

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 1 of 82

- [1- Warner has clean sweep in volleyball action](#)
- [2- Hemorrhagic Disease Confirmed in Deer Across South Dakota](#)
- [3- Homecoming Week Activities](#)
- [4- Missouri River Bridge Replacement Project Awarded](#)
- [5- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [8- Area COVID-19 Cases](#)
- [9- Sept. 22nd COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [13- Mike Nehls for County Commission](#)
- [14- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [15- Weather Pages](#)
- [18- Daily Devotional](#)
- [19- 2020 Groton Events](#)
- [20- News from the Associated Press](#)

"GENUINE KINDNESS IS NO ORDINARY ACT, BUT A GIFT OF RARE BEAUTY."

-SYLVIA ROSSETTI



Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Warner has clean sweep in volleyball action

Warner had a clean sweep in Groton Tuesday night as the Monarchs won all three matches in volleyball action.

The C match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM/GDIRADIO, sponsored by Frost Construction. Game scores were 25-18 and 25-6. The junior varsity match was also broadcast on GDLIVE.COM/GDIRADIO sponsored by Jerry and Kathy Bjerke. Game scores were 25-10 and 25-16.

The varsity match was broadcast on GDILIVE.COM/GDIRADIO, sponsored by BK Custom T's & More, S & S Lumber, Hefty Seed, Bary Keith at Harr Motors and the Groton Chiropractic Clinic. Game scores were 25-6, 25-6 and 25-8.

In the varsity match, Aspen Johnson and Megan Fliehs each had three kills and Madeline Fliehs had two. Allyssa Locke had seven of the nine sets. Allyssa Thaler had nine of the team's 24 digs with Madeline Fliehs and Allyssa Locke each having four.

The Monarchs had 15 ace serves, 33 kills, 31 assists, 31 digs and six blocks.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

Hemorrhagic Disease Confirmed in Deer Across South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks has documented deer mortalities in 2020 due to hemorrhagic disease, also known as epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) or blue tongue. EHD has been confirmed by laboratory analysis in deer from Butte, Davison, Hughes, Meade and Sully counties. Additional reports of dead deer are coming in from other areas as well, many of which likely succumbed to EHD.

This disease is common in white-tailed deer and is typically detected in late summer or early fall. Minor deer losses to EHD can occur in any given year in South Dakota, but weather and habitat conditions will dictate the severity of the disease. EHD is not infectious to humans. For more information on the EHD virus visit <https://gfp.sd.gov/epizootic-hemorrhagic-disease/>.

The virus is spread by a biting midge and causes extensive internal hemorrhaging in infected animals. Many deer exhibit no clinical signs and appear perfectly healthy, while others may have symptoms such as respiratory distress, fever, and swelling of the tongue. With highly lethal strains of the virus, deer can be dead within 1-3 days. Affected deer are often found near low lying areas or water, likely due to the deer attempting to combat the high fever.

“With hunters now out in the field and landowner’s surveillance of wildlife on their properties, we ask those that encounter dead deer to report those to their local conservation officer or GFP office”, said Chad Switzer, wildlife program administrator. “This information will assist wildlife managers in making recommendations to respond accordingly”.

EHD outbreaks can be locally severe, but rarely affect a high proportion of the deer population in a management unit. In 2016, the disease affected deer populations in certain areas of eastern South Dakota and license adjustments were made in some management units to react to these unforeseen mortality events. Deer can continue to succumb to this disease until a hard freeze reduces the midge populations that carry the disease.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 3 of 82

Homecoming theme is: ALL AROUND THE WORLD (COUNTRIES)

Wednesday, September 23, 2020 - Duo Day* at MS/HS, Wacky Hair/Wacky Hat Day at Elementary
* (Examples are Salt and Pepper, or Mustard and Ketchup)

Thursday, September 24, 2020 - Class Colors Day** at MS/HS, Throwback Day at Elementary
** Seniors - black, juniors - white, sophomores - grey, freshmen - gold, 8th grade - purple, 7th grade - blue, 6th grade - red, staff/teachers - pink.
10 a.m.: Boys golf at Sisseton Golf Course
4 p.m.: Boys soccer hosting James Valley Christian. (To be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM/GDIRADIO 89.3FM, sponsored by the White House Inn)

Volleyball - Clark/Willow Lake in Groton

5 p.m.: Junior high matches will be played in the GHS Gym.
5 p.m.: C match in the Arena followed by the JV and then the varsity match. Varsity match broadcast on GDLIVE.COM/GDIRADIO 89.3FM, sponsored by the Groton Chiropractic Clinic, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, S & S Lumber/Hardware Hank, BK Custom T's & More and Hefty Seed. The JV match will also be broadcast, sponsored by Jerry and Kathy Bjerke)

Friday, September 25, 2020 - Spirit Day

1 p.m.: Homecoming Parade (Broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM)
7 p.m.: Homecoming football game with Redfield at Doney Field (To be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM/GDIRADIO 89.3FM, sponsored by Mike Nehls for Brown County Commission - Mike will also be a guest commentary. Touchdown Sponsor is Frost Construction)

Saturday, September 26, 2020

1 pm: Girls soccer to host Tea Area. (To be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM/GDIRADIO 89.3FM - sponsored by some of the parents)
3 p.m.: Boys soccer to host Tea Area. (To be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM/GDIRADIO 89.3FM, sponsored by the Groton Vet Clinic)

Missouri River Bridge Replacement Project Awarded

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Secretary of Transportation Secretary Darin Bergquist announced that the Transportation Commission approved the award of the Pierre-Fort Pierre Missouri River Bridge replacement project to Jensen Construction Company for \$49.99 million.

“Replacing the Missouri River Bridge at this location has been in the planning stages for the better part of 20 years,” said Secretary Bergquist. “A project of this magnitude takes tremendous resources and cooperation from several entities. I’d like to extend a sincere thank you to the SDDOT team, cities of Pierre and Fort Pierre, FHWA, Governor Noem, and the Transportation Commission for bringing this project to life.”

The existing the John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge carries U.S. Highways 14 and 83, as well as S.D. Highway 34 over the Missouri River between Fort Pierre and Pierre. This project will replace the bridge built in 1962 that connects east and west river South Dakota near the center of the state. Construction is expected to take place over the next three years with completion expected in late 2023.

Work includes building a new bridge to the northwest of the current bridge, then removing the current bridge once traffic is moved to the new structure. For about the first year, work will occur mostly in the water as specialty crews work to build the foundations and substructure that will support the bridge structure.

The cities of Pierre and Fort Pierre have been very involved in the process and both have approved enhancements to the bridge and plazas that will be located at each end of the bridge. The new bridge will retain the designation as the John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge.

Traffic will be very minimally impacted during the project and more information will be forthcoming over the next few months.

#212 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I don't much like the look of things. Everything's up. New cases today were at 51,000, our first day in over two weeks over 50,000. I was thinking we'd left that in the rear view mirror, at least until it gets colder outside, but I was wrong about that. This was a 0.7% increase to 6,916,400. We keep this up, we'll hit seven million on Thursday; let's hope we don't keep this up. The 14-day new-case average increased again today, this time by a hefty 7% to almost 42,000, which is not at all amusing. This is a very worrisome sign: Our caseload is growing—again. The middle of the country is still on fire. States with the highest per capita new-case averages are North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Iowa, Utah, Missouri, Texas, and Nebraska, all near or over 150 new cases/100,000. We are seeing far broader spread than in any earlier period; the virus is working its way through rural communities and college towns. None of this is even remotely OK. We're in trouble, folks.

We did, as predicted, go over 200,000 deaths today; we're at 200,658. There were 918 new deaths reported today, a 0.5% increase. Looking back, in March we were seeing estimates that as many as 500 would die from this infection. Then in April, just a month later, we were hearing "more like 60,000"—big difference; I remember being horrified at that prediction. In May, we were still thinking 100,000 or so. Now, I don't want to minimize a single one of those projected 500 lives way back when—hard to say "only 500" when we're counting bodies—but that's looking pretty good about now. It's hard to wrap your head around 200,000 people dead from a single virus over the span of around seven months; this is the low end of the CDC's worst-case scenario from March, and now we're nowhere near out of this thing, and we've hit the worst case already. That's almost two and a half times the US military losses in the Vietnam and Korean conflicts combined. For the record, each of those conflicts went on for many years, not just seven months. Also for the record—and for all of the folks who are quite willing to sacrifice some old people in order to get back to their restaurant meals, Saturday nights out, and salon appointments—40,000 of these people were under 65. And, of course, that means some 160,000 grandpas, aunties, and old friends who were over 65 also died. This means something. Or it should.

The FDA has produced new, stricter guidelines for the emergency authorization of any new vaccine; these need to go through some layers of approval yet, including from the Department of Health and Human Services and the White House. The guidelines describe more specific criteria for trial data and recommend vetting by a committee of independent experts before the FDA authorizes any vaccine, calling for demonstrations of safety and mechanisms showing the vaccine provides long-term immunity and a reduced risk of severe symptoms.

And on the subject of a new vaccine, I read a disturbing op-ed by a couple of respected experts that deals with the phase 3 vaccine trials underway right now. You may recall that the companies with vaccines in phase 3 trials have released more information about their trial protocols—the list of rules and guidelines they'll be following throughout these trials and as they evaluate the vaccines.

Experimental design is important in any study; well done, it gives you an opportunity to notice when there's something wrong with your results and gives you confidence in whatever your results tell you. An important feature of experimental protocols is what's called the endpoint, the final result that will tell you you're found out whatever it is you were seeking to find out. With a vaccine, the endpoint will be efficacy of the vaccine, but even this specific-sounding description requires further definition: What do we mean by efficacy?

The FDA has said it won't license a vaccine unless it shows 50% efficacy, so we need to define that. In the Moderna and Pfizer trials, the endpoint is any symptomatic case of Covid-19, so even the mildest case, a cough plus a positive lab test, would be included. AstraZeneca plans to count mild symptoms with fever. Here's the thing: Mild cases are far more common than severe ones, so if we stop a trial as soon as the specified number of cases is reached, when we define a case as having any symptoms at all, a "successful" vaccine might prevent every mild case, but not touch the severe ones. A vaccine could meet the trial's benchmark for efficacy if it lowered the risk of mild disease, but never showed reductions in

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 6 of 82

moderate or severe forms of the disease. While this would be very nice for those who would have gotten mildly ill, it does nothing to reduce hospitalizations or deaths; and let's be honest that those are the cases which are disrupting our lives so much and hurting patients and families. As things stand, a vaccine could be approved that protects young, healthy adults quite well, but doesn't do much for the vulnerable.

The other problem is that Moderna and Pfizer have acknowledged their vaccines have some side effects which may look like the mild symptoms of Covid-19. More than half of participants experience headache, muscle pain, and chills. And if the vaccine's only benefit is to reduce the risk of these mild infections, but it causes symptoms pretty much like mild Covid-19, then it's tough to make the case that it provides a benefit at all. Could be the vaccine causes more discomfort than it prevents.

These writers say, "To say a vaccine works should mean that most people no longer run the risk of getting seriously sick. That's not what these trials will determine as they are currently outlined." Especially if they are stopped early after one of the interim evaluations because the number of infections statistically determined to show evidence of efficacy has been reached, we will not necessarily have the evidence we need that a vaccine protects against moderate and severe disease. The trials can still be adjusted to accommodate these concerns, either by the companies running them or by the FDA; and these authors are encouraging such changes be made.

We've seen reports from international clinical trials confirming that steroid drugs are effective in seriously ill patients. New treatment guidance says they should be used in severely and critically ill, but not mildly ill, patients. This is based on pooled data from seven randomized clinical trials evaluating three steroids in over 1700 patients. Each of the drugs reduced the risk of death. JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association) published this study plus three related studies and an editorial describing the research as an "important step forward." These widely-available and cheap treatments have shown more benefit than the expensive new stuff like remdesivir. Steroids as a group were linked with a one-third reduction in deaths among critically-ill patients in a number of different trials. So let's add dexamethasone (which we've talked about before), hydrocortisone (long-approved drug), and methylprednisolone (also long-approved) to our arsenal of weapons against the inflammatory effects of this virus.

There is a concern, however, and this is that these drugs can suppress the immune response to a virus. This means, if they are given too soon or in a mild case of disease, they may actually impair the body's ability to deal with the infection. Remdesivir shortens the course of the disease, but has not been demonstrated to reduce mortality; these drugs, given on an appropriate schedule, do reduce mortality. This is a big deal.

Five years ago, as a high school freshman, Chloe Duckworth founded a program at a hospital in San Jose, California, a hospital that serves a large population of homeless individuals. Her program had volunteers visiting hospitalized patients and helping with their care. Asavari Gowda collected supplies from hospitals that were no longer usable by the hospital due to regulations—things like unused items from opened sterile packs and outdated, but still functional supplies—and taking them to food banks so they would be available to the homeless. When the pandemic began, hospitals shut down to visitors, and these kinds of volunteer activities had to stop, and the friends had to get creative.

Joined by Chloe's sister, Heather, and Quynh Nuyen, these women formed a nonprofit called Hope Hearted to raise money and provide supplies to the substantial population of unhoused people who are highly vulnerable to infection and growing in size due to the recession we're facing. They're assembling basic kits to be distributed at food banks and shelters; the kits include a face mask, bandages, a water bottle, hand sanitizer, bars of soap tissues, and disinfectant wipes. They prefer to hand the kits out in person at shelters and such, when the organizations' rules permit; when they can't, they just drop them off. Their goal is to distribute 5000 kits by the end of the year.

Now that they can no longer go into hospitals to collect unused bandages and such, they have raised money mostly from family and friends, plus local stores; but they are seeing the limits to that. As a result, they have been reaching out to corporate partners asking for in-kind and monetary donations. They talk like CEOs: Chloe Duckworth, now a sophomore in college, said, "In terms of scaling, it's not really sustain-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 7 of 82

able to have this business model where we're always getting donations from family friends. We can only reach out to them so often." So they're evolving to meet the needs of the time we're in.

They're also providing a sense of hope to those of us who hear about their work. These are people who see a need and figure out a way to serve it. Although they're intending to help a very specific population, I think they have the potential to help a much broader swath of the population—those who hear about them and the people these folks are inspired to help. That's really passing it on.

Keep yourself healthy. We'll talk again.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 8 of 82

Area COVID-19 Cases

	Sept. 23
Minnesota	91,422
Nebraska	41,785
Montana	10,700
Colorado	66,053
Wyoming	4,231
North Dakota	18,508
South Dakota	19,189
United States	6,897,495
US Deaths	200,818

Minnesota	+480
Nebraska	+397
Montana	+271
Colorado	+654
Wyoming	+42
North Dakota	+264
South Dakota	+320
United States	+39,357
US Deaths	+928

	Sept. 16	Sept. 17	Sept. 18	Sept. 19	Sept. 20	Sept. 21	Sept. 22
Minnesota	85,351	85,813	86,722	87,807	88,721	90,017	90,942
Nebraska	38,970	39,419	39,921	40,387	40,797	41,083	41,388
Montana	9,244	9,431	9,647	9,871	10,163	10,299	10,429
Colorado	62,099	62,686	63,145	63,750	64,356	64,857	65,399
Wyoming	3,762	3,866	3,936	4,009	4,039	4,124	4,189
North Dakota	16,066	16,333	16,723	17,230	17,607	17,958	18,244
South Dakota	16,994	17,291	17,686	18,075	18,444	18,696	18,869
United States	6,606,674	6,631,561	6,676,410	6,726,480	6,766,631	6,799,141	6,858,138
US Deaths	195,961	196,831	197,655	198,603	199,268	199,474	199,890

Minnesota	+402	+462	+909	+1,085	+914	1,296	+925
Nebraska	+328	+449	+502	+466	+410	+286	+305
Montana	+137	+187	+216	+224	+292	+136	+130
Colorado	+400	+587	+459	+605	+606	+501	+542
Wyoming	+39	+104	+70	+73	+30	+85	+65
North Dakota	+ 235	+267	+390	+507	+377	+351	+286
South Dakota	+195	+297	+395	+389	+369	+252	+173
United States	+51,431	+24,887	+44,849	+50,070	+40,151	+32,510	+58,997
US Deaths	+1,416	+870	+824	+948	+665	+206	+416

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 9 of 82

September 22nd COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Not sure what to say. I'm not an expert, but I think unless something drastically changes, you will continue to see the numbers increase. The high positive numbers will result in high recovery numbers in a couple of weeks. The yo-yo effect will continue. We had 17 more currently being hospitalized. Despite the high numbers, we had more recoveries than positive numbers today.

Locally, Brown had 21 positive and 11 recoveries. Day had two positive and five recoveries. Edmunds had five positive and four recoveries. Marshall had two positive and one recovery. McPherson had two positive and four recoveries. Spink had seven positive and nine recoveries.

No deaths in South Dakota. North Dakota had three.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +21 (1,052) Positivity Rate: 19.4%
Total Tests: 108 (9,934)
Recovered: +11 (914)
Active Cases: +9 (135)

Ever Hospitalized: +0 (38)
Deaths: 0 (3)
Percent Recovered: 86.9%

South Dakota:

Positive: +320 (19,189 total) Positivity Rates: 13.8%

Total Tests: 2,318 (247,705 total)
Hospitalized: +26 (1,323 total). 178 currently hospitalized +17)

Deaths: +0 (202 total)
Recovered: +393 (16,170 total)
Active Cases: -73 (2,817)
Percent Recovered: 84.3%

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 7% Covid, 46% Non-Covid, 46% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 6% Covid, 62% Non-Covid, 32% Available

Ventilator Capacity: 5% Covid, 14% Non-Covid, 81% Available

Fully recovered from positive cases: Aurora 42-42, Mellette 25-25, Miner 19-19.

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 cases)
Beadle (9): +4 positive, +5 recovered (45 active cases)
Bennett (1): +2 recovered (23 active cases)
Bon Homme (1): +1 positive, +4 recovered (15

active cases)

Brookings (2): +16 positive, +9 recovered (116 active cases)

Brown (3): +21 positive, +12 recovered (135 active cases)

Brule: +2 positive, +2 recovered (16 active cases)

Buffalo (3): +1 positive (6 active cases)

Butte (1): 18 active cases

Campbell: +1 positive (7 active cases)

Charles Mix: +7 positive, +2 recovered (23 active cases)

Clark: +2 recovered (5 active cases)

Clay (5) +3 positive, +11 recovered (41 active cases)

Codington (3): +22 positive, +29 recovered (188 active cases)

Corson (1): +1 positive, +2 recovered (10 active cases)

Custer (2): +3 positive, +3 recovered (39 active case)

Davison (2): +14 positive, +4 recovered (52 active cases)

Day: +2 positive, +5 recovered (12 active cases)

Deuel: +1 recovered (11 active cases)

Dewey: +4 positive, +3 recovered (37 active cases)

Douglas: +6 positive, +4 recovered (27 active cases)

Edmunds: +5 positive, +4 recovered (20 active cases)

Fall River (3): +2 recovered (17 active cases)

Faulk (1): +3 positive, +3 recovered (13 active cases)

Broton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 10 of 82

Grant (1): +2 positive, +6 recovered (31 active cases)
 Gregory (1): +9 positive, +5 recovered (55 active cases)
 Haakon: +1 recovered (7 active case)
 Hamlin: +1 recovered (8 active cases)
 Hand: +1 positive, +3 recovered (8 active cases)
 Hanson: +2 positive, +1 recovered (7 active cases)
 Harding: Fully Recovered
 Hughes (4): +10 positive, +10 recovered (154 active cases)
 Hutchinson (2): +1 positive, +1 recovered (17 active cases)
 Hyde: +1 positive, +2 recovered (8 active cases)
 Jackson (1): +1 positive, +1 recovered (11 active cases)
 Jerauld (1): +5 positive, +4 recovered (19 active cases)
 Jones: 2 active cases
 Kingsbury: +1 positive, +2 recovered (14 active cases)
 Lake (7): +1 positive, +6 recovered (21 active cases)

Lawrence (4): +8 positive, +16 recovered (68 active cases)
 Lincoln (2): +11 positive, +16 recovered (160 active cases)
 Lyman (3): +1 recovered (5 active cases)
 Marshall: +2 positive, +1 recovered (10 active cases)
 McCook (1): +2 positive, +2 recovered (15 active cases)
 McPherson: +2 positive, +4 recovered (8 active case)
 Meade (4): +13 positive, +16 recovered (97 active cases)
 Mellette: +1 recovered (3 active cases)
 Miner: Fully Recovered
 Minnehaha (78): +62 positive, +74 recovered (500 active cases)
 Moody: +4 positive, +3 recovered (13 active cases)
 Oglala Lakota (3): -1 positive, +3 recovered (28 active cases)
 Pennington (35): +37 positive, +60 recovered (299 active cases)
 Perkins: +4 positive, +3 recovered (10 active cases)
 Potter: 1 recovered (14 active cases)
 Roberts (1): +1 recovered (43 active cases)
 Sanborn: +2 positive (5 active cases)
 Spink: +7 positive, +9 recovered (27 active cases)
 Stanley: +2 recovered (5 active cases)
 Sully: 1 active case
 Todd (5): +3 positive, +3 recovered (15 active cases)
 Tripp: +2 positive, +6 recovered (54 active cases)
 Turner (2): +1 positive, +3 recovered (34 active cases)
 Union (5): +3 positive, +10 recovered (44 active cases)
 Walworth: +1 positive, +3 recovered (28 active cases)
 Yankton (4): +3 positive, +12 recovered (74 active cases)

Ziebach: +1 recovered (15 active case)
 North Dakota Dept. of Health Report
 COVID-19 Daily Report, September 22:

- 6.0% rolling 14-day positivity
- 9.1% daily positivity
- 266 new positives
- 2,910 susceptible test encounters
- 92 currently hospitalized (+5)
- 3,092 active cases (-118)

Total Deaths: +3 (196)

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	610	0
10-19 years	2123	0
20-29 years	4686	2
30-39 years	3335	7
40-49 years	2618	10
50-59 years	2560	20
60-69 years	1714	32
70-79 years	866	35
80+ years	677	96

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	9868	96
Male	9321	106

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 11 of 82

County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread
Aurora	45	42	486	0	Minimal
Beadle	707	653	2362	9	Substantial
Bennett	62	40	634	1	Substantial
Bon Homme	77	61	1114	1	Moderate
Brookings	696	578	4292	2	Substantial
Brown	1052	914	6534	3	Substantial
Brule	95	79	994	0	Moderate
Buffalo	119	110	711	3	Minimal
Butte	77	58	1199	1	Moderate
Campbell	13	6	143	0	Moderate
Charles Mix	150	124	2014	0	Moderate
Clark	32	27	513	0	Moderate
Clay	540	494	2226	5	Substantial
Codington	741	550	4432	3	Substantial
Corson	85	74	713	1	Moderate
Custer	175	134	1011	2	Substantial
Davison	225	170	3227	2	Substantial
Day	63	51	888	0	Moderate
Deuel	76	65	595	0	Substantial
Dewey	121	84	2781	0	Substantial
Douglas	70	43	514	0	Substantial
Edmunds	86	66	555	0	Substantial
Fall River	87	67	1295	3	Substantial
Faulk	64	50	288	1	Moderate
Grant	94	62	1039	1	Substantial
Gregory	107	51	594	1	Substantial
Haakon	18	11	331	0	Moderate
Hamlin	80	72	924	0	Moderate
Hand	27	19	426	0	Moderate
Hanson	32	25	314	0	Minimal
Harding	3	3	65	0	Minimal
Hughes	330	172	2605	4	Substantial
Hutchinson	75	56	1150	2	Moderate

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 12 of 82

Hyde	16	8	196	0	Moderate
Jackson	27	15	541	1	Moderate
Jerauld	73	53	322	1	Substantial
Jones	7	5	84	0	Minimal
Kingsbury	47	33	752	0	Substantial
Lake	173	145	1237	7	Substantial
Lawrence	342	270	3071	4	Substantial
Lincoln	1223	1061	9661	2	Substantial
Lyman	112	104	1154	3	Moderate
Marshall	37	27	623	0	Moderate
McCook	85	69	859	1	Substantial
McPherson	29	21	291	0	Moderate
Meade	475	374	2982	4	Substantial
Mellette	29	26	454	0	Minimal
Miner	19	19	322	0	Minimal
Minnehaha	6293	5715	37310	78	Substantial
Moody	75	62	833	0	Moderate
Oglala Lakota	228	197	3442	3	Substantial
Pennington	2041	1707	14628	35	Substantial
Perkins	34	24	299	0	Moderate
Potter	39	25	448	0	Moderate
Roberts	163	119	2510	1	Substantial
Sanborn	22	17	297	0	Minimal
Spink	113	86	1411	0	Substantial
Stanley	32	27	388	0	Moderate
Sully	9	8	127	0	Minimal
Todd	108	89	2676	5	Moderate
Tripp	99	45	797	0	Substantial
Turner	142	106	1251	2	Substantial
Union	360	310	2561	6	Substantial
Walworth	93	65	1095	0	Substantial
Yankton	360	282	4268	4	Substantial
Ziebach	60	45	490	0	Minimal
Unassigned	0	0	14808	0	

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 13 of 82



- ✓ 30 year law enforcement veteran with city and county government experience
- ✓ Progressive thinker/ Conservative spender
- ✓ Common sense approach to solving issues



I pledge

- ✓ to put taxpayers first by no wasteful spending
- ✓ to increase transparency to taxpayers
- ✓ to maintain roads and bridges
- ✓ to the creation of a criminal justice task force addressing Meth, Opioid and other drug addictions

Your vote will be much appreciated!



Absentee voting begins September 18th



Representation from eastern Brown County is long overdue! (35 years)

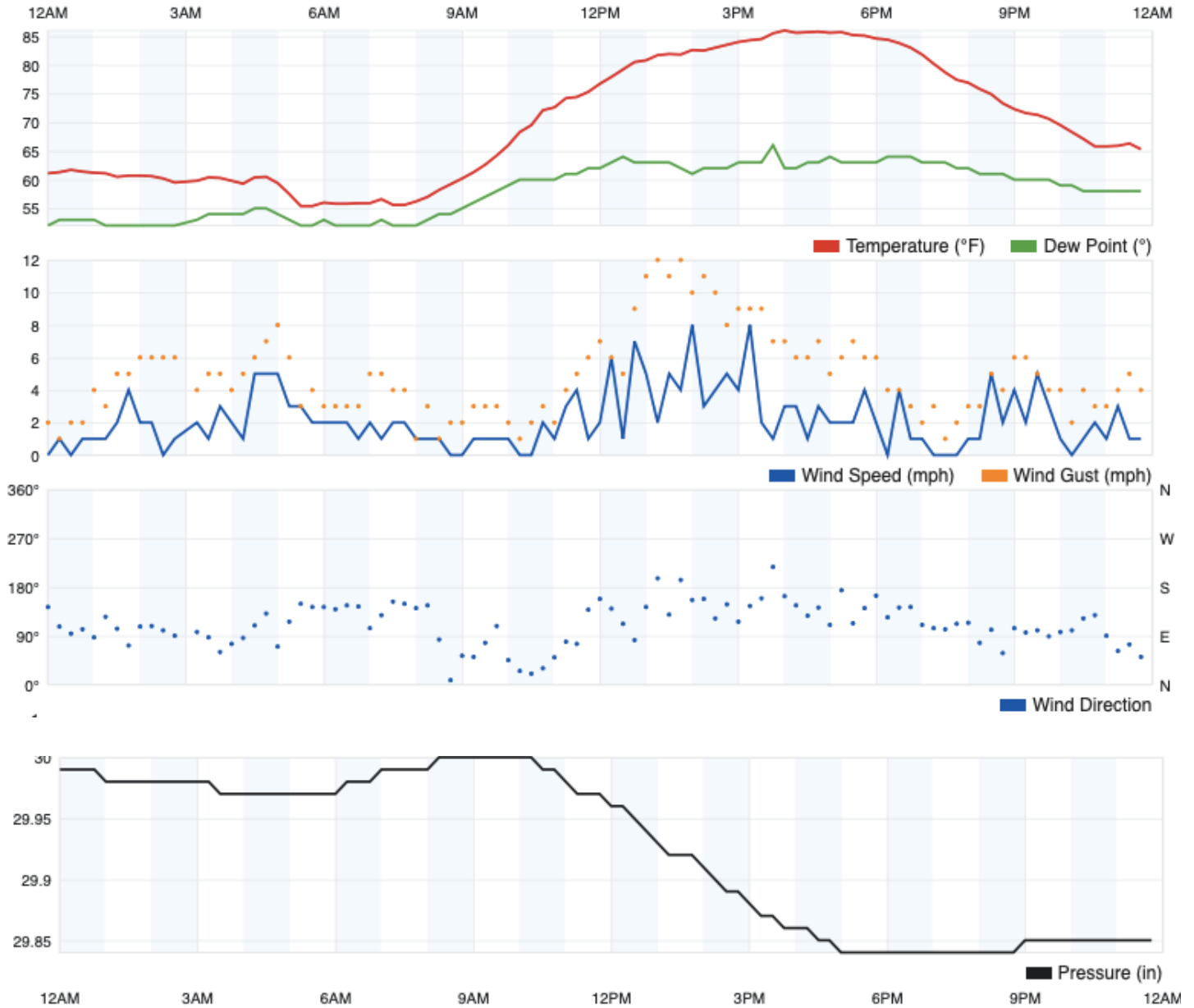
Vote for Michael Nehls for Brown County Commission (your vote **only for Mike could make a difference)**

Paid for by the committee to elect Mike Nehls to Brown County Commission

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 14 of 82

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 15 of 82

Today



Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Thursday



Sunny

Thursday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Friday



Mostly Cloudy

High: 82 °F

Low: 51 °F

High: 78 °F

Low: 57 °F

High: 76 °F

Today
Partly Sunny, Warm & Hazy
Highs in the 80s

Tonight
Partly Cloudy
Lows 45-55°F

Thursday
Sunny, Mild East, Warm West
Highs 72-90°F

***** High Fire Danger Central South Dakota**

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

ISSUED: 2:58 AM - Wednesday, September 23, 2020

A system will move across the region today, but rain chances are minimal given the very dry atmosphere. Meanwhile, the sky will be hazy at times due to elevated smoke. Temperatures should remain well above normal. #sdwx #mnwx

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 16 of 82

Today in Weather History

September 23, 1984: Snow fell from the early morning to the late evening hours across northwest South Dakota bringing more than a foot of snow to some locations. Camp Crook in Harding County reported 14 inches. Amounts between six and twelve inches were common across Harding and Perkins Counties as well as parts of Meade and Butte Counties. Roads in these areas were slushy with icy bridges. The snow covered much of the western third of South Dakota with depths an inch or less.

September 23, 2004: A tornado touched down northeast of Browns Valley, MN during the late afternoon. This tornado traveled through a cornfield and a farmstead before dissipating. The tornado damaged several sheds and a trailer along with toppling a large grain bin. Another tornado touched down south and southwest of Rosholt in Roberts County in the late afternoon. This F2 tornado destroyed a house, a mobile home, and a travel trailer. The tornado also killed three cattle.

1551: The Grand Harbour at Valetta, Malta, was hit by a waterspout which then moved inland. This waterspout sunk four ships, killing at least 600 people. It should be noted, the year of the event could also be 1555, or 1556 as sources conflict.

1722: La Nouvelle-Orléans (New Orleans) was founded May 7, 1718, by the French Mississippi Company, under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, on land inhabited by the Chitimacha. Four years later, a hurricane destroys nearly every building in the village, including the only church and hospital.

1975: On September 22, Hurricane Eloise intensified to attain Category 2 strength, and became a major hurricane of Category 3 status shortly after that as it turned towards the northeast. Several ships penetrated the storm's center during its passage through the Gulf. Hurricane Eloise continued to strengthen until it reached its peak winds of 125 mph and a minimum barometric pressure of about 955 mbar. It moved ashore along the Florida Panhandle near Panama City on September 23.

2009: A massive dust storm swept 725 miles across the outback to engulf Sydney, New South Wales producing a red hue across the region from the 22nd through the 24th. Wind gusts topped 60 mph as the storm transported an estimated 5,000 metric tons of dust, spreading it into the southern region of Queensland.

1815 - One of the greatest hurricanes to strike New England made landfall at Long Island and crossed Massachusetts and New Hampshire. It was the worst tempest in nearly two hundred years, equal to the hurricane which struck in 1938, and one of a series of severe summer and autumn storms to affect shipping lanes that year. (David Ludlum)

1904 - The temperature at Charlotteburg, NJ, dipped to 23 degrees, the coldest reading of record for so early in the autumn for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - A thunderstorm downburst caused a timber blowdown in the Kaibab National Forest north of the Grand Canyon. Two hundred acres were completely destroyed, and scattered destruction occurred across another 3300 acres. Many trees were snapped off 15 to 30 feet above ground level. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Autumn began on a rather pleasant note for much of the nation. Showers and thunderstorms were confined to Florida and the southwestern deserts. Warm weather continued in the western U.S., and began to spread into the Great Plains Region, but even in the southwestern deserts readings remained below 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front in the south central U.S. produced severe weather in Oklahoma during the afternoon and early evening hours. Thunderstorms produced softball size hail near Noble and Enterprise, and baseball size hail at Lequire and Kinta. A tornado near Noble OK destroyed a mobile home injuring one person. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Seventeen cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Devils Lake ND with a reading of 22 degrees. Jackson KY reported a record low of 41 degrees during the late afternoon. Strong northwesterly winds ushering cold air into the central and northeastern U.S. gusted to 55 mph at Indianapolis IND. Winds along the cold front gusted to 65 mph at Norfolk VA, and thunderstorms along the cold front deluged Roseland NJ with 2.25 inches of rain in one hour. The temperature at Richmond VA plunged from 84 degrees to 54 degrees in two hours. Snow and sleet was reported at Binghamton NY. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

Groton Daily Independent

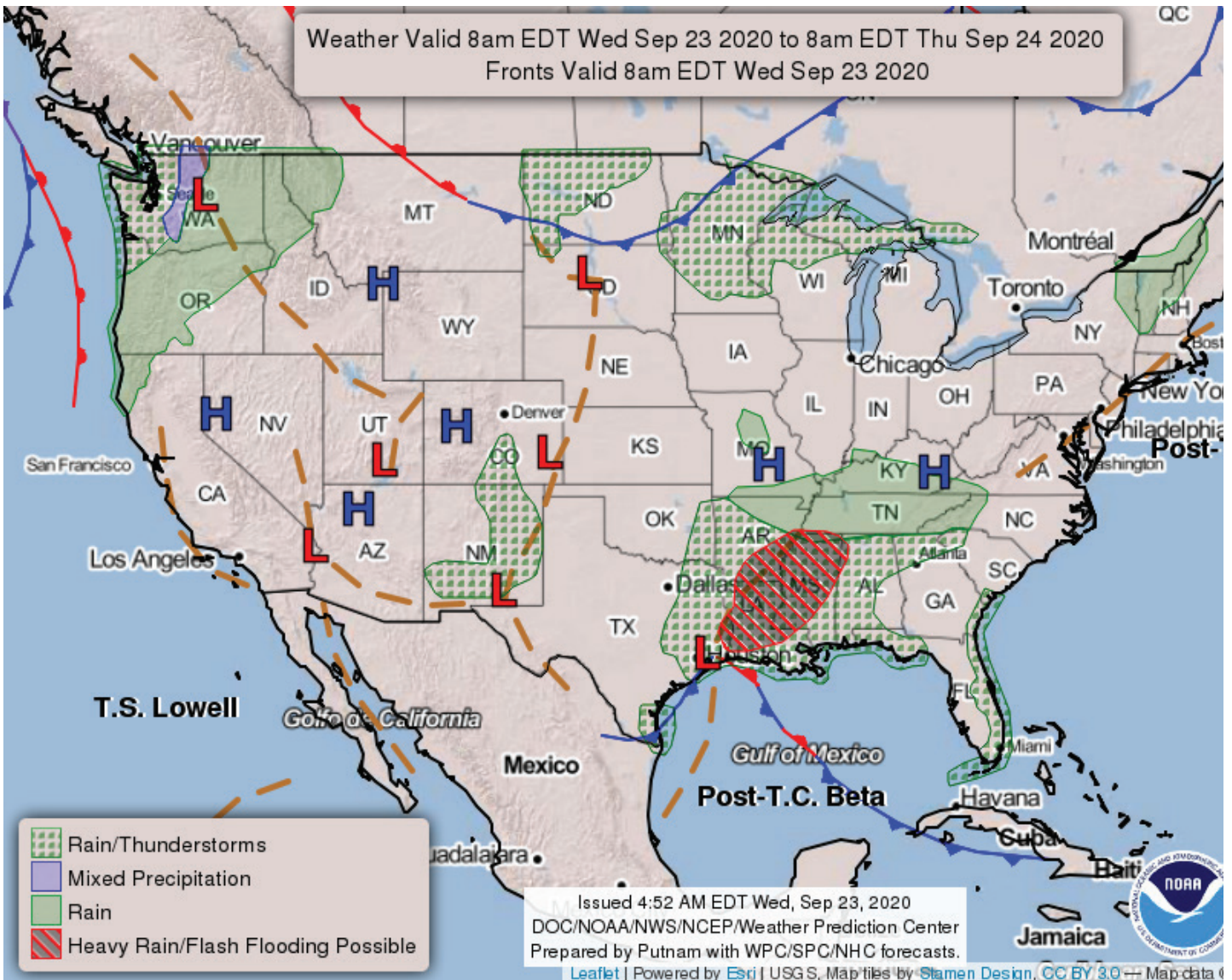
Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 17 of 82

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 86 °F at 3:57 PM
Low Temp: 55 °F at 5:27 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 1:07 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 94° in 1935
Record Low: 22° in 2012
Average High: 69°F
Average Low: 42°F
Average Precip in Sept...: 1.62
Precip to date in Sept.: 1.52
Average Precip to date: 17.91
Precip Year to Date: 14.87
Sunset Tonight: 7:28 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:24 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 18 of 82



THE NEED TO BE KIND

Miss Wilson went to the post office nearly every day to buy a stamp or two. Often the line was long, and it appeared that she had difficulty standing quietly, waiting for her turn at the counter.

A stranger who had seen her on many occasions asked, "Why don't you just use the stamp machine? It would be so much easier and quicker, and you wouldn't have to stand so long."

"Oh my," she said, "the clerks are so kind to me. They always smile at me and ask me how I am doing and how I feel. The machines don't do that."

Kindness does two things at the same time: It makes us feel good, and others feel good. And, it rarely costs us anything even though it usually makes others feel important.

Kindness, like love, has its source in God. We read in Titus that "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared in us, we know that He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy."

When we begin to understand the fullness of God's kindness to us personally, we will no doubt see others in a different light. We certainly do not deserve God's compassion and kindness - yet He has been more than kind to us. He held nothing back in giving His Son to be our Savior. Showing kindness to others demonstrates His love.

Prayer: Acts of kindness, Father, present endless opportunities for us to show others that we care for them just as You do. Help us to represent You always in all ways. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:4-5

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 19 of 82

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)
- 10/30/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
- **CANCELLED** 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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 20 of 82

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

36-43-44-55-68, Mega Ball: 12, Megaplier: 4

(thirty-six, forty-three, forty-four, fifty-five, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: twelve; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. Waubay/Summit, 25-17, 25-17, 25-15

Baltic def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 25-22, 25-20, 15-25, 14-25, 15-11

Chester def. Parker, 25-15, 25-15, 21-25, 25-22

Clark/Willow Lake def. Lake Preston, 25-17, 25-23, 25-13

Colman-Egan def. DeSmet, 25-8, 25-16, 25-17

Corsica/Stickney def. Kimball/White Lake, 25-17, 19-25, 25-23, 25-23

Crawford, Neb. def. Edgemont, 25-17, 23-25, 21-25, 25-18, 15-12

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Howard, 25-18, 25-13, 25-16

Deubrook def. Deuel, 25-10, 25-14, 25-10

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Beresford, 25-17, 25-16, 25-21

Faulkton def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-16, 25-27, 25-17, 16-25, 15-12

Florence/Henry def. Sisseton, 25-7, 25-20, 25-17

Garretson def. Dell Rapids, 25-10, 25-16, 25-19

Hamlin def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-20, 25-12, 25-15

Harrisburg def. Brookings, 25-16, 22-25, 25-9, 25-18

Hill City def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-4, 25-13, 25-7

Hitchcock-Tulare def. Iroquois, 25-8, 25-14, 25-14

James Valley Christian def. DeSmet, 25-17, 25-16, 25-18

Langford def. Wilmot, 25-19, 25-14, 25-17

Lennox def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-17, 14-25, 25-12, 25-11

McCook Central/Montrose def. Flandreau, 25-17, 25-21, 26-24

North Central Co-Op def. Sully Buttes, 25-19, 25-20, 25-22

Northwestern def. Leola/Frederick, 25-7, 25-5, 25-9

Platte-Geddes def. Burke, 25-13, 25-19, 20-25, 25-18

Redfield def. Miller, 25-14, 17-25, 21-25, 28-26, 17-15

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Sioux Falls Washington, 25-15, 25-23, 25-14

Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Mitchell, 25-13, 25-23, 25-19

Spearfish def. Sturgis Brown, 24-26, 23-25, 25-20, 25-16, 15-9

St. Thomas More def. Hot Springs, 25-15, 25-10, 25-13

Sunshine Bible Academy def. Lower Brule, 25-17, 25-18, 25-13

Tea Area def. Vermillion, 25-22, 25-13, 25-16

Timber Lake def. McLaughlin, 25-8, 25-7, 25-10

Tri-Valley def. Canton, 19-25, 25-17, 25-13, 25-22

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 21 of 82

Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-17, 25-23, 25-22

Wagner def. Bon Homme, 25-16, 25-20, 25-16

Warner def. Groton Area, 25-6, 25-6, 25-8

West Central def. Dakota Valley, 25-9, 25-13, 25-14

Wolsey-Wessington def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-16, 21-25, 25-17, 24-26, 15-9

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Editorial Roundup: Excerpts from South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press and Dakotan, Yankton, Sept. 21

Chaos lurks after death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg

The death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is a profound loss to the judicial conscience of this nation.

But in our mourning, there is no escaping the political firestorm that has erupted with her passing — as if this election year needed even more flammable fuel.

Within two hours after the news of Ginsburg's death broke, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declared that the Senate would proceed with all due speed on confirming the nominee put forth by President Donald Trump. This contradicts what memorably happened in 2016 when Justice Antonin Scalia died that winter and President Barack Obama put forth a nominee but McConnell refused to even consider the nomination on the grounds that, it being an election year, the next president should make that decision. So, in 2016, a Democratic president's nominee was stonewalled for 10 months because it was an election year, but in 2020, just six weeks before the election, a Republican president's nominee will apparently proceed full steam ahead.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune has embraced McConnell's approach. "As Leader McConnell said, President Trump's Supreme Court nominee will receive a vote on the floor of the U.S. Senate." This in contrast to what Thune said of Obama's ability to nominate a justice in March 2016: "Since the next presidential election is underway, the next president should make this lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court."

Of course, this is 1) naked hypocrisy, and 2) utterly unsurprising. In this political climate, no one can pretend otherwise.

One rationalization for this flip-flop is the argument that the Democrats would do the same thing if given the chance. That may well be true, for it is a politically irresistible temptation. But that supposition also functions as self-fulfilling prophesy, for Democrats would now likely do just that in response to this.

And here lurks chaos.

Trump may indeed send a nomination to the Senate and could get a vote prior to the election — although, at this writing, that isn't a sure thing as a few Republican senators are mulling whether to adhere to the 2016 precedent. In this scenario, it could put an even more pronounced rightward tilt to the court that may last a generation (although, given the turnover we've seen lately, maybe 5-10 years at best).

However, should the Republicans proceed with this but Joe Biden then wins the presidency and Democrats take the Senate — which is a real possibility — the Democrats could opt to scrap the filibuster rule and expand the Supreme Court by two or four or six (or more) justices, a maneuver that would not fall under constitutional constraints.

Thus, we may be on the precipice of "slippery slope" territory with this situation. (As an aside, an expansion of the Supreme Court has intriguing arguments for it both ways, but that's another debate for another time.)

At this point, it's hard to see who stands down in this political confrontation. It's also difficult to see how one action on one side (other than enough Republicans refusing to move with this until after the election) can diffuse the other and bring a sense of order to this extraordinary moment in our history.

This is high drama in real time, and it may remain so for quite some time.

Daily Leader, Madison, Sept. 16

Increase in vehicle-pedestrian accidents concerning

It's far too early to make final conclusions about an alleged fatal accident involving South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg and Joseph Boever in rural Hyde county. The incident is being investigated by the Department of Public Safety, the Hyde County Sheriff's Office and the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

Preliminary conclusions are that Ravnsborg was driving on the highway when he struck and killed Boever, who was walking along the roadway at about 10:30 p.m. Saturday.

We should wait for the investigation to be completed before we make final conclusions. But we should still discuss the seemingly frequent accidents and close calls between vehicles and pedestrians.

In recent weeks, there have been news reports of vehicles hitting pedestrians in Sioux Falls. We've read about vehicle-pedestrian accidents on Native American reservations. We've heard of close calls between vehicles and pedestrians, as well as the angry exchanges that have occurred afterward.

In many cases, we believe, both parties can share blame. Drivers may be texting, changing a radio station or otherwise distracted. There is no question that enforcement of distracted driving laws should continue to be a public safety priority.

And we've seen plenty of pedestrians walking on roadways when they shouldn't be, including those who are impaired by alcohol. Recently, we saw runners on the shoulder of Highway 81 north of Madison an hour before dawn.

We need to fix both sides of the equation. Drivers must be more attentive to what's ahead on the road, whether it's a person, animal or debris. Pedestrians shouldn't walk on highways or roads. If it's unavoidable, pedestrians should walk in the ditch, even though it would be more difficult.

And municipalities should continue to construct and maintain sidewalks throughout their jurisdictions. Madison's long-running sidewalk plan has certainly spared many people the heartbreak of a car-pedestrian accident.

As COVID-19 cases rise, health care industry sees upheaval

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Tuesday reported 320 new cases of COVID-19 as the state experiences an uptick in cases in recent weeks and state lawmakers readied plans to address the crisis with federal relief money.

Representatives from the state's health care providers told lawmakers that the pandemic has stressed their operations, revenues and staff as the number of hospitalizations increased and infections spread. State legislators concluded a series of public input sessions Tuesday as they prepare for a special legislative session on Oct. 5.

Gov. Kristi Noem called the session so the Legislature can provide input on using the \$1.25 billion in federal funds the state received to address the pandemic and its economic impact. The state has so far spent about \$114 million.

The Republican governor has proposed making \$100 million available to health care providers that provide services through Medicaid and other federal and state programs. She has also proposed a plan to make \$400 million available to businesses hurt by the pandemic.

Over the last two weeks, South Dakota has reported the nation's second-most new cases per capita, with 405 new cases per 100,000 people. The number of hospitalizations also rose to 178, representing 7% of hospital beds in the state. About 46% of hospital beds are open statewide.

Noem continued to downplay the threat of the pandemic, saying in a tweet that "we continue to be in good shape" with the number of people hospitalized.

But South Dakota's Second Judicial Circuit Court, which operates in Sioux Falls, announced that it is suspending jury trials, citing the rise in hospitalizations. Three school districts in the state have also canceled

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 23 of 82

in-person classes due to outbreaks among staff.

Health care providers described to lawmakers how their operations have been upended in recent months, creating a crunch that has led to both shortfalls in staffing and forced furloughs in their industry.

"Nursing centers are facing extraordinarily difficult choices," Mark Deak, the executive director of the South Dakota Health Care Association, which lobbies for long-term care facilities, told lawmakers.

He also warned that some facilities could face closures as they bear extra expenses combined with a downturn in residents due to fears of outbreaks in facilities. The pandemic also has taken a toll on the mental health of residents as facilities restrict visitors.

With the region emerging as a hotspot of the virus, others pushed for expanding testing to help stem an increase in COVID-19 patients and outbreaks in long-term care facilities.

The seven-day positivity average for COVID-19 testing is over 17% in South Dakota, according to the COVID Tracking Project. That is one of the highest positivity rates in the nation and an indicator that there are many infections that testing is not catching.

"Additional hotspots will emerge over the next weeks and months, even in rural communities," said Jill Franken, who is a board member at the Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas.

Over the course of the pandemic, more than 19,000 people have tested positive for the virus in South Dakota. About 84% of those people have fully recovered, but 2,817 have active infections and 202 have died. The Department of Health did not report any new deaths Tuesday.

Lopers announce 4-game football schedule starting in Oct. 31

KEARNEY, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska-Kearney has announced a four-game nonconference football schedule beginning Oct. 31.

A scheduling alliance with other Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association teams will account for two games. The other games are against Chadron State and South Dakota Mines.

"This gives our football student-athletes an opportunity to compete in a few contests this fall. Our students and coaches are better off engaging in activities together," UNK athletics director Marc Bauer said Monday. "Studies demonstrate that participation in sports has many significant benefits, such as improved academic achievement, high energy levels and a focused mindset. We want to provide the best possible experience and opportunities for our student-athletes to succeed and do it safely."

UNK, which began practice last week, will host Chadron State (Nov. 7) and Missouri Western State (Nov. 21) and travel to Pittsburg State (Oct. 31) and South Dakota Mines (Nov. 14). Both Chadron State and SDMT are members of the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference.

UNK and its opponents will be tested for COVID-19 once a week, per NCAA resocialization rules. UNK Athletics also has a daily COVID screening process that has taken place since June 1. Fans will be allowed to attend games in Kearney, with more information and policies to be announced later. Each school may have different attendance policies.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/Collegefootball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Oglala man pleads not guilty in 2019 fatal crash

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — An Oglala man has pleaded not guilty to involuntary manslaughter for a 2019 crash that killed a 74-year-old woman.

Clifford Running Hawk, 44, entered his plea earlier this month at the federal courthouse in Rapid City, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in South Dakota. He faces up to eight years in prison if convicted.

Running Hawk is accused of driving under the influence and speeding near Oglala on Nov. 21, 2019 when he crashed into an oncoming vehicle, resulting in the death of Virginia Kills Crow Indian.

The mother of eight children died several days later at the hospital in Rapid City.

The Latest: United Arab Emirates sees spike in virus cases

By The Associated Press undefined

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- The United Arab Emirates has recorded 1,083 new coronavirus infections, marking a four-month peak after schools and businesses reopened across the country.

That brings the total number of confirmed cases in the UAE to 87,530 and 406 deaths.

While the spike follows an aggressive coronavirus testing campaign, the country hasn't seen such high infection rates since mid-May.

In the months since, authorities have relaxed restrictions. Dubai, the region's business hub, reopened its airport for international travelers and schools resumed in-person instruction.

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

- More virus-related restrictions in store for hard-hit Madrid
- 200,000 dead in the US as Trump vilifies science, prioritizes politics
- India adds 83,347 new coronavirus cases in past 24 hours
- Johnson & Johnson to begin huge study to see if a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine can protect against the virus. It will test 60,000 volunteers in various countries.
- Israel has reported a new record level of daily cases of coronavirus as government officials planned to discuss tightening a new nationwide lockdown.
- One of just four doctors managing the COVID-19 unit at a Sierra Leone hospital is also trying to provide quality care for those afflicted with other infectious diseases.

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

MADRID — Health authorities in Madrid may extend to more communities the restrictions on movement it imposed on areas of the Spanish capital with high coronavirus infection rates.

About 860,000 Madrid residents already are required to justify trips out of 37 neighborhoods, mostly working-class areas. People have complained that the restrictions stigmatize the poor.

The region's deputy health chief, Antonio Zapatero, says a decision on additional measures, including possible customer limits in restaurants, would be announced Friday.

Zapatero says the outbreak situation in the Madrid region, which has a population of 6.6 million, was one of "sustained increase."

Madrid had a contagion rate of 772 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 14 days, nearly three times Spain's national average of 287 cases per 100,000.

Spain recorded 241 more virus-related deaths on Tuesday, bringing the total confirmed death toll to 30,904.

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis says all segments of society, especially the poor, have a role to play in making the world a better place after the coronavirus and drug companies shouldn't get a bigger say than front line health workers.

Francis called Wednesday for an inclusive rethink of the economic, social and political structures of the global economy that have showed their weaknesses during the pandemic. He spoke during his weekly general audience, held in a Vatican courtyard before a few dozen masked faithful.

Francis has long insisted on the need to involve society's most marginalized groups, such as indigenous, poor and elderly people, in making decisions about their own futures.

On Wednesday, he extended that concept to the virus, saying: "Everyone needs to have the possibility of assuming responsibility in the process of healing the society of which he or she is a part."

The pope added: "The large pharmaceutical companies are listened to more than the healthcare workers employed on the front lines in hospitals or in refugee camps. This is not a good path."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 25 of 82

Francis next week is expected to release an encyclical on fraternity and solidarity in the post-coronavirus world.

LONDON — The British government is defending its strategy for combatting a second wave of coronavirus infections from criticism that new restrictions didn't go far enough to stop the exponential spread of the virus.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson unveiled a slate of new rules on Tuesday to stem the renewed outbreak, including a 10 p.m. curfew on bars and restaurants, increased use of face masks and again encouraging people to work from home.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab told Sky News on Wednesday that the government's approach was "focused, balanced and proportionate." He says that if everyone complies with the measures, they will be enough to prevent a second national lockdown "with all the impact on society and families but also the damage it would do to businesses."

Many health experts said the government's plan wouldn't be enough to stop the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections.

The dean of epidemiology and population health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, John Edmunds, says the government needs to quickly impose much wider restrictions or risk losing control of the virus.

Edmunds told the BBC: "We will have let the epidemic double and double and double again until we take those measures."

BERLIN — Austrian authorities are canceling the 2021 Vienna Opera Ball in February, a high society highlight, because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz told the Austria Press Agency that the ball is a "flagship" for Vienna and for Austria as a cultural nation but that it would be "irresponsible" to press ahead as usual.

Austria, like many other European countries, has seen a resurgence of new infections recently and has tightened some restrictions on public life.

Culture minister Andrea Mayer said the Opera Ball requires extensive planning and authorities can't assume at the moment that a relaxed event with 7,000 people dancing will be feasible on Feb. 11.

But she said the decision doesn't affect operas and concerts in Vienna, which are going ahead with hygiene precautions.

NEW DELHI — India added 83,347 new coronavirus cases in the past 24 hours, showing some decline after a record 97,000 a week ago.

The past six days have shown some drop in the new cases. Wednesday's increase reported by the Health Ministry raised the nation's total to more than 5.6 million, which is on pace to pass the U.S. total within weeks.

The ministry said 1,085 more people died in the past 24 hours, for a total of 90,020.

The Health Ministry says more than 80% of people infected have recovered, leaving less than 1 million active cases.

Balram Bhargava, director-general of the Indian Council for Medical Research, said vaccines with 50% efficacy will be approved for use against the coronavirus.

That's the benchmark set by the World Health Organization as no vaccine for respiratory diseases has a 100% efficacy, he told reporters on Tuesday.

Election 2020 Today: Trump vs. science, Biden takes his time

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Wednesday in Election 2020, 41 days until Election Day:

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 26 of 82

HOW TO VOTE: AP's state-by-state interactive has details on how to vote in this election.

TODAY'S TOP STORIES:

TRUMP VILIFIES SCIENCE: With the nation's COVID-19 death toll at 200,000, President Donald Trump is engaged in an ongoing war against his administration's own scientists. Over the past six months, the Trump administration has prioritized politics over science at key moments, refusing to follow expert advice that might have contained the spread of the coronavirus and the disease it causes.

REPUBLICANS' BIDEN REPORT: Two Republican-led Senate committees have issued a politically charged report on the work Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's son did in Ukraine. Biden's campaign immediately panned the report, released six weeks before the election, as an effort by an ally of Trump to damage his election opponent.

'BIDIN' HIS TIME: Joe Biden was running late. Again. With their packed schedules, relish for meeting as many people as possible and natural tendency toward verbosity, most presidential candidates rarely get anywhere, or do anything, on time.

GINSBURG MEME DEFENDED: Republican U.S. Senate candidate Lauren Witzke of Delaware defended a meme posted on Facebook by her campaign after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The post is accompanied by a photo that appears to show a small group of half-naked children in a developing country smiling and dancing. The photo caption reads: "Black babies when Ruth Vader Ginsburg dies." "Yes, my campaign posted a meme and I stand by it," the firebrand political newcomer said during an online candidate forum. Witzke added that the meme was removed because she had received death threats.

QUOTABLE: "On public relations I give myself a D. On the job itself we take an A-plus." — Trump to Fox News Channel on his handling of the pandemic.

ICYMI:

Trump, Biden fight to define campaign's most pressing issues

In battleground states, Catholics are a pivotal swing vote

AP-NORC poll: Views of economy stabilize as election nears

North Carolina board agrees to more absentee ballot changes

Russia's Navalny released from German hospital after 32 days

By DAVID RISING and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been released from a Berlin hospital after more than a month's treatment for poisoning, with doctors now believing that a "complete recovery" from the Soviet-era nerve agent is possible for him, the hospital said Wednesday.

Navalny spent 32 days at Berlin's Charite hospital, 24 of them in intensive care, before doctors deemed his "condition had improved sufficiently for him to be discharged from acute inpatient care."

As he was released Tuesday, the 44-year-old displayed his characteristic sarcastic sense of humor. In an Instagram post, he took swipes at Russian President Vladimir Putin, scoffing at reported comments by the Russian leader suggesting that Navalny might have intentionally poisoned himself.

Navalny, a politician and corruption investigator who is Putin's most visible opponent, was flown to Germany two days after falling ill on Aug. 20 on a domestic flight in Russia. He spent those two days in a coma in a hospital in the Siberian city of Omsk, where Russian doctors said they found no trace of any poisoning.

German chemical weapons experts have determined that he was poisoned with the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok — findings corroborated by labs in France and Sweden.

The hospital said based on Navalny's progress, physicians believe that a "complete recovery is possible," but added it "remains too early to gauge the potential long-term effects of his severe poisoning."

In recent days, Navalny has been posting regular photos of his convalescence from the hospital on Instagram, first showing him sitting up in his bed surrounded by his family, then up and about in the building.

In his post Tuesday night, he laughed off a report in the French newspaper Le Monde saying that Putin suggested to French President Emmanuel Macron in a call that he "could have taken the poison himself."

"Good theory, I believe it deserves the most careful attention," Navalny wrote in Russian. "Cooked Novi-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 27 of 82

chok in the kitchen. Took a sip from a flask on the plane. Fell into a coma.”

He wryly wrote that the “ultimate aim of my cunning plan” must have been to die in Siberia, where the cause of death would be “lived long enough.”

“But Putin outmaneuvered me. You can’t fool him,” Navalny wrote. “As a result, I lay in coma for 18 days like a fool, but didn’t get my way. The provocation failed!”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Wednesday said the report about Putin’s conversation with Macron was “inaccurate in its reported wording,” but refused to elaborate as to which part was inaccurate. Macron’s office refused to comment on the report.

The nerve agent used in the attack was the same class of Soviet-era poison that Britain said was used on former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England, in 2018. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has called the poisoning attempted murder and she and other world leaders have demanded that Russia fully investigate the case.

Navalny was kept in an induced coma for more than two weeks as he was treated with an antidote. Members of his team accused the Kremlin of involvement in the poisoning, charges that Russian officials have vehemently denied.

Russia has bristled at the demands for an investigation, saying that Germany needs to share medical data in the case or compare notes with Russian doctors.

Germany has noted that Navalny was in Russian treatment for 48 hours and that Russia has its own samples from Navalny. Peskov said Wednesday that Moscow needs data from Germany “to compare” tests results.

Germany has also enlisted the Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons for technical assistance in the case. The agency has collected independent samples from Navalny for testing but results have not yet been announced.

The Charite statement was released in consultation with Navalny and his wife, and the hospital would not comment further on any outpatient care for him.

Navalny’s team has said he eventually plans to return to Russia, but had no immediate statement after his release from the hospital.

Peskov said Wednesday that Navalny, “as any other Russian citizen,” is free to come back to Russia “at any moment.” He reiterated that what happened to the him remains “a big question” for the Kremlin, as Russian investigators “don’t have any facts pointing to” poisonous substances in Navalny’s body.

Peskov once again called for Germany, France and Sweden to share their data with Moscow.

“We’re still expecting it and are convinced that it can help us make significant progress in this case,” he said.

Litvinova reported from Moscow. Angela Charlton in Paris contributed.

President of Belarus inaugurated despite election protests

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus assumed his sixth term of office Wednesday during an inauguration ceremony that officials did not announce in advance after weeks of mass protests against the authoritarian leader’s reelection, which opposition activists maintain was rigged.

State news agency Belta reported that the swearing-in ceremony took place in the capital of Minsk with several hundred top government officials, lawmakers, representatives of media organizations and other prominent figures present.

Lukashenko, 66, took an oath in Belarusian with his right hand on the country’s Constitution, and the head of the country’s central election commission handed him the official ID card of the president of Belarus.

“The day of assuming the post of the president is the day of our victory, convincing and fateful,” Lukashenko said at the ceremony. “We were not just electing the president of the country — we were defending our values, our peaceful life, sovereignty and independence.”

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 28 of 82

Lukashenko has run Belarus, an ex-Soviet nation of 9.5 million, with an iron fist for 26 years. Official results of the country's Aug. 9 presidential election had him winning 80% of the vote. His strongest opponent, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, got 10%.

Tsikhanouskaya, who is in exile after being forced to leave Belarus, has not accepted the outcome of the election as valid. Neither have the thousands of her supporters who continued demanding Lukashenko's resignation during more than six weeks of mass protests.

The United States and the European Union have questioned the election and criticized the brutal police crackdown on peaceful protesters during the first few days of demonstrations.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius called Wednesday's inauguration ceremony "such a farce." "Forged elections. Forged inauguration. The former president of Belarus does not become less former. Quite the contrary. His illegitimacy is a fact with all the consequences that this entails," Linkevicius said on Twitter.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, called the fact that the ceremony was prepared in secrecy "very telling."

"Even after this ceremony today, Mr. Lukashenko cannot claim democratic legitimization, which would be the condition to recognize him as the legitimate president of Belarus," Seibert said Wednesday.

Protests demanding Lukashenko to step down have rocked the country daily since last month's election, with the largest rallies in Minsk attracting up to 200,000 people.

During the first three days of the protests, police used truncheons and rubber bullets to disperse crowds. Several protesters died, and more than 7,000 were detained.

The time and location of the inauguration ceremony were not publicized in advance. Law enforcement officers blocked off central areas of Minsk on Wednesday morning and public transportation services were suspended.

The Viasna human rights group said several protesters were detained near the Palace of Independence, where the ceremony took place, holding banners saying "The king has no clothes" and "The victory (will belong to) the people."

Alexander Klaskousky, an independent Minsk-based analyst, said the secrecy surrounding the president's inauguration illustrated the threat the ongoing unrest poses to Lukashenko's grip on power.

"The secret inauguration illustrates the level of trust of the leader in the official results of the election and in the people. Those who officially got 80% of the votes don't act like that," Klaskousky said.

"Lukashenko received rebelling people as a gift from who he needs to hide during the inauguration, fearing mass protests," he said.

Lukashenko has bristled at suggestions of dialogue with the opposition. Amid international outrage, Belarusian authorities switched to prosecuting top activists and mass detentions, avoiding large-scale violence.

Many members of the Coordination Council that was formed by the opposition to push for a transition of power have been arrested or forced to leave the country.

A prominent Coordination Council member, Pavel Latushko, compared the inauguration to a "gathering of thieves" and refused to recognize Lukashenko as the president of Belarus.

"For us, the citizens of Belarus, for the international community, he is a nobody. An unfortunate error of history and a disgrace of the civilized world," Latushko said on the messaging app Telegram. "We will never agree with the falsification (of the election) and are demanding a new vote. We urge everyone to engage in indefinite civil disobedience!"

Daria Litvinova in Moscow, Liudas Dapkus in Vilnius, Lithuania and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this report.

Thousands expected to honor Ginsburg at Supreme Court

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 29 of 82

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands of people are expected to pay their respects at the Supreme Court to the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the women's rights champion, leader of the court's liberal bloc and feminist icon who died last week.

Even with the court closed to the public because of the coronavirus pandemic and Washington already consumed with talk of Ginsburg's replacement, the justice's former colleagues, family, close friends and the public will have the chance Wednesday and Thursday to pass by the casket of the second woman to serve on the Supreme Court.

The sad occasion is expected to bring together the remaining eight justices for the first time since the building was closed in March and they resorted to meetings by telephone.

Ginsburg will lie in repose for two days at the court where she served for 27 years and, before that, argued six cases for gender equality in the 1970s.

Following a private ceremony Wednesday in the court's Great Hall, her casket will be moved outside the building to the top of the court's front steps so that public mourners can pay their respects in line with public health guidance for the pandemic.

Since her death Friday evening, people have been leaving flowers, notes, placards and all manner of Ginsburg paraphernalia outside the court in tribute to the woman who became known in her final years as the "Notorious RBG." Court workers cleared away the items and cleaned the court plaza and sidewalk in advance of Wednesday's ceremony.

Following past practice at the tradition-laden court, Ginsburg's casket is expected to arrive just before 9:30 a.m. EDT Wednesday, the court said. Supreme Court police will carry it up the court steps, which will be lined by former Ginsburg law clerks serving as honorary pallbearers.

Chief Justice John Roberts and the other justices will be in the Great Hall when the casket arrives and is placed on the Lincoln Catafalque, the platform on which President Abraham Lincoln's coffin rested in the Capitol rotunda in 1865. A 2016 portrait of Ginsburg by artist Constance P. Beaty will be displayed nearby.

It's unclear whether President Donald Trump would visit the court before he leaves town Wednesday afternoon, though he did pay respects when Justice John Paul Stevens died last year and President Barack Obama visited the court after Justice Antonin Scalia's death in 2016.

The entrance to the courtroom, along with Ginsburg's chair and place on the bench next to Roberts, have been draped in black, a longstanding court custom. These visual signs of mourning, which in years past have reinforced the sense of loss, will largely go unseen this year. The court begins its new term Oct. 5, but the justices will not be in the courtroom and instead will hear arguments by phone.

After the private ceremony inside the court, Ginsburg's casket will be on public view from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Wednesday and 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday.

On Friday, Ginsburg will lie in state at the Capitol, the first woman to do so and only the second Supreme Court justice after William Howard Taft. Taft had also been president. Rosa Parks, a private citizen as opposed to a government official, is the only woman who has lain in honor at the Capitol.

Ginsburg will be buried beside her husband, Martin, in a private ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery next week. Martin Ginsburg died in 2010. She is survived by a son and a daughter, four grandchildren, two step-grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

Ginsburg's death from cancer at age 87 has added another layer of tumult to an already chaotic election year. Trump and Senate Republicans are plowing ahead with plans to have a new justice on the bench, perhaps before the Nov. 3 election.

Only Chief Justice Roger Taney, who died in October 1864, died closer to a presidential election. Lincoln waited until December to nominate his replacement, Salmon Chase, who was confirmed the same day.

When Scalia, Ginsburg's closest friend on the court, died unexpectedly in 2016, Republicans refused to act on President Barack Obama's high-court nomination of Judge Merrick Garland.

Late-stage study of first single-shot vaccine begins in US

By LINDA A. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 30 of 82

Johnson & Johnson is beginning a huge final study to try to prove if a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine can protect against the virus.

The study starting Wednesday will be one of the world's largest coronavirus vaccine studies so far, testing the shot in 60,000 volunteers in the U.S., South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru.

A handful of other vaccines in the U.S. — including shots made by Moderna Inc. and Pfizer Inc. — and others in other countries are already in final-stage testing. Hopes are high that answers about at least one candidate being tested in the U.S. could come by year's end, maybe sooner.

U.S. health officials insist the race for a vaccine isn't cutting corners.

"We want to do everything we can without sacrificing safety or efficacy — we're not going to do that — to make sure that we end up with vaccines that are going to save lives," Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, told reporters.

But many vaccine specialists question whether the Food and Drug Administration will stick to that goal under intense pressure from the Trump administration. President Donald Trump has consistently presented a faster timeline for a new vaccine than experts say is adequate to fully test the candidates.

Meanwhile, testing of still another experimental vaccine, made by AstraZeneca, remains on hold in the U.S. as officials examine a safety question, even though studies have resumed in other countries.

Earlier this week, Vice President Mike Pence urged state governors to "do your part to build public confidence that it will be a safe and effective vaccine."

And Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, added in the call to governors that he is confident in "a tried and true process" that has checks and balances built in, including an independent board evaluating the progress of each vaccine trial, as well as "the integrity of the FDA."

A recording of the call was provided to The Associated Press.

Senators were scheduled to question FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn, Fauci and other administration officials later Wednesday about the pandemic response.

Even if the FDA were to allow emergency use of a vaccine by year's end, supplies would be limited and given first to vulnerable groups such as health workers. Most Americans aren't likely to receive a vaccine until sometime next year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention wants states to get ready now to roll out vaccinations, which will present enormous logistical challenges. On Wednesday the CDC was set to announce distribution of \$200 million in congressionally approved funds to help begin setting up operations.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said the COVID-19 vaccine campaign will build on long-standing cooperation between the federal government and the states on immunizations.

J&J's vaccine is made with slightly different technology than others in late-stage testing, modeled on an Ebola vaccine the company created. Unlike the other three vaccines that started late-stage testing in the U.S., it requires only one shot, not two. Despite a later start to testing than some of its competitors, Dr. Paul Stoffels, J&J's chief scientific officer, told reporters that the study was large enough to yield answers possibly by early next year.

Associated Press writers Luran Neergaard and Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar contributed to this report.

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Mars drops Uncle Ben's, reveals new name for rice brand

By ALEXANDRA OLSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Uncle Ben's rice brand is getting a new name: Ben's Original.

Parent firm Mars Inc. unveiled the change Wednesday for the 70-year-old brand, the latest company to drop a logo criticized as a racial stereotype. Packaging with the new name will hit stores next year.

"We listened to our associates and our customers and the time is right to make meaningful changes

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 31 of 82

across society," said Fiona Dawson, global president for Mars Food, multisales and global customers. "When you are making these changes, you are not going to please everyone. But it's about doing the right thing, not the easy thing."

Several companies have retired racial imagery from their branding in recent months, a ripple effect from the Black Lives Matters protests over the police killing of George Floyd and other African Americans.

Quaker Oats announced in June that it would drop Aunt Jemima from syrup and pancake packages, responding to criticism that the character's origins were based the "mammy," a black woman content to serve her white masters. Quaker said packages without the Aunt Jemima image will start to appear in stores by the end of the year, although the company has not revealed the new logo.

The owner of Eskimo Pie has also said it will change its name and marketing of the nearly century-old chocolate-covered ice cream bar. Beyond food brands, the Washington NFL franchise dropped the "Redskins" name and Indian head logo amid pressure from sponsors including FedEx, Nike, Pepsi and Bank of America.

Geechie Boy Mill, a family-owned operation in South Carolina that makes locally-grown and milled white grits, is also planning a name change. Geechie is a dialect spoken mainly by the descendants of African-American slaves who settled on the Ogeechee river in Georgia, according to Merriam-Webster.com.

"We are in the process of changing our name and have developed a whole new brand. We look forward to sharing it with the public," said Greg Johnsman, owner of Geechie Boy Mill.

Mars had announced in the summer that the Uncle Ben's brand would "evolve."

Since the 1940s, the rice boxes have featured a white-haired Black man, sometimes with a bow tie, an image critics say evokes servitude. Mars has said the face was originally modeled after a Chicago maitre d' named Frank Brown. In a short-lived 2007 marketing campaign, the company elevated Uncle Ben to chairman of a rice company.

Dawson said months of conversations with employees, customer studies and other stakeholders led the company to settle on "Ben's Original. She said the company is still deciding on an image to accompany the new name.

Mars also announced several other initiatives, including a \$2 million investment in culinary scholarships for aspiring Black chefs in partnership with the National Urban League. It also is planning a \$2.5 million investment in nutritional and education programs for students in Greenville, Mississippi, the majority African-American city where the rice brand has been produced for more than 40 years.

Mars said it has set a goal of increasing the ranks of racial minorities in U.S. management positions by 40%. The company did not give a timeframe for reaching that number.

AP Writer Dee-Ann Durbin in Detroit contributed to this story.

Asia Today: India sees 83,000 new cases, but numbers falling

NEW DELHI (AP) — India reported more than 83,000 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, showing some decline after reaching a record a week earlier.

The country has now confirmed more than 5.6 million cases. The health ministry also reported 1,085 new fatalities, raising the death toll to 90,020.

India is expected to become the world's worst-hit country within weeks, surpassing the United States, where nearly 6.9 million people have been infected by the virus.

But the past week has seen some improvement in India, with the numbers dropping after a record 97,894 new cases were reported on Sept. 16.

Balram Bhargava, director-general of the Indian Council for Medical Research, said Tuesday that vaccines with at least 50% efficacy will be approved for use against the coronavirus. That's the benchmark set by the World Health Organization, as no vaccine for respiratory diseases is 100% effective, Bhargava told reporters.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region:

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 32 of 82

— Xi Jinping, China's president and the leader of its Communist Party, cast the fight against the virus as an important exercise in international cooperation, an opportunity to "join hands and be prepared to meet even more global challenges." Xi took oblique potshots at the United States and its foreign policies, cautioning in a U.N. address Tuesday that the world must "not fall into the trap of a clash of civilizations" — remarks played minutes after delegates heard U.S. President Donald Trump insist that the United Nations "hold China accountable" for how it handled the emergence of the coronavirus. While Xi, being prerecorded and not there, could not rebut what Trump said, his U.N. ambassador was in the General Assembly chamber and responded directly while introducing the Xi video.

Nearly 500 pilot whales stranded in Australia; 380 dead

HOBART, Australia (AP) — More pilot whales were found stranded in Australia on Wednesday, raising the estimated total to nearly 500, including 380 that have died, in the largest mass stranding ever recorded in the country.

Authorities had already been working to rescue survivors among an estimated 270 whales found Monday on a beach and two sand bars near the remote coastal town of Strahan on the southern island state of Tasmania.

Another 200 stranded whales were spotted from a helicopter on Wednesday less than 10 kilometers (6 miles) to the south, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service Manager Nic Deka said.

All 200 had been confirmed dead by late afternoon.

They were among 380 whales that had died overall, 30 that were alive but stranded and 50 that had been rescued since Tuesday, Deka said.

"We'll continue to work to free as many of the animals as we can," he said. "We'll continue working for as long as there are live animals."

About 30 whales in the original stranding were moved from the sandbars to open ocean on Tuesday, but several got stranded again.

About a third of the first group had died by Monday evening.

Tasmania is the only part of Australia prone to mass strandings, although they occasionally occur on the Australian mainland.

Australia's largest mass stranding had previously been 320 pilot whales near the Western Australia state town of Dunsborough in 1996.

The latest stranding is the first involving more than 50 whales in Tasmania since 2009.

Marine Conservation Program wildlife biologist Kris Carlyon said the latest mass stranding was the biggest in Australia "in terms of numbers stranded and died."

Why the whales ran aground is a mystery. The pod may have been drawn into the coast to feed or by the misadventure of one or two whales, which led to the rest of the pod following, Carlyon said.

"It's really likely this was the one stranding event of a big group. This would have been one big group offshore," he said.

Marine scientist Vanessa Pirotta said there were a number of potential reasons why whales might become beached, including navigational errors.

"They do have a very strong social system, these animals are closely bonded and that's why we have seen so many in this case unfortunately in this situation," Pirotta said.

And rescuing them doesn't always work "because they are wanting to return back to the pod, they might hear the acoustics for the vocalizations of the sounds that the others are making, or they're just disoriented and in this case extremely stressed, and just probably so fatigued that they in some cases don't know where they are," she added.

In neighboring New Zealand, more than 600 pilot whales washed up on the South Island at Farewell Spit in 2017, with more than 350 dying.

Telling COVID's story: At UN, leaders spin virus storylines

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

The subject: coronavirus. The status: urgent. The solutions: as diverse as the nations they lead.

With the 75th annual U.N. General Assembly reduced to recorded speeches because of the pandemic, leaders are using this week as an opportunity to depict the pandemic from the vantage points of their nations and themselves — and present their visions of efforts to fight the virus and advocate what they believe must be done.

A smattering of myriad ideas from speeches on Tuesday, the first day of the general debate:

— South African President Cyril Ramaphosa called for a suspension of interest payments on African nations' debt and renewed focus on eradicating global poverty.

— Chilean President Sebastián Piñera called on powerful nations to work together and stop generating "a worrisome lack of leadership."

— Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte echoed a call from many leaders when he said that once an effective vaccine is developed, it must be made available to all nations.

Not surprisingly in such speeches, aimed at both domestic audiences and the international community, heads of state were presenting their own efforts in favorable light while sometimes harshly criticizing other countries or taking jabs at the United Nations.

This year's theme — "reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism" — comes at a time of extreme physical isolation between citizens in respective countries and between nations, a moment when international travel has declined sharply. It also comes as the world approaches 1 million deaths from the virus since December, adding urgency to the search for solutions.

"The leaders of our nations are not personally present. They will not be able to interact with each other," General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir, a Turkish diplomat, said in opening Tuesday's session. "But our need for deliberation is higher than ever."

Despite this year's theme, speeches by leaders of some of the world's most powerful nations have thus far been peppered with initiatives that sound more go-it-alone than collaborative, though all gave nods to working together.

Russian President Vladimir Putin went so far as to offer U.N. personnel a coronavirus vaccine his country is developing. Chinese President Xi Jinping said a handful of vaccines were in phase 3 of clinical trials and that Beijing would give millions to a U.N. fund to combat the virus.

"1.4 billion Chinese, undaunted by COVID-19, have made all efforts to control the virus," Xi said, underscoring how China had drastically slowed the spread after the virus was discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, while lauding his own nation's cooperation and calling for nations to work together, took a swipe at how the U.N. currently functions. Earlier this year, Erdoğan said, it took months for the Security Council to even discuss the pandemic.

Saeed Khan, director of global studies at Wayne State University in Michigan, said the coronavirus has "become a metaphor for globalism versus nationalism."

"The greatest resistance is coming from regimes that are hypernationalistic," he said.

To be sure, the pandemic has brought out simmering divisions between nations, providing new things over which to argue.

U.S. President Donald Trump told the assembly that America had "waged a fight against a great enemy, the China virus," and called on the U.N. to hold China accountable for the virus and other things.

Trump, campaigning for re-election ahead of November's election, did not mention that on Tuesday the U.S. reached an unwanted milestone — 200,000 coronavirus deaths, by far the largest number of any country in the world — or that polls show a majority of Americans disapprove of his handling of the pandemic.

Xi said any "politicizing or stigmatizing should be avoided, that "major countries should act like major countries" and no solutions could be found by burying "one's head in the sand like an ostrich," not-so-subtle criticisms of America's response. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez lamented how much COVID-19 had altered daily life, then argued that U.S. policies, unchecked capitalism and military spending

were the roots of many problems worldwide.

Richard Caplan, a professor of international relations at Oxford University, said that although there were "assaults" on multinationalism around the pandemic, particularly in the form of "vaccine nationalism," there were also indications that COVID-19 could lead to more cooperation, even among longtime foes.

Caplan noted that earlier this year, Israel and the Palestinian Authority coordinated efforts between health ministries. Thousands of Palestinian workers were able to remain in Israel for longer periods so as to slow the spread of the virus.

"Unfortunately this unprecedented practical cooperation broke down, in part because of political tensions associated with the Trump (Middle East) peace plan and Israel's moves towards annexation" of Palestinian territories, Caplan said.

There is also the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility, or COVAX, a grouping of more than 150 countries pooling resources around combating the disease and distribution of a future vaccine. The U.S. is not participating in the effort, led by the World Health Organization. Trump says WHO is influenced heavily by China and that joining the effort could constrain U.S. efforts to develop a vaccine.

Some leaders identified other virus-related problems that needed tackling.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in expressed concern about possible second and third waves of the coronavirus. Like many others, he also noted the damage to economies worldwide.

"Like a tsunami that follows an earthquake, economic aftershocks are sweeping us," he said.

On the question of reviving the world economy, few concrete suggestions surfaced. Most leaders seemed to argue that a vaccine was the only viable long-term solution, though many did cite concern for local economies as a way to defend their handling of the pandemic at home.

At a time when heads of state can't meet in person, and several don't appear interested in deepening ties, it is unclear how much progress the U.N. may make during this year's assembly, which continues through Sept. 29. Just one thing is certain: Dozens more leaders will be talking about the pandemic and their own experiences, and together they will create a global leadership snapshot of the human struggle that's unfolding at this strange moment in history.

When it comes to a vaccine, however, it probably doesn't matter in the long run how much progress is made toward multilateralism at the assembly, said Naim Salem, professional of international relations at Notre Dame University in Beirut, Lebanon.

"Multilateral cooperation is optimal," Salem said. "But if a vaccine proves to be effective in one country, it will spread or taken up by other countries."

Longtime international correspondent Peter Prengaman is the Western U.S. regional news director for The Associated Press. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/peterprengaman>

'The port came to us': Story behind AP photo of Beirut blast

By ZEINA KARAM and HASSAN AMMAR Associated Press

JIIYYEH, Beirut (AP) — When Mustafa Kinno felt the ground shake and heard the deafening blast toward the port, he frantically called his brother living nearby.

No reply. He tried a neighbor, who said the family was sitting outside their apartment across from the port when it exploded. Terrified, Mustafa ran more than two miles (four kilometers) to his brother, glass crunching under his feet.

When he arrived, first he spotted his niece Sedra's head poking out of the rubble. He collapsed and crawled toward her but couldn't move her. Then he found his younger niece, Hoda, slung her over his shoulder and started walking.

An image of the two, captured by Associated Press photographer Hassan Ammar, has come to symbolize the devastation of the Aug. 4 blast at the Beirut port, which took 193 lives and wounded 6,500. In the photo, a dust-covered Hoda, 11, holds her body stiffly against her uncle's shoulder, a gash bleeding from her forehead, eyes half-closed and face set in a grimace.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 35 of 82

The story behind the photo reflects the particular pain of Syrian refugee families like Hoda's. At least 43 Syrians were among those who died in the explosion, plunging a war-weary community into further misery. Lebanon now hosts nearly one million Syrian refugees — about one in five people.

"It was always bad even before the explosion, but we were getting by," said Mahmoud, the girls' older brother. "Now, life is unbearable."

It wasn't supposed to be this way.

Ali Kinno, 45, moved from the Aleppo region of Syria to Lebanon in 2008 to find work, determined to provide a better life for his family. The residential tower facing the port was still under construction then, and he soon got a job as a concierge.

In 2011, after Syria's civil war erupted, he fretted for his family's safety. A year later, after northern Aleppo became a frontline, he asked them to join him in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon.

But the family never quite settled there. Syrian refugees faced resentment and discrimination — his daughter was harassed on the street, and his sons found it increasingly difficult to get jobs, he said. The situation got worse as the country's economic crisis set in, culminating in a local currency collapse.

Ali was so protective and scared for his children, especially the two girls, that he didn't let them go to school, despite Sedra's pleas. Cooped up in their tiny apartment, the children grew closer. The girls became inseparable. Because their mom suffered back pain and asthma, they took care of the apartment, especially Sedra.

"She cooked, made tea, she looked after her younger brother Ahmad, gave him his bath. She was everything," said Ali's wife, Fatima, choking on the last sentence.

It was just after 6 p.m. on Aug. 4 when Ali Kinno asked his son Qoteiba to turn off the generator which provides electricity to their 20-floor residential building. He also asked 15-year-old Sedra to prepare the tea.

It was that time at the end of the day when the sun begins to soften, and Ali and his family sit outside the building where he works as a concierge, drinking tea and watching the highway that runs parallel to the port. Only this time, smoke was pouring out of the facility.

Sedra brought the tea and put it on a small table but didn't pour it - the family was animatedly discussing the pink-tinged smoke. The flames grew bigger, and the fire began making popping sounds. A convoy of red fire engines, sirens screaming, zipped past on the highway.

Alarmed, Ali's wife called for them to go inside the apartment. That's when they heard the first explosion. But it was the second blast seconds later that seemed to lift the earth under the port and throw it in their direction.

"It was as if the port came to us," says Ali.

In a flash, the middle-class neighborhood housing the headquarters of one of Lebanon's most famous fashion designers turned to a hell on earth, tossing everyone and everything in the air and showering them with debris.

"Tiles, stones, aluminium, glass. Everything fell on us," said Ali, who suffered brain hemorrhage, several broken ribs, loss of vision in his left eye and damaged hearing in his right ear that day.

Sedra, who was standing near the entrance to the apartment, died instantly, pinned by tile cladding that rained down from the building. Hoda suffered a fracture in her neck and other injuries. Fatima fractured her spine, shattered a leg and could not move.

That was the scene Mustafa saw when he arrived from across town and carried Hoda away. Another of Ammar's photos captured Sedra's dead body, in a long flowered dress, carried by her older brother Qoteiba and brother-in-law Fawaz.

In the chaotic aftermath of the explosion, the Kinno family separated, each of them taken to a different hospital.

A man with a scooter offered to take Sedra to the hospital, and Fawaz jumped behind him with Sedra in the middle. But she was pronounced dead on arrival.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 36 of 82

Mustafa put Hoda in an army vehicle that was ferrying the injured to the hospital. But the hospital was so overwhelmed with victims that they couldn't operate on her neck and advised that he take her elsewhere. Eventually he took her in a taxi to a hospital in the Bekaa region, miles away.

Later that night, a Syrian man sat on the pavement in tears outside the hospital where Hoda was initially taken. He said one of his sisters was killed, another sister's neck was fractured. He didn't know where his injured mother and father were taken and was making calls trying to track them down. It was Mahmoud, Ali and Fatima's eldest son.

He had been at his job as a foreman in Kfour, 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of Beirut. Unable to reach any of his family in the wake of the explosion, he sat in a taxi for 45 minutes to Beirut. When the traffic got blocked, he abandoned the car and ran the remaining few miles home.

"I saw people dead in their cars along the way... The more I saw the more I imagined something horrible has happened to the family," he said.

That's when Fawaz called him and broke the news that Sedra had died.

A month after the explosion, the family has been reunited in temporary shelter in an apartment south of Beirut. They are devastated, still getting treated for injuries and trying to make ends meet as the medical bills pile up.

Hoda, wearing a neck brace, barely speaks. She says she doesn't remember the explosion and its aftermath.

Fatima, her mother, says Hoda is obsessed with watching video clips of the blast on social media. She wakes up several times at night, sometimes crying.

Fatima is dealing with her own demons.

"Everything scares me now, I see a door and imagine it will collapse on me," she says, seated on a sofa with a bandaged leg and a back brace.

Mahmoud, the 21-year-old eldest brother, is saddled with responsibilities, now that his father has lost his job. With his own 4-year-old son to worry about, he says he is looking to smuggle himself out of Lebanon, joining others escaping poverty who recently began attempting to make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean to Europe.

"I don't want to stay here another day," he says.

The youngest child, 6-year-old Ahmad, was sleeping at the time of the blast, and miraculously escaped virtually unscathed even though the glass in the apartment shattered and his room was badly damaged. But he is now very quiet. He told his father that when the family gets well, they will go back home and bring Sedra.

Ali keeps going back in his mind to that moment when he lost control over his family's life, feeling utterly helpless. Ten days after the explosion, he went to the building, stood in front of it and cried for his daughter.

"She was always in the kitchen. She loved to cook," he said. "I imagined her there."

World leaders who skipped past UN meetings get their moment

By CHRISTINE ARMARIO Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — He's not recognized as a head of state by the country he'd be visiting. His diplomatic immunity is granted by the United Nations, not an unfriendly American administration that could decide to pick him up on drug-trafficking charges if he sets foot in the United States. Then there's the \$15 million U.S. bounty for information leading to his arrest.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has good reason not to travel to New York for the annual United Nations gathering of world leaders. But this year's virtual U.N. General Assembly format means he can be heard without having to come to New York — or risk an uprising back home if he left the country.

Instead, Maduro will speak from the comfort of the presidential palace, renewing his place on the international stage after missing out on last year's event.

"This opens up an opportunity that Maduro doesn't usually have," Venezuelan analyst Luis Vicente Leon

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 37 of 82

said. "On a net scale, he comes out winning."

He's not alone. A virtual General Assembly knows no national borders, incurs no travel expenses and allows even the most cautious, prickly or paranoid leaders to have their say without leaving their at-home security bubbles.

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte spoke to the General Assembly for the first time in his four years in office. Saudi Arabia's King Salman's speech marks only the second time in more than six decades that a sitting monarch from the kingdom addresses the gathering. And Tanzania's populist president, who rarely leaves the country, will get his 15 minutes, too.

Whether a short online speech will give them a leg up at home remains to be seen. After months of lockdown, much of the world is effectively Zoomed out. But these leaders' voices will almost certainly travel farther than in years past. The opposite is true for their opposition foes, who generally rely on side events to get their message out as leaders came together in New York.

"The virtual speeches do give an opening," said Shannon O'Neil, a vice president at the Council on Foreign Relations, said as the assembly got underway. "But the virtual format puts them on the same platform as your regular Zoom, too."

Venezuela's situation is a case in point: The nation is in the midst of a power tug of war between Maduro and U.S.-backed opposition leader Juan Guaidó. Last year, both men sent representatives who carefully avoided crossing paths at the U.N.. While Vice President Delcy Rodríguez got the main stage, the opposition commanded a powerful presence on the sidelines. U.S. President Donald Trump personally hosted one of four high-level meetings on the country's crisis.

This year, Maduro will give his country's official address and Guaidó will deliver online remarks on a separate platform. His aides will attend some side U.N. events – none of which are specifically about Venezuela. The lack of face-to-face meetings is expected to make things more complicated for the opposition, which has been losing momentum over the last year.

"Without a doubt this format makes it much more difficult to focus just on Venezuela," said Miguel Pizarro, who represents the opposition's humanitarian efforts in Washington.

The opposition's lessened visibility also packs an emotional punch.

"I think in general for Venezuelans every time that Maduro talks trying to represent us all, it's an insult," the exiled Venezuelan lawmaker said.

But the online speech also is unlikely to win Maduro any new friends.

A recent United Nations Human Rights Council report accuses Maduro's government of committing crimes against humanity, including grisly cases of torture and killings supposedly carried out by security forces. Their method: electric shocks, genital mutilation, asphyxiation and more. The allegations are likely to be brought up repeatedly at the virtual assembly.

"I don't believe he is going to have any added benefit," said retired U.S. Ambassador Nicholas Burns, a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School. "If he is speaking on Zoom it might as well attract additional criticism."

All leaders making an appearance on the U.N. screen could see diminished returns.

"Most of the leaders are going to see this as a purely domestic exercise," said Philip Alston, a law professor at New York University. "That is always the case to some extent, but given there is no opportunity for photo ops, for meetings with other presidents and so on, the only real value is getting speech out there which restates certain positions for domestic consumption."

Duterte used the platform Tuesday to defend his drug crackdown that has left more than 5,700 mostly poor people dead. Tanzania's John Magufuli will speak as he seeks a second term in an election next month in which opposition leaders say they've faced government obstruction at every turn. And King Salman's speech will be the first since his brother addressed the General Assembly in 1957. The 84-year-old monarch has generally relied on his foreign minister.

In a short speech Monday to commemorate the U.N.'s 75th year, Maduro came out guns blazing, charging that the world is facing a critical choice between a multipolar world and one dominated by imperialism.

"A world of diversity, peace and cooperation versus a world of hegemony," he said, speaking before a

giant portrait of liberation hero Simón Bolívar.

As his speech was broadcast on Maduro's Facebook feed, some chimed in congratulating the "comrade" while others blasted him for appearing at all.

"Thank you, Mr. President, for your work in destroying the country," one man wrote.

Fanny González, 60, watched the feed from her mobile phone. Though a proud Maduro supporter, she's watched her two adult children leave the country in recent years, joining an estimated 5 million compatriots who have decided to seek a future abroad. Electricity and water outages are frequent. Government boxes of food are slower to arrive.

Still, she said it made her proud to watch him from the apartment she credits the late Hugo Chávez's socialist revolution with providing her.

"Many thought he wouldn't survive," she said. "But he keeps moving forward."

Associated Press writers Aya Batrawy in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Cara Anna in Johannesburg contributed to this report.

200,000 dead as Trump vilifies science, prioritizes politics

By JASON DEAREN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — "I did the best I could," President Donald Trump said.

Huddled with aides in the West Wing last week, his eyes fixed on Fox News, Trump wasn't talking about how he had led the nation through the deadliest pandemic in a century. In a conversation overheard by an Associated Press reporter, Trump was describing how he'd just publicly rebuked one of his top scientists — Dr. Robert Redfield, a virologist and head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Redfield had angered the president by asserting that a COVID-19 vaccine wouldn't be widely available until late 2021. So hours later, with no supporting evidence, Trump called a news conference to say Redfield was "confused." A vaccine, Trump insisted, could be ready before November's election.

Mission accomplished: Fox was headlining Trump's latest foray in his administration's ongoing war against its own scientists.

It is a war that continues unabated, even as the nation's COVID-19 death toll has reached 200,000 — nearly half the number of Americans killed in World War II, a once unfathomable number that the nation's top doctors just months ago said was avoidable.

Over the past six months, the Trump administration has prioritized politics over science at key moments, refusing to follow expert advice that might have contained the spread of the virus and COVID-19, the disease it causes. Trump and his people have routinely dismissed experts' assessments of the gravity of the pandemic, and of the measures needed to bring it under control. They have tried to muzzle scientists who dispute the administration's rosy spin.

While there is no indication that Trump's desperation for a vaccine has affected the science or safety of the process, his insistence that one would be ready before the election is stoking mistrust in the very breakthrough he hopes will help his reelection.

Today, he is pushing hard for a resumption of normal activity and trying to project strength and control to bolster his political position in his campaign against Democrat Joe Biden.

In hindsight, Trump says, there's nothing he would have done differently, citing his early move to restrict travel from China — a move that data and records show was ineffective. Still, he gives himself high marks on his handling the pandemic — except for bad messaging.

"On public relations I give myself a D," he told Fox this week. "On the job itself we take an A-plus."

In late January, after the virus had first emerged in Wuhan, China, the CDC launched its emergency operations center. What was needed, epidemiologists said, was an aggressive public education campaign and mobilization of contact tracing to identify and isolate the first cases before the disease spread out of control.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 39 of 82

Instead, Trump publicly played down the virus in those crucial first weeks, even though he privately acknowledged the seriousness of the threat.

"I wanted to always play it down," the president told journalist Bob Woodward in March. "I still like playing it down because I don't want to create a panic."

But the virus kept coursing through the country, and the world. And with a president bent on minimizing the dangers, the U.S. would become ever more polarized, with the simple acts of wearing masks and keeping a distance transformed into political wedge issues.

"You have to be calm," Trump said on March 6, during a visit to the Atlanta headquarters of the CDC. "It'll go away."

By mid-March, hospitals in New York and elsewhere were deluged with patients and storing bodies in refrigerated morgue trucks.

And that was just the beginning.

The death chart was the awakening. On March 31, the nation was still grappling to understand the scope of the pandemic. Schools were disrupted, people sheltered at home and professional sports were paused. But the ascending lines of mortality on the chart said things were going to get way worse.

Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, and Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, stood next to the president to explain the numbers. The doctors said that models of the escalating pandemic showed that, unless the country adopted masks, practiced distancing and kept businesses closed there would be 100,000 to 240,000 deaths. They stressed that if the U.S. adopted strict measures, the deaths could remain under 100,000.

"We would hope that we could keep it under that," Trump said then.

Still, instead of issuing a national mask mandate and other recommended measures, the Trump administration within weeks posted its "Opening Up America Again" plan.

The CDC began developing a thick document of guidelines to help local leaders make decisions about when reopening in their corner of the country was safe. But the White House thought the guidelines were too strict. They "would never see the light of day," CDC scientists were told.

The Associated Press would eventually release the 63-page document, which offered science-based recommendations for workplaces, day care centers and restaurants.

Meanwhile, the president refused to wear a mask in public, planned political rallies where masks were not required, and downplayed the CDC's data tracking the disease's toll. And in May, communities reopened without the CDC's up-to-date guidance.

The predictable happened: Cases surged as soon as communities reopened. And by the end of May all hope for keeping the death toll under 100,000 vanished.

The president's argument was the toll from remaining closed would be too high — both economically and for people struggling with isolation at home and unable to send their children to school. Unspoken: the potential impact on his own reelection prospects.

Eager to find a quick fix that would justify a fast reopening timetable set by the White House, Trump himself championed the use of hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug, as a "game changer" to treat COVID-19. He persisted despite repeated warnings from the Food and Drug Administration and others that there was no proof that it was effective, and there was reason to believe it could be dangerous.

The administration also touted the use of convalescent plasma as a treatment, though Fauci and others thought the supporting data was weak.

Trump and his administration did not take scientific naysaying well.

Trump installed a lobbyist, Michael Caputo, to head communications for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees CDC and the FDA. Caputo had worked as a public relations consultant hired by the Russian energy giant Gazprom to improve President Vladimir Putin's image in the U.S., and had no public health background.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 40 of 82

Caputo hosted a video on Facebook in which he likened government scientists to a “resistance” against Trump, and emails surfaced in which he castigated CDC officials, challenging their scientific pronouncements and trying to muzzle staffers. He would take a leave in September after his actions were revealed.

But the CDC’s science-based recommendations continued to be routed through the White House task force for vetting before release.

The administration’s meddling and public rebukes has driven CDC morale to an all-time low, according to agency officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were afraid of losing their jobs. The constant battling against the administration’s political forces has made the difficult job of managing a pandemic even harder, and created a high rate of burnout.

Redfield has been criticized for not being a strong enough defender; those who long worked at the agency hope to see its leadership stand up for science in the face of politics.

“I’m sure this won’t be easy, but it’s essential to CDC’s reputation,” said Dr. Sonja Rasmussen, a 20-year CDC veteran who is now a medical professor at the University of Florida. “We need a strong and trusted CDC to get ourselves through this pandemic — as well as through the next public health emergency after this one.”

Even as Fauci was restricted in his interactions with the media — his candor did not wear well with the administration — Trump elevated a new public face for his pandemic response task force: Dr. Scott Atlas, a Stanford University neurologist with no background in infectious disease.

White House officials said Atlas’ role is to play devil’s advocate, and to question data brought by doctors and public health experts — with an eye toward Trump’s goal of a wider economic reopening in the weeks before the election, according to two White House officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal operations.

In Atlas, Trump has a doctor who has downplayed the need for students to wear masks or social distance. Atlas has advocated for allowing the virus to run amok to create “herd immunity,” the idea that community-wide resistance can be built by infecting a large portion of the population. The World Health Organization has discredited the approach as dangerous.

White House officials say Atlas no longer supports it.

As Fauci said in August, there is “a fundamental anti-science feeling” at a time when some people are pushing back at authority. “Science tends to fall into the category of authoritative. People don’t like that.”

Trump’s tweets and other pronouncements have served to rally that opposition, down to the local level.

At least 60 state or local health leaders in 27 states have resigned, retired or been fired since April, according to a review by the AP and Kaiser Health News. Those numbers have doubled since June, when the AP and KHN first started tracking the departures.

Many quit after experiencing political pressure from public officials, or even violent threats from people angry about mask mandates and closures.

In Ohio, Dr. Joan Duwve was nominated by the governor for the job of state health director on Sept. 10. But just hours later, she withdrew her name from consideration. She said in a statement to The State newspaper that she did so to protect her family, after she learned that armed protesters had gone to the home of the woman who would have been her predecessor, Dr. Amy Acton, before she eventually resigned in June.

The White House has realized there is a downside to publicly undermining science. Officials recognize voter mistrust in the administration’s pandemic response and concerns about political interference in speeding the vaccine production timetable is an emerging public health crisis of its own. They say they’re worried there will be unnecessary deaths and economic impact if Americans are afraid of getting vaccinated, according to two White House officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the administration’s thinking.

The White House has ordered a campaign to bolster public confidence in the development process. It would include elevating the profiles of Trump targets like FDA Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn and the CDC’s Redfield.

One person is not on board — Trump. Less than seven weeks from Election Day, he appears driven to

say and do what he sees as necessary to secure a second term, whether backed by science and evidence or not. So he embraces rallies that break all the rules proposed by his own scientists, and taunts Biden for following them.

And despite the grim death toll, the president continues to frame the past six months as a success.

"When the terrible plague arrived from China, we mobilized American industry like never before. We rapidly developed life-saving therapies, reducing the fatality rate," Trump told a raucous Ohio crowd at a rally Monday. "We're going to deliver a vaccine before the end of the year. But it could be a lot sooner than that."

Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire and Zeke Miller in Washington and Michelle R. Smith in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed to this report.

Trump, Biden fight to define campaign's most pressing issues

By STEVE PEOPLES, ZEKE MILLER and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

SWANTON, Ohio (AP) — President Donald Trump was interrupted twice during an Ohio rally this week by sign-waving supporters chanting, "Fill that seat!"

"I will fill that seat," Trump responded before launching into an extended riff on his plans to quickly nominate a successor to Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. "They say it's the most important thing a president can do."

During a swing through Wisconsin a few hours earlier, there were no big crowds for Democrat Joe Biden, whose campaign is strictly following protocols to combat the coronavirus. The battle over the future of the Supreme Court was largely missing, too, with Biden far more eager to talk about the pandemic, health care and the economy.

Since Ginsburg's death on Friday sparked a battle over the future of the Supreme Court, Trump and Biden have fought to define the lens through which voters view the 2020 contest. Biden wants the election to be a referendum on Trump and his failure to control a pandemic that has killed 200,000 Americans or address the nation's larger health care issues. Trump wants to focus on the court fight to unite the party and energize the GOP's base.

Biden openly acknowledged his reluctance to focus on the Supreme Court during an interview with WBAY, a local Green Bay, Wisconsin, news station, when asked whether he'd support liberal proposals to add seats to the high court.

"It's a legitimate question, but let me tell you why I'm not going to answer that question — because it will shift the focus. That's what he wants. He never wants to talk about the issue at hand, and he always tries to change the subject," Biden said of Trump.

He insisted discussion should be about why Trump "is moving in a direction that's totally inconsistent with what (the) founders wanted."

Each candidate's strategy carries risk.

Biden's measured approach risks alienating his party's left wing, which desperately wants to stop Trump from giving conservatives a larger majority on the nation's high court. Not only has Biden been reluctant to embrace the topic, he also broke from his more liberal primary rivals earlier in the year by opposing calls to add seats to "pack" the Supreme Court.

Biden, who ran a relatively centrist primary campaign and spent 36 years in the Senate, is concerned that such a move would worsen divisions during a particularly polarized moment in American history.

And Trump, by leaning into the issue, risks alienating swing voters in key states who don't see the court debate anywhere near as important as issues related to the immediate threat of the pandemic and the sluggish economic recovery.

There is little polling data so soon after Ginsburg's death, but Republican and Democratic pollsters believe that the Supreme Court is not an animating issue for persuadable voters. Those close to the Trump campaign privately acknowledge it's helpful mostly because it shifts the conversation away from Trump's

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 42 of 82

divisive leadership. And Democrats believe the court simply isn't a top-of-mind issue for the working-class voters they're trying to reach.

"I don't know that swing voters are motivated by it," said Ron Harris, who chairs the Democratic National Committee's Midwestern Caucus. "It's a motivating issue for the base."

Harris noted that Biden is not completely ignoring the court fight, but "he's trying to get back on the turf we've been winning: the economy, health care, the pandemic."

Still, the timing of the Supreme Court confirmation process will ensure it's a significant part of the conversation during the closing weeks of the election. Trump said he would announce his nominee Saturday, and Senate Republicans appear to be giving him enough support to move forward with the nomination, which will require a committee hearing and subsequent vote by the full Senate before it's finalized.

There is growing internal pressure on Trump and Senate Republicans to finish the confirmation process before the Nov. 3 election.

Biden's messenger on the issue could become his running mate, California Sen. Kamala Harris. She won't be able to avoid questions on the subject as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, where she'll be one of the Democrats questioning Trump's nominee.

Harris elevated her national profile in 2018 with an aggressive role in Brett Kavanaugh's contentious Supreme Court confirmation hearing, and she faces the prospect of an even bigger spotlight as Biden's counterpart on Capitol Hill moving forward.

Biden's team wouldn't predict whether the Democrat's closing message might change. One aide speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations said the campaign hasn't ruled out running ads around the Supreme Court vacancy, though a final decision has yet to be made. The aide said Biden himself would like to pay his respects at Ginsburg's services this week, but even those plans haven't yet been set in stone.

Trump, meanwhile, is relishing the debate, at least for now. His next Supreme Court nomination would be his third.

"A lot of presidents get none; we've had three," Trump told his cheering supporters. "It's blowing their minds, it's blowing their minds, but for the people of Ohio, this is what you want."

Peoples reported from New York and Jaffe reported from Manitowoc, Wis.

Senate GOP plans vote on Trump's court pick before election

By LISA MASCARO, ZEKE MILLER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Votes in hand, Senate Republicans are charging ahead with plans to confirm President Donald Trump's pick to fill the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Supreme Court seat before the Nov. 3 election, launching a divisive fight over Democratic objections before a nominee is even announced.

Trump said Tuesday he will name his choice Saturday, confident of support. Democrats say it's too close to the election, and the winner of the presidency should name the new justice. But under GOP planning, the Senate could vote Oct. 29.

"I guess we have all the votes we're going to need," Trump told WJBX FOX 2 in Detroit. "I think it's going to happen."

Republicans believe the court fight will energize voters for Trump, boosting the party and potentially deflating Democrats who cannot stop the lifetime appointment for a conservative justice. The Senate is controlled by Republicans, 53-47, with a simple majority needed for confirmation. The one remaining possible Republican holdout, Mitt Romney of Utah, said Tuesday he supports taking a vote.

Still, with early presidential voting already underway in several states, all sides are girding for a wrenching Senate battle over health care, abortion access and other big cases before the court and sure to further split the torn nation.

It is one of the quickest confirmation efforts in recent times. No court nominee in U.S. history has been considered so close to a presidential election. And it all comes as the nation is marking the grave milestone

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 43 of 82

of 200,000 deaths from the coronavirus pandemic.

During a private lunch meeting Tuesday at Senate GOP campaign headquarters, several Republican senators spoke up in favor of voting before the election. None advocated a delay.

Elsewhere, as tributes poured in for Ginsburg with vigils and flowers at the court's steps, Democrats led by presidential nominee Joe Biden vowed a tough fight. The Senate Democratic leader, Chuck Schumer, said "we should honor her dying wish," which was that her seat not be filled until the man who wins the presidential election is installed, in January.

But that seemed no longer an option. So far, two Republicans have said they oppose taking up a nomination at this time, but no others are in sight. Under Senate rules, Vice President Mike Pence could break a tie vote.

While not all Republican senators have said they will support the eventual pick, few appear willing to stand in the way of a top party priority.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell made no scheduling announcements. But hearings could start as soon as Oct. 12 by the Senate Judiciary Committee, with a vote in the full Senate by Oct. 29, according to a GOP aide granted anonymity to discuss deliberations.

After Trump met with conservative Judge Amy Coney Barrett at the White House on Monday he told reporters he would interview other candidates and might meet with Judge Barbara Lagoa when he travels to Florida later this week. Conversations in the White House and McConnell's office have been increasingly focused on Barrett and Lagoa, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the private deliberations.

Barrett, 48, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit, has long been favored by conservatives. Those familiar with the process said interest inside the White House seemed to be waning for Lagoa amid concerns she did not have a proven record as a conservative jurist. Lagoa has been pushed by Florida's governor, and aides tout her political advantages of being Hispanic and hailing from the key political battleground state.

Democrats point to hypocrisy in Republicans trying to rush through a pick so close to the election after McConnell led the GOP in refusing to vote on a nominee of President Barack Obama in February 2016, long before that year's election.

Romney, the GOP's 2012 presidential nominee, dismissed that argument, saying "it was not unfair" for Republicans to refuse to consider Obama's choice of Merrick Garland.

The Utah Republican backed up his decision by saying it's not "written in the stars" that the court should have a liberal bent. He said Trump's pick will tip the court to become more conservative, and he said that is appropriate "for a nation which is, if you will, center right, to have a court which reflects a center right point of view."

At the private lunch, Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana said, senators advocating swift voting warned of "too many complications" if it's delayed until after the election — presumably if Biden wins the White House or Republicans lose the Senate.

Conservative groups pushing for swift approval also argue the election result could be disputed with legal battles dragging on for weeks.

Democrats say voters should speak first, on Election Day. Biden appealed to GOP senators to "uphold your constitutional duty, your conscience" and wait until the president is chosen.

But few Republicans are willing to cross Trump. The president has criticized Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska for opposing a Senate vote before elections. Trump warned they would be "very badly hurt" by voters in November.

Collins went further Tuesday saying she would vote against Trump's pick, "not because I might not support that nominee under normal circumstances but we're simply too close to the election."

The parties braced for the fight ahead.

At an evening rally in Pittsburgh, Trump marveled at how important the Supreme Court is to some voters, and at his own opportunity to pick a third justice. "Can you imagine?" he asked.

"These sorts of fights bring Republicans together," said Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., the party's Senate campaign chairman.

At a memorial on the National Mall marking the 200,000 COVID deaths, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi paid tribute to Ginsburg and warned against Trump's coming court challenge to the Affordable Care Act. "It's a time for us to vote health," she said.

The mounting clash over the vacant seat injects new turbulence in the presidential campaign with the nation still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic and shattered economy, with millions unemployed and heightened partisan tensions and anger.

Ginsburg, 87, died Friday of metastatic pancreatic cancer. She will lie in state at the U.S. Capitol this week, the first woman accorded that honor. Her casket will be on view Wednesday and Thursday on the steps of the high court.

No nominee has won confirmation so quickly since Sandra Day O'Connor — with no opposition from either party — became the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court in 1981.

Associated Press writers Mark Sherman, Andrew Taylor, Matthew Daly, Kevin Freking and Mike Balsamo in Washington, Alex Jaffe in Philadelphia, Bill Barrow in Atlanta and Steve Peoples and Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this report.

US government executes killer obsessed with witchcraft

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. (AP) — The U.S. government on Tuesday executed a former soldier who said an obsession with witchcraft led him to kill a Georgia nurse he believed had put a spell on him.

William Emmett LeCroy, 50, was pronounced dead at 9:06 p.m. EDT after receiving a lethal injection at the same U.S. prison in Terre Haute, Indiana, where five others have been executed in 2020 following a 17-year period without a federal execution.

Lawyers had asked President Donald Trump in a petition to commute LeCroy's sentence to life in prison, saying that LeCroy's brother, Georgia State Trooper Chad LeCroy, was killed during a routine traffic stop in 2010 and that another son's death would devastate their family.

The execution began nearly three hours later than scheduled as LeCroy's lawyers made an ultimately failed, last-minute bid to convince the U.S. Supreme Court to issue a stay.

As a curtain rose across glass windows separating witnesses from the death chamber, LeCroy lay strapped to a cross-shaped gurney, with IVs in his forearms and hands. He kept his eyes fixed firmly on the ceiling, not turning to look toward witnesses. The witnesses included the father and fiancé of Joann Lee Tiesler, whom LeCroy raped and stabbed to death 19 years ago, Justice Department spokesperson Kerri Kupec said in a statement.

LeCroy's spiritual adviser, Sister Barbara Battista, stood a few feet away inside the chamber, her head bowed and reading softly from a prayer book.

LeCroy had said last week he didn't want to play into what he called the "theater" surrounding his execution and so might not make a full statement in the minutes before he died, Battista told The Associated Press earlier Tuesday.

When a prison official leaned over him Tuesday night and gently pulled off LeCroy's face mask to ask if he had any last words, LeCroy responded calmly and matter-of-factly. His last and only words were: "Sister Battista is about to receive in the postal service my last statement."

LeCroy kept his eyes open as someone out of his view in an adjacent room began administering the lethal injection of pentobarbital. His eyelids grew heavy while his midsection began to heave uncontrollably. After several more minutes, color drained from his limbs, his face turned ashen and his lips tinted blue. After about 10 more minutes, an official with a stethoscope entered the chamber, felt LeCroy's wrist for a pulse and then listened to his heart before officially declaring him dead.

Another execution, of Christopher Vialva, is scheduled Thursday. He would be the first African American on federal death row to be put to death in the series of federal executions this year.

Critics say the Justice Department's resumption of federal executions this year is a cynical bid to help Trump claim the mantle of law-and-order candidate leading up to Election Day. Supporters say Trump is

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 45 of 82

bringing long-overdue justice to victims and their families.

LeCroy broke into the Cherrylog, Georgia, mountain home of Joann Lee Tiesler on Oct. 7, 2001, and waited for her to return from a shopping trip. When she walked through the door, LeCroy struck her with a shotgun, bound and raped her. He then slashed her throat and repeatedly stabbed her in the back.

LeCroy had known Tiesler because she lived near a relative's home and would often wave to her as he drove by. He later told investigators he'd come to believe she might have been his old babysitter he called Tinkerbelle, who LeCroy claimed sexually molested him as a child. After killing Tiesler, he realized that couldn't possibly be true.

Two days after killing Tiesler, LeCroy was arrested driving Tiesler's truck after passing a U.S. checkpoint in Minnesota heading to Canada.

Authorities found a note LeCroy wrote before his arrest in which he asked Tiesler for forgiveness, according to court filings. "You were an angel and I killed you," it read. "I am a vagabond and doomed to hell."

"Today justice was finally served. William LeCroy died a peaceful death in stark contrast to the horror he imposed on my daughter Joann," the victim's father, Tom Tiesler, said in a statement.

"I am unaware that he ever showed any remorse for his evil actions, his life of crime or for the horrific burden he caused Joann's loved ones," the statement read.

A few hours before the execution, Battista, waiting near the prison, held a bag of caramel chocolate that she said was LeCroy's favorite. In conversations with him in the days leading up to the execution, she said he had been contemplating his likely death and sounded resigned.

"He said, 'You know, once we were not and then we are and then we are not,'" she said. "He was reflective. He didn't seem agitated."

LeCroy joined the Army at 17 but was soon discharged for going AWOL and later spoke about an interest in witchcraft that began during a previous stint in prison for burglary, child molestation and other charges.

He had ruminated for days before the slaying about how Tiesler was Tinkerbelle and that assaulting her would reverse a hex she put on him. After he cut her throat, he went to Tiesler's computer to search for books about witchcraft, court filings said.

He was convicted in 2004 on a federal charge of carjacking resulting in death and a jury recommended a death sentence.

LeCroy's lawyers had unsuccessfully tried to halt the execution and argued that his trial lawyers didn't properly emphasize evidence about his upbringing and mental health that could have persuaded jurors not to impose a death sentence. Their last-minute appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court was also rejected.

Over previous 56 years, before the Trump administration's reboot of executions this year, the federal government had executed just three people — all in the early 2000s. Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh was among them.

Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mtarm>

Few resources, old-growth forest allowed for fire's growth

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A lack of firefighting resources in the hours after it was sparked allowed a fast-moving wildfire to make an unprecedented run through Southern California mountains and eventually find fuel in old-growth trees to become one of Los Angeles County's largest fires ever, an official said Tuesday.

The Bobcat Fire has burned for more than two weeks and was still threatening more than 1,000 homes after scorching its way through brush and timber down into the Mojave Desert. It's one of dozens of other major blazes across the West.

"This is a stubborn fire," Angeles National Forest spokesman Andrew Mitchell said. Only about 100 fire-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 46 of 82

fighters were initially dispatched on Sept. 6 when the Bobcat Fire broke out and swiftly grew to about 200 acres (81 hectares), he said.

"To put that into perspective, normally for a fire that size we'd have at least double or triple that number of firefighters," Mitchell said. At the time, many Southern California ground crews and a fleet of retardant- and water-dropping aircraft were assigned to multiple record-breaking blazes in the northern part of the state.

By the time staffing was ramped up, flames had found their way deep into inaccessible forest. Embers floated across mountain ridges, igniting towering trees and creating an expanding wall of fire.

"A lot of that old growth hadn't seen fire in 40 or 50 years. The fire had a lot of places to go," Mitchell said. The blaze had more than doubled in size over the past week to 170 square miles (440 square kilometers).

As of Monday, the fire was still advancing at one to two miles (1.6 to 3.2 kilometers) per hour at times and threatened the desert town of Pearblossom after burning into the Antelope Valley foothill area, across the San Gabriel Mountains from Los Angeles.

The blaze has destroyed or damaged at least 29 homes and other buildings, with the toll rising to perhaps 85 when damage assessment teams can complete their work this week, authorities said.

Cheryl Poindexter lost her desert home.

"That fire came over the hill so hard and fast that I turned around and I barely got my eight dogs and my two parrots out," Poindexter told ABC7. "You can see everything is ash."

Firefighters also battled flareups near Mount Wilson, which overlooks greater Los Angeles and has a historic observatory founded more than a century ago and numerous broadcast antennas that serve Southern California.

The fire was pushed by erratic winds over the weekend, although they had died down by Monday and were expected to remain light through Tuesday. About 1,100 homes and some 4,000 residents remained under evacuation orders, and the fire was only 17 percent contained, fire officials said.

Numerous studies in recent years have linked bigger U.S. wildfires to global warming from the burning of coal, oil and gas, especially because climate change has made California much drier. A drier California means plants are more flammable.

The Bobcat Fire was one of more than two dozen major wildfires burning across California, including five of the largest in state history.

Twenty-six people have been killed. Officials were investigating the death of a firefighter at another Southern California wildfire that erupted earlier this month from a smoke-generating pyrotechnic device used by a couple to reveal their baby's gender.

Charles Morton, 39, died Sept. 17 while battling the El Dorado Fire in the San Bernardino National Forest east of Los Angeles.

Morton, was a 14-year veteran of the U.S. Forest Service and a squad boss with the Big Bear Interagency Hotshot Crew.

"Charlie is survived by his wife and daughter, his parents, two brothers, cousins, and friends. He's loved and will be missed," Morton's family said in a statement.

In Wyoming, a wildfire that roared across a wilderness area toward cabins and a water supply reservoir for Cheyenne, the capital city, calmed down Tuesday. But predictions for more gusty winds were cause for concern. The blaze has charred over 21 square miles (55 square kilometers) of Medicine Bow National Forest. Officials were investigating signs the fire was human-caused.

More than 9,000 firefighters were battling large wildfires across Oregon and Washington, where thousands of homes have been destroyed, the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service said.

House easily passes stopgap funding bill, averting shutdown

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a sweeping bipartisan vote that takes a government shutdown off the table, the House passed a temporary government-wide funding bill Tuesday night, shortly after President Donald Trump prevailed in a behind-the-scenes fight over his farm bailout.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 47 of 82

The stopgap measure will keep federal agencies fully up and running into December, giving lame-duck lawmakers time to digest the election and decide whether to pass the annual government funding bills by then or kick them to the next administration. The budget year ends Sept. 30.

The 359-57 vote came after considerable behind-the-scenes battling over proposed add-ons. The final agreement gives the administration continued immediate authority to dole out Agriculture Department subsidies in the run-up to Election Day. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., retreated from an initial draft that sparked a furor with Republicans and farm-state Democrats, who said she was interfering with the routine implementation of the rural safety net as low crop prices and Trump's own tariffs slam farm country.

"It's a big deal. This is cash flow to mom and pop businesses all over rural America," said Texas Rep. Michael Conaway, top Republican on the House Agriculture Committee. "They get them every year in October. They come like clockwork."

In talks Tuesday, Pelosi restored a farm aid funding patch sought by the administration, which has sparked the ire of Democrats who said it plays political favorites as it gives out bailout money to farmers and ranchers.

In return, Pelosi won COVID-related food aid for the poor, including an extension of a higher food benefit for families whose children are unable to receive free or reduced lunches because schools are closed over the coronavirus. Another add-on would permit states to remove hurdles to food stamps and nutrition aid to low-income mothers that are more difficult to clear during the pandemic.

The deal permitted the measure to speed through the House after a swift debate that should ensure smooth sailing in the GOP-held Senate before next Wednesday's deadline. There's no appetite on either side for a government shutdown.

On Monday, Democrats released a version of the stopgap measure that did not contain the farm bailout provision, enraging Republicans and putting passage of the measure in doubt. It became apparent that Pelosi did not have the votes to pass it — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., dismissed it as a "rough draft" — and negotiations continued.

Democrats complain that the Trump administration has favored southern states such as Georgia — a key swing state and home of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue — and larger producers in distributing bailout funds. Farmers are suffering from low commodity prices and the effects of higher tariffs imposed by Trump. Trump announced a new \$13 billion allotment of bailout funding at a political rally in Wisconsin last week.

The administration's handling of farm subsidies had angered Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, the powerful top Democrat on the Agriculture Committee. She said that the Agriculture Department didn't need the special financing provision that sparked the furor and that the money would come in November at the latest anyway. But the financial fix had been passed before, and other Democrats, including endangered House incumbents in states like Iowa and Minnesota, pressed for it.

"Now is not the time to be playing politics with aid to farmers or the assistance needed to save our families and local economies from economic disaster," said freshman Rep. Abby Finkenauer, D-Iowa.

The measure is the bare minimum accomplishment for Capitol Hill's powerful Appropriations committees, who pride themselves on their deal-making abilities despite gridlock in other corners of Congress. It came after bipartisan negotiations on a huge COVID-19 relief package imploded and appear unlikely to be rekindled — especially since the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has upended U.S. politics.

"We need to keep the government open but we also need additional COVID relief for the American people," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla.

The legislation — called a continuing resolution, or CR, in Washington-speak — would keep every federal agency running at current funding levels through Dec. 11, which will keep the government afloat past an election that could reshuffle Washington's balance of power.

The measure also extends many programs whose funding or authorizations lapse on Sept. 30, including the federal flood insurance program, highway and transit programs, and a long set of extensions of various

health programs, such as a provision to prevent Medicaid cuts to hospitals that serve many poor people. It also finances the possible transition to a new administration if Joe Biden wins the White House and would stave off an unwelcome COVID-caused increase in Medicare Part B premiums for outpatient doctor visits.

The underlying stopgap measure deals with the 30% of the federal government's day-to-day budget that goes to Cabinet agency operations funded by Congress each year. The annual appropriations process broke down in the Senate this year and it's unclear but probably unlikely that the \$1.3 trillion in agency spending bills will be enacted this year, even in a post-election lame duck session, especially if Biden is elected to replace Trump.

In the past, both Democrats and Republicans have sought to use government funding deadlines and must-pass temporary funding bills as leverage to try to win concessions elsewhere on Washington's agenda. Such efforts invariably fail.

Republicans in 2013 used it in a failed attempt to prevent implementation of the so-called Obamacare health law, and Senate Democrats returned the favor in 2018 in a futile effort to force debate on permitting immigrants brought into the country illegally as children to remain in the U.S.

Pelosi studiously avoided such a confrontation this time.

'Unfathomable': US death toll from coronavirus hits 200,000

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The U.S. death toll from the coronavirus topped 200,000 Tuesday, by far the highest in the world, hitting the once-unimaginable threshold six weeks before an election that is certain to be a referendum in part on President Donald Trump's handling of the crisis.

"It is completely unfathomable that we've reached this point," said Jennifer Nuzzo, a Johns Hopkins University public health researcher, eight months after the scourge first reached the world's richest nation, with its state-of-the-art laboratories, top-flight scientists and stockpiles of medical supplies.

The number of dead is equivalent to a 9/11 attack every day for 67 days. It is roughly equal to the population of Salt Lake City or Huntsville, Alabama.

And it is still climbing. Deaths are running at close to 770 a day on average, and a widely cited model from the University of Washington predicts the U.S. toll will double to 400,000 by the end of the year as schools and colleges reopen and cold weather sets in. A vaccine is unlikely to become widely available until 2021.

"The idea of 200,000 deaths is really very sobering, in some respects stunning," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-disease expert, said on CNN.

The bleak milestone was reported by Johns Hopkins, based on figures supplied by state health authorities. But the real toll is thought to be much higher, in part because many COVID-19 deaths were probably ascribed to other causes, especially early on, before widespread testing.

Trump said it was "a shame" the U.S. reached that number but argued the toll could have been much worse.

"I think if we didn't do it properly and do it right, you'd have 2.5 million deaths," Trump told reporters at the White House before leaving for a campaign rally in Pittsburgh. He added that the United States is now "doing well" and "the stock market is up."

He also gave his often-repeated broadside that China was at fault for the pandemic. In a prerecorded speech to the U.N. General Assembly, he demanded that Beijing be held accountable for having "unleashed this plague onto the world." China's ambassador rejected the accusations as baseless.

On Twitter, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said, "It didn't have to be this bad."

"It's a staggering number that's hard to wrap your head around," he said. "There's a devastating human toll to this pandemic — and we can't forget that."

For five months, America has led the world by far in sheer numbers of confirmed infections — nearly 6.9 million as of Tuesday — and deaths. The U.S. has less than 5% of the globe's population but more than 20% of the reported deaths.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 49 of 82

Brazil is No. 2 with about 137,000 deaths, followed by India with approximately 89,000 and Mexico with around 74,000. Only five countries — Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Spain and Brazil — rank higher in COVID-19 deaths per capita.

"All the world's leaders took the same test, and some have succeeded and some have failed," said Dr. Cedric Dark, an emergency physician at Baylor College of Medicine in hard-hit Houston. "In the case of our country, we failed miserably."

Black and Hispanic people and American Indians have accounted for a disproportionate share of the deaths, underscoring the economic and health care disparities in the U.S.

Worldwide, the virus has infected more than 31 million people and is closing in fast on 1 million deaths, by Johns Hopkins' count, though the real numbers are believed to be higher because of gaps in testing and reporting.

For the U.S., it wasn't supposed to go this way.

When the year began, the U.S. had recently garnered recognition for its readiness for a pandemic. Health officials seemed confident as they converged on Seattle in January to deal with the country's first known case of the coronavirus, in a 35-year-old Washington state resident who had returned from visiting his family in Wuhan, China.

On Feb. 26, Trump held up pages from the Global Health Security Index, a measure of readiness for health crises, and declared, "The United States is rated No. 1 most prepared."

It was true. The U.S. outranked the 194 other countries in the index. Besides its labs, experts and strategic stockpiles, the U.S. could boast of its disease trackers and plans for rapidly communicating lifesaving information during a crisis. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was respected around the world for sending help to fight infectious diseases.

But monitoring at airports was loose. Travel bans came too late. Only later did health officials realize the virus could spread before symptoms show up, rendering screening imperfect. The virus also swept into nursing homes and exploited poor infection controls, claiming more than 78,000 lives.

At the same time, gaps in leadership led to shortages of testing supplies. Internal warnings to ramp up production of masks were ignored, leaving states to compete for protective gear.

Trump downplayed the threat early on, advanced unfounded notions about the behavior of the virus, promoted unproven or dangerous treatments, complained that too much testing was making the U.S. look bad, and disdained masks, turning face coverings into a political issue.

On April 10, the president predicted the U.S. wouldn't see 100,000 deaths. That milestone was reached May 27.

Nowhere was the lack of leadership seen as more crucial than in testing, a key to breaking the chain of contagion.

"We have from the very beginning lacked a national testing strategy," Nuzzo said. "For reasons I can't truly fathom, we've refused to develop one."

Sandy Brown of Grand Blanc, Michigan, called the death toll "gut-wrenching." Her husband of 35 years and their 20-year-old son — Freddie Lee Brown Jr. and Freddie Lee Brown III — died of COVID-19 just days apart in March, when there were fewer than 4,000 recorded deaths in the U.S.

"The thing that really gets to me is ... if things had been done properly, we could have put a lid on this," said Brown, who has no other children. "Now it's just unbelievable. It's devastating."

The real number of dead from the crisis could be significantly higher: As many as 215,000 more people than usual died in the U.S. from all causes during the first seven months of 2020, according to CDC figures. The death toll from COVID-19 during the same period was put at about 150,000 by Johns Hopkins.

Researchers suspect some coronavirus deaths were overlooked, while other deaths may have been caused indirectly by the crisis, by creating such turmoil that people with chronic conditions such as diabetes or heart disease were unable or unwilling to get treatment.

Dark, the emergency physician at Baylor, said that before the crisis, "people used to look to the United States with a degree of reverence. For democracy. For our moral leadership in the world. Supporting sci-

ence and using technology to travel to the moon.”

“Instead,” he said, “what’s really been exposed is how anti-science we’ve become.”

Associated Press writers Kelli Kennedy in Miami and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

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Cindy McCain endorses Biden for president in rebuke of Trump

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Cindy McCain endorsed Democrat Joe Biden for president Tuesday in a rebuke of President Donald Trump by the widow of the GOP’s 2008 nominee.

Trump has had a fraught relationship with members of John McCain’s family since he disparaged the Arizona senator during his 2016 campaign. But the McCains have until now stopped short of endorsing Trump’s rivals.

Cindy McCain cited the decadeslong friendship between her family and Biden’s and their bond as the parents of children serving in the military.

“He supports the troops and knows what it means for someone who has served,” McCain said in a phone interview. “Not only to love someone who has served, but understands what it means to send a child into combat. We’ve been great friends for many years, but we have a common thread in that we are Blue Star families.”

McCain’s backing could help Biden appeal to Republicans disaffected with the GOP president and give the former vice president a boost in Arizona, a crucial swing state that McCain represented in Congress for 35 years. He’s remained a revered figure since his 2018 death from complications of a brain tumor, particularly with the independent voters whom Biden is courting.

“I decided to take a stand, and hopefully other people will see the same thing. Other women particularly,” McCain said. “You may have to step out of your comfort zone a little bit, but Biden is by far the best candidate in the race.”

McCain said she hasn’t voted for a Democrat since she was 18 and followed the lead of her parents. She remains a registered Republican and has no plans to change, she said.

Biden told donors on Tuesday evening that McCain’s endorsement was coming “because of what (Trump) talks about how my son and John and others who are heroes, who served their country. You know, he said they’re ‘losers, suckers.’”

Biden was referring to comments Trump reportedly made mocking the American war dead. Trump has denied making the remarks, first reported through anonymous sources by The Atlantic, but many of the comments were later confirmed by The Associated Press.

Cindy McCain had not initially been expected to offer an explicit endorsement of Biden, but she had already gone to bat for his presidential run. She lent her voice to a video that aired during the Democratic National Convention and was focused on Biden’s close friendship with her late husband.

John McCain was assigned to be a military aide for Biden, then a senator, during an overseas trip, and their families formed an enduring friendship. Biden and his wife introduced the McCains to each other,

They later shared a grim bond over glioblastoma, an aggressive cancer that killed Biden’s son Beau three years before McCain succumbed to the same disease.

John McCain said in 2016 that he couldn’t support Trump or Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016, citing Trump’s demeaning comments about women.

“It’s not pleasant for me to renounce the nominee of my party,” McCain said during a debate as he sought his sixth term in the Senate. “He won the nomination fair and square.”

A Navy pilot, John McCain was shot down over North Vietnam in 1967. He was captured, beaten and

held prisoner for more than five years, refusing to be released ahead of other American servicemembers.

During his 2016 campaign, Trump said of McCain, "He's not a war hero. He was a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured." McCain later angered Trump with his dramatic thumbs-down vote against repealing Obama's health care law.

The McCains' daughter Meghan McCain has been outspoken about the pain she feels when the president disparages her father. Biden consoled Meghan McCain on an appearance on "The View" after her father was diagnosed with the cancer that eventually took his life. She has said Biden often reaches out to her to offer support, after losing his own son Beau to the same cancer in 2015.

Trump wasn't invited to John McCain's funeral.

Senate GOP plans vote on Trump's court pick before election

By LISA MASCARO, ZEKE MILLER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Votes in hand, Senate Republicans are charging ahead with plans to confirm President Donald Trump's pick to fill the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Supreme Court seat before the Nov. 3 election, launching a divisive fight over Democratic objections before a nominee is even announced.

Trump said Tuesday he will name his choice Saturday, confident of support. Democrats say it's too close to the election, and the winner of the presidency should name the new justice. But under GOP planning, the Senate could vote Oct. 29.

"I guess we have all the votes we're going to need," Trump told WJBX FOX 2 in Detroit. "I think it's going to happen."

Republicans believe the court fight will energize voters for Trump, boosting the party and potentially deflating Democrats who cannot stop the lifetime appointment for a conservative justice. The Senate is controlled by Republicans, 53-47, with a simple majority needed for confirmation. The one remaining possible Republican holdout, Mitt Romney of Utah, said Tuesday he supports taking a vote.

Still, with early presidential voting already underway in several states, all sides are girding for a wrenching Senate battle over health care, abortion access and other big cases before the court and sure to further split the torn nation.

It is one of the quickest confirmation efforts in recent times. No court nominee in U.S. history has been considered so close to a presidential election. And it all comes as the nation is marking the grave milestone of 200,000 deaths from the coronavirus pandemic.

During a private lunch meeting Tuesday at Senate GOP campaign headquarters, several Republican senators spoke up in favor of voting before the election. None advocated a delay.

Elsewhere, as tributes poured in for Ginsburg with vigils and flowers at the court's steps, Democrats led by presidential nominee Joe Biden vowed a tough fight. The Senate Democratic leader, Chuck Schumer, said "we should honor her dying wish," which was that her seat not be filled until the man who wins the presidential election is installed, in January.

But that seemed no longer an option. So far, two Republicans have said they oppose taking up a nomination at this time, but no others are in sight. Under Senate rules, Vice President Mike Pence could break a tie vote.

While not all Republican senators have said they will support the eventual pick, few appear willing to stand in the way of a top party priority.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell made no scheduling announcements. But hearings could start as soon as Oct. 12 by the Senate Judiciary Committee, with a vote in the full Senate by Oct. 29, according to a GOP aide granted anonymity to discuss deliberations.

After Trump met with conservative Judge Amy Coney Barrett at the White House on Monday he told reporters he would interview other candidates and might meet with Judge Barbara Lagoa when he travels to Florida later this week. Conversations in the White House and McConnell's office have been increasingly focused on Barrett and Lagoa, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the private deliberations.

Barrett, 48, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit, has long been favored by conser-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 52 of 82

vatives. Those familiar with the process said interest inside the White House seemed to be waning for Lagoa amid concerns she did not have a proven record as a conservative jurist. Lagoa has been pushed by Florida's governor, and aides tout her political advantages of being Hispanic and hailing from the key political battleground state.

Democrats point to hypocrisy in Republicans trying to rush through a pick so close to the election after McConnell led the GOP in refusing to vote on a nominee of President Barack Obama in February 2016, long before that year's election.

Romney, the GOP's 2012 presidential nominee, dismissed that argument, saying "it was not unfair" for Republicans to refuse to consider Obama's choice of Merrick Garland.

The Utah Republican backed up his decision by saying it's not "written in the stars" that the court should have a liberal bent. He said Trump's pick will tip the court to become more conservative, and he said that is appropriate "for a nation which is, if you will, center right, to have a court which reflects a center right point of view."

At the private lunch, Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana said, senators advocating swift voting warned of "too many complications" if it's delayed until after the election — presumably if Biden wins the White House or Republicans lose the Senate.

Conservative groups pushing for swift approval also argue the election result could be disputed with legal battles dragging on for weeks.

Democrats say voters should speak first, on Election Day. Biden appealed to GOP senators to "uphold your constitutional duty, your conscience" and wait until the president is chosen.

But few Republicans are willing to cross Trump. The president has criticized Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska for opposing a Senate vote before elections. Trump warned they would be "very badly hurt" by voters in November.

Collins went further Tuesday saying she would vote against Trump's pick, "not because I might not support that nominee under normal circumstances but we're simply too close to the election."

The parties braced for the fight ahead.

At an evening rally in Pittsburgh, Trump marveled at how important the Supreme Court is to some voters, and at his own opportunity to pick a third justice. "Can you imagine?" he asked.

"These sorts of fights bring Republicans together," said Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., the party's Senate campaign chairman.

At a memorial on the National Mall marking the 200,000 COVID deaths, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi paid tribute to Ginsburg and warned against Trump's coming court challenge to the Affordable Care Act. "It's a time for us to vote health," she said.

The mounting clash over the vacant seat injects new turbulence in the presidential campaign with the nation still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic and shattered economy, with millions unemployed and heightened partisan tensions and anger.

Ginsburg, 87, died Friday of metastatic pancreatic cancer. She will lie in state at the U.S. Capitol this week, the first woman accorded that honor. Her casket will be on view Wednesday and Thursday on the steps of the high court.

No nominee has won confirmation so quickly since Sandra Day O'Connor — with no opposition from either party — became the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court in 1981.

Associated Press writers Mark Sherman, Andrew Taylor, Matthew Daly, Kevin Freking and Mike Balsamo in Washington, Alex Jaffe in Philadelphia, Bill Barrow in Atlanta and Steve Peoples and Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this report.

China, top global emitter, aims to go carbon-neutral by 2060

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping says his country will aim to stop adding to the global warming problem by 2060.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 53 of 82

Xi's announcement during a speech Tuesday to the U.N. General Assembly is a significant step for the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases.

Calling for a "green revolution," Xi said the coronavirus pandemic had shown the need to preserve the environment.

"Humankind can no longer afford to ignore the repeated warnings of nature," he said.

Citing the Paris Agreement that he and former U.S. President Barack Obama helped forge in 2015, Xi said his country would raise its emissions reduction targets with "vigorous policies and measures."

"We aim to have CO2 emissions peak before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060," he said.

The term "carbon neutrality" means releasing no additional CO2 into the atmosphere, though technically it allows countries to keep emitting if they ensure that an equal amount is captured again in some form.

The announcement was cheered by climate campaigners. Greenpeace executive director Jennifer Morgan called it "an important signal" that showed climate change is "top of agenda for China."

"A big shift for curbing emissions and a significant step forward in international cooperation" U.N. climate chief Patricia Espinosa said.

The goal will be a challenge for China, which relies heavily for its electricity on coal, one of the most carbon-intensive fossil fuels.

China released the equivalent of 10 billion tons of carbon dioxide, or CO2, into the atmosphere in 2018, according to the Global Carbon Project that tracks emissions worldwide. That was almost twice as much as the United States and three times as much as the European Union.

Several other major emitters have set earlier deadlines, with the EU aiming to be carbon neutral by 2050. Frans Timmermans, who leads the EU executive's efforts on climate change, welcomed Xi's announcement.

"We need decisive action from every country to keep temperatures under control, tackle climate change and keep our planet inhabitable," he said.

The United States has so far not set such a goal. President Donald Trump, who once described climate change as a hoax invented by China, has started the process of pulling the U.S. out of the Paris accord.

If China fulfills Xi's goal, it could prevent 0.4 to 0.7 degrees (0.2 to 0.4 degrees Celsius) further warming for the world, according to "very rough estimates" by MIT management professor John Sterman, who models and tracks emission reductions and pledges with Climate Interactive.

But much depends on how they do their emissions reduction and how soon they cut them, he said, adding he has to do a more thorough analysis.

"That's a lot," Sterman said. "China's by far the world's big emitter. They're emitting more than the EU and US together."

"It puts a lot more pressure on the United States," Sterman said.

Perhaps even more important than the carbon neutrality pledge is the effort to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 instead of by 2030, Sterman said. Carbon dioxide's more than 100-year lifetime in the air makes earlier emission cuts more effective than promises in the future, he said.

"Emissions that don't happen between now and 2030 are going to reduce warming a lot more than the same emission reductions after 2060," Sterman said.

However, pledges are not the same as actions. What's needed is signs of action, such as eliminating plans to build new coal-fired power plants, cutting subsidies for coal power and getting off coal entirely, Sterman said. Coal is the biggest carbon dioxide emitter of power sources.

Twenty-nine nations before China have pledged to achieve climate neutrality in different years, according to the Carbon Neutrality Coalition.

With China, the 30 countries that have some kind of carbon neutrality pledges, account for about 43% of the world's carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. The largest polluting countries not on the list are the United States, India, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, South Africa, Turkey, Brazil and Australia.

World powers clash, virus stirs anger at virtual UN meeting

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 54 of 82

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Kept apart by a devastating pandemic and dispersed across the globe, world leaders convened electronically Tuesday for an unprecedented high-level meeting, where the U.N. chief exhorted them to unite and tackle the era's towering problems: the coronavirus, the "economic calamity" it unleashed and the risk of a new Cold War between the United States and China.

As Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the first virtual "general debate" of the U.N. General Assembly, the yawning gaps of politics and anger became evident. China and Iran clashed with the United States — via prerecorded videos from home — and leaders expressed frustration and anger at the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, which the U.N. chief has called "the number one global security threat in our world today."

As he began his speech, the secretary-general looked out at the vast General Assembly chamber, where only one mask-wearing diplomat from each of the U.N.'s 193 member nations was allowed to sit, socially distanced from one another.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our annual meeting beyond recognition," Guterres said. "But it has made it more important than ever."

While the six-day mainly virtual meeting is unique in the U.N.'s 75-year history, the speeches from leaders hit on all the conflicts, crises and divisions facing a world that Guterres said is witnessing "rising inequalities, climate catastrophe, widening societal divisions, rampant corruption."

In his grim state of the world speech, he said "the pandemic has exploited these injustices, preyed on the most vulnerable and wiped away the progress of decades," including sparking the first rise in poverty in 30 years.

The secretary-general called for global unity, foremost to fight the pandemic, and sharply criticized populism and nationalism for failing to contain the virus and for often making things worse.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan criticized how "countries were left on their own" at the onset of the pandemic, stressing that "effective multilateralism requires effective multilateral institutions." He urged rapid U.N. reforms, starting with the Security Council, the most powerful body with five veto-wielding members — the U.S., China, Russia, Britain and France.

By contrast, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, whose country has reported the second-highest coronavirus death toll after the U.S., trumpeted his focus on the economy in dealing with the pandemic.

Bolsonaro lambasted "segments of the Brazilian media" for "spreading panic" by encouraging stay-at-home orders and prioritizing public health over the economy. He's downplayed the severity of the coronavirus and repeatedly said shutting down the economy would inflict worse hardship on people.

Guterres told the virtual audience that "too often, there has also been a disconnect between leadership and power."

A year ago, he warned about the rising U.S.-China rivalry, saying Tuesday: "We are moving in a very dangerous direction."

"Our world cannot afford a future where the two largest economies split the globe in a great fracture — each with its own trade and financial rules and internet and artificial intelligence capacities," Guterres said. "We must avoid this at all costs."

The rivalry between the two powers was in full display as President Donald Trump, in a very short virtual speech, urged the United Nations to hold Beijing "accountable" for failing to contain the virus that originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan and has killed over 200,000 Americans and nearly 1 million worldwide.

China's ambassador rejected all accusations against Beijing as "totally baseless."

"At this moment, the world needs more solidarity and cooperation, and not a confrontation," U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun said before introducing President Xi Jinping's prerecorded speech. "We need to increase mutual confidence and trust, and not the spreading of political virus."

French President Emmanuel Macron said the pandemic should be "an electric shock" to encourage more multilateral action. Otherwise, he warned, the world will be "collectively condemned to a pas de deux" by the U.S. and China in which everyone else is "reduced to being nothing but the sorry spectators of a

collective impotence.”

Tensions with the U.S. also dominated a fiery speech by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, whose country is facing the worst COVID-19 crisis in the Middle East. He lashed out at U.S. sanctions but declared that his country will not submit to U.S. pressure.

Rouhani said the United States can't impose negotiations or war on Iran, stressing that his country is "not a bargaining chip in U.S. elections and domestic policy." He used the May death of Black American George Floyd under the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer as a metaphor for Iran's "own experience" with the United States.

"We instantly recognize the feet kneeling on the neck as the feet of arrogance on the neck of independent nations," Rouhani said.

U.S.-Iran tensions have run dangerously high this year, and Trump signed an executive order this week to enforce all U.N. sanctions on Iran because it's not complying with a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers — a move he touted in his U.N. speech but that most of the world rejects as illegal.

Similarly, Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed the need for multilateral cooperation against the pandemic, urging an end to "illegitimate sanctions" against his country and others that he said could boost the global economy and create jobs.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, speaking on behalf of the African Union, said rich nations haven't been generous enough in helping developing countries combat COVID-19, which is setting back the continent's economy and development.

After the pandemic shut down big parts of the world in March, Guterres called for a global cease-fire to tackle it. On Tuesday, he appealed for a 100-day push by the international community, led by the Security Council, "to make this a reality by the end of the year."

Amid widespread calls for U.N. reforms, France's Macron said the global body itself "ran the risk of impotence."

"Our societies have never been so interdependent," he said. "And at the very moment when all this is happening, never have we been so out of tune, so out of alignment."

Jennifer Peltz contributed from New York and Angela Charlton from Paris

Kentucky city prepares for Breonna Taylor announcement

By DYLAN LOVAN and REBECCA REYNOLDS YONKER Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Officials in Kentucky's largest city were preparing Tuesday for more protests and possible unrest as the public nervously awaits the state attorney general's announcement about whether he will charge officers in Breonna Taylor's shooting death.

With timing of the announcement still uncertain, Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer declared a state of emergency due to the potential for civil unrest, hours after police said they would restrict access in the city's downtown area. The mayor and police said they were trying to plan ahead of time to protect both demonstrators and the people who live and work there.

But some involved in protests seeking justice for Taylor questioned why the police were going to such "overkill" lengths when the city has been the site of peaceful protests for months.

Attorney General Daniel Cameron has declined to set a deadline for his decision. Earlier this month, he remarked that "an investigation, if done properly, cannot follow a certain timeline."

Interim Police Chief Robert Schroeder said officials from Cameron's office have promised to try to give authorities a heads-up.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said the measures taken by Louisville police are due to the intense scrutiny of the Taylor case, in Louisville and around the country.

"The national attention here is so great, the potential for outsiders so significant, the possibility of someone taking something peaceful and trying to turn it into something that's not, is all there," Beshear said during his daily COVID-19 briefing Tuesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 56 of 82

Mayor Fischer said officials' goal "is ensuring space and opportunity for potential protesters to gather and express their First Amendment rights after the announcement."

"At the same time, we are preparing for any eventuality to keep everyone safe," he said.

In a news release Tuesday, the Louisville Metro Police Department said it was placing barricades around Jefferson Square Park, where protests over Taylor's death have been held, and the perimeter of the downtown area; allowing only pedestrians in the blocks immediately surrounding the park; restricting vehicle traffic in other areas of downtown and limiting access to parking garages.

The department apologized for any inconveniences to workers and downtown residents.

"However, public safety is our number one priority, and it would be irresponsible if we did not take preemptive action to preserve it," the statement said.

Police first mentioned the barricades on Monday, when they also said they had canceled vacations and were denying officers' requests for time off for the time being.

Federal officials closed the federal courthouse and other federal buildings for the week.

Sadiqa Reynolds, who heads the nonprofit Louisville Urban League and lives downtown, described the city's measures as "overkill."

"This is certainly an over-response to the local protests that have been happening in our community," she said, noting that protesters have been demonstrating in and around the city for nearly four months.

When Reynolds and hundreds of others staged a peaceful protest on Kentucky Derby day, police blocked off streets surrounding Churchill Downs and stationed dozens of officers at the track, which was without fans inside.

"This city keeps meeting the desire for justice with this preparation for war," she said.

Taylor, a Black emergency medical worker, was shot multiple times March 13 by officers who entered her home using a no-knock warrant during a narcotics investigation. The warrant used was connected to a suspect who did not live there, and no drugs were found inside. The use of no-knock warrants has since been banned by Louisville's Metro Council.

Large protests over Taylor's death that at times became violent erupted in late May in the city but most demonstrations since then have been peaceful. Celebrities, athletes, activists and Taylor's family have for months pushed Cameron to criminally charge the officers involved in the raid.

Last week, the city of Louisville settled a lawsuit from Taylor's family for \$12 million and pledged several police reforms as part of the agreement.

Meanwhile, an officer who was shot in the leg by Taylor's boyfriend the night police entered her apartment wrote an email to fellow officers telling them that with their actions, Fischer and top police officials had "failed all of us in epic proportions."

In the email, published by news outlets Tuesday and confirmed by his attorney, Sgt. Jonathan Mattingly wrote, "I know we did the legal, moral and ethical thing that night."

Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, told police he fired one round after Taylor's door was broken down and Mattingly entered. Walker said he thought someone was breaking into the house and didn't know that it was police who were entering.

Referring to protesters, Mattingly added that police officers should not be in a position "that allows thugs to get in your face and yell, curse and degrade you."

His attorney, Kent Wicker, told The Associated Press in an email that Mattingly's email was "expressing his support for (fellow officers) and their work during these difficult times."

This story has been edited to read that Taylor was shot "multiple times," instead of eight times, to reflect differing accounts.

Associated Press reporter Bruce Schreiner contributed to this report.

Firefighter who died in blaze was on elite Hotshot crew

By AMY TAXIN Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 57 of 82

A California firefighter killed while battling a blaze in the mountains east of Los Angeles was identified Tuesday as a member of an elite Hotshot crew dedicated to fighting wildfires.

Charles Morton, 39, a San Diego native, was a 14-year veteran of the U.S. Forest Service and a squad boss for the Big Bear Interagency Hotshots in San Bernardino National Forest, officials said. He was married and had a daughter.

Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen said Morton was a well-respected leader who was always there for his squad and his crew at the toughest times.

"Our hearts go out to Charlie's loved ones, coworkers, friends and the Big Bear Hotshots," she said. "We will keep them in our thoughts and prayers."

On Tuesday, a procession escorted Morton's body from San Bernardino to an Orange County mortuary. Ramon Herrera, also with the U.S. Forest Service, told KTLA he had worked with Morton.

"He always had my back," Herrera said. "I mean, to lose such a good man, not just a firefighter, but he was a good person, and I'm going to miss him terribly."

The U.S. Hotshots Association posted a photo of a belt buckle on social media after Morton's death, writing: "Rest easy brother, may the wind be at your back."

Hotshots, according to the Forest Service, are highly skilled hand crews and often assigned to work on the most challenging parts of wildfires. They must meet stringent standards for physical fitness and training.

Toni Atkins, president pro tempore of the California Senate said, "San Diego, and the state, lost a true hero last week."

Patrick Gaines, who served on a Wyoming Hotshot crew in the 1990s, said the work is not for people that hold desk jobs during the week.

"This is arduous. It's serious." he said. "It's very strenuous. It's very demanding — not just physically, but mentally."

Morton died Thursday while fighting the El Dorado fire some 80 miles (129 kilometers) east of Los Angeles. On Tuesday, it had burned more than 22,000 acres and was 60% contained. It was sparked when a couple used a device that was supposed to emit blue or pink smoke to reveal their baby's gender.

Fire officials said the couple fired off the device in a field and it ignited grasses and quickly spread with sweltering temperatures, low humidity and a stiff breeze. The couple tried to put out the flames but couldn't and called 911.

It was one of more than two dozen fires in the state.

Associated Press writer Christopher Weber in Los Angeles contributed this report.

They said it: Leaders at the virtual UN, in their own words

By The Associated Press undefined

Lots of leaders saying lots of things about lots of topics — topics that matter to them, to their regions, to the world.

That's what the speechmaking at the U.N. General Assembly invariably produces each year. And each year, certain enormous topics and certain louder voices dominate.

Here, The Associated Press takes the opposite approach and spotlights some thoughts you might not have heard — the voices of leaders speaking at the first all-virtual U.N. General Assembly leaders meeting who might not have captured the headlines and the airtime on Tuesday, the first day of the 2020 debate.

"Life is experiencing a radical redesigning of age-old ways, and uncertainty is replacing certainty. Even close friends cannot recognize each other due to the masks that protect us from the contagion. Everything is changing."

— Miguel Diaz-Canel, president of Cuba

"Recognizing that protecting our natural environment would ultimately protect all existence, Jordan has

drafted a charter, to be submitted to the UNGA, that grants selected ecosystems and all species of flora and fauna the legal right to exist. And thus ensuring humanity itself continues to exist.”

— King Abdullah of Jordan

“Those who conquer, those who dominate, those who colonize always try to justify their atrocities by denigrating the first peoples by calling them barbarians or savages.”

— Andrés Manuel López Obrador, president of Mexico

“Rarely has there been a more pressing time for creative thinking and innovation.”

— Danny Faure, president of the Seychelles

“Our eyes are focused with hope and faith on scientists and researchers who are working on vaccines and drugs to stop the pandemic.”

— Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedo, president of Turkmenistan

Beta weakens to tropical depression, stalls over Texas coast

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Beta weakened to a tropical depression Tuesday as it parked itself over the Texas coast, raising concerns of extensive flooding in Houston and areas farther inland.

Beta, which made landfall late Monday as a tropical storm just north of Port O'Connor, is the first storm named for a Greek letter to make landfall in the continental United States. Forecasters ran out of traditional storm names last week, forcing the use of the Greek alphabet for only the second time since the 1950s.

By Tuesday afternoon, Beta was 40 miles (64 kilometers) north of Port O'Connor, Texas, with maximum sustained winds of 30 mph (48 kph), the U.S. National Hurricane Center said. The storm was moving east-northeast at 5 mph (8 kilometers) and was expected to crawl inland along the coast over Texas through Wednesday.

The National Hurricane Center said parts of the Houston area had seen up to 14 inches (36 centimeters) of rain by Tuesday afternoon. One area in Brazoria County, located south of Houston along the coast, got nearly 18 inches (46 centimeters) of rain in the last two days.

Street flooding was reported in parts of the Houston area. Fire Chief Samuel Peña said first responders had done nearly 100 water rescues on city roadways since Monday evening.

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo said there were preliminary reports of some home flooding along a creek south of Houston.

Both Hidalgo, the top elected official in Harris County, and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner urged residents to stay home and off the roads. About 70 barricades had been placed throughout the city in high water areas.

“Your sedan is not a submarine. Your minivan is not magical. So stay off the roads right now,” Hidalgo said. “Your destination is not worth your life. It’s not worth the life of the first responder that’s going to have to come and rescue you if you drive into high water and are stuck there.”

Houston-area officials worried additional rainfall Tuesday evening and Wednesday on already saturated ground and waterways could result in more flooding.

Houston resident Adam Matter, who was out near a flooded downtown area bayou on Tuesday, said Beta’s flooding was “serious in spots. You should avoid those spots, but I don’t think it’s anything to be too concerned about.”

Beta was the ninth named storm that made landfall in the continental U.S. this year. That tied a record set in 1916, according to Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach.

Beta was expected to move over Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi later in the week, bringing the risk of flash flooding.

However, forecasters and officials reassured residents that Beta was not expected to be another Hur-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 59 of 82

ricane Harvey or Tropical Storm Imelda. Harvey in 2017 dumped more than 50 inches (127 centimeters) of rain on Houston, causing \$125 billion in damage in Texas. Imelda, which hit Southeast Texas last year, was one of the wettest cyclones on record.

Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 29 Texas counties on Monday, ahead of Beta's arrival.

Beta was forecast to dump heavy rain on the southwestern corner of Louisiana three weeks after the same area got pounded by Hurricane Laura. The rainfall and storm surge prompted Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards to declare a state of emergency.

Parts of the Alabama coast and Florida Panhandle were still reeling from Hurricane Sally, which roared ashore Sept. 16, causing at least two deaths.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Teddy was moving toward Canada, with a predicted landfall in Nova Scotia early Wednesday before heading into Newfoundland on Wednesday night, forecasters said. The large and powerful storm was causing dangerous rip currents along the U.S. East Coast, the hurricane center said.

Teddy was about 300 miles (480 kilometers) south of Halifax, Nova Scotia, on Tuesday afternoon with maximum sustained winds of 100 mph (160 kph). It was expected to weaken through Wednesday, but forecasters said it would likely be a strong, post-tropical cyclone when it moves in and over Nova Scotia.

Paulette, which made landfall last week in Bermuda as a hurricane, regenerated near the Azores but was weakening Tuesday, the hurricane center said. Now a tropical storm, Paulette was expected to become a post-tropical remnant low in the next day or so.

The National Weather Service said on Twitter: "Because 2020, we now have Zombie Tropical Storms. Welcome back to the land of the living, Tropical Storm Paulette."

Associated Press video journalist John Mone in Houston, reporters Seth Borenstein in Kensington, Maryland, Janet McConaughy in New Orleans and Julie Walker in New York City contributed to this report.

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

What a gift: Russia offers UN staff free virus vaccines

MOSCOW (AP) — What do you do when Vladimir Putin offers you Russia's new coronavirus vaccine, for free?

United Nations staff in New York and around the world are now facing that choice, after the Russian president offered Tuesday to provide them the Sputnik-V vaccine in a speech to this year's General Assembly marking the body's 75th birthday.

Only results from small early studies on the Russian vaccine have been published, raising concerns among some scientists that it isn't ready yet for widespread use — and prompting worldwide memes about potential bizarre side effects.

"Any one of us could face this dangerous virus. The virus has not spared the staff of the United Nations, its headquarters and regional entities," Putin said in a prerecorded speech from Moscow.

The coronavirus pandemic means this year's General Assembly is a work-from-home production, for the first time in its history.

"Russia is ready to offer U.N. workers the necessary, qualified help, and in particular we propose to supply our vaccine for free to employees of the organization and its subsidiaries who volunteer for vaccination," said Putin, who announced the vaccine to broad fanfare last month and said his own daughter is among those who have taken it.

He described Tuesday's offer as a response to popular demand: "Some colleagues from the U.N. have asked about this, and we will not remain indifferent to them."

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said, "We thank President Putin for his generous offer which will be studied by our medical services."

At the U.N.'s medical agency in Geneva, the World Health Organization, spokeswoman Dr. Margaret Harris declined to comment.

In a report published in the journal *Lancet*, developers of the Russian vaccine said it appeared to be safe and to prompt an antibody response in all 40 people tested in the second phase of the study within three weeks. However, the authors noted that participants were only followed for 42 days, the study sample was small and there was no placebo or control vaccine used.

By contrast, other vaccines that have also shown promise in early tests are now being studied more widely, in tens of thousands of people in several countries, to understand if they can protect people from infections — and whether they have side effects that can only be found through large trials.

On Monday, Russian media reported that the WHO's regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, praised the vaccine after a meeting with Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko in Moscow. The state Tass news agency quoted Kluge as saying that "the WHO appreciates Russia's efforts in developing a vaccine against the coronavirus, Sputnik V" and calling it "safe and effective."

Russian officials have defended the vaccine on the world stage, as pharmaceutical companies around the world race to market an effective vaccine on a mass scale, and governments race to ensure access to a vaccine for their populations.

UK's Johnson urges 'spirit of togetherness' to combat virus

By JILL LAWLESS and PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson appealed Tuesday for resolve and a "spirit of togetherness" through the winter as he unveiled new restrictions on everyday life to suppress a dramatic spike in coronavirus cases.

Warning that the measures could last for six months, Johnson voiced hope that "things will be far better by the spring" when a vaccine and mass testing could be in place.

The most high-profile change centered on pubs, restaurants and other entertainment venues in England, which from Thursday must close at 10 p.m. In a change of emphasis, Johnson urged people to work from home where possible. He said stiff fines will be imposed on anyone breaking quarantine rules or gathering in groups of more than six, while the use of face masks will be expanded to include passengers in taxis and staff at bars and shops.

He said further restrictions might have to be introduced if people fail to abide by the rules.

"If we follow these simple rules together, we will get through this winter together," Johnson said in a prime-time televised address. "But now is the time for us all to summon the discipline, and the resolve, and the spirit of togetherness that will carry us through."

In a speech with deliberate echoes of World War II communal spirit, Johnson said that "never in our history has our collective destiny and our collective health depended so completely on our individual behavior."

The other nations of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — also tightened restrictions, going further in some cases.

The new curbs came as the U.K. recorded 4,926 new confirmed coronavirus cases, the highest daily total since early May and four times the figure of a month ago.

Many scientists see echoes of the path of the outbreak earlier in the year when the virus spread swiftly through the country and led to Europe's deadliest outbreak. The U.K. has seen 41,825 people die within 28 days of testing positive for COVID-19.

Johnson had told lawmakers in the House of Commons on Tuesday that barring a vaccine or new forms of mass testing, "we should assume that the restrictions I have announced will remain in place for perhaps six months."

He said that if the new curbs did not slow the outbreak, "we reserve the right to deploy greater firepower, with significantly greater restrictions."

Johnson's government has faced a barrage of criticism over its handling of the pandemic, notably over big problems in the testing regime.

It has also been criticized over its perceived mixed messaging and sudden lurches in policy.

Just last month it was encouraging people back to pubs and restaurants with a discount scheme. Only

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 61 of 82

weeks ago, Johnson was encouraging workers to go back into offices to keep city centers from becoming ghost towns, and had even expressed hope that society could return to normal by Christmas.

Some lawmakers from Johnson's governing Conservative Party remain uneasy about tightening restrictions on business and daily life, citing civil liberties and the impact on Britain's already-reeling economy.

Johnson, who was hospitalized in intensive care with the coronavirus in April, said he was "deeply, spiritually reluctant to make any of these impositions, or infringe anyone's freedom."

But he said "the tragic reality of having COVID is that your mild cough can be someone else's death knell."

Some scientists think it's inevitable that further restrictions will have be imposed.

Dr. David Strain, a senior clinical lecturer at the University of Exeter, said most transmission is happening socially and the government should have done more to limit social gatherings. At present, six people from six different households can meet in England.

"Closing down restaurants and pubs earlier will do little to stave the spread for as long as multiple different households can interchangeably meet up," he said.

Governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland both went further than Johnson in limiting social interaction.

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, who has often struck a more cautious note than Johnson during the pandemic, said that with a few exceptions people will be barred from visiting others' homes.

"We know what we need to do to protect ourselves and others and all of us have a part to play," she said in a televised address straight after Johnson spoke.

Businesses, especially in the hospitality, sports and arts sectors, said they urgently needed financial support to weather the new restrictions. Kate Nicholls, chief executive of trade body UKHospitality, said before the announcement that the restrictions would be "another crushing blow" for many businesses.

Carolyn Fairbairn, director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, said telling people to work from home was necessary but "comes at a serious price." She urged the government to introduce new financial support for businesses in hard-hit city centers and for furloughed workers.

Amid concerns that some people who test positive for the virus are still going to work because they can't afford to stay home, the government announced it would pay low-income workers 500 pounds (\$639) if they are told to self-isolate for 14 days.

Jennifer Cole, a biological anthropologist at Royal Holloway University, said people's behavior is "the biggest influence" on the spread of the virus.

"In essence, the government is saying, 'Stay sober, stay sensible and the venues can stay open.' It's a carrot to encourage responsible behavior," she said.

Danica Kirka in London contributed to this story.

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

UK's Johnson urges 'spirit of togetherness' to combat virus

By JILL LAWLESS and PAN PYLAS Associated Press

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Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 62 of 82

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But he said "the tragic reality of having COVID is that your mild cough can be someone else's death knell."

Some scientists think it's inevitable that further restrictions will have to be imposed.

Dr. David Strain, a senior clinical lecturer at the University of Exeter, said most transmission is happening socially and the government should have done more to limit social gatherings. At present, six people from six different households can meet in England.

"Closing down restaurants and pubs earlier will do little to stave the spread for as long as multiple different households can interchangeably meet up," he said.

Governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland both went further than Johnson in limiting social interaction.

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, who has often struck a more cautious note than Johnson during the pandemic, said that with a few exceptions people will be barred from visiting others' homes.

"We know what we need to do to protect ourselves and others and all of us have a part to play," she said in a televised address straight after Johnson spoke.

Businesses, especially in the hospitality, sports and arts sectors, said they urgently needed financial support to weather the new restrictions. Kate Nicholls, chief executive of trade body UKHospitality, said before the announcement that the restrictions would be "another crushing blow" for many businesses.

Carolyn Fairbairn, director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, said telling people to work from home was necessary but "comes at a serious price." She urged the government to introduce new financial support for businesses in hard-hit city centers and for furloughed workers.

Amid concerns that some people who test positive for the virus are still going to work because they can't afford to stay home, the government announced it would pay low-income workers 500 pounds (\$639) if they are told to self-isolate for 14 days.

Jennifer Cole, a biological anthropologist at Royal Holloway University, said people's behavior is "the biggest influence" on the spread of the virus.

"In essence, the government is saying, 'Stay sober, stay sensible and the venues can stay open.' It's a carrot to encourage responsible behavior," she said.

Danica Kirka in London contributed to this story.

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

Trooper who faced firing in Black man's death dies in crash

By JIM MUSTIAN and MELINDA DESLATTÉ Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — A Louisiana state trooper has died following a single-vehicle highway crash that happened just hours after he learned he would be fired for his role last year in the in-custody death of a Black man.

Master Trooper Chris Hollingsworth was pronounced dead Tuesday following a brief hospitalization, Warren Lee, chief investigator for the Ouachita Parish Coroner's Office, told The Associated Press.

Hollingsworth had been airlifted to Shreveport early Monday after crashing his personal vehicle on Interstate 20 near Monroe. Police have not released any details about how the crash occurred.

Hours before, Hollingsworth had received word that State Police intended to terminate him following an internal investigation into the May 2019 death of Ronald Greene, a case that has drawn mounting scrutiny and become the subject of a federal civil rights investigation.

Authorities initially said Greene died after crashing his vehicle into a tree following a high-speed chase in rural northern Louisiana that began over an unspecified traffic violation. But Greene's family alleges troopers used excessive force and "brutalized" him while taking him into custody.

State Police, despite growing pressure, have repeatedly declined to release body-camera footage and other records related to Greene's arrest.

Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat, said Tuesday he has not seen the footage but pledged to make it public once the ongoing investigations are concluded.

"When that happens," he said, "the videos will be shown."

Greene's family called for "the immediate arrest of the remaining men responsible for this tragic and unnecessary death."

"Trooper Hollingsworth's family has the finality of knowing exactly how he died as their community mourns his loss," said Lee Merritt, a prominent civil rights attorney representing the family. "The family of Ronald Greene, however, is still being denied the same finality by the State of Louisiana."

Greene's family has filed a federal wrongful-death lawsuit alleging troopers "brutalized" Greene, used a stun gun on him three times and "left him beaten, bloodied and in cardiac arrest" before covering up his actual cause of death.

The controversy deepened last week when Greene's family released graphic photographs showing deep bruises and cuts to his face, and other photos showing his car with little damage. That raised questions about whether Greene received those injuries in a car crash — as authorities initially told his family — or when troopers arrested him.

State Police have said only that the 49-year-old Greene died "after resisting arrest and a struggle with troopers" who took him into custody.

The agency opened an internal investigation into the case last month and placed Hollingsworth on paid leave Sept. 9. No disciplinary action has been announced against the other five troopers involved.

Edwards said Tuesday he was "not comfortable in saying that I'm happy" with the amount of time — more than 15 months — that passed between Greene's death and the opening of the State Police internal investigation. He added, however, that "there are reasons for that, and there's an approach that has been

taken for as long as anybody can remember when you have criminal investigations that are ongoing.”

“Whether that continues to be the most appropriate approach to that, I’m not sure,” he said. “We’re going to be taking a look into that and whether some changes are necessary.”

Mustian reported from New York.

Vanessa Bryant sues LA sheriff over helicopter crash photos

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Vanessa Bryant, the widow of basketball star Kobe Bryant, has filed a lawsuit against the Los Angeles County sheriff claiming deputies shared unauthorized photos of the crash that killed her husband, their 13-year-old daughter and seven others.

After the Jan. 26 crash, reports surfaced that graphic photos of the victims were being shared. Vanessa Bryant was “shocked and devastated” by the reports, the lawsuit states.

The suit seeks damages for negligence, invasion of privacy and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

“This lawsuit is about accountability and about preventing this disgraceful behavior from happening to other families in the future who have suffered loss,” Vanessa Bryant’s attorney, Luis Li, said in a statement. “The department formally refused Mrs. Bryant’s requests for information saying it was ‘unable to assist’ with any inquiry and had no legal obligation to do so. It’s now for a court to tell the department what its obligations are.”

The victims died when the helicopter crashed into a hillside in Calabasas, northwest of Los Angeles, during cloudy weather. They were traveling to a youth basketball tournament at Bryant’s sports facility in Thousand Oaks. The National Transportation Safety Board has not concluded what caused the crash on the outskirts of Los Angeles County but said there was no sign of mechanical failure in the Sikorsky S-76 helicopter.

Sheriff Alex Villanueva previously told news media that eight deputies took or shared graphic photos of the scene and he ordered the images deleted. The sheriff said the department has a policy against taking and sharing crime scene photos, but it does not apply to accident scenes.

“That was my No. 1 priority, was to make sure those photos no longer exist,” Villanueva previously told NBC News. “We identified the deputies involved, they came to the station on their own and had admitted they had taken them and they had deleted them. And we’re content that those involved did that.”

Vanessa Bryant’s lawsuit alleges the sheriff’s actions constituted a “cover-up” of the misconduct. The suit claims the photos could still exist.

“Mrs. Bryant feels ill at the thought of strangers gawking at images of her deceased husband and child and she lives in fear that she or her children will one day confront horrific images of their loved ones online,” the lawsuit states.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has not yet signed a bill that would make it a misdemeanor for first responders to take unauthorized photos of deceased people at the scene of an accident or crime. The legislation was prompted by the crash photos.

A statement from the sheriff’s department Tuesday incorrectly said such actions are now criminal. The bill has not yet been signed into law.

“Shortly following this tragic crash, Sheriff Villanueva sponsored legislation which now makes it a crime for public safety personnel to take and share non-official pictures of this nature,” the statement said. “Due to the pending litigation, we are unable to offer further comment.”

The Los Angeles Times first reported the allegations that the graphic photos had been taken and disseminated in February.

Bryant previously filed a claim, a precursor to a lawsuit, in May. The suit was filed Thursday.

Separately, Vanessa Bryant has also filed a lawsuit alleging the helicopter’s pilot, Ara Zobayan, was careless and negligent to fly in the fog and should have aborted the flight.

The brother of the pilot has said in a court filing that Bryant knew the risks of helicopter flying and his survivors aren’t entitled to damages from the pilot’s estate, while the helicopter company, Island Express,

says it is not responsible for damages, calling the crash, among other things, "an act of God" and "an unavoidable accident" that was beyond its control.

State auditor: UC wrongly admitted well-connected students

By JOCELYN GECKER and JULIET WILLIAMS Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The University of California "inappropriately admitted" at least 64 wealthy, mostly white students over the past six years as "favors to donors, family, and friends," according to an audit released Tuesday that found hundreds more questionable cases of students accepted to the top UC schools.

Among them were a student whose family was friends with a member of the Board of Regents, the child of a major donor and an applicant who babysat for a colleague of a former admissions director, according to the report from the California State Auditor.

"This is a significant problem that the university needs to deal with," State Auditor Elaine Howle said in a telephone interview. "Let's hope this isn't occurring across the country, or at other universities in California. But it is very concerning."

The audit examined admissions policies and practices over the six academic years from 2013-2014 to 2018-2019 at four of the UC's nine campuses — UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC San Diego and UC Santa Barbara.

Auditors found that at least 22 applicants were falsely designated as student-athlete recruits "because of donations from or as favors to well-connected families." These students "had little or no athletic skills," Howle said.

The report did not name students, coaches or specific sports but the investigators looked at a mix of teams at each campus, including soccer, crew, golf, water polo, swimming, track and field, women's basketball and men's tennis, the report said.

It identified at least 13 applicants improperly admitted as student athletes to UC Berkeley, four each at UCLA and UC Santa Barbara and one at UC San Diego.

"UC Berkeley really had some significant weaknesses in their admissions process," Howle said. The audit found the elite school admitted 42 applicants who were the children of staff and donors, while denying admission to others who were more qualified.

In one case, the child of a major donor applied to UC Berkeley and received the lowest possible score on their application, which was marked, "Do Not Recommend," the report said. But the application was revived by an associate director of the donor relations department who contacted a coach to say the family had "a huge capacity and is already a big supporter of Cal." The coach backed up the applicant as a prospective student athlete, "even though the applicant had played only a single year of the sport in high school and at a low level of competition." After admission, the applicant's family donated several thousand dollars to the team, the report said. "The applicant never competed with the team, and the coaches removed the applicant from the team after the season ended."

A UCLA coach admitted a student as an athlete, as a favor to a donor — even after the student's application had been marked, "Denied," the report said.

Howle said she believes the findings have barely scratched the surface of problems in the UC admissions process. The majority of the 64 applicants were white and at least half had annual family incomes of \$150,000 or more, the audit said.

Those 64 students were identified in the audit based on "definitive evidence," such as emailed communications showing a student was denied admission but then reconsidered and accepted after an athletic coach or the development office got involved to suggest the student's entry could lead to donations, Howle said.

"There's at least another 400 or so students ... that were really questionable," Howle said, including some student athletes who didn't appear to have any athletic ability.

UC President Michael V. Drake, who took over the job in July, said in a statement that he took the findings and recommendations "very seriously and will do all I can to prevent inappropriate admissions" in the 285,000-student system.

"The University will swiftly address the concerns the State Auditor raised. Furthermore, individuals involved

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 66 of 82

in improper activities will be disciplined appropriately," Drake said. "Unethical means to gain admission, as rare as they may be, run contrary to our longstanding values of equity and fairness."

The audit recommends the president's office take a robust role in auditing admissions at the nine campuses, closely examining "admissions by exception," that are granted for student athletes, artists, or those who have other specific talents that are attractive to a campus.

The audit was requested last year by state Assemblywoman Tasha Boerner Horvath in response to the national college admissions scandal, which embroiled prestigious universities nationwide, athletic coaches and dozens of wealthy parents. The scandal shed light on the murky world of U.S. college admissions and how the rich and famous exploit it to buy their children's way into top schools with rigged test scores or fake athletic credentials. At the center of the scheme was Newport Beach-based college admissions consultant, William "Rick" Singer.

The audit's findings go beyond those investigations, known as Operation Varsity Blues, which had previously identified at least three students at UCLA and UC Berkeley who were improperly admitted.

UCLA men's soccer coach Jorge Salcedo was indicted on charges of racketeering conspiracy for allegedly accepting \$200,000 in bribes from the scheme's mastermind, Rick Singer, in exchange for helping two students gain admission to the school as soccer players, though they didn't play the sport competitively. Salcedo pleaded guilty to one count and is expected to be sentenced next month.

At UC Berkeley, at least one student was known to have been admitted with fraudulent test scores, prosecutors allege. David Sidoo, a Canadian businessman and former professional football player, pleaded guilty to one charge of mail fraud conspiracy for paying Singer to fix entrance exams for his two sons and was sentenced to three months in prison. The younger son, Jordan Sidoo, attended UC Berkeley.

Then-UC President Janet Napolitano ordered an internal investigation of all UC campuses that resulted in a sweeping list of recommendations aimed at better policing of fraud and conflicts of interest in student admissions. It called for stronger verification of claims on students' applications, reviewing potential links between donors and applicants and stricter scrutiny of students admitted for special talents.

However, Howle found that staff were insufficiently trained and supervised in reviewing applications, "which led to inconsistent reviews, and affected applicants' chances of admission."

"The Office of the President has allowed weaknesses to persist for years and has not ensured the admissions policies and processes have been consistently and fairly applied from campus to campus," the audit said.

She also recommended that the president require campuses to verify athletic talent and review donation records before admitting prospective student athletes.

Iran strikes defiant tone at UN under crushing US sanctions

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Grappling with a weakened economy and the Middle East's worst coronavirus outbreak, Iran's president delivered a defiant and fiery speech Tuesday to the U.N. General Assembly as he insisted it would be the United States that surrenders to Iran's resilience.

Hassan Rouhani spoke in a prerecorded speech to the virtual summit just days after Iran's currency plunged to its lowest levels ever against the U.S. dollar due to crippling U.S. sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump, who pulled the U.S. out of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018. The accord had been signed by the Obama administration. The sanctions effectively bar Iran from selling its oil globally.

"The United States can impose neither negotiations nor war on us," Rouhani said, adding: "Life is hard under sanctions. However, harder is life without independence."

Rouhani compared his country's plight with that of George Floyd, the Black American man who died in May after a white police officer in Minneapolis pinned him to the ground by pressing a knee into his neck. Floyd's death set off nationwide protests in support of Black lives.

Calling it "reminiscent of our own experience," Rouhani said: "We instantly recognize the feet kneeling on the neck as the feet of arrogance on the neck of independent nations."

He said Iran "has paid a similar high price" in its quest for freedom and liberation from domination.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 67 of 82

Rouhani insisted his nation does not deserve sanctions and described the U.S. as “a terrorist and interventionist outsider” before referring to the 1953 U.S.-backed coup that cemented the control of the shah in Iran, which ultimately pushed the country toward its Islamic Revolution and hostility with the West. He said it is the U.S. that has been “the sole user of atomic bombs” in the world.

This week, the White House doubled down on its maximum-pressure campaign against the Islamic republic with an executive order to enforce all U.N. sanctions on Iran because Tehran is not complying with the nuclear deal — a move that most of the rest of the world rejects as illegal.

Because Trump withdrew from the nuclear agreement, few U.N. member states believe the U.S. has the legal standing to restore the sanctions. Even so, diplomatic efforts in Europe have failed to preserve the deal. Iran has steadily broken restrictions on the amount of uranium it can enrich in order to pressure countries to do more.

U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus outbreak have pummeled Iran’s economy. In March, Tehran requested a \$5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, marking the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that Iran has sought such assistance.

Iran has recorded more than 429,000 infections of the virus, including more than 24,000 deaths as it resists nationwide lockdowns that could further imperil the economy.

Rouhani’s speech reflects how tensions have skyrocketed between Tehran and Washington following the U.S. strike in January that killed Iranian Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad, Iraq. Iran retaliated with a ballistic missile strike on Iraqi bases housing American troops. The powerful commander was close to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who wept openly at his funeral.

Rouhani mentioned the commander briefly in his speech, referring to him as an “assassinated hero.”

Gulf Arab states and Israel have long wanted the United States to push back Tehran’s drive to spread influence through Shiite proxies across the region that Soleimani had commanded. They see Iran as a destabilizing force that has exploited failed uprisings, military interventions and chaos in Arab states like Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have cemented ties with Israel in part due to shared concerns over Iran, their shared rival. Saudi Arabia, which blames Iran for a stunning missile and drone attack last year on its main oil refinery, is also quietly cementing ties with Israel.

Rouhani sought to frame Iranian interventions as in defense of besieged people, and noted Iran’s efforts fighting against extremist Sunni Muslim groups like the Islamic State.

Trump, in the middle of a contentious re-election race, has made pressure on Iran a cornerstone of his Mideast foreign policy. He’s also increased U.S. military presence in the Gulf.

“We are not a bargaining chip in U.S. elections and domestic policy,” Rouhani said. It was his last speech to the U.N. assembly as president of Iran. Fresh elections in Iran are slated for 2021.

Follow Dubai-based Associated Press journalist Aya Batrawy on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ayaelb.

Review: Millie Bobby Brown has fun with ‘Enola Holmes’

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

There is a long, questionable and occasionally successful tradition of spinning off iconic literary and film characters through relatives distant and not from James Bond Jr. to John Shaft II and III. In other words, it’s not out of bounds that someone would come along and invent a little sister for Sherlock Holmes and eventually make a movie out of it.

Enola Holmes is the creation of American author Nancy Springer who wrote a series of six young adult novels about Sherlock and Mycroft’s teenage sister who becomes a detective in her own right. The light-hearted and enjoyable film adaptation stars “Stranger Things” Millie Bobby Brown as the titular character in an origin story that is clearly an attempt to start a franchise. Thankfully it isn’t merely a “set-up” film.

We’re introduced to Enola by Enola herself, who breaks the fourth wall and directly addresses the camera and audience to tell us about how her mother raised her after her much older brothers left early. It’s no

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 68 of 82

surprise that the director, Harry Bradbeer, directed almost every episode of "Fleabag," which relied heavily on this technique as well.

Enola, who tries not to think too much about the significance of the fact that her name backwards spells "Alone," is clever and spirited and wholly isolated from the world and the social mores of Victorian-era England. She and her mother (a lovely Helena Bonham-Carter) who are fiercely independent except from each other, use their stately mansion as a playground. They practice archery and tennis indoors, blow things up in the name of science, read books and generally don't seem all that concerned with the upkeep of anything but their minds.

So it comes as a shock when Enola wakes up one morning to find her mother gone. Even more disconcerting is when her brothers Sherlock (a probably too buff Henry Cavill) and Mycroft (Sam Claflin) return to take care of her and the estate, they don't recognize her. The grown men are also horrified that their little sister is so rough around the edges — no hat, no gloves, no worries about manners or decorum — and decide that she must be sent to finishing school.

Naturally, Enola is not excited about the prospect of finding a husband or fitting into society and instead sneaks off to try to track down her mother instead. On her journey she becomes entangled in the life of a fellow runaway, The Viscount Tewksbury, Marquess of Basilwether (Louis Partridge), who becomes her first client.

Brown is a natural star and seems to be having a lot of fun with Enola and getting to do something a little more carefree than portraying the trauma stricken Eleven. And besides a gnarly head injury late in the film, "Enola Holmes" is an all-ages endeavor.

The biggest knock against "Enola Holmes" is it feels like it should or could have been a series. It's very long and even this first story feels naturally episodic as she goes back and forth between searching for her mother and helping Tewksbury. The second is that the screenplay is only credited to Jack Thorne and this script could have benefitted from a woman's involvement. Its feminist touchstones veer on cliché.

Brown did have a hand in producing the film, however, which is itself a neat message. Whether or not it becomes a franchise will remain to be seen. "Enola Holmes" was supposed to be a theatrical release and Netflix jumped in to take it early in the pandemic. But regardless of whether or not there are more, "Enola Homes" is the kind of movie that the preteen set will surely delight in and watch over and over. I know I would have.

"Enola Holmes," a Netflix release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "some violence." Running time: 123 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

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MPAA Definition of PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter: www.twitter.com/ldbahr

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Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 69 of 82

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As US struggles, Africa's COVID-19 response is praised

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — At a lecture to peers this month, John Nkengasong showed images that once dogged Africa, with a magazine cover declaring it "The Hopeless Continent." Then he quoted Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah: "It is clear that we must find an African solution to our problems, and that this can only be found in African unity."

The coronavirus pandemic has fractured global relationships. But as director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Nkengasong has helped to steer Africa's 54 countries into an alliance praised as responding better than some richer countries, including the United States.

While the U.S. surpassed 200,000 COVID-19 deaths and the world approaches 1 million, Africa's surge has been leveling off. Its 1.4 million confirmed cases are far from the horrors predicted. Antibody testing is expected to show many more infections, but most cases are asymptomatic. Just over 34,000 deaths

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 70 of 82

are confirmed on the continent of 1.3 billion people.

Experts caution that data collection in many African countries is incomplete, and Nkengasong warned against complacency, saying a single case can spark a new surge.

"Africa is doing a lot of things right the rest of the world isn't," said Gayle Smith, a former administrator with the U.S. Agency for International Development. She's watched in astonishment as Washington looks inward instead of leading the world. But Africa "is a great story and one that needs to be told."

Nkengasong, whom the Gates Foundation honored Tuesday with its Global Goalkeeper Award as a "relentless proponent of global collaboration," is the continent's most visible narrator. A former official with the U.S. CDC, the Cameroon-born virologist modeled the African version on his ex-employer. It pains him to see the U.S. struggle now.

Nkengasong insists that Africa can stand up to COVID-19 if given a fighting chance.

Early modeling assumed "a large number of Africans would just die," he said. The Africa CDC decided not to issue projections. "When I looked at the data and the assumptions, I wasn't convinced," he said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Health experts point to Africa's youthful population as a factor in why COVID-19 hasn't taken a larger toll, along with swift lockdowns and the later arrival of the virus.

"Be patient," Nkengasong cautioned. "There's a lot we still don't know."

As Africa's top public health official, leading an agency launched only three years ago, he plunged into the race for medical supplies and now a vaccine. At first, it was a shock.

"The collapse of global cooperation and a failure of international solidarity have shoved Africa out of the diagnostics market," Nkengasong wrote in the journal *Nature* in April. "If Africa loses, the world loses."

Supplies slowly improved, and African countries have conducted 13 million tests, enough to cover 1% of the continent's population. But the ideal is 13 million tests per month, Nkengasong said.

He and other African leaders are haunted by the memories of 12 million Africans dying during the decade it took for affordable HIV drugs to reach the continent. That must not happen again, he said.

This week, more world leaders than ever are gathering online for the biggest global endeavor since COVID-19 appeared, the United Nations General Assembly. If Nkengasong could address them, he would say this: "We should be very careful that history doesn't record us on the wrong side of it."

African leaders are expected to say much the same. "The COVID-19 pandemic has shown we have no option but to depend on each other," Ghana's president, Nana Akufo-Addo, told the gathering on Monday.

Nkengasong urges African countries not to wait for help and rejects the image of the continent holding a begging bowl. The money is there, he said.

Acting on that idea, Africa's public and private sectors created an online purchasing platform to focus their negotiating power, launched by the African Union to buy directly from manufacturers. Governments can browse and buy rapid testing kits, N95 masks and ventilators, some now manufactured in Africa in another campaign endorsed by heads of state.

Impressed, Caribbean countries have signed on.

"It's the only part of the world I'm aware of that actually built a supply chain," said Smith, the former USAID chief.

When the pandemic began, just two African countries could test for the coronavirus. Now all can. Nkengasong was struck by how much information "doesn't get translated" to member states, so the Africa CDC holds online training on everything from safely handling bodies to genomic surveillance.

"I look at Africa and I look at the U.S., and I'm more optimistic about Africa, to be honest, because of the leadership there and doing their best despite limited resources," said Sema Sgaier, director of the Surgo Foundation, which produced a COVID-19 vulnerability index for each region. She spoke even as Africa's cases were surging weeks ago.

With COVID-19 vaccines the next urgent issue, African countries held a conference to insist on equitable access and explore manufacturing to end their almost complete reliance on the outside world. They began securing the late-stage clinical trials that long have been held outside the continent, aiming to land 10 as

soon as possible.

Nkengasong said Africa needs at least 1.5 billion vaccine doses, enough to cover 60% of the population for "herd immunity" with the two likely required doses. That will cost about \$10 billion.

The World Health Organization says Africa should receive at least 220 million doses through an international effort to develop and distribute a vaccine known as COVAX.

That's welcome but not enough, Nkengasong said.

His next hurdle is how to deliver doses throughout the vast continent with the world's worst infrastructure. Less than half of Africa's countries have access to modern health care facilities, he said.

COVID-19's effects are "devastating" for Africa, from education to economies to the fight against other diseases. Nkengasong plans a major conference next year to press countries to significantly increase health spending ahead of the next pandemic.

"If we do not," he said, "something is terribly wrong with us."

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

Court, COVID, race are topics for first Trump-Biden debate

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Joe Biden will face off on the Supreme Court, the coronavirus pandemic and race and violence in the nation's cities next week when they meet for their first presidential debate.

The nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates on Tuesday announced the six topics for the first face-to-face event scheduled for Sept. 29 in Cleveland. The topics were selected by the debate's moderator, Fox News' Chris Wallace, and will each be the subject of 15-minute "blocks" in the debate.

The topics are: "The Trump and Biden Records," "The Supreme Court," "Covid-19," "The Economy," "Race and Violence in our Cities," and "The Integrity of the Election."

The topics are subject to change because of news developments, the commission said.

Powell and Mnuchin voice optimism but back more economic aid

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin expressed cautious optimism Tuesday that the U.S. economy is rebounding from the pandemic-induced recession with federal support but that more help from the government is likely needed.

Powell told the House Financial Services Committee that he believed the economy was "healing." Mnuchin, the chief economic spokesman for the Trump administration, proclaimed that the country was in the "midst of the fastest economic recovery from any crisis in history" after the steepest economic plunge since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Striking a more cautious note, Powell noted that the job market has regained only about half the 22 million jobs that were lost in March and April when the virus flattened the U.S. economy, triggering a recession.

Both officials stressed that major sectors of the economy were still suffering.

Some Republican lawmakers complained that House Democrats were blocking approval of further relief because of their insistence on achieving a larger package than GOP lawmakers are willing to support.

Mnuchin said he was ready to resume negotiations and said the administration would be willing to support stand-alone legislation to boost support through the Paycheck Protection Program, which benefited small businesses.

"We are in a very different situation than we were the last time," when Congress enacted nearly \$3 trillion in emergency financial aid, Mnuchin said. "At that time, the entire economy was shut down."

Mnuchin said that further federal aid should be focused on the most damaged sectors of the economy,

such as restaurants and the travel industry.

"This time," the Treasury secretary told lawmakers, "it should be much more targeted to industries that are most impacted."

Tuesday's testimony from Powell and Mnuchin began three days of oversight hearings on the government programs that were enacted last spring to cushion the impact of a devastating recession in which much of the economy was shut down to try to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

That support totaled a record high of nearly \$3 trillion and included such measures as economic impact payments of up to \$1,200 per individual, enhanced unemployment benefits of \$600 per week and a Paycheck Protection Program to encourage small businesses to keep workers on their payrolls.

The Democratic-led House passed additional support. But Senate Republicans have balked at the size of the measure, and both sides have spent months arguing over possible compromise legislation. After some programs expired this summer, President Donald Trump signed executive orders to keep aid flowing, although that effort has produced limited benefit.

Pressed to say what types of aid the Trump administration would support in a new bill, Mnuchin said the administration would favor sending another round of \$1,200 in individual payments.

The loans provided to small businesses through a program run by the Small Business Administration and the Treasury Department and can be forgiven as long as much of the money goes to keeping workers on the payroll or rehiring laid-off workers. Some lawmakers said they were hearing that the forms that are needed to gain forgiveness for the loans were too complicated.

Mnuchin said the Treasury and the SBA had worked to make the forms simpler to fill out. He said the administration would be willing to consider some type of blanket forgiveness that would speed up the process if Congress wanted to pass legislation to that effect.

Bolsonaro to world: Brazil is victim of environmental smear

By DAVID BILLER and MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro defended his administration's record protecting the Amazon rainforest, telling the United Nations' virtual meeting of global leaders on Tuesday that his country has been wrongly portrayed as an environmental villain. Bolsonaro's critics were quick to pick apart his claims.

As the first speaker in the U.N. General Assembly's general debate, in keeping with tradition for the Brazilian leader, Bolsonaro said the South American nation's agribusiness sector has succeeded in boosting agricultural exports to feed a growing global population, which has made it a target.

"We are victims of one of the most brutal disinformation campaigns about the Amazon and the Pantanal wetlands," Bolsonaro said. "The Brazilian Amazon is well known to be very rich. That explains why international institutions support such campaigns based on ulterior interests, joined by self-serving and unpatriotic Brazilian associations, with the objective of harming the government and Brazil itself."

Last week, a group of European countries — the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership, led by Germany — published a joint statement urging Brazil to take action in the Amazon. They said deforestation is making it "increasingly difficult" for businesses and investors in Brazil to fulfill their environmental, social and governance criteria.

"He (Bolsonaro) claimed that they were leading a campaign to discredit his government, yet it is his administration that has systematically eroded environmental legislation and not enforced penalties for environmental crime," said Robert Muggah, co-founder of Igarapé Institute, a Rio de Janeiro-based think tank focused on public, digital and environmental security.

"Under his watch, illegal land clearances, illicit deforestation, and wildcat mining have soared," Muggah said.

Bolsonaro came to office in 2019 promising to open more of the Amazon to development such as farming and mining. International concern, particularly after last year's fires, has led investors to distance themselves from rising deforestation and pressure Bolsonaro's government to take more action.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 73 of 82

In Bolsonaro's debut appearance at the assembly in 2019, he struck a defiant tone, railing against the media and socialism. He declared Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon and denounced what he termed "radical environmentalism."

"It is the same as last year: a mix of denial of reality and self-praise for promoting an environmental policy that does not exist," said Rubens Ricupero, a Brazilian who was secretary-general of the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development for nearly a decade.

In May, Bolsonaro put the army in charge of protecting the rainforest. Two months later, he banned setting agricultural and forest fires for 120 days as the country entered the dry season. Brazilian law requires permits for fires to clear brush and open land for farming, ranching or logging, but the requirement is widely ignored.

Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon region may have reached a 14-year high in the 12 months through July, according to preliminary data published last month by the country's space agency. Final data will be released in coming months.

Fires spiraled out of control in Brazil's Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetlands, with the number of blazes surpassing 16,000 so far in 2020 — considerably more than any full year on record, since 1998.

Bolsonaro also defended his government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in front of the U.N., highlighting the distribution of emergency cash for 65 million low-income Brazilians and financial support for small and micro businesses to keep them afloat amid a crushing economic downturn.

"Part of the Brazilian press also politicized the virus, disseminating panic among the population under the motto 'Stay at home and we'll see about the economy after,' and almost brought social chaos to the country," Bolsonaro said. "Our government, in a bold way, implemented various economic measures that avoided the greater evil."

Igarapé's Muggah pointed out that Bolsonaro initially opposed the pandemic aid until he perceived how it helped buoy his approval ratings.

And Thiago de Aragão, director of strategy for political consultancy Arko Advice, said Bolsonaro is bragging about results of the ongoing tragedy by claiming, without evidence, that a worse outcome was avoided.

Since the pandemic's onset, Bolsonaro downplayed the severity of the coronavirus, calling it "a little flu." Even as he himself tested positive for the virus this summer and had to quarantine, he has at times adopted fatalism, saying there's no way to prevent 70% of the population from contracting the illness. He has repeatedly said that shutting down the economy would inflict worse hardship upon the population.

And he led by example, often taking outings that drew thronging crowds, sometimes without wearing a mask. Through his actions and his rhetoric, he sabotaged efforts by mayors and governors to convince people to remain in quarantine.

In his speech to the U.N., Bolsonaro said the Supreme Court ruled states would determine quarantine measures. He fired his first health minister for siding with local leaders on the need for broad restrictions to activity.

Brazil has confirmed 4.6 million coronavirus cases, the third most in the world, according to the tally compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Its death toll of 137,000 trails only the U.S.

Finally, Bolsonaro made appeals to his conservative base, saying that Brazil is a Christian country and denouncing what he called "Christian-phobia."

"The speech was, once again, aimed at his supporters at home rather than to the world," Arko's de Aragão said. "It seems that the opinion of the world matters less and less to him."

Savarese reported from Sao Paulo. Follow David Biller on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/DLBiller>

China's Xi: COVID reveals isolationism as a futile pursuit

By TED ANTHONY and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

China's leader took oblique potshots at the United States and its foreign policies Tuesday, cautioning in a U.N. address that the world must "not fall into the trap of a clash of civilizations" — remarks played minutes

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 74 of 82

after delegates heard the American president insist that the United Nations "hold China accountable" for how it handled the emergence of the coronavirus.

"Major countries should act like major countries," Xi Jinping said in a speech to the U.N. General Assembly, a speech made remotely and recorded in advance because the pandemic prevented leaders from convening as they have for decades. The virus first emerged in China early this year and has spread around the world, killing nearly 1 million people.

Xi, China's president and the leader of its Communist Party, cast the fight against the virus as an important exercise in international cooperation, an opportunity to "join hands and be prepared to meet even more global challenges."

"COVID-19 reminds us that the economic globalization is an indisputable reality and a historical trend," Xi said. "Burying one's head in the sand like an ostrich in the face of economic globalization or trying to fight it with Don Quixote's lance goes against the trend of history. Let this be clear: The world will never return to isolation."

Such remarks, while not naming U.S. President Donald Trump, are highly critical of him and his "America First" philosophy, which goes against China's public stance on how diplomacy should be managed. In reality, China often acts unilaterally in affairs both domestic and international.

Earlier in the day, Trump used his own U.N. speech to roundly condemn Xi's government for what the American president frequently calls "the China virus," a term he used again Tuesday. He referred to the virus as the "invisible enemy." Many consider the very term "China virus" to be racist.

Though Trump had lavish praise for Xi early in his term, two key issues — a tariff dispute and the emergence of coronavirus — have helped cause his administration to take a more hardline attitude toward the Chinese government.

"The United Nations must hold China accountable for their actions," Trump said in his own speech.

China has a longtime practice of reflexively rejecting any criticism of its policies. Tuesday was no exception. While Xi, being prerecorded and not there, could not rebut what Trump said, his U.N. ambassador was on site in the General Assembly chamber and responded directly while introducing the Xi video.

"At this moment, the world needs more solidarity and cooperation, and not a confrontation," Zhang Jun said. "We need to increase mutual confidence and trust, and not the spreading of political virus. China resolutely rejects the baseless accusation against China."

Xi spoke at a historical moment in which China is working to manage its staggering — and staggeringly complex — military, economic and political rise while confronting the aggressive containment strategies of the world's current superpower, the United States, and its friends and allies.

"Xi Jinping has his work cut out for him at the General Assembly," said Mike Mazza, a China analyst at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. He pointed to tensions with Europe over trade and investment, climate and human rights, in addition to the Trump administration's more consistently confrontational approach to China.

Xi has failed to leverage ill feelings between many European leaders and Trump, while a potential detente with Japan has stalled. Relations with Australia have nosedived over allegations of spying and political manipulation and calls for an investigation into the Chinese origins of the coronavirus outbreak, Mazza said.

These troubles are, "by and large, problems of its own making," Mazza said of China.

As aggressive as Beijing can seem to its neighbors when using its expanding military and powerful economy to carve out what it sees as its natural sphere of influence in Asia, this is a fragile moment in what's often seen as China's inevitable rise as a superpower.

Beijing has faced criticism over the continuing fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, which originated in Wuhan province late last year. Some say Beijing initially attempted to cover up the outbreak before seeking to take advantage of its response for public-relations ends.

There's outrage over China's severe restriction of civil rights in Hong Kong following its imposition on the semi-autonomous city of a sweeping national security law, and over widespread accusations of mass detentions and cultural genocide against Muslims in the Xinjiang region. And there's wariness also over

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 75 of 82

China's rising pressure and military threats against Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy that Beijing claims as its own territory.

Meanwhile, China's moves to claim nearly the entire South China Sea have led to friction with the United States and with Beijing's neighbors to the south, while a decades-long border dispute with India erupted this year into deadly brawling between the rivals' troops and the firing of shots for the first time in decades.

All this has undercut arguments that favor engagement with China as a trade war between Beijing, the world's second-biggest economy, and Washington, the biggest, continues to simmer.

"Xi will find a very mixed international environment when he addresses the UNGA. Most of the democracies which had previously been very supportive of China's modernization and development are getting uncomfortable with how Xi is steering the rise of China," said Steve Tsang, director of the China Institute at London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

The United States and China are now "locked on a collision course that could potentially result in dangerous military conflict," said Brookings Institution China analyst Cheng Li. An immediate goal of Xi's will be to "showcase how China has stepped up to the plate to call for multilateralism and address global concerns ... while the United States has increasingly left a gaping void in global leadership."

Xi, in doing that with his speech, insisted that China under his rule isn't veering into the imperialism his communist government has long condemned.

"We will never seek hegemony, expansion or sphere of influence," he said. "We have no intention of fighting either a Cold War or a hot one with any country."

Foster Klug, AP's news director for the Koreas, Japan, Australia and the South Pacific, has covered Asia at the annual UNGA meetings since 2005. Ted Anthony was AP correspondent and news editor in Beijing from 2001 to 2004 and director of Asia-Pacific News from 2014 to 2018.

EU postpones summit after Michel goes into quarantine

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The coronavirus pandemic forced the European Union to postpone a scheduled summit for a week after EU Council President Charles Michel went into quarantine because a close collaborator was diagnosed with COVID-19.

Spokesman Barend Leyts said Tuesday that Michel "today learned that a security officer, with whom he was in close contact early last week, tested positive for COVID."

Leyts said that the European Council chief is "respecting Belgian rules" and "he has gone into quarantine as of today."

Even as the United Nations held its annual General Assembly remotely with video screens, the 27-nation EU had been preparing to stage its second live summit in a little over two months. A July summit took place with exhaustive precautions and no reported health consequences.

This week, it took one person from Michel's inner circle to test positive to scuttle plans two days ahead of the meeting.

The summit set for Thursday and Friday was to address issues as wide-ranging as Brexit negotiations, climate change and the tensions between Greece and Turkey over energy rights.

Preparations for the meeting were already in full swing when Michel made the sudden announcement. He postponed the summit by one week, to Oct. 1-2.

Live summits with the leaders of EU nations coming to Brussels only resumed over the summer. Throughout the spring, they met through video conferences while staying in their own capitals.

As the chief of the European Council, Michel is the host of the regular summits of EU leaders. In July, he forced the national leaders to stay for four days in Brussels to broker a 1.85 trillion-euro agreement on a pandemic recovery fund and long-term EU budget.

The 27 leaders often wore facemasks and met in a room that normally holds 300 to accommodate social distancing. Key meetings were held on a roof terrace under the open sky.

Tuesday's postponement is a setback to the EU leaders' hope for a return to normalcy.

Michel, who tested negative for the virus on Monday, did not want to risk bringing the leaders together in one room, however big, for fear of further exposure. The decision to delay also took place against a background of irritation when government officials do not take the same care with precautionary measures as the general public does.

Only last month, the EU's chief trade negotiator, Commissioner Phil Hogan, had to resign when he admitted flaunting some measures during a summer stay in his native Ireland. EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier tested positive for the virus in March.

Almost 150,000 people in the European Union have died in the pandemic, which also has thrown the bloc into the worst economic crisis of its history.

Lennon's killer says he sought glory, deserved death penalty

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — The man who killed John Lennon in 1980 says he was seeking glory and deserved the death penalty for a "despicable" act.

Mark David Chapman made the comments in response to questions last month from a parole board, which denied him parole for an 11th time. As in previous parole board hearings, the now 65-year-old inmate expressed remorse for gunning down the former Beatle outside the musician's Manhattan apartment building.

"I assassinated him .. because he was very, very, very famous and that's the only reason and I was very, very, very, very much seeking self-glory. Very selfish," Chapman said, according to a transcript released by the state Monday after an open records request.

Looking back 40 years later, Chapman called his actions "creepy" and "despicable." He said he thinks all the time about the pain he inflicted on Lennon's wife, Yoko Ono.

"I just want her to know that she knows her husband like no one else and knows the kind of man he was. I didn't," he said.

Chapman shot and killed Lennon on the night of Dec. 8, 1980, as he and Ono were returning to their Upper West Side apartment. Lennon had signed an autograph for Chapman on a copy of his recently released album, "Double Fantasy," earlier that day.

"He was actually kind to me that day," Chapman said.

Chapman is serving a 20-years-to-life sentence at Wende Correctional Facility, east of Buffalo. He told the board he would have "no complaint whatsoever" if they chose to leave him in prison for the rest of his life.

"I deserve zero, nothing. At the time I deserved the death penalty. When you knowingly plot someone's murder and know it's wrong and you do it for yourself, that's a death penalty right there, in my opinion," he said.

In denying him parole, the board said Chapman committed an "evil act" and said they found his statement that "infamy brings you glory" disturbing.

Chapman will be up for parole again in August 2022.

AP-NORC poll: Views of economy stabilize as election nears

By JOSH BOAK and EMILY SWANSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Americans view the nation's economic situation as bleak, but a rising percentage also see signs of stability six weeks before Election Day — if not reasons for optimism.

According to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 60% of Americans describe the national economy as poor and 40% deem it good. That's a rebound in confidence from low points in April and May, when just 29% called the economy good as the coronavirus pandemic took hold of the country.

About 4 in 10 Americans — 43% — say they expect the economy to improve in the next year, about the same as in July. But just 28% said they expect things to get even worse, a slight improvement from the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 77 of 82

35% who said so in July and a significant improvement from May, when 40% expected things to continue getting worse. This month, 27% expect no change in economic conditions in the next year.

That relative hopefulness may say more about the nation's politics than the underlying health of the world's largest economy.

President Donald Trump is seeking reelection against Democrat Joe Biden with stock market gains as a rallying cry. The unemployment rate has improved, but remains high at 8.4%, and lawmakers have failed to agree on additional aid for Americans suffering financially due to the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the continued toll from the virus — including the loss of schooling and revenue shortfalls for state and local governments — threatens the prospect for a wider recovery.

The poll found that 67% of Republicans call the economy good, compared with 16% of Democrats. Republicans are significantly more likely to expect the economy to get better than worse in the next year, 64% to 14%. Among Democrats, 39% expect things to get worse and 28% expect them to get better, while 32% expect no change.

"It's kind of just in a neutral gear," said Gary Cameron, 65, a retiree and Trump supporter from Midwest City, Oklahoma. "I do expect after the pandemic is over, it will probably go back to where it was, maybe better."

But Cameron believes that the world's largest economy would be hurt by a Biden presidency, saying he does not believe the country suffers from systemic racism and that addressing the demands of civil rights protesters would come at the expense of institutions that drive growth.

"The people the Democratic Party have gotten into bed with do not love America," Cameron said. "I think it would do damage to the country."

The poll finds that half of Americans approve of how Trump is handling the economy, which remains his strongest issue. By comparison, 43% approve of how he's handling his job overall. Eighty-nine percent of Republicans and 15% of Democrats approve of Trump's handling of the economy.

About two-thirds of Americans — 65% — say their own personal finances are good. That number has remained largely steady since before the pandemic began. Seventy-eight percent of Republicans and 58% of Democrats say their personal finances are good. Americans are also more likely to expect their personal finances to get better than worse, 38% to 13%, with 48% expecting no change.

Bob Blanchard, 73, of Augusta, Georgia, lives in a community hurt by the coronavirus and the loss of business locally from a spectator-free Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club. A consulting engineer, Blanchard said local businesses are suffering and he can no longer make money by renting out his house to the crowds who came for the fabled golf tournament.

"My wife and I don't go out to eat," Blanchard said. "We avoid retail shopping like the plague. No pun intended."

Blanchard, who intends to vote for Biden, says the blame for this rests with Trump.

"He just was completely irresponsible and incompetent," he said. "He knew it was bad, but he didn't do anything."

The poll shows 22% of Americans who say they or someone in their household lost a job as a result of the pandemic say the job has returned. Thirty-five percent expect the job to come back, but 44% expect it won't.

Overall, 27% of Americans say their household lost a job, 36% that someone was scheduled for fewer hours, 26% took unpaid time off and 27% had wages or salaries reduced. All told, 53% experienced at least one form of household income loss during the pandemic. Income losses have been especially concentrated among Black and Hispanic Americans and those without college degrees.

Ryan Wilson, 37, said that half of the workers at the seafood warehouse where he's a supervisor were furloughed when the pandemic started — and not all have returned to their jobs. A resident of Altamonte Springs, Florida, he said his concern is that the economic troubles are worsening drug addiction and domestic violence.

"People are really suffering," he said. "They're facing levels of depression, anxiety and distress — and not just financially. They turn to something to escape the daily pressures of life and that's ravaging across

American right now.”

The AP-NORC poll of 1,108 adults was conducted Sept. 11-14 using a sample drawn from NORC’s probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

Online:

AP-NORC Center: <http://www.apnorc.org/>

Who’s a hypocrite? GOP, Dems debate past comments on court

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The “H” word — hypocrisy — is suddenly in vogue at the Capitol as lawmakers debate how quickly to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court following the death of liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has vowed that President Donald Trump’s as-yet unnamed nominee will receive a vote on the Senate floor “this year,” but has been careful not to say exactly when that will happen.

Democrats accuse the Kentucky Republican of blatant hypocrisy after McConnell refused to consider President Barack Obama’s Supreme Court nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, eight months before the 2016 election.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer took to the Senate floor Monday to remind McConnell of his own words hours after the February 2016 death of conservative Justice Antonin Scalia. “The American people,” McConnell said then, “should have a voice in the selection of their next Supreme Court justice.” The vacancy created by Scalia’s death should not be filled until the election of a new president, he added.

“No amount of sophistry can change what McConnell said then, and it applies even more so now — so much closer we are to an election,” Schumer said Monday.

But McConnell said it is Democrats who are being hypocritical. What Republicans did in 2016 — blocking a nominee of the opposing party — was “precisely what Democrats had indicated they would do themselves” when they were in the majority, McConnell said in his own floor speech Monday. He and other Republicans cited a 1992 speech by then-Sen. Joe Biden — now the Democratic nominee for president — indicating that a vacancy occurring in an election year should not be filled.

Biden, Schumer and other Democrats flip-flopped in 2016, in McConnell’s telling, because they urged the Senate to act on Obama’s nominee.

McCONNELL IN 2016

McConnell stunned the political world in 2016 with his declaration that the Senate would not consider a replacement for Scalia until after the presidential election nearly nine months away. While daring, McConnell said his action was justified by history.

“Remember that the Senate has not filled a vacancy arising in an election year when there was divided government since 1888, almost 130 years ago,” he declared again and again that year, frequently citing what Republicans called the “Biden Rule.” That so-called rule — never adopted in any formal sense by the Senate — urged the Senate to delay action on a Supreme Court vacancy until after the presidential election.

“President Obama was asking Senate Republicans for an unusual favor that had last been granted nearly 130 years prior. But voters had explicitly elected our majority to check and balance the end of his presidency. So we stuck with the historical norm,” McConnell said Monday as he recounted past fights over the Supreme Court.

McConnell’s statement, while accurate, omitted a more recent vote when the Democratic-controlled Senate approved President Ronald Reagan’s nomination of Anthony Kennedy in February 1988. Kennedy was named to fill a vacancy that arose in 1987, after two failed nominations.

2019 McCONNELL STATEMENT

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 79 of 82

By 2019, with Trump in office and a continued GOP Senate majority, McConnell said Senate action on a court opening close to the election would not be an issue. Asked at a May 2019 appearance in his home state what he would do if a Supreme Court justice died the next year, creating a vacancy on the nine-member court, McConnell responded immediately: "Oh, we'd fill it."

The main difference? Unlike 2016, when the White House and Senate were controlled by different parties, both are now under Republican control, McConnell said.

"I'd also remind everybody what I just told you, which is the Senate is of the same party as the president of the United States," McConnell told Fox News in February of this year. "And in that situation we would confirm" a new justice.

Schumer wasn't buying it. He cited a 2016 op-ed co-written by McConnell imploring that the American people be given the opportunity to "weigh in on whom they trust to nominate the next person for a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court."

"Now these words don't apply?" Schumer asked. "It doesn't pass the smell test in any way. No wonder Leader McConnell was so defensive in his comments."

Schumer and other Democrats urged McConnell to abide by his own standard. "What's fair is fair. A senator's word must count for something," Schumer said.

But McConnell, in his speech, said that at a time when "the American people have elected a Senate majority to work closely with the sitting president, the historical record is even more overwhelming — in favor of confirmation."

Eight times in the nation's history vacancies have arisen during an election year when the White House and Senate were controlled by the same party. Seven of those times the justice was confirmed. The sole exception was in 1968, when President Lyndon Johnson tried to elevate Justice Abe Fortas to become chief justice. The nomination faced a filibuster due in part to ethics problems that later led Fortas to resign from the court.

"Apart from that one strange exception, no Senate has failed to confirm a nominee in the circumstances that face us now," McConnell said.

"The American people reelected our majority in 2016 and strengthened it further in 2018 because we pledged to work with President Trump on the most critical issues facing our country. The federal judiciary was right at the top of that list," he said.

On that final point — the importance of the judiciary — Schumer agreed.

"That's what this (fight) is all about," he said. "All the rights enshrined in our Constitution that are supposed to be protected by the Supreme Court of the United States" are at stake.

"The right to join a union, marry who you love, freely exercise your right to vote ... (and) proper health care. If you care about these things and the kind of country we live in, this election — and this vacancy — mean everything," Schumer said.

Assaults, arson, slurs: Report finds anti-Semitism in Berlin

By CIARÁN FAHEY Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Small square brass plates set in the pavement remember Jewish residents of Berlin's Lichtenberg district who were torn from their homes and killed by the Nazis decades ago. Nearby, the charred remains of a Jewish-run bar destroyed by arson last month attest to a hatred that still burns among far-right extremists.

The attack on the bar named Morgen Wird Besser, which in English means Tomorrow Will Be Better, underscores the findings of a victim support group that anti-Semitism remains in Germany's capital 75 years after World War II ended.

In a report released Tuesday, the Department for Research and Information on Anti-Semitism Berlin, or RIAS, documented 410 incidents — more than two a day — during the first half of 2020. The group's count of anti-Semitic acts included six physical attacks, 25 cases of property damage, 20 threats, 58 examples of anti-Semitic propaganda and 301 examples of malicious behavior such as giving the stiff-armed Nazi salute.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 80 of 82

The report's publication comes amid nationwide concerns that intensified in October 2019 after an armed man tried to force his way into a synagogue in central German city of Halle on Judaism's holiest day, Yom Kippur, then fatally shot two people nearby. The suspect posted an anti-Jewish screed online before the attack.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel last week decried how anti-Semitism had become "more visible and uninhibited."

"It is a disgrace, and it shames me deeply," Merkel said.

A national report issued in May showed anti-Semitic crimes in Germany last year reached their highest level since the country started keeping records.

The Interior Ministry reported a 13% increase in anti-Semitic crimes to 2,032, more than 93% of which were attributed to the far right. Anti-Muslim crimes also rose 4.4% to 950, more than 90% of them committed by alleged far-right perpetrators.

The report Tuesday highlights recent cases in Berlin. Graves were desecrated at a Jewish cemetery in Pankow, a borough where a man also interrupted a woman speaking Hebrew on her phone with a Nazi salute and a shout of "Heil Hitler!"

The words "Jew! Hate! J.H." were sprayed outside a Jewish-owned business in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf and a swastika was etched into the glass of a restaurant in Schöneberg. In Kreuzberg, 10 "Stolpersteine" — brass memorial plates like the ones near the Lichtenberg bar — were painted black.

"Despite the massive restrictions on public life to contain the COVID-19 pandemic since March 17, the number of anti-Semitic incidences was just under the level for the first half of 2019," said RIAS, which documented 458 incidents for the same period last year.

The head of Germany's Central Council of Jews, said the pandemic is acting as a "catalyzer," with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories circulating online. RIAS documented incidences of protesters wearing Stars of David, the yellow badges persecuted Jews were forced to wear under Nazi rule, at demonstrations against anti-virus measures.

Levi Salomon, of the Jewish Forum for Democracy and Against Anti-Semitism, told The Associated Press the problem has been growing for a long time and has become a "huge, huge" issue — not only in Berlin.

"I've been observing right-wing extremism for more than 20 years across the whole country, and the situation has become far worse than it was 20 years ago," Salomon said.

The owner of the bar in Lichtenberg, for example, had been receiving threats since he first opened a Jewish restaurant in the area in 2012. He later converted it to a bar.

He declined to speak with the AP for fear of attracting more attention but told Salomon's group that neo-Nazis entered his bar and smashed bottles in early 2019. The year before, he said, they insulted him as a "dirty Jew" and said they would drive him out of the premises. Anti-Semitic slogans were scrawled outside the pub.

The latest threat came the Monday before the arson, when an anonymous caller told the bar owner he wasn't wanted in the neighborhood. Someone then smashed a window and set a couch inside on fire, leading to the almost complete destruction of the bar on Aug. 14.

A crude Star of David also was scratched into the door, as were the numbers 2 and 8, an apparent reference to the "Blood and Honor" neo-Nazi network, the owner reported.

Lichtenberg has "a very active right-wing/far-right scene, which had been very much aware of the fact that the owner of this bar was Jewish," RIAS researcher Alexander Rasumny said.

His group has also tracked threats against individuals involved in fighting anti-Semitism. The mayor of Lichtenberg reported being on an "enemy list" drawn up by right-wing extremists. A prominent Turkish-born local politician said she received threats from neo-Nazis.

However, hundreds of residents and others rallied against anti-Semitism outside the bar shortly after the fire. Some held signs with slogans such as "No place for Nazis!" and "No place for extremism."

Following last year's attack in Halle, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer warned that far-right extremism poses a growing threat in Germany. Since then, authorities have banned several neo-Nazi groups and car-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 81 of 82

ried out extensive raids.

But Seehofer has resisted calls for a study on police racism after multiple incidents in the last year involving extremism among officers.

Calls for such a study grew stronger last week after more than two dozen officers in western Germany were suspended on suspicion of sharing far-right propaganda in WhatsApp groups. Officials said the chats contained "the most foul and repugnant neo-Nazi, racist and anti-refugee agitation."

In response to the concerns in Berlin, the state prosecutors' office this month announced a new department focused on hate crimes.

Prosecutor Ines Karl, who will head the department, said it will open direct contacts with victim and support groups, provide more transparency of police work and win back trust in the justice system. No additional staff are being hired, however.

The Jewish Forum for Democracy and Against Anti-Semitism's Salomon said more investment is needed to help fight anti-Semitism.

"As long as that doesn't happen, we're going to really have problems," Salomon said.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 23, the 267th day of 2020. There are 99 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 23, 1952, Sen. Richard M. Nixon, R-Calif., salvaged his vice-presidential nomination by appearing on television from Los Angeles to refute allegations of improper campaign fundraising in what became known as the "Checkers" speech.

On this date:

In 63 B.C., Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, was born.

In 1806, the Lewis and Clark expedition returned to St. Louis more than two years after setting out for the Pacific Northwest.

In 1846, Neptune was identified as a planet by German astronomer Johann Gottfried Galle (GAH'-luh).

In 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded.

In 1939, Sigmund Freud (froyd), the founder of psychoanalysis, died in London at age 83.

In 1949, President Harry S. Truman announced there was evidence the Soviet Union had recently conducted a nuclear test explosion. (The test had been carried out on Aug. 29, 1949.)

In 1955, a jury in Sumner, Mississippi, acquitted two white men, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, of murdering Black teenager Emmett Till. (The two men later admitted to the crime in an interview with Look magazine.)

In 1957, nine Black students who'd entered Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas were forced to withdraw because of a white mob outside.

In 1987, Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., withdrew from the Democratic presidential race following questions about his use of borrowed quotations and the portrayal of his academic record.

In 1999, the Mars Climate Orbiter apparently burned up as it attempted to go into orbit around the Red Planet.

In 2001, President George W. Bush returned the American flag to full staff at Camp David, symbolically ending a period of national mourning following the 9/11 attacks.

In 2002, Gov. Gray Davis signed a law making California the first state to offer workers paid family leave.

Ten years ago: The U.S. delegation walked out of a U.N. speech by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (ah-muh-DEE'-neh-zahd) after he said some in the world had speculated that the U.S. staged the September 11, 2001 attacks in an attempt to assure Israel's survival. Congressional Republicans unveiled their "Pledge to America," a strongly worded manifesto promising to return government to the people. Te-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 082 ~ 82 of 82

resa Lewis, 41, was executed by the state of Virginia for arranging the killings of her husband and stepson to collect on a \$250,000 insurance policy.

Five years ago: In the first canonization on U.S. soil, Pope Francis elevated to sainthood Junipero Serra, an 18th-century missionary who'd brought Catholicism to the American West Coast. Earlier in the day, the pontiff met with President Barack Obama at the White House and was greeted by adoring crowds during an outdoor procession. Chinese President Xi Jinping, visiting Seattle, addressed Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, billionaire investor Warren Buffett and other top American and Chinese business leaders, vowing his country would work to remove barriers to foreign investment and improve intellectual property protections. Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn resigned, days after admitting that the world's top-selling carmaker had rigged diesel emissions to pass U.S. tests during his tenure; Winterkorn denied any personal wrongdoing.

One year ago: During a meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations, President Donald Trump denied telling the president of Ukraine that his country would only get U.S. aid if Ukraine investigated the son of Democratic rival Joe Biden. World leaders gathered at the Climate Action Summit at the United Nations pledged to do more to prevent a warming world from reaching even more dangerous levels; even before they spoke, they were scolded in a speech by teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg, who shamed them for their inaction by repeatedly asking, "How dare you?" Hundreds of thousands of travelers were left stranded across the world after the British tour operator Thomas Cook collapsed, immediately halting almost all of its flights and hotel services and laying off employees; the 178-year-old company had helped create the package tour industry.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Julio Iglesias is 77. Actor Paul Petersen (TV: "The Donna Reed Show") is 75. Actor/singer Mary Kay Place is 73. Rock star Bruce Springsteen is 71. Director/playwright George C. Wolfe is 66. Rock musician Leon Taylor (The Ventures) is 65. Actor Rosalind Chao is 63. Golfer Larry Mize is 62. Actor Jason Alexander is 61. Actor Chi McBride is 59. Country musician Don Herron (BR549) is 58. Actor Erik Todd Dellums is 56. Actor LisaRaye is 54. Singer Ani (AH'-nee) DiFranco is 50. Rock singer Sam (formerly Sarah) Bettens (K's Choice) is 48. Recording executive Jermaine Dupri is 48. Actor Kip Pardue is 44. Actor Anthony Mackie is 42. Pop singer Erik-Michael Estrada (TV: "Making the Band") is 41. Actor Aubrey Dollar is 40. Actor Brandon Victor Dixon is 39. Actor David Lim is 37. Pop singer Diana Ortiz (Dream) is 35. Actor Cush Jumbo is 35. Actor Skylar Astin is 33. Former tennis player Melanie Oudin (oo-DAN') is 29.