governor's reopening task force, describing lobbying from amusement parks, bingo halls and other entertainment venues.

Though governors often work with business leaders to craft policy, the emails offer a new window into their decisions during a critical early juncture in the nation's battle against the pandemic. Many governors chose to reopen before their states met all the nationally recommended health guidelines, which include a sustained downward rate of infection and robust testing and contact tracing.

"The interest in trying to reopen and restart economic activity had a much greater pull at the time ... than did public health concerns or question marks about how it would go," said Anita Cicero, deputy director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security.

Many states were forced to halt or roll back their reopening plans as COVID-19 cases spiked across the country this summer, and the number of infections and deaths in the U.S. far outpaced those of any other country.

In early August, McMaster transformed his restaurant guidelines into requirements, including a mandate that all diners and employees wear masks. The governor's spokesman, Brian Symmes, said "some restaurants weren't doing what they needed to do."

Symmes also defended the spring reopening, saying the governor "has a wider scope of responsibility and focus than our public health officials."

"It simply isn't the government's job to put its thumb on the scale by shuttering these small businesses for an undefined and indefinite period of time," Symmes said.

Two weeks after North Dakota reopened, Republican Gov. Doug Burgum received a report showing a single-day spike of 69 new COVID-19 cases in one county. Burgum fired off an email to several of his top officials complaining that the outbreak — combined with lower-than-promised daily COVID-19 testing — was "driving our state numbers in the wrong direction."

"Our house is on fire," Burgum wrote, accompanied by a fire emoji. "Need to drive a much greater sense of urgency and action."

North Dakota was among at least 15 states that provided records to the AP at no cost. A few states wanted hundreds or thousands of dollars to supply copies of the communications that could reveal how governors were making decisions — and which voices influenced them the most.

Some states suspended or slowed responses to open-records requests because of the coronavirus. Three months after submitting its request, the AP is still awaiting records from many states, including Texas and Florida, which have some of the highest numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases. California denied the AP's request, because state law shields correspondence involving the governor's office from public disclosure.

"In a pandemic, you need more transparency, more information — not less of either one of those," said Dan Bevarly, executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition.

As she was putting the finishing touches on a reopening plan in May, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown received a letter from a coalition of business groups pressing for more say in the process. Two hours later, the head of the state hospital association wrote urging the Democrat to mandate masks as "foundational to any business opening where people will be gathered, indoors or out."

At first, Brown required masks only for employees of certain businesses, but she had to reverse course as COVID-19 cases rose over the summer. She became one of 34 governors to impose statewide mask mandates.

In Washington state, landscapers, dog walkers and car wash operators all had a role in the rules affecting their businesses, according to the emails provided by Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee's administration.

Lance Odermat, vice president of Brown Bear Car Wash in Seattle, said he was frustrated that car washes were not exempt from Inslee's order shutting down many businesses in March. But Odermat continued to plead his case. He was included in a car-wash reopening group and sent the administration the company's internal plan for reopening with coronavirus precautions.

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When the governor released his reopening strategy, "it seemed like a lot of those guidelines were taken directly from our operating plan," Odermat said.

In North Carolina, the head of a restaurant association sent a copy of the group's reopening plan to Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's chief of staff on April 24 and warned in a letter the following week that the outlook for restaurants "becomes more dire" with each passing day. She also served on a state task force that helped shape the guidelines Cooper eventually issued, which allowed in-person dining to resume with up to 50% of fire-code capacity and tables spaced at least 6 feet apart.

The tensions between economic and health interests were evident in New Hampshire in a decision allowing campgrounds to open with restricted capacities.

Margaret Byrnes, executive director of the New Hampshire Municipal Association, urged Republican Gov. Chris Sununu's administration to keep campgrounds closed because of concerns they could attract visitors from areas with higher coronavirus caseloads. She also wanted cities to have a greater voice on the governor's reopening task force.

"There was a lot of business and industry representation, which is really important in the reopening process, but it needed to be balanced with some local municipal representation," Byrnes said.

Sunu's policy director, D.J. Bettencourt, said municipalities were represented on the task force through lawmakers who doubled as local officials. He said opening campgrounds on May 1 was "an essential aspect of ensuring housing" for some health care workers and guarding against homelessness.

Back in South Carolina, the director of the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism said in an April 27 email that he had asked the restaurant association to "create a plan for the 'new dining room'" guidelines. The association proposed to resume indoor dining May 11, according to the email.

On May 1, the health department chief of staff emailed the governor's top staff saying the agency recommended waiting until May 18 to resume indoor dining. The agency also recommended a 25% capacity limit for restaurants, with no more than six people per table and mandatory masks for employees.

But the governor's final plan, announced a week later, stuck with the May 11 start date, a 50% capacity guideline and up to eight people per table. There were no mandates, and the entire policy was only a suggestion.

How closely did McMaster's restaurant guidelines mirror the industry's plan?

"Oh, it was exactly," said Douglas O'Flaherty, vice president of the restaurant organization. "He basically said, 'What the South Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association's recommendations are, you should follow.'"

—
Follow David A. Lieb on Twitter: www.twitter.com/DavidALieb

UK leader urges parents to let their kids go back to school

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's prime minister is asking parents to set aside their fears and send their children back to school next month when schools in Britain fully reopen for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic shut them down more than five months ago.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was the government's "moral duty" to reopen the schools as he stressed that authorities now know more about COVID-19 than they did when the country went into lockdown on March 23.

Johnson's comments came hours after Britain's top public health officials issued a joint statement saying that children were more likely to be harmed by staying away from school than from being exposed to COVID-19.

"This is why it's vitally important that we get our children back into the classroom to learn and to be with their friends," Johnson said in a statement released late Sunday. "Nothing will have a greater effect on the life chances of our children than returning to school."

The statements come as parents and teachers have expressed concerns about reopening schools amid

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fears that social distancing measures won't keep children safe. Unions have demanded that Johnson's Conservative government make sure that social distancing measures and other protective procedures are in place to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Schools across the U.K. closed in March as the government sought to control the spread of coronavirus. Some students were allowed to return in early June, but classes weren't mandatory and only about 18% of students nationwide took part.

The chief medical officers of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales said in their statement that children are less likely to catch COVID-19 than adults and they have "an exceptionally low risk" of dying from the disease.

By contrast, they said studies show that not going to school limits children's ability to succeed in life and may worsen physical and mental health problems.

"Very few, if any, children or teenagers will come to long-term harm from COVID-19 due solely to attending school," the medical officers said. "This has to be set against a certainty of long-term harm to many children and young people from not attending school."

Britain has the highest confirmed virus-related death toll in Europe, at 41,515 people, and Johnson's government has been strongly criticized for not locking down sooner, not getting medical workers enough protective equipment and not properly protecting the elderly in care homes from the virus.

Thousands of British travelers had to cut short vacations and rush home earlier this month after the government abruptly announced it was slapping 14-day quarantines on people returning from France.

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

Shipbuilders approve 3-year pact, ending monthslong strike

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

BATH, Maine (AP) — A 63-day strike at Bath Iron Works — against the backdrop of a pandemic in an election year — came to an end Sunday with shipbuilders voting to return to their jobs producing warships for the United States Navy.

With the approval of a three-year contract, the 4,300 production workers represented by Machinists Local S6 will begin returning to work on Monday.

After falling behind schedule, Bath Iron Works is eager to get caught up on production of destroyers as the U.S. Navy faces growing competition from China and Russia on the high seas. The General Dynamics subsidiary was already more than six months behind schedule before the strike.

"We are pleased to welcome back our valued manufacturing employees and get back to the important work of building ships on schedule for the U.S. Navy," Bath Iron Works said Sunday in a statement.

Robert Martinez Jr., the Machinists' international president, cast the outcome on Sunday in historic terms, saying "this fight for dignity, justice and good Maine jobs will go down in the history books of the Machinists Union."

The shipyard on the Kennebec River is one of the Navy's largest, and it's also a major employer in the state with with 6,800 workers.

The stakes were high for both a company that feared being priced out of competition for Navy contracts and a highly skilled workforce that didn't want to give up ground to subcontractors. The test of wills ultimately ended with help from a federal mediator.

Shipbuilders represented by Machinists Local S6 got most of what they wanted when it came to work rules and maintaining the status quo for hiring of subcontractors, along with the previous proposal's annual pay raises of 3% for three years. The company got streamlined rules for hiring subcontracting, and a commitment to work together to get back on track.

Because of the pandemic, voting on the contract's approval — unanimously endorsed by the union negotiating committee — took place online and by telephone. Voting began Friday and ending at noon

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Sunday. The vote was 87% in favor of the contract among those who voted, said Jay Waldeigh, a district union official.

"Now that we successfully protected our contract language with respect to subcontracting and seniority, we need to get back to work," said Local S6 President Chris Wiers.

The shipyard builds the workhorse of the Navy fleet, destroyers that have the ability to provide air defense while simultaneously waging war against submarines and surface warships. Destroyers are also one of the few types of warships equipped to withstand a chemical attack.

The Navy wants to increase the fleet's size — something President Donald Trump supports — and Bath Iron Works has said it needs to get back on schedule and lower costs to remain competitive on those contracts.

Going into negotiations, the shipyard's production workers were already angry over past concessions that ultimately still failed to yield contracts on Coast Guard cutters and a new class of Navy frigates. The pandemic in which they were required to remain on the job only added to their feeling that the company didn't care about them — deemed essential by the Navy, the shipyard continued production despite a union request to shut down for two weeks.

Workers were determined enough to strike, despite the loss of company-paid insurance as the coronavirus raged around the country. A giant inflatable, cigar-smoking pig outside the union hall took aim at corporate greed as workers fumed over the hiring of "scab" workers and political leaders got involved.

It's a far cry from the way things were in the past.

The strike was the first in 20 years at Bath Iron Works. There was enough trust between management and the union in 1994 that a contract was approved allowing cross-training of workers under a formula called a "High Performance Work Organization." Then-President Bill Clinton visited the shipyard to praise the collaboration.

The company hopes that mediated discussions between the union and the company will help get the relationship back on track.

But it's going to take time. Levi Benner, a shipfitter, said there are hard feelings because management routinely rejects workers' ideas for improvements.

"It's going to be hard to restore trust. We know what we're doing. We've been building ships for years and years. These guys are geeks. They know their graphs and pie charts, but they don't know how to build ships," he said Sunday.

In the end, workers and the shipyard must learn how to work together if the company is to successfully compete for contracts against lower-cost competitors, said Loren Thompson, an analyst at the Lexington Institute.

"Both sides need to understand that their best chance for having a future is to get along with each other," he said. "The American landscape is littered with the debris of destroyed industries. Most of them made a good product but they're still gone."

This story has been corrected to show that the giant inflatable animal outside the union hall was a pig, not a rat.

Sato, Rahal give Rahal Letterman Lanigan banner Indy 500

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

The long, white beard cascading out from David Letterman's mask as he climbed onto the new-look winner's podium at Indianapolis Motor Speedway was evidence of just how long it's been since the longtime "Late Show" host joined team co-owner Bobby Rahal in celebrating an Indy 500 victory.

Sixteen years between Buddy Rice's improbable win and Takuma Sato's celebration on Sunday.

While the Honda-powered cars of Andretti Autosport had been the talk of the paddock leading up to "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing," which was postponed from its typical Memorial Day weekend date because of the coronavirus, it was the Hondas behind Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing that managed to

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dash Scott Dixon's hopes of a second Indy 500 win.

"To even be here, to be in the pits, to be part of the activity — this is some DNA we're talking about," said Letterman, who grew up in the Broad Ripple neighborhood of Indianapolis. "We're always as kids on the outside-looking in, and now we're on the inside and enjoying it and winning the race. For me it's a thrill."

Dixon had dominated all race before Sato found himself in the lead with five laps to go. And when teammate Spencer Pigot wrecked heavily exiting Turn 4 to bring out a caution and effectively end the race, not only did Sato have a second victory of his own but teammate Graham Rahal had a third-place finish to match the best of his career.

"It's unbelievable," Sato said, "the entire Rahal Letterman Lanigan team."

Letterman is an astute enough racing aficionado to know winning the Indianapolis 500 is no easy task, even though it may have once seemed like it. He had bought a share of the team formed by 1986 race winner Bobby Rahal in the mid-90s, but he began spending more time in the garage area in 2004, when the team adopted its current name.

That's when Rice won just about everything — the pole, the pit stop competition and ultimately the race.

There have been plenty of near-misses in the intervening years. Vitor Meira was second to Dan Wheldon in 2005, and Sato crashed while challenging Dario Franchitti for the win in 2012. Graham Rahal fifth three years later, and Sato finished third behind Simon Pagenaud and Alexander Rossi just last year.

Perhaps it was all those close calls that made for some emotional words from Letterman to his winning driver on Sunday.

"God bless you my friend," he said. "Thank you very much. Hell of a job."

Graham Rahal did a fine job in his own right. He laid low most of the hot, sunny afternoon at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, steering clear of wrecks that claimed Rossi and others, and putting himself in position for the biggest win of his career.

There's no telling whether he would have had anything for Sato and Dixon if IndyCar decided to red-flag the race and force a green-white-checkered finish. But it was nonetheless a photo-worthy finish when Sato crossed the finish line flanked by his teammate on one side and Dixon on the other, especially amid the canyon-like ocean of empty front-stretch seats.

"We belong in the conversation of who are the best teams out there," Bobby Rahal said, "and I take great pride in that. As an owner, you just know how hard it is to put an organization together to do all this."

Rahal joked that he's never introduced as a three-time IndyCar champion, but rather the winner of the 1986 Indy 500. That prompted Letterman to joke, "I'm typically introduced as a television has-been, so for me this is a delight."

"I have very little to do with the functioning of this organization, so all of this is reflected positively on me," he said. "When we won it in 2004, honest to God, it was like I had been hooked up to some powerful electrical generator, and I thought I would never experience anything like this again in my life. It was life-changing experience, and here we are in 2020 and I get to go through this again."

More AP auto racing: <https://apnews.com/tag/apf-AutoRacing> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

The Latest: Sato wins 2nd Indy 500 as race ends under yellow

By The Associated Press undefined

The Latest from the Indianapolis 500, which was delayed from Memorial Day weekend because of COVID-19:

5:45 p.m.

Takuma Sato has won his second Indianapolis 500 after Spencer Pigot crashed heavily exiting Turn 4, bringing out the caution with five laps remaining and forcing what had been a thrilling race to end under caution.

After dominating most of the race, Scott Dixon had been chasing Sato for about 15 laps and was start-

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ing to bite into a gap that had emerged in lapped traffic. But the race ended when Pigot spun into the outside wall, then crossed back across the track and slammed into the safety tires that guard the entrance to pit lane.

Pigot exited the car but was helped onto a stretcher. His car was left in pieces across the front stretch. Dixon pulled up alongside Sato with Graham Rahal, his teammate, on the other side to finish third.

5 p.m.

Alexander Rossi will want to forget all about this year's Indianapolis 500.

The winner of the 100th edition of the race spent the early stages dueling with Scott Dixon for the lead. But he was forced to play catch-up when he was told to pit late and missed pit lane, then was penalized and sent to the back of the field later when he bumped another car on the release from his stall following another stop.

Rossi was trying to aggressively work back to the front when he got loose and hit the outside wall. That brought out a caution with 53 laps remaining, putting pit strategy front and center for the rest of the field.

4:30 p.m.

It's been the Scott Dixon-Alexander Rossi show at the Indianapolis 500, though plenty of crashes behind them have provided an exciting subplot to "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing."

The latest involved Spanish youngster Alex Palou, who got out of the groove and slapped the wall in the short chute between Turns 1 and 2. Palou was running in the top 10 when he crashed.

The timing of the crash creates some fuel intrigue. Teams can make it about 30 laps on each green-flag run before needing to pit. There were just under 80 laps to go when Palou brought out the caution flag.

4 p.m.

Scott Dixon has dominated the first half of the Indianapolis 500, much as the five-time IndyCar champion and 2008 race winner has dominated the rest of the season for Chip Ganassi Racing.

Dalton Kellett brought out a caution before the midway point when he hit the wall hard. That erased about a lead of about 10 seconds that Dixon had built over the course of a long green-flag run. But after the field cycled through pit stops, Dixon found himself at the sharp end of the field once again.

When the race went to green, Conor Daly and Oliver Askew were involved in a heavy wreck deep in the field. Askew was visibly shaken as he climbed out of the car, sitting on the tub for several minutes to catch his breath.

3:30 p.m.

The story of the second quarter of the Indianapolis 500 has been miscues on pit road.

Alexander Rossi was challenging race leader Scott Dixon when he came out of Turn 4 too hot and missed the entry to pit lane. Sage Karam lost a lot of time when he locked up his tires and missed his stall on pit road. Rookie driver Rinus VeeKay also lost several seconds when he stalled leaving his pit, then he was penalized for hitting a team member.

The most intriguing part of the race so far has been pit strategy. Several of the Team Penske drivers are on a completely different strategy from the leaders, including the defending winner Simon Pagenaud. They are hoping that strategy may help overcome what appears to be a gap between Honda and their own Chevrolet engines.

3 p.m.

Marcus Ericsson got into some turbulent air while running near the front of the Indy 500 and slapped the outer wall in Turn 2, bringing out the second caution flag on the hot, sunny day in Indianapolis.

Scott Dixon had led the first 28 laps before taking the field down pit road for the first set of stops. He was still in first after the stop with Takuma Sato, Alexander Rossi and Marco Andretti close behind.

The weather could play a factor in the race. It is much warmer than it typically is during the race in May.

1:40 p.m.

James Davison has brought out the first caution flag of the Indianapolis 500 when he made contact with the wall in the opening laps and his right front tire turned into a ball of fire.

Davison was able to exit the car without any problem. His car was still smoking as it was lifted onto a flatbed truck.

Scott Dixon went immediately to the front when the green flag dropped, passing pole sitter Marco Andretti heading into Turn 1. Ryan Hunter-Reay also was on the move in the opening laps as Honda flexed the muscle it has shown all month.

1:30 p.m.

Marco Andretti has led the field to the green flag for the 104th running of the Indianapolis 500, the familiar field of 33 roaring down the canyon-like front stretch of empty seats at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

The warm-ups found Andretti following the IndyCar two-seater driven by his grandfather and 1969 winner Mario Andretti with his father and team owner Michael Andretti in the second seat. It was the first time that the three generations of the family were on the track at the Brickyard at the same time.

The call to start the engines was delivered by Roger Penske, whose family purchased the speedway along with the IndyCar Series. He promised that fans would be "back home again in Indiana" in 2021.

1 p.m.

The countdown is on to the start of the Indy 500, which was delayed from its traditional date in May because of the coronavirus pandemic and will be run without fans for the first time in its 104 editions.

New track owner Roger Penske, whose team has four cars in the field, and IndyCar executives have tried to create an entertaining prerace show for broadcaster NBC. But the build up to "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing" is still somewhat eerie without the 250,000-plus fans who typically show up inside the Brickyard.

Driver introductions took place with the voice of the public address announcer echoing off the empty stands. There also will be no military parade or balloon release, two staples of race day. But there will be Jim Cornelson singing "Back Home Again in Indiana" and the Air Force's famed Thunderbirds performing a flyover.

More AP auto racing: <https://apnews.com/apf-AutoRacing> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Opera's Domingo denies abusing power, seeks to clear name

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press Writer

NAPLES, Italy (AP) — Opera legend Plácido Domingo denied ever abusing his power during his management tenure at two U.S. opera houses in an interview with The Associated Press on Sunday, as he embarks on a full-throttle campaign to clear his name after two investigations found credible accusations he had engaged in "inappropriate conduct" with multiple women over a period of decades.

Domingo deflected direct questions about whether he ever sexually harassed women, accusations that were first reported by the AP last summer. The allegations have crippled his career in the United States, as well as his native Spain.

"I never promised a part to a singer, or never take a part from a singer," he said. "I have spent my whole life helping, and you know, encouraging and driving people." He added that responsibilities within opera companies are divided, meaning he never had sole sway over casting decisions.

"People that deserved to sing were singing," he said.

Multiple performers told the AP that Domingo harassed them and abused his power while he held management positions at Los Angeles Opera and Washington National Opera. Numerous women said Domingo had dangled career opportunities as he pursued sexual relationships with them and then withdrew the offers or stopped hiring them when they rejected his advances.

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Investigations by LA Opera and the American Guild of Musical Artists found the sexual harassment allegations to be credible. LA Opera did not find he had abused his power, but AGMA found a clear pattern of such abuse, according to people who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose the findings.

Two of Domingo's managers and a spokesperson briefly cut off the interview when the singer was asked to respond to the fact that both investigations had found the sexual harassment accusations credible and that one had found a pattern of abuse.

AGMA has never released the full report of its findings, but Domingo's team referred to two written statements by the union -- one for the public and one for members -- neither of which mentioned abuse of power. They also cited Washington Opera never launching an investigation as an indication that such allegations were baseless.

"Never, never, never," Domingo said, when asked again if he had misused his power as a manager.

Domingo put the focus on the abuse of power allegations during a wide-ranging interview in the library of his Naples hotel. It has emerged as his main line of defense against the accusations that tarnished a year in which he celebrated his 50-year anniversaries at both Milan's La Scala theater and Arena di Verona.

The star tenor, who has moved into baritone roles, has emerged from a bout with coronavirus that put him in the hospital in Mexico for 10 days in March with a mission to rehabilitate his opera career as he approaches his 80th birthday.

"It was really a big blow when we got -- both my wife and me -- we got the coronavirus. It was a terrible impression because for a singer, one's lungs are very important," he said, noting that his singing training might ultimately have made him resilient and helped him recover.

Recognizing that the virus could lead to death, "you make decisions that if everything goes well, we need to fix many things in life," he said.

In Domingo's response to the accusations in AP's initial story, he had said he recognized "the rules and standards by which we are -- and should be -- measured" had changed over the decades. And earlier this year, he issued a statement after the union findings were leaked to the AP, saying of the women who accused him that he was "truly sorry for the hurt that I caused them. I accept full responsibility for my actions."

But after Spain, his native country, canceled his engagements, he quickly walked back the apology, insisting in a new statement that "I have never behaved aggressively toward anyone."

Asked what he meant in his first statement about the rules changing, Domingo responded, "The problem is that so much time has passed. I must, what we are trying to do, is clear my name, above all for my family."

He said he hopes he can smooth out what he sees as a misunderstanding with Spanish officials' responding to press reports without speaking directly to him so he can once again perform in the country where his parents once ran the Zarzuela light opera house in Madrid.

Domingo said he sees his return to stages in the U.S. as less likely. He forfeited his AGMA membership, saying he realized he no longer would be welcome at New York's Metropolitan Opera or at LA Opera, which he helped found, and that he is likely to sing only through the 2021 and 2022 seasons.

"It's very sad for me not to be able to sing ... in the United States. I enjoy it so much," Domingo said. "For over a half-century ... the public has been really, really extraordinary."

In Europe, Domingo has a full singing and conducting schedule for the fall, mostly concentrated in Italy, Germany and Austria, that started with a Saturday concert in nearby Caserta, where he demonstrated that his voice had not been harmed by the virus.

"A concert like yesterday, or like I am doing in Verona this week, is easy. It is not a complete opera," Domingo said. "I wonder how it will be when I get to Vienna at the beginning of September to do a whole production. I don't know how we will do the staging, or how close the singers will be. We don't have masks on, and we are making a big effort. It is going to be very complicated."

Israel's Netanyahu accepts compromise, avoids election

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Sunday that he had accepted a proposal to extend budget negotiations, preventing the government from collapsing and plunging the country into a new election.

In a nationally televised address, Netanyahu said that now was not the time to drag the country into a fourth parliamentary elections in less than two years.

"Now is the time for unity. Not for elections," he said.

Netanyahu and his rival and coalition partner, Benny Gantz, had faced a Monday night deadline to agree on a budget. Otherwise, the government would have collapsed and automatically triggered a new vote.

Netanyahu said that following a historic agreement to establish official relations with the United Arab Emirates, and with the country struggling with a coronavirus outbreak, he felt it was wrong to go to elections.

He said he accepted a compromise that would give the sides an additional 100 days to reach a budget deal, and in the meantime direct spending to struggling areas of the economy and society.

His announcement came after Israeli lawmakers spent much of the day unsuccessfully trying to agree on a compromise.

The current political crisis pitting the prime minister against rival-turned-partner Gantz is ostensibly over the country's national budget.

But the crisis has deeper roots in the troubled partnership between Netanyahu and Gantz, economic troubles stemming from the country's coronavirus outbreak and the prime minister's ongoing corruption trial. Critics accuse Netanyahu of using the budget battle to force a new election in hopes of securing a friendlier parliament that could help solve his legal troubles.

After three deadlocked elections, Netanyahu and Gantz reached a power-sharing agreement in April to form a government to address the virus crisis. As part of their coalition deal, Netanyahu's Likud party and Gantz's Blue and White agreed to pass a two-year budget.

But Netanyahu has insisted on passing a budget to cover only the remainder of 2020, saying it will provide immediate assistance to the economy. Gantz is adamant that the government honor its agreement and pass one for 2020 and 2021. Their disagreement has again brought the country to the brink of political meltdown.

The Knesset, or parliament, must pass the legislation in two rounds of voting in parliament before Monday night's deadline.

But pushing back the deadline would only kick the budget crisis down the road. The two parties are at loggerheads over several key issues — including judicial appointments and the annexation of West Bank settlements — and the government has been beset by infighting. Gantz also complained that Netanyahu left him and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi in the dark about the deal announced earlier this month to normalize relations with the United Arab Emirates.

If the budget deadline is not deferred, and new elections are triggered, it would plunge the country into political chaos during a deep economic and public health crisis and while the prime minister is on trial for corruption.

Netanyahu is charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. His criminal trial began in June, but he has refused to step down from office and denies any wrongdoing.

At the same time, Israel has recorded more than 100,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 800 deaths. Unemployment remains over 20% despite the government's reopening of the economy in May, following a more than month-long lockdown.

Netanyahu has faced intense criticism over his government's handling of the crisis, and the largest sustained protests against his rule in nearly a decade. On Saturday, an estimated 10,000 people took part in a weekly protest outside the prime minister's official residence in Jerusalem, calling on Netanyahu to resign.

Nonetheless, recent polls indicate Netanyahu would score a sizable victory if snap elections were held. By dissolving the government, Netanyahu would avoid giving Gantz the premiership in November 2021 as required by the coalition agreement.

Netanyahu appears determined to remain prime minister — and therefore not legally obligated to resign while under indictment — through the duration of his trial, which is expected to last several years.

Video shows armed Belarus president as protests roil capital

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

MINSK, Belarus (AP) — The authoritarian president of Belarus made a dramatic show of defiance Sunday against the massive protests demanding his resignation, toting a rifle and wearing a bulletproof vest as he strode off a helicopter that landed at his residence while demonstrators massed nearby.

In the 15th day of the largest and most determined protests ever in independent Belarus, a crowd of about 200,000 rallied against President Alexander Lukashenko in a square in Minsk, the capital. They then marched to another rally and approached the Independence Palace, the president's working residence.

Video from the state news agency Belta showed a government helicopter landing on the grounds and Lukashenko getting off holding what appeared to be a Kalashnikov-type automatic rifle. No ammunition clip was visible in the weapon, suggesting that Lukashenko, who cultivates an aura of machismo, aimed only to make a show of aggression.

Protests started Aug. 9 after a presidential election that officials say handed the 65-year-old Lukashenko his sixth term in office with 80% voter approval. Opponents claim the results are fraudulent.

The size and duration of the protests have been unprecedented for Belarus, a former Soviet republic of 9.5 million people that Lukashenko has ruled harshly for 26 years.

On Sunday afternoon, an opposition rally overflowed Minsk's sprawling 7-hectare (17-acre) Independence Square. There were no official figures on crowd size, but it appeared to be about 200,000 people or more.

The demonstrators then marched to another square about 2.5 kilometers (1.2 miles) away and approached the edges of the presidential residence grounds, where police in full riot gear stood shoulder-to-shoulder, holding large shields.

The protesters dispersed in the evening amid rain.

There were no immediate reports of arrests. Earlier this month, some 7,000 people were arrested at protests, many of them badly beaten with clubs or wounded by rubber bullets, violence that only caused public outrage to swell.

Lukashenko appears to be flailing about for a strategy to counter the anti-government demonstrations.

He has repeatedly blamed Western interference, claimed the protests were backed by the United States and accuses NATO of building up troop concentrations in Poland and Lithuania on Belarus' western border, which the alliance denies. He also claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin was willing to offer security assistance to his government to quell the protests if he asked for it.

Lukashenko has consistently repressed opposition during his time in office and weariness with his hard-line rule, as well as dismay over the country's deteriorating economy and Lukashenko's cavalier dismissal of the coronavirus pandemic, appear to have galvanized opponents.

"Belarus has changed. Lukashenko has been able to unify everybody, from workers to intelligentsia, in the demand for change," said protester Slava Chirkov, who attended Sunday's demonstration with his wife and son.

They held a sign declaring "Lukashenko, your milk has gone sour," referencing Lukashenko's former job as the director of a Soviet-era collective farm.

A similarly enormous crowd turned out for a protest a week ago and daily demonstrations have taken place since the vote. Several of the country's key factories have been hit with protest strikes by workers fed up with government policies. Those strikes not only threaten the already-ailing economy, but show that opposition to Lukashenko extends beyond educated white-collar circles and into his traditional blue-collar base.

"Are you going to work for a dictator? Strike — that's our answer," Sergei Dilevsky, leader of the strike committee at the Minsk Tractor Works, one of Belarus' largest industrial enterprises, told protesters at Sunday's second rally site.

Lukashenko's main election challenger, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, fled to Lithuania the day after the election. Several other possible challengers fled the country even before the election.

An opposition Coordination Council was created last week to develop a strategy for a transition of power, but authorities in Belarus have opened a criminal probe into its formation.

Also Sunday, more than 50,000 Lithuanians joined hands in a human chain stretching 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the capital of Vilnius to the Belarus border to express solidarity with the protesters.

—
Jim Heintz in Moscow and Luida Dapkus in Vilnius, Lithuania, contributed to this story

Execution of Native American man stirs emotion within tribe

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — Late on a fall evening in 2001, Alyce Slim and her granddaughter stopped at a gas station on the Navajo Nation after searching for a traditional healer for leg ailments.

There, in an area where hitchhiking is common, Slim agreed to give two males a ride. They got into her pewter-colored pickup truck and when she stopped later to let them out, they didn't budge.

Instead, Lezmond Mitchell and Johnny Orsinger stabbed Slim 33 times and placed her lifeless body next to the 9-year-old in the back seat as they drove to an abandoned sheep camp. They told Tiffany Lee to prepare to die and slit her throat. She was still breathing, so they dropped rocks on her head, killing her, too.

As the 38-year-old Mitchell sits on federal death row, his execution scheduled for Wednesday, the Navajo government is asking officials to spare his life on the basis of cultural beliefs and sovereignty. The stance is pushing up against the wishes of some of the victims' family for the execution to move forward, including Tiffany's parents.

"An eye for an eye," the girl's father, Daniel Lee told The Associated Press. "He took my daughter away, and no remorse or anything like that. The Navajo Nation president, the council, they don't speak for me. I speak for myself and for my daughter."

Under federal law, Native American tribes can decide whether they want their citizens subjected to the death penalty for a set of crimes involving Natives on tribal land. Nearly all 574 federally recognized tribes, including the Navajo Nation, have opted out.

Mitchell was the first Native American sentenced to death since the resumption of the federal death penalty in 1994 and the only Native American currently awaiting execution. He ended up on death row because he was convicted of carjacking resulting in death — a crime that carries the possibility of capital punishment regardless of where it happens.

His upcoming execution is the first of a handful set after the government said it would carry out executions following an informal 17-year moratorium. The case has stirred emotion among tribal members and painful reminders of the grisly crime.

Mitchell and others used Slim's truck in an armed robbery. He and Orsinger returned to where they dumped the two bodies, mutilated them and buried some of the remains while dragging others into the woods. They burned the victims' belongings and washed their knives in a stream nearby.

Days later, tribal police found the pickup truck abandoned in Tsaile where many tribal members make a living by ranching, farming and doing arts and crafts. Mitchell and others tried to torch the truck, but the windows were rolled up and the fire had no oxygen.

"All they did was make a smoky mess on the interior of the truck and leaving all the relevant evidence related to the murder, the carjacking and the robbery behind," said former FBI agent McDonald Rominger, who worked the case.

Navajo Nation lawmaker Carl Slater, whose grandparents testified against the death penalty in Mitchell's case, said the details of the crime make defining a just punishment uncomfortable. Still, the tribal government has asked President Donald Trump to grant Mitchell clemency.

"We can never lose sight of the big picture, be forward-looking," Slater said. "Every action creates precedent, especially when you're a governing body. This is not just going to impact the Navajo Nation. It's

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going to impact all of Indian Country.”

More than a dozen tribal leaders across the country and individual Native Americans have supported the Navajo government’s request.

Federal criminal jurisdiction on tribal land dates back to 1885 and stems from Congress’ displeasure over how one tribal nation settled a killing with restitution to the victim’s family — money, horses and a blanket. The federal authority is still disputed today.

Slim’s daughter and Tiffany’s mother, Marlene Slim, initially opposed putting Mitchell to death. The tribe has used her previous statements in pushing for Mitchell’s sentence to be reduced to life in prison.

Earlier this month, attorneys for some of Slim’s family and Lee wrote to tribal officials saying they support the federal government’s efforts to carry out the execution.

“Mr. Mitchell’s actions destroyed this family,” the letter read. “Mr. Mitchell did not consider or have any respect for the Navajo cultural teachings that stress the sanctity of life.”

Mitchell has long maintained he wasn’t the aggressor in the killings. Orsinger, now 35, had a criminal record but was a juvenile at the time and could not be sentenced to death. He is serving life in prison in Atlanta.

Letters that Mitchell’s attorneys submitted as part of the clemency petition paint him as a troubled kid who was shuffled around homes but was high-achieving, played varsity football and was a problem-solver.

“He was a good kid and he always took care of the children, always protected the children, so when he was involved in a crime against a child, it was really hard to believe,” said Mitchell’s uncle, Auska Mitchell.

Putting Mitchell to death would “break my heart,” he said. “I do hope that things change ... What’s even worse is I can’t see the guy.”

Mitchell has lost all of his appeals so far, a point U.S. Attorney General William Barr reiterated in announcing Mitchell’s latest execution date.

“The Justice Department upholds the rule of law, and we owe it to the victims and their families to carry forward the sentence imposed by our justice system,” Barr has said.

Alyce Slim was nearing retirement after driving a school bus for 30 years in the district around the Navajo Nation capital of Window Rock in Arizona. Family, friends and her co-workers spent days searching for her and Tiffany when they didn’t return home from their trip and posted pictures of them around the region.

Julie McCabe, whose sister was close friends with Marlene Slim, said Alyce Slim was gracious, strong, spiritual and hard-working. She had a way of speaking to others without making them feel inadequate or small, McCabe said.

“And the students on her route were just very lovable to her,” McCabe said.

Marlene Slim lamented shortly after the deaths that she would miss out on watching Tiffany grow.

Mitchell’s attorneys declined a request to interview him. They have made multiple requests lately to delay his execution as they argued over protocol and sought to interview jurors over potential racial bias.

“If the execution were to proceed, Mr. Mitchell will be the first, and only, Native American sentenced to death and executed by the federal government in modern history,” his attorneys said.

6 dead, 10 missing as flooding hits Turkey’s Black Sea coast

By ANDREW WILKS Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Flooding caused by heavy rains has killed six people along Turkey’s Black Sea coast and left 10 others missing, including some rescue workers, officials said Sunday.

Television footage showed vehicles and debris being swept away by floods on the main road of the mountain town of Dereli, which lies 12 miles (20 kilometers) inland from the Black Sea in Giresun province. Bridges, roads and buildings were washed away by what Agriculture and Forestry Minister Bekir Pakdemirli said was more than five inches (12.7 centimeters) of rain in less than a day.

“This is the first time I’ve seen such a natural disaster,” Pakdemirli said from Dereli. “The town’s skyline has changed.”

Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly, who traveled to Giresun to oversee rescue efforts, said 153 people

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had been rescued from the floods. He said 98 villages in the region were cut off and 38 were without electricity. About 20 people were stranded in a wedding hall in Dereli.

Two of the dead were police officers whose vehicle was swept away by the floods. Three of their colleagues and the operator of a mechanical digger are among the missing. Their vehicles fell into a ravine when a main road collapsed as they traveled to the disaster area.

Across the province, 17 buildings were destroyed and more than 360 were damaged, officials said.

Heavy rain along Turkey's Black Sea coast on Saturday evening also saw apartment buildings evacuated after landslides in Rize province, 110 miles (180 kilometers) east of Giresun.

At this time of year, the Black Sea region's population is swollen by seasonal workers who travel to harvest tea and hazelnuts and live in flimsy camps.

Meteorologists forecast more heavy storms ahead for Giresun and the neighboring provinces of Trabzon, Rize and Artvin.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, speaking at an event in Istanbul, vowed to help those affected by the floods.

"As a state, we will quickly overcome the destruction and devastation here with God's will," Erdogan said.

Comatose Russian dissident visited by wife, aide in Germany

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Alexei Navalny's wife and a top aide visited him Sunday in a Berlin hospital where the comatose Russian dissident is being treated by German doctors after a suspected poisoning.

Navalny was flown to Germany on Saturday from Siberia after doctors determined he was stable enough to be brought to the capital's Charité hospital for treatment.

After his arrival, hospital spokeswoman Manuela Zingl said the 44-year-old would be undergoing extensive diagnostic tests and that doctors wouldn't comment on his illness or treatment until they were able to evaluate the results.

On Sunday, Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, and aide Leonid Volkov visited the Russian opposition leader in the hospital but did not speak to reporters.

Navalny, a politician and corruption investigator who is one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critics, fell ill on a flight back to Moscow from Siberia on Thursday and was taken to the hospital in the city of Omsk after the plane made an emergency landing. His supporters believe that tea he drank was laced with poison — and that the Kremlin is behind both his illness and a delay in transferring him to Germany.

While his supporters and family members insist that Navalny was poisoned, doctors in Omsk denied that, saying a metabolic disorder was the most likely diagnosis and that a drop in blood sugar may have caused Navalny to lose consciousness.

Russian health authorities on Saturday said tests so far haven't shown any poisons in his system.

When German specialists arrived Friday morning aboard a plane equipped with advanced medical equipment at his family's behest, Navalny's physicians in Omsk initially said he was too unstable to move. The dissident's supporters suggested that was just a ploy to delay his departure until any poison was out of his system.

The Kremlin denied that resistance to the transfer was political, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying that it was purely a medical decision. However, the reversal to allow him to leave came as international pressure on Russia's leadership mounted.

Navalny's own doctor, Yaroslav Ashikhmin, said the politician has always been in good health, regularly went for medical checkups and didn't have any underlying illnesses that could have triggered his condition.

Like many other opposition politicians in Russia, Navalny has been frequently detained by law enforcement and harassed by pro-Kremlin groups. In 2017, he was attacked by several men who threw antiseptic in his face, damaging an eye.

Last year, Navalny was rushed to a hospital from jail where he was serving a sentence on charges of violating protest regulations. His team also suspected poisoning then. Doctors said he had a severe allergic

reaction and sent him back to detention the following day.

If he was poisoned, it would not be the first time a prominent, outspoken Russian was targeted in such a way — or the first time the Kremlin was accused of being behind it.

'Hoax' book reveals extent of internal unease at Fox

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Brian Stelter knows critics accuse Fox News of bending the truth in order to maintain its staunch support of and closeness to President Donald Trump. As CNN media reporter and host of "Reliable Sources," he's often one of them.

He wasn't prepared to hear the extent of concerns about the network's direction by people who work there.

It was one of the reasons he wrote "Hoax: Donald Trump, Fox News, and the Dangerous Distortion of Truth," which will be released Tuesday. The book shot from No. 340 to No. 1 on Amazon's best-seller's list following Stelter's appearance with Rachel Maddow on MSNBC Friday.

Several people at Fox privately expressed worry to him about the growing power of prime-time opinion hosts Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham at the expense of Fox's news operation, he said.

"There is a real resistance inside Fox News," Stelter told The Associated Press. "Nobody there would use that term. But there are many people there who are uncomfortable with Sean Hannity's lies and Tucker Carlson's xenophobia. It's just that they are powerless, or feel powerless, and the prime-time stars have all the power. There are Trump true believers at Fox, but there are many others who are concerned about the damage being done, and don't feel that they can speak out publicly."

After being presented with details of the book and phone conversations Thursday and Saturday, a Fox News representative said the network was declining comment.

While Stelter relies on insider accounts for some juicy details — including that Hannity has privately expressed doubts about Trump despite being his biggest on-air fan — much of the disturbing content in "Hoax" didn't require any special access. He reported what has been said on the air and how it echoed or was echoed by Trump's Twitter feed.

Stelter is particularly scathing about the response to the coronavirus epidemic: how it was minimized by both Fox and the president, how the drug hydroxychloroquine was pushed even as studies showed it wasn't effective against the virus, and the early cheerleading for reopening society.

"It's readily apparent that Fox failed its viewers at key moments during the pandemic," he wrote.

"This story is about a rot at the core of our politics," he wrote. "It's about an ongoing attack on the very idea of a free and fair press. It's about the difference between news and propaganda. It's about the difference between state media and the fourth estate."

Fox News is a money machine, and although outlets like One America News Network, NewsMax and Sinclair Broadcasting have tried, none have made a serious dent in Fox's dominance with conservative viewers and Trump fans. New Fox CEO Suzanne Scott has been praised for her financial stewardship.

Yet, Stelter's account gives a sense that, from an editorial standpoint, there's no one really in control — that Hannity, Carlson, Ingraham and the "Fox & Friends" morning team can essentially do what they want. The three prime-time hosts have personally advised Trump on policy, something that would be unthinkable at other news organizations.

Stelter was surprised at internal longing for Roger Ailes, the former chief executive who was fired for sexual misconduct in 2016 and died less than a year later. No one questioned that Ailes was in charge.

"When Ailes was forced out and when he died, the channel was still being produced for an audience of one — but now it's Donald Trump," he said.

Stelter said concern about the network's direction was a factor in the decisions of at least a dozen people who have left Fox News in the past four years, even if some haven't said so publicly.

Shepard Smith broke a contract to leave early weeks after a public tiff with Carlson. Megyn Kelly was stung by Bill O'Reilly's questioning of the "loyalty" of people like her who had made public accusations

against Ailes; the loud boing she received from the audience at a Trump rally in 2016 made the consequences of questioning him clear.

Catherine Herridge, a respected Washington reporter who left for CBS, told colleagues that Fox management was "afraid of the news," Stelter wrote. Political reporter Carl Cameron has been public about his discontent. The book discusses the exits of several others, including Jenna Lee, Abby Huntsman, Conor Powell, Clayton Morris and Ellison Barber.

Sean Graf, a researcher who started at Fox in 2016 and left earlier this year, told Stelter that "Fox's editorial voice, and disregard for the facts, is rejected by many of those within the organization."

As a frequent critic of Fox and employee of rival CNN, Stelter is unpopular with many conservatives, said Tim Graham, director of media analysis at the conservative watchdog Media Research Center. They are likely to regard his book with suspicion, he said.

Graham also noted the reliance on accounts from people who are not named, saying, "I do not trust anonymous sources when the author is hostile to the subject."

But Stelter said that there is such a fear within Fox about speaking to the press — a culture that dates to Ailes and is reinforced by non-disclosure agreements — that even some people who hadn't worked there for many years didn't want to be identified.

"I'm just as skeptical about anonymous sources as anybody else," he said, "but there was no other way to tell a story inside Fox News."

While he works for CNN now, Stelter said he's been covering Fox since starting a cable news blog as a college student through his years at The New York Times. He considers the book an extension of that reporting.

He brushes off potential attacks.

"Tucker Carlson has called me a eunuch and Sean Hannity has called me Humpty-Dumpty," he said. "So I don't know what else they could possibly say about me."

Trump's vision of American greatness at center of convention

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans will aim to recast the story of Donald Trump's presidency when they hold their national convention, featuring speakers drawn from everyday life as well as cable news and the White House while drawing a stark contrast with Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

Trump is looking to shift his campaign away from being a referendum on a presidency ravaged by a pandemic and economic collapse and toward a choice between vastly different visions of America's future. Reshaping the national conversation around the race has taken on greater urgency for Trump, who trails in public and private surveys as the coronavirus continues to ravage the nation's economy and his reelection chances.

The four-day event is themed "Honoring the Great American Story," according to four Trump campaign officials involved with the planning process but not authorized to discuss it by name. The convention will feature prominently a number of well-known Trump supporters, including members of the Trump family, but also those whom the GOP say are members of the "silent majority" of Americans who have been aided by Trump's policies. Some have been "silenced" by a "cancel culture" pushed by Democrats, the campaign officials said.

Trump himself was expected to appear each night in the key 10 p.m. Eastern hour, planners said.

Where Democrats highlighted Republicans who crossed party lines to back Biden as an indictment of Trump's leadership, the GOP lineup will primarily feature figures on the conservative media circuit with the hope that they can deliver red meat for the president's loyal supporters — though planners say they will feature some people who did not vote for Trump in 2016.

Planners insist they will put forward a more "positive" convention than Democrats' roasting of Trump. Yet the president also appears intent on trying to seize on the nation's cultural divides, particularly around issues of racial injustice and policing, drawing on grievances to motivate his base.

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The officials outlined the campaign plans to The Associates Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss the emerging schedule.

The opening night Monday will highlight the "Land of Promise," aiming to show how Trump helped renew the American dream. Featured speakers include South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, who will deliver the coveted closing speech of the televised prime-time block; former Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley; presidential son Donald Trump, Jr.; staunch congressional defenders Reps. Matt Gaetz of Florida and Jim Jordan of Ohio; and Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel.

Tanya Weinreis, a Montana coffee shop owner who received federal loans to pay her employees during the coronavirus, will also speak, as will Andrew Pollack, whose daughter Meadow was among those killed in the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

Tuesday's theme is "Land of Opportunity," which is expected to cast Biden's plans as "socialist" and "radical left." Speakers will highlight Trump's actions on trade, abortion and the nation's opioid crisis. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will address Trump's foreign policy record, an unusual foray into domestic politics by the nation's top diplomat, and Trump children Eric and Tiffany Trump will also speak.

Another speaker will be Nicholas Sandmann, who as a student at a Catholic high school in Kentucky gained national attention last year for his interaction with a Native American man during demonstrations in Washington. Media commentary in the aftermath of the viral video from the interaction depicted the students as racially insensitive. Sandmann and the Native American man, Nathan Phillips, later said they were both trying to defuse tensions among conflicting groups that converged at the Lincoln Memorial.

First lady Melania Trump will deliver the marquee address of the night from a newly renovated White House Rose Garden.

Wednesday, themed "Land of Heroes," will feature a raft of conservative personalities including South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, White House counselor Kellyanne Conway, former acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell, Rep. Lee Zeldin of New York and presidential daughter-in-law Lara Trump.

Clarence Henderson, a civil rights figure from the 1960s, is also on deck to address the "true meaning of peaceful protest," planners said, as Trump plans to highlight police officers amid a nationwide call for policing reform after the May death of George Floyd in police custody.

Vice President Mike Pence will deliver the keynote Wednesday from Baltimore's Fort McHenry, which inspired "The Star-Spangled Banner" in 1814, to highlight Trump's opposition to professional athletes who protest racial injustice by kneeling during the national anthem.

Speakers on the final night, themed "Land of Greatness," will include Alice Johnson, the criminal justice advocate whose sentence on drug crimes was commuted by Trump at the urging of celebrity Kim Kardashian; Carl and Marsha Mueller, the parents of human rights activist Kayla Mueller, who died while being held by the Islamic State group in Syria; and evangelist Rev. Franklin Graham.

Trump's personal attorney, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, whose attempts to dig up dirt in Ukraine on Biden's family were at the center of the president's impeachment last year, will also address the final night of the convention. Republican congressional leaders Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California and Democrat-turned-Republican Rep. Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey are to deliver remarks, as will Ultimate Fighting Championship President Dana White.

Trump will close out the convention during an unprecedented address from the White House South Lawn. He and Ivanka Trump, his daughter and senior adviser who is set to introduce him, will speak from an elaborate stage in front of the Executive Mansion. The move has drawn criticism from Democrats and ethics groups, who argue that Trump is violating the spirit, if not the letter, of federal law by using the White House grounds to stage his convention.

While the president is not covered by the Hatch Act, his aides cannot appear at the convention in their official capacities and staffers are extremely limited in what they may do to help pull off the convention. Planners insist they are following all ethics rules.

Plans for the GOP event have rapidly come together over the last six weeks, since it became apparent to the party that Trump could not hold an in-person convention at his backup site of Jacksonville, Florida. Trump was forced to move most of the convention out of Charlotte, North Carolina, the original host city,

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because of restrictive state coronavirus precautions.

Republicans — and Trump himself — closely watched last week's Democratic convention for cues on what worked and what didn't in the virtual format, hoping that will provide an advantage in putting together their week of events.

One major difference, Republicans said, will be the emphasis on live rather than taped events — and holding events with crowds to the greatest extent practicable. Trump repeatedly criticized Democrats' reliance on pre-taped videos, rather than live addresses, saying Tuesday, "Live, by the way, is always much more exciting."

A small crowd was expected for Melania Trump's speech in the Rose Garden, with a larger cohort watching in person when Pence speaks Wednesday from Fort McHenry. More than 1,000 guests are anticipated on the South Lawn when Trump delivers his acceptance speech Thursday night. The RNC has requested approval to launch fireworks from the National Mall after Trump's speech.

Unlike Democrats, Republicans are not expected to feature a roll call of states to formally renominate the president — traditionally one of the most dramatic moments of a convention. The actual voting will be taking place in truncated format Monday morning in Charlotte with a condensed recap expected to air later during the evening.

Trump delivered on some big 2016 promises, but others unmet

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — He's broken his pledge never to take a vacation or play golf for pleasure. His plan to update the nation's infrastructure has become a running punchline and he's dropped his threat to throw Army deserter Bowe Bergdahl out of a plane without a parachute. But behind the drama, chaos and tumult that has defined President Donald Trump's administration, the president has fulfilled a wide range of promises he made during his 2016 campaign.

It's a theme that will play a major role in the upcoming Republican National Convention, as the president tries to convince a weary nation that he deserves a second term, even when millions of Americans have been infected by the coronavirus, the economy is in tatters and racial tensions are boiling over.

"I'm the only candidate that gave you more than I promised in the campaign. It's true. I'm the only one ever, maybe ever," Trump said at a rally in battleground Arizona last week.

Back in 2016, Trump was criticized for failing to release detailed policy plans akin to those of his rival, Hillary Clinton. What Trump did do was lay out a vision for a new America — one driven by a nationalist self-interest and disregard for Democratic norms.

In the years since, Trump has acted on that vision, making good on his nativist immigration rhetoric, tearing back regulations on business and transforming America's role in the world by abandoning multi-lateral agreements and upending decades-old alliances, cheered on by many of his most loyal supporters and generating great alarm among his critics.

But will that matter when more than 175,000 Americans have died and more than 5.5 million have been infected by a virus that has hit the U.S. far harder than other industrialized nations?

"I think the golden egg of Trump's reelection effort is going to be the promises kept, such as getting two Supreme Court justices in power and keeping America out of foreign wars like Afghanistan and Iraq," said Douglas Brinkley, presidential historian at Rice University. "The problem he has is that his COVID response wasn't on the ballot in 2016 and he's gotten poor marks on how he's handled the pandemic. So that's put a wrinkle in his promises kept talking points."

Arguably Trump's biggest impact has been on immigration.

While Mexico never did pay for the "big, beautiful wall" Trump pledged to build along the 2,000-mile southern border — the signature promise of his 2016 campaign — the project is now underway, with 450 miles expected to be completed by the end of December. (Only a sliver of that, however — just 4 miles — has been built along stretches where no barrier stood before.) And Trump has succeeded in fundamentally transforming the nation's immigration system, despite resistance from the courts and little cooperation from Congress.

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Using more than 400 executive actions, according to a recent analysis by the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute, Trump has effectively shut down the asylum system at the southwest border and slashed refugee admissions. At the same time, Trump has imposed a slew of new restrictions on legal immigration, with the pandemic spurring many more. With so few visas being processed and immigration fees collected, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has all but run out of money and is about to furlough large swaths of its workforce.

Some specific promises on immigration went unfulfilled: Trump failed to create a new "deportation force," never met his pledge to deport millions, didn't end funding for sanctuary cities that don't cooperate with immigration authorities and didn't move to end the constitutional right to birthright citizenship. But he did clamp down on "catch and release" of immigrants in the country illegally, enhance background screening of migrants and move to suspend immigration from a host of majority-Muslim nations — an evolution of the Muslim ban he floated during his campaign.

"They have used the tools that the executive branch has on immigration really to their ultimate extent. And they've been successful," said Doris Meissner, the director of the Migration Policy Institute's U.S. Immigration Policy Program and a former commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. "And you know, in many ways remarkably so because there's been very stiff resistance all the way."

In other areas, Trump's record has been more mixed. On health care, Republicans in Congress did repeal the Obama-era individual mandate forcing people to buy health insurance, but he failed to replace the Affordable Care Act with an alternative, despite frequent promises to present his own plan.

On the economy, Trump and congressional Republicans pushed through a promised tax cut early in his term that dramatically slashed the corporate tax rate — as he had promised — and doubled the estate tax threshold, but did not eliminate it. He also did not meet his pledge to reduce the number of individual income tax brackets from seven to three to simplify the tax code, and efforts to bolster manufacturing jobs began to stall by his third year in office.

Trump had promised to boost economic growth to 3.5% per year on average. But he never surpassed 3% growth in any year, and progress on lowering unemployment has been annihilated by the pandemic, which has ushered in the worst recession since the Great Depression.

Some of Trump's more controversial promises have fallen by the wayside, such as his pledge to eliminate gun-free zones at schools and on military bases and to establish a national right to carry concealed weapons that would trump local restrictions. He has all but ignored the spiraling cost of college education and the plans he had proposed to make student loan repayment more affordable. He never made good on his pledge to push a constitutional amendment to impose term limits on members of Congress. And his pledge to embark on a massive \$1 trillion effort to rebuild the nation's infrastructure, including airports, roads and bridges, has become a running punchline.

He also quickly abandoned his promise never to take a vacation while president, making frequent trips to his properties in Florida and New Jersey. And while he claimed he would only play golf with those who might help him govern and never with friends, he has now paid more than 270 visits to golf clubs since his inauguration, according to a website dedicated to tracking his visits. He is often photographed playing with pros.

But he delivered on other fronts. He immediately enacted a federal hiring freeze, as he had promised, and mandated that for every new federal regulation enacted, two be eliminated. He launched an aggressive campaign to roll back environmental protections passed by the Obama administration, including those that protected waterways, encouraged cleaner energy, reduced auto emissions and restricted offshore drilling and oil exploration on federal land. At the same time, he has prioritized tapping the country's shale oil, and natural gas and coal reserves.

However, courts are undoing many of Trump's environmental rollbacks, calling them poorly reasoned and illegal.

On trade, Trump renegotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement and withdrew the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, but failed to decrease the U.S.-China trade imbalance while starting a trade war with the country.

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On the international front, the impact has been enormous as he has put his "America First" policy into practice, fundamentally redefining America's place in the world. He increased funding for the military, joined the race to weaponize space, all but abandoned efforts to curb nuclear proliferation, and has threatened U.S. membership in the landmark alliances of the 20th century, including NATO.

At the same time, he has pulled the U.S. from participation in a host of landmark accords, including the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal (though he failed to bring Iran back to the negotiating table to broker a replacement deal, as he had pledged.) At international summits, he has cozied up to authoritarian leaders, including Russia's Vladimir Putin, while picking fights with longstanding allies like the U.K. and Canada.

In a sign of just how far he has broken from the global community, he stopped funding the World Health Organization in the midst of the pandemic earlier this year.

Jeremy Shapiro, a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said Trump has altered U.S. foreign policy in ways that go beyond what he outlined before taking office.

"I don't think he was really preparing people for the degree of revolution. He didn't say, 'I don't care about human rights' on the campaign trail. He didn't say, 'I don't care about democracy.' He didn't say, 'I don't care about alliances,'" Shapiro said.

While Trump complained the U.S. had gotten a raw deal in so many areas, he has failed, Shapiro argued, to negotiate improvements, aside from perhaps the new NAFTA.

"It's easy to destroy a deal. It's much harder to create a better one. And he hasn't done that," Shapiro said.

Follow Colvin on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/colvinj>

How starving public health fueled a COVID fire in Florida

By LAURA UNGAR, JASON DEAREN and HANNAH RECHT Associated Press and Kaiser Health News
JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — On a sweltering July morning, Rose Wilson struggled to breathe as she sat in her bed, the light from her computer illuminating her face and the oxygen tubes in her nose.

Wilson, a retiree who worked as a public health department nurse supervisor in Duval County for 35 years, had just been diagnosed with COVID-19-induced pneumonia. She had a telemedicine appointment with her doctor.

Staring back from her screen was Dr. Rogers Cain, who runs a tidy little family medical clinic a couple of blocks from the Trout River in north Jacksonville, a predominantly Black area where the coronavirus is running roughshod. Wilson, 81, was one of Cain's patients who'd tested positive — he had seven other COVID patients that morning before noon. Three of her grown children had contracted the virus, too.

"It started as a drip, drip, drip in May," said Cain, his voice muffled by his mask. "Now it's more like a faucet running."

Cain and Wilson are nervous. Over the past two decades, both watched as the county health department was gutted of money and people, hampering Duval's ability to respond to outbreaks, including a small cluster of tuberculosis cases in 2012. And now they face the menace of COVID-19 in a city once slated to host this week's Republican National Convention, in one of the states leading the latest U.S. surge.

Florida is both a microcosm and a cautionary tale for America. As the nation starved the public health system intended to protect communities against disease, staffing and funding fell faster and further in the Sunshine State, leaving it especially unprepared for the worst health crisis in a century.

Although Florida's population grew by 2.4 million since 2010 to make it the nation's third-most populous state, a joint investigation by KHN and The Associated Press has found, the state slashed its local health departments' staffing — from 12,422 full-time equivalent workers to 9,125 in 2019, the latest data available.

According to an analysis of state data, the state-run local health departments spent 41% less per resident in 2019 than in 2010, dropping from \$57 to \$34 after adjusting for inflation. Departments nationwide have also cut spending, but by less than half as much — an average of 18%, according to data from the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

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Even before the pandemic hit, that meant fewer investigators to track, trace and contain diseases such as hepatitis. It meant fewer public health nurses to teach people how to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS or the flu. When the wave of COVID-19 inundated Florida, the state was caught flat-footed when it mattered most, its main lines of defense eviscerated.

Now, confirmed cases have soared past 588,000 and deaths have risen to more than 10,000. Concerns over the virus prompted Republicans to cancel plans for an in-person convention in Jacksonville, opting for a pared-down version in North Carolina.

Health experts blame the funding cuts on the Great Recession and choices by a series of governors who wanted to move publicly funded state services to for-profit companies.

And when the pandemic took hold, they say, residents got mixed messages about prevention strategies like wearing masks from Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and other political leaders. Voices within the health departments were muzzled.

"The reality, unfortunately, is people are going to die because of the irresponsibility of the decisions being made by the people crafting the budgets," said Ron Bialek, president of the Public Health Foundation, a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., offering tools and training. "Public health can't help us get out of this situation without our elected officials giving us the resources."

State officials neither answered specific, repeated questions from The Associated Press and KHN about changes in public health funding, nor made staffers available for deeper explanations.

Dr. Leslie Beitsch, a former deputy secretary of Florida's state health department, said failing to prepare for a foreseeable disaster "is governmental malpractice." The nation's pandemic response is only as good as the weakest link, he said. Since the virus respects no borders, other states feel the ripples of Florida's failings.

Those failings are clear in Duval County, which had employed the equivalent of 852 full-time workers and spent \$91 per person in 2008 but in 2019 had only 422 workers and spent just \$34 per resident, according to the KHN/AP analysis of state data. That's less than the typical list price of a single COVID test. Former county health director Dr. Jeff Goldhagen said the county's team has been "dismantled to the extent that it could not really manage an outbreak."

Yet it must.

Cain's private north Jacksonville medical clinic alone has had about 60 confirmed COVID cases and eight deaths. "We are all on fire right now," he said. "You have to have a fire department that is adequately equipped to put out the fire."

DWINDLING BUDGETS

Florida faced similar shortcomings around the time of the last great pandemic, the 1918 flu. Back then, according to a 1924 state report, public health workers faced too many demands and their efforts were "to some extent scattered and transitory." The state could have used at least three more district health officers, the report said: "It is a source of regret and a matter of grave concern to public health workers that the funds available are not sufficient."

County-based health departments began in 1930, providing more robust services closer to home. About 50 years later, legislation created state-administered primary care programs in which county health departments provided low-income Floridians with the type of basic health care and treatment most people now get at private doctors' offices.

The 1990s saw a move toward privatization, particularly as Medicaid managed care took hold, said a 2004 paper in the Florida Public Health Review. Still, per-person spending on local public health rose until the late 1990s, when adjusted for inflation to 2019 dollars, peaking at \$59.

Wilson, the retired public health nurse stricken with COVID-19, recalled how Duval County's department started feeling the financial pain during former Republican Gov. Jeb Bush's administration in the early 2000s and kept losing nurses and other staff until they were "very, very short."

Beitsch, who worked for the state health department in the 1990s, said the downward trend continued under former Republican governors Charlie Crist and Rick Scott, fueled by a growing belief in shrinking government that flourished in many states. Florida's leaders exerted more control over public health,

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Beitsch said, and "the amount of local autonomy has been diminishing with successive administrations."

The recession that began in late 2007 sparked public health reductions across the nation that were especially harsh in Florida. By 2011, budget cuts and lack of money were the most frequently cited challenges in a Florida public health workforce survey, which pointed to growing needs. In the following years, the state had some of the nation's highest rates of heart disease and diabetes.

Squeezed departments struggled and sometimes stumbled. A report from the state health department's inspector general for the 2018-19 fiscal year, for example, found a series of lost and inconsistent shipments of lab specimens from county health departments to the state lab — not long before the pandemic would make labs more important than ever.

As governor, Scott presided over the state from 2011 to 2019, when funding and staffing dropped most. Now a U.S. senator, he said through a spokesperson that he was unapologetic for health department cuts, which he characterized as a move toward "making government more efficient" without endangering public health.

"I'm sure that he had no problem with the cuts that were being made," said Patrick Bernet, an associate professor in health administration at Florida Atlantic University. "To put it all on him is not fair because a bunch of little henchmen from the counties had to vote that way. ... We keep voting in people who undervalue public health."

Democratic state Sen. Janet Cruz, a legislator who has represented the Tampa region for a dozen years and sat on health care committees, said she watched lawmakers systematically cut money for health departments. When she questioned it, she said, some colleagues claimed the need wasn't as great because the state was moving toward private family health care centers. "Public health in Florida has been wholly underfunded," she said.

Some places have suffered more than others. Departments serving at least half a million residents spent \$29 per person in 2019 on average, compared with \$90 per person in departments serving 50,000 or fewer — a difference starker than the typical gap between larger and smaller departments nationally, according to an KHN-AP analysis. Experts can't say exactly why the gap is wider in Florida, which has a state-run system, but point to politics and historical decisions about budgets.

Duval County's health department spending was the equivalent of \$34 per person, down 63% since 2008. Typically, about 22 workers, or 5% of the total staff, have been dedicated to preparing for and tracking disease outbreaks.

But when the pandemic hit, many there and elsewhere were diverted to fight the coronavirus, leaving little time for their typical duties such as mosquito abatement and tracking sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis.

"Current events demonstrate how bad a decision" the deep cuts to public health were, said Dr. Marissa Levine, a professor of public health and family medicine at the University of South Florida. "It's really come back to haunt us."

MIXED AND MUZZLED MESSAGES

The pandemic caught fire in Florida this summer as the state's rapid reopening allowed people to flock to beaches, Disney World, movie theaters and bars.

The state has had more than half a million confirmed cases — among them, players and workers for baseball's Miami Marlins — and 35,000 hospitalizations, yet DeSantis still hasn't issued a mask mandate. Some local governments have. Jacksonville adopted one in late June, and about a week later Republican Mayor Lenny Curry announced he and his family were self-quarantining because he'd been exposed to someone who tested positive for the virus.

Chad Neilsen, director of infection prevention at University of Florida-Jacksonville, lauded the mayor for the mask requirement, saying, "We know that masking works." But he pointed out that other counties have different rules and that the inconsistent messaging breeds confusion.

St. Johns County began requiring masks in late July but only in county facilities. And DeSantis has appeared in public without a mask numerous times, including at an Aug. 13 coronavirus update briefing during which some other speakers wore them.

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"One voice is so critical during a pandemic," said Dr. Jonathan Kantor, a Jacksonville epidemiologist and dermatologist. "We have to have one voice, and consistent leadership that is modeling behavior if we want to get people to change their behaviors."

Instead, experts in Florida said, public health workers have been silenced or told by top state officials what to say. For example, The Palm Beach Post reported that state leaders told school boards they needed health department approval to keep schools closed, then instructed health directors not to give it.

"All the communication is directed by the state, and localities are very limited in what they can do," said Levine, the University of South Florida professor. "Anything to do with a mandate, there's resistance to do at a state level. This includes the hot debate on masks. The locals have to extend the state messaging." Local health officials "are being told bluntly: 'Shut up,'" Bernet said. "They literally cannot speak."

Beitsch, who now chairs the department of behavioral sciences and social medicine at Florida State University, said such limitations — and similar mixed messages and silencing of medical experts at the national level — fuels the politicization of public health and undermining of science.

"People think they should be listening to politicians and state legislative leaders about their health care. They're not listening to health experts and the epidemiologists who say if you just wear a mask and if you just wash your hands, we can really, really reduce the spread of the virus," said Cruz, the state senator. "People are confused, and they think this is a hoax and it's nothing more than the flu."

Meanwhile, the COVID caseload continues to rise, surpassing 25,000 in Duval County, with minorities stricken disproportionately, as elsewhere in the nation. In a county that's 29% Black and 60% white, Black residents with COVID have been hospitalized at more than double the rate of white residents. Rates are also high for Floridians grouped together as "other," including Native American, Asian and multiracial residents.

Duval County's overall caseload is rising so fast that Goldhagen, the former health department director, said the agency has given up on contact tracing, which means trying to curb the virus by identifying and warning people who have been exposed.

"It's impossible," Goldhagen said. "Dismantling the system was a complete disregard for the health and well-being of the citizens of Florida."

With an ill-equipped public health system, Wilson, the retired public health nurse, said it falls to everyone to lead Jacksonville, and Florida, out of the coronavirus crisis.

"My hope is that everybody begins to take this virus seriously, and wear their mask and stay social distancing. It can work if we do that," said Wilson, whose condition has improved. "So, that's my hope. Eventually there will be a vaccine that will curtail this virus. But until then, it's up to us to help do that. And if we're not serious about it, then we're doomed."

Dearen is a writer for The Associated Press, and Ungar and Recht are writers for KHN.

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As shoppers stay away, small stores seek refuge online

By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For small retailers across the country, the coronavirus outbreak has turned an already challenging business environment into never-ending uncertainty.

Amy Witt might have 20 customers on a good day in her Dallas women's clothing store, and then none the next.

"It's a rollercoaster we ride every day," says Witt, whose store, Velvet Window, reopened May 1 after being closed since March. "We're doing everything we can to cover expenses and keep the store stocked with inventory."

Many of Witt's older customers are still shy about going into stores, especially since the virus has re-

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surged in Texas. As she reopened the store in May, Witt told The Associated Press she planned to use services like private shopping hours to encourage reluctant customers to come in. The strategy has helped but sales remain well below Witt's expectations. She hopes to boost sales by selling at an outdoor market where shoppers can feel more comfortable.

Still, Witt is grateful to be open — there are empty stores in the shopping center where Velvet Window is located.

Small retailers, especially those selling non-necessities like apparel, are still struggling months after state and local governments lifted shutdown orders aimed at containing the virus. With the virus far from under control in many areas, however, consumers worried about getting sick are staying home and doing their purchasing online or, if they venture out, going to big stores like Walmart and Target where they can do one-stop shopping.

The weak sales and erratic customer traffic have forced store owners to be creative in hopes of persuading customers to stop in rather than order from a big online retailer. But for some owners, disappointing sales and an uncertain outlook have forced them to close their stores for good and stake the future of their businesses on the internet.

Washington was one of the first epicenters of the virus, and one of the first states to shut down its economy. Ambika Singh felt the impact immediately: Her company, Armoire, rents clothing to professional women. Her customers, suddenly stuck at home, no longer needed outfits for the office, dinners and business trips.

Singh has permanently closed her two stores in Seattle, knowing they couldn't be sustained. She's adapted her online business to meet customers' rapidly changing needs — they wanted different clothes, like luxury loungewear or more dress shirts to look business-like on videoconferences even as they wore sweatpants

Having lost customers due to the weakened economy, Armoire's revenue is down about 35% from February, which was its best month ever. One of Singh's biggest challenges now is marketing to new customers as she tries to replace the shoppers who left.

"As we've lost the physical connection with customers, can we rebuild?" she says.

The internet has been a refuge for many retailers during the pandemic, says Carlos Castelan, managing director of The Navio Group, a retail consultancy based in Minneapolis. He noted that Shopify, a company that hosts e-commerce websites, had a 71% increase in new stores in the second quarter compared to a year earlier.

"They're urgently setting up these e-commerce models to serve their customers," he says.

The most recent retail sales tallies from the government show sales at clothing sellers, which tend to have physical locations, fell nearly 36% from May through July. But online and other non-traditional retailers saw their sales soar 26%.

Small retailers have also learned to be more customer-friendly. They're using, for example, texts to communicate with shoppers and making pickups easier by setting aside dedicated parking spaces so people can grab and go, Castelan says. And stores are letting shoppers know they are trying to keep everyone safe.

"The primary driver has been as much about convenience and safety. That's more the story rather than merchandising," he says.

The internet has been a lifeline for Antonelli's Cheese Shop. The Austin, Texas, store remained open during the government-ordered shutdown, but many consumers stayed home, sharply reducing store traffic. The shop also sells to restaurants, which stopped ordering as they were forced to close. The shop's business is still down 20%.

Owners John and Kendall Antonelli say they've managed to survive by taking the events they normally run on their premises, like cheese tastings, and putting them online. They've had as many as 150 people take part in a tasting, with many people ordering cheese in advance and picking it up curbside. More recently, with fewer people sheltering at home, they've been more likely to get 50 people, but that is still about double the number of attendees they had pre-pandemic.

The Antonellis revamped their website so local customers can order a la carte instead of pre-selected

packages — that's more expensive for the store, but it keeps people happy and shopping.

The Antonellis have learned that several cheese shops in other cities have gone out of business, so they know they too could be at risk.

"We are potentially considered one of the success stories — and what I mean by that is we're still operating," Kendall Antonelli says.

Business has been slow since Mallory Shelter's Washington, D.C., jewelry store reopened in June. Shelter, whose store bears her name, responded to the pandemic and shutdown by pouring her marketing efforts into her website. It now accounts for 75% of her revenue, up from 8% before the virus struck, but her overall revenue is down by half. She also has changed her product mix, focusing more on custom items that can have a more personal meaning for buyers.

A big question is whether her in-store business will recover in time for the holiday season that starts three months from now.

"This is the month when I'm preparing for the holidays. But that looks really hard when you don't know if you're going to be open, if there's going to be another wave of the virus or what people's spending will be like," Shelter says.

Iran retrieves data, cockpit talk from downed Ukraine plane

By NASSER KARIMI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran has retrieved some data, including a portion of the cockpit conversations, from the Ukrainian jetliner that was accidentally downed by the Revolutionary Guard forces in January, killing all 176 people on board, an Iranian official said Sunday.

That's according to a report on the website of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization, which described the official's remarks as part of the final report that Tehran plans to issue on the shutdown of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752.

The development comes months after the Jan. 8 crash near Tehran. Iranian authorities had initially denied responsibility, only changing course days later, after Western nations presented extensive evidence that Iran had shot down the plane.

The shutdown happened the same night Iran launched a ballistic missile attack targeting U.S. soldiers in Iraq, its response to the American drone strike that killed Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on Jan. 3.

At the time, Iranian troops were bracing for a U.S. counterstrike and appeared to have mistaken the plane for a missile. Iran, however, has not acknowledges that, only saying that after the missile attack, its air defense was sufficiently alert and had allowed previously scheduled air traffic to resume — a reference to the Ukrainian plane being allowed to take off from Tehran amid such an unprecedented crisis.

The Ukrainian passenger plane was apparently targeted by two missiles. The plane had just taken off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport when the first missile exploded, possibly damaging its radio equipment. The second missile likely directly struck the aircraft, as videos from that night show the plane exploding into a ball of fire before crashing into a playground and farmland on the outskirts of the Iranian capital.

For days after the crash, Iranian investigators combed the site, sifting through the debris of the plane.

The head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization, Capt. Touraj Dehghani Zangeneh, said on Sunday that the plane's black boxes have only 19 seconds of conversation following the first explosion, though the second missile reached the plane 25 seconds later. The report quoting him did not elaborate.

He said the first missile explosion sent shrapnel into the plane, likely disrupting the plane's recorders. He did not reveal any details of the cockpit conversation that was retrieved.

Representatives from the U.S., Ukraine, France, Canada, Britain and Sweden — countries whose citizens were killed in the crash — were present during the process to gather data from the recorders, Zangeneh said.

In the months since the downing of the plane, Iran has struggled with vast domestic economic problems

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and a major health crisis. It has the Middle East's largest and deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus, with more than 358,000 confirmed cases, including 20,643 deaths. The Iranian government is also grappling with both crushing U.S. sanctions, as well as the Trump administration's push to impose so-called "snapback" sanctions on Iran over what Washington says is Iran's violation of the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Last month, an initial report from the Iranian investigation said that a misaligned missile battery, miscommunication between troops and their commanders and a decision to fire without authorization all led to the fatal downing of the jetliner.

That report said the surface-to-air missile battery that targeted the Boeing 737-800 had been relocated and was not properly reoriented. Those manning the missile battery could not communicate with their command center, they misidentified the civilian flight as a threat and opened fire twice without getting approval from ranking officials, it said.

Western intelligence officials and analysts believe Iran shot down the aircraft with a Russian-made Tor system, known to NATO as the SA-15. In 2007, Iran took the delivery of 29 Tor M1 units from Russia under a contract worth an estimated \$700 million. The system is mounted on a tracked vehicle and carries a radar and a pack of eight missiles.

The initial report did not say why the Guard moved the air defense system, though that area near the airport is believed to be home to both regular military and bases of the paramilitary force.

It also noted that the Ukrainian flight had done nothing out of the ordinary up until the missile launch, with its transponder and other data being broadcast. The aircraft's black boxes were brought to Paris in July, to France's BEA accident investigation agency, where they are being examined.

"Data recovery activity was all done with the aim of safety and preventing similar incidents," Zangeneh said, adding an appeal against "any political use of the process."

Later in the day, Iranian state TV quoted Zangeneh as saying the data showed the Ukrainian plane was on the right flight path. After 19 seconds of the first explosion, the communication system of the black boxes was cut, he said.

Planes carry two different flight recorder devices, called black boxes — the flight data recorder and the cockpit voice recorder.

"All three crew in the cockpit were controlling the flight until the very last," Zangeneh said.

He added that Iran's airspace is now "safe and ready" for international flights.

Associated Press writers Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Elaine Ganley in Paris contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Aug. 24, the 237th day of 2020. There are 129 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On August 24 in A.D. 79, long-dormant Mount Vesuvius erupted, burying the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in volcanic ash; an estimated 20,000 people died.

On this date:

In A.D. 410, Rome was overrun by the Visigoths, a major event in the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

In 1814, during the War of 1812, British forces invaded Washington, D.C., setting fire to the Capitol (which was still under construction) and the White House, as well as other public buildings.

In 1932, Amelia Earhart embarked on a 19-hour flight from Los Angeles to Newark, New Jersey, making her the first woman to fly solo, non-stop, from coast to coast.

In 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty came into force.

In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Communist Control Act, outlawing the Communist Party in the United States.