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“ ONE OF THE MOST COURAGEOUS THINGS YOU CAN DO IS IDENTIFY YOURSELF, KNOW WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN AND WHERE YOU WANT TO GO. ”

-SHEILA MURRAY BETHEL

Schedule Addition

There is an addition to the volleyball scheduled. Groton Area will host Wauaby-Summit on Monday, Oct. 12th. There will be a junior high match, junior varsity and varsity.

The SDHSAA has ruled that there will be no wrestling tournaments this year. Only duals and triangulars will be held during the regular season.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



Base for new water tower

The base for the new Groton water tower was poured Wednesday afternoon. As you can see in the photo above, they had the concrete truck with a long conveyer belt moving the concrete to the hole. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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This photo features the round base as workers smooth it out and make sure all of the air bubbles are out of it. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

#213 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Still looking rocky. Today, 41,000 new cases were reported, a 0.6% increase to 6,957,400. The 14-day average is up by 13%; it was up by 7% yesterday, and Monday was the first day in forever that this number increased at all. Bad trajectory. Wisconsin set a single-day new-case record today, and I believe South Dakota did too.

We are seeing increasing case numbers and increasing test positivity rates, both terrible trends. Twenty-seven states and Puerto Rico have higher seven-day new-case averages than they have since late August, and on Monday, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Puerto Rico set records for seven-day average. Michael Osterholm, University of Minnesota epidemiologist, said, "I think we're just in the beginning of what's going to be a marked increase in cases in the fall. And it won't be just a testing artifact, either. This is real." What's more, many states' data are expected to become less reliable as they are deciding not to report results of rapid antigen tests, which can mean many cases are missed in the official counts.

There were 1123 deaths reported today, a 0.6% increase to 201,781 deaths in the US. Hospitalizations and deaths remain lower than they were mid-summer, but these lag new case reports by several weeks, so would not be expected to rise—yet. We are seeing an increase in the 14-day average here too, although so far it is a small one. However, again, with a number that has been on a steady decline for quite some weeks, any increase in the average is worrisome.

On the sort of trajectory we're on at the moment, it is likely, by the end of the year, that we will have more deaths from Covid-19 than from diabetes, influenza and pneumonia, kidney disease, and suicide combined in 2017. We've already exceeded the annual toll from accidents and injuries with three months left in the year. We have five states with more than 10,000 deaths; there are only 15 entire in the world with more than 10,000 deaths. As a nation, we are sixth in the world for per capita death rate.

Early on, small and rural towns had almost no deaths at all; the very worst outcomes were in cities, primarily large ones—30,000 of the first 100,000 deaths were in New York, mostly in the city; but that's changing as patterns of spread change. Today, more than one in five deaths occurs in a small/rural town and some lightly-populated places now have as many deaths per capita as New York City.

The CDC issued guidance for Halloween a couple of days ago, and sadly, it is recommending you give the traditional trick-or-treating a miss this year, citing the chance of at-risk people becoming infected as a result. They also caution against indoor gatherings to celebrate the holiday. Moderate-risk activities, according to the CDC, include socially-distanced trick-or-treating—washing your hands thoroughly before making up and leaving goodie bags out for children to pick up, masked costume parties—recognizing that Halloween masks do not take the place of cloth masks, and outdoor haunted forests—although they do caution against screaming while near other people because of the risk of airborne transmission. If you're going out to pick pumpkins or apples, sanitize your hands before and after touching the goods. Low-risk activities would be an online costume contest, a household-only pumpkin carving activity, or a distanced outdoor scavenger hunt. (And no, none of these sounds like as much fun to me either.) It's probably a good idea to begin talking with children now about how Halloween is going to differ from last year; preparing them well in advance of the day may ease things a bit.

We are seeing that contact tracing efforts are faltering pretty seriously in many places across the country. Patients are simply not reporting contacts, perhaps because they don't want to subject those people to quarantine measures, or are not responding at all to attempts to contact them. Other factors are that people tend not to answer calls from unknown numbers—I certainly don't, so I get this—and the high volume of cases when tracing staff is limited. Thing is if we cannot trace contacts, we can't stop this, as is becoming increasingly clear while we watch case numbers grow.

New research published yesterday from Public Health England reports on findings from people infected with both influenza virus and SARS-CoV-2 between January and April. The risk of severe disease was heightened in those co-infected with the two viruses, and those with both viruses were 2.27 times more likely to die than those with covid-19 alone. The report urgently recommended citizens get a flu shot before

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the season begins. Flu by itself can be deadly; combined with Covid-19, it is even more so.

Finland began piloting a program using virus-sniffing dogs at Helsinki airport today. We talked a couple of months ago about this possibility, and now work has moved to the stage where it's worth a real-life try. The tests will be voluntary and will require less than a minute of a traveler's time. While other teams are studying the possibility, this project is the largest in scale and most advanced so far. We know dogs can sniff cancers and other infections because changes in health affect the odor a person has, detectable in sweat. Trials with dogs in Dubai were 90% accurate, and after promising lab results, are ready for larger trials. Travelers agreeing to participate will not come into contact with the dogs; they will swab their own necks and submit the swabs for the dogs to sniff. They will then be encouraged to have a no-cost PCR test, the best kind we currently have available, to monitor the dogs' accuracy. Researchers do warn that canine tests would be difficult to scale; training for the dogs is time-consuming and expensive. Nonetheless, they are optimistic dogs have a role to play. It will be interesting to see how these trials turn out.

Phase 3 clinical trials for a fourth Covid-19 vaccine candidate, this one from Janssen, a division of Johnson & Johnson, began in the US with a goal of enrolling up to 60,000 participants. The hope is to have results by the end of the year with a goal of manufacturing a billion doses next year of a licensed vaccine. As things stand, the plan is for a single-dose vaccine, which significantly reduces difficulty, complexity, and expense from a two-dose product. This candidate has the added benefit of being stable at refrigeration temperatures for up to three months, so even though it will be shipped frozen, distribution and administration under simple refrigeration will be significantly easier and less expensive. This is also a tried-and-true style of vaccine that uses a viral vector, a harmless adenovirus, to carry the gene for viral antigen into the vaccinated person. The virus delivers the gene, the patient's cells make copies of the gene product, and the immune system (if all goes according to plan) will then produce an immune response against that protein. The other vaccines in phase 3 trials in the US all rely on technology which has yet to be licensed at all.

Johnson & Johnson has agreed to publish its full trial protocol, as have the other companies in trials, which will provide outside experts the opportunity to evaluate the experimental design; it is the hope this transparency will improve public confidence in the licensing process and the vaccine's safety and efficacy. This trial needs a minimum of 154 cases in order to determine efficacy, and as with the other candidates, there are interim analyses scheduled.

The larger trial size could help this study to reach an endpoint sooner, and it will give a clearer picture of any rare side effects which might present themselves. As I've said many times, more alternatives is better. Let's wish this team well too; what's good for them is good for all of us.

Nine-year-old Hunger Michael Hutchins lives in Indianapolis and decided he wanted to do something nice for the front-line medical workers in his city as they take risks in order to care for patients during this pandemic. So with his birthday approaching, he posted a video for family and friends on social media, asking them to forego the usual birthday gifts and donate instead to his project to provide appreciation for those folks. I liked the part near the end of his video where he said, "And if you don't want to donate, that's OK too. But please donate."

Hutchins then took that seed money and combined it with the proceeds from his scrap metal business to raise money for his project. He collects aluminum cans and tabs, as well as various other scrap metal items, including old satellite dishes, poles and iron bars, and used batteries, and takes them to metal dealers as his stock accumulates. While his folks have to do the driving, he handles and loads items for himself.

Anyone who's ever hauled scrap metal to a dealer knows you don't get a whole lot of money for a given volume of metal; but Hutchins persists over time. He has raised over \$2000 so far and is already on the way to his second \$2000. With the money he raises, he provides snacks to workers at nearby hospitals, delivering them periodically as he has money to purchase more items.

Now, I don't think free snacks are changing any individual workers' lives; but I cannot imagine his gifts go unnoticed. Here's a kid, doing what he can with what he has, to show appreciation to those whose work often can be pretty thankless. He's not a bad model for the rest of us. "And a little child shall lead them." We should probably follow.

Be well. I'll see you tomorrow.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Sept. 23	Sept. 24
Minnesota	91,422	92,100
Nebraska	41,785	42,278
Montana	10,700	10,912
Colorado	66,053	66,669
Wyoming	4,231	4,368
North Dakota	18,508	18,981
South Dakota	19,189	19,634
United States	6,897,495	6,935,415
US Deaths	200,818	201,920

Minnesota	+480	+678
Nebraska	+397	+493
Montana	+271	+212
Colorado	+654	+616
Wyoming	+42	+137
North Dakota	+264	+473
South Dakota	+320	+445
United States	+39,357	37,920
US Deaths	+928	+1,102

	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

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September 23rd COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Miner County is the only county remaining that is fully recovered in South Dakota. Today, the positive cases numbered 445 with only 154 recovered. North Dakota has passed South Dakota in deaths, recording seven today while South Dakota had none. North Dakota had 475 positive cases today. Those hospitalized in South Dakota reached 192, up 14 from yesterday.

Locally, Brown had 14 positive and 5 recovered with 145 active cases. Day County had 2 more positive cases, with 14 active cases now. Edmunds had 4 positive, 2 recovered and 22 active cases. No change in McPherson with 8 active cases. Marshall County had 1 positive, 2 recovered and 9 active cases. Spink County had 2 positive, 1 recovered and 28 active cases.

Counties with double digit increases are Beadle with 16, Brown 15, Codington 16, Hughes 19, Lawrence 20, Lincoln 28, Meade 12, Minnehaha 90, Pennington 50, Tripp 15 and Yankton 12.

The State Health officials announced Wednesday, September 23rd, that an individual who attended a Women's Conference held at Faith Family Church at 127 N. Spring Ave in Sioux Falls has tested positive for COVID-19.

The individual attended the event while able to transmit the virus to others on these dates and times:

September 9th from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

September 10th from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

September 11th from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Due to the risk of exposure, individuals that attended the event during the specified dates and times should monitor for symptoms for 14 days after they visited.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +15 (1,067) Positivity Rate: 16.0%

Total Tests: 94 (10,028)

Recovered: +5 (919)

Active Cases: +10 (145)

Ever Hospitalized: +2 (40)

Deaths: 0 (3)

Percent Recovered: 86.1%

South Dakota:

Positive: +445 (19,634 total) Positivity Rates: 16.6%

Total Tests: 2,688 (247,705 total)

Hospitalized: +44 (1,367 total). 192 currently hospitalized +14)

Deaths: +0 (202 total)

Recovered: +154 (16,324 total)

Active Cases: +291 (3,108)

Percent Recovered: 83.1%

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: 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: 3 active cases

Beadle (9): +16 positive, +1 recovered (60 active cases)

Bennett (1): 23 active cases

Bon Homme (1): +2 positive, +1 recovered (16 active cases)

Brookings (2): +8 positive, +8 recovered (116 active cases)

Brown (3): +15 positive, +5 recovered (145 active cases)

Brule: +9 positive, +1 recovered (24 active cases)

Buffalo (3): +4 positive (10 active cases)

Butte (1): +5 positive (23 active cases)

Campbell: +3 positive (10 active cases)

Charles Mix: +6 positive, +2 recovered (27 active cases)

Clark: +2 positive, +1 recovered (6 active cases)

Clay (5) 41 active cases

Codington (3): +16 positive, +10 recovered (194 active cases)

Corson (1): +4 positive (14 active cases)

Custer (2): +4 positive, +2 recovered (41 active case)

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Davison (2): +5 positive, +2 recovered (55 active cases)
 Day: +2 positive (14 active cases)
 Deuel: +3 positive (14 active cases)
 Dewey: +4 positive (41 active cases)
 Douglas: +2 positive (29 active cases)
 Edmunds: +4 positive, +2 recovered (22 active cases)
 Fall River (3): +1 positive (18 active cases)
 Faulk (1): +1 positive, +1 recovered (13 active cases)
 Grant (1): +4 positive, +1 recovered (34 active cases)
 Gregory (1): +3 positive (58 active cases)
 Haakon: +1 positive, +1 recovered (7 active case)
 Hamlin: 8 active cases
 Hand: +5 positive (13 active cases)
 Hanson: +1 recovered (6 active cases)
 Harding: +2 positive (2 active cases)
 Hughes (4): +19 positive, +7 recovered (166 active cases)
 Hutchinson (2): +3 positive, +1 recovered (19 active cases)
 Hyde: +2 positive (10 active cases)
 Jackson (1): +2 positive, +2 recovered (11 active cases)
 Jerauld (1): +3 positive, +2 recovered (20 active cases)

Jones: 2 active cases
 Kingsbury: +2 recovered (12 active cases)
 Lake (7): +2 positive, +2 recovered (21 active cases)
 Lawrence (4): +20 positive, +2 recovered (86 active cases)
 Lincoln (2): +28 positive, +10 recovered (178 active cases)
 Lyman (3): +8 positive, +1 recovered (12 active cases)
 Marshall: +1 positive, +2 recovered (9 active cases)
 McCook (1): +3 positive (18 active cases)
 McPherson: 8 active case
 Meade (4): +12 positive, +4 recovered (105 active cases)
 Mellette: +1 positive (4 active cases)
 Miner: Fully Recovered
 Minnehaha (78): +90 positive, +24 recovered (566 active cases)
 Moody: +3 positive, +1 recovered (15 active cases)
 Oglala Lakota (3): +7 positive, +2 recovered (33 active cases)
 Pennington (35): +50 positive, +21 recovered (328 active cases)
 Perkins: +2 positive, +2 recovered (10 active cases)
 Potter: +1 positive, +2 recovered (13 active cases)
 Roberts (1): +4 positive, +4 recovered (43 active cases)
 Sanborn: +1 positive, +1 recovered (5 active cases)
 Spink: +2 positive, +1 recovered (28 active cases)
 Stanley: +2 positive (7 active cases)
 Sully: 1 active case
 Todd (5): +4 positive, +2 recovered (17 active cases)
 Tripp: +15 positive, +8 recovered (61 active cases)
 Turner (2): +1 positive, +1 recovered (34 active cases)
 Union (5): +7 positive, +1 recovered (50 active cases)
 Walworth: +9 positive, +4 recovered (33 active cases)
 Yankton (4): +12 positive, +5 recovered (81 active cases)
 Ziebach: +1 recovered (14 active case)

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

- 5.8% rolling 14-day positivity
- 6.8% daily positivity
- 475 new positives
- 5,743 susceptible test encounters
- 89 currently hospitalized (+3)
- 3,092 active cases (+210)

Total Deaths: +7 (203)

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	624	0
10-19 years	2177	0
20-29 years	4758	2
30-39 years	3407	7
40-49 years	2687	10
50-59 years	2619	20
60-69 years	1773	32
70-79 years	896	35
80+ years	693	96

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	10112	96
Male	9522	106

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County ▲	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread
Aurora	45	42	488	0	Minimal
Beadle	723	654	2399	9	Substantial
Bennett	62	40	635	1	Substantial
Bon Homme	79	62	1127	1	Moderate
Brookings	704	586	4317	2	Substantial
Brown	1067	919	6586	3	Substantial
Brule	104	80	1014	0	Moderate
Buffalo	123	110	728	3	Minimal
Butte	82	58	1220	1	Moderate
Campbell	16	6	143	0	Moderate
Charles Mix	156	126	2084	0	Moderate
Clark	34	28	517	0	Moderate
Clay	540	494	2244	5	Substantial
Codington	757	560	4487	3	Substantial
Corson	89	74	716	1	Moderate
Custer	179	136	1021	2	Substantial
Davison	230	172	3239	2	Substantial
Day	65	51	895	0	Moderate
Deuel	79	65	601	0	Substantial
Dewey	125	84	2756	0	Substantial
Douglas	72	43	533	0	Substantial
Edmunds	90	68	560	0	Substantial
Fall River	88	67	1302	3	Substantial
Faulk	65	51	294	1	Moderate
Grant	98	63	1054	1	Substantial
Gregory	110	51	608	1	Substantial
Haakon	19	12	332	0	Moderate
Hamlin	80	72	929	0	Moderate
Hand	32	19	430	0	Moderate
Hanson	32	26	317	0	Minimal
Harding	5	3	64	0	Minimal
Hughes	349	179	2625	4	Substantial
Hutchinson	78	57	1160	2	Moderate

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Hyde	18	8	202	0	Moderate
Jackson	29	17	544	1	Moderate
Jerauld	76	55	326	1	Substantial
Jones	7	5	86	0	Minimal
Kingsbury	47	35	757	0	Substantial
Lake	175	147	1257	7	Substantial
Lawrence	362	272	3126	4	Substantial
Lincoln	1251	1071	9765	2	Substantial
Lyman	120	105	1174	3	Moderate
Marshall	38	29	627	0	Moderate
McCook	88	69	862	1	Substantial
McPherson	29	21	293	0	Moderate
Meade	487	378	3021	4	Substantial
Mellette	30	26	455	0	Minimal
Miner	19	19	330	0	Minimal
Minnehaha	6383	5739	37746	78	Substantial
Moody	78	63	838	0	Moderate
Oglala Lakota	235	199	3458	3	Substantial
Pennington	2091	1728	14767	35	Substantial
Perkins	36	26	300	0	Moderate
Potter	40	27	455	0	Moderate
Roberts	167	123	2543	1	Substantial
Sanborn	23	18	304	0	Minimal
Spink	115	87	1458	0	Substantial
Stanley	34	27	391	0	Moderate
Sully	9	8	127	0	Minimal
Todd	112	91	2672	5	Moderate
Tripp	114	53	798	0	Substantial
Turner	143	107	1264	2	Substantial
Union	367	311	2574	6	Substantial
Walworth	102	69	1099	0	Substantial
Yankton	372	287	4277	4	Substantial
Ziebach	60	46	492	0	Minimal
Unassigned	0	0	14685	0	

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- ✓ 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)

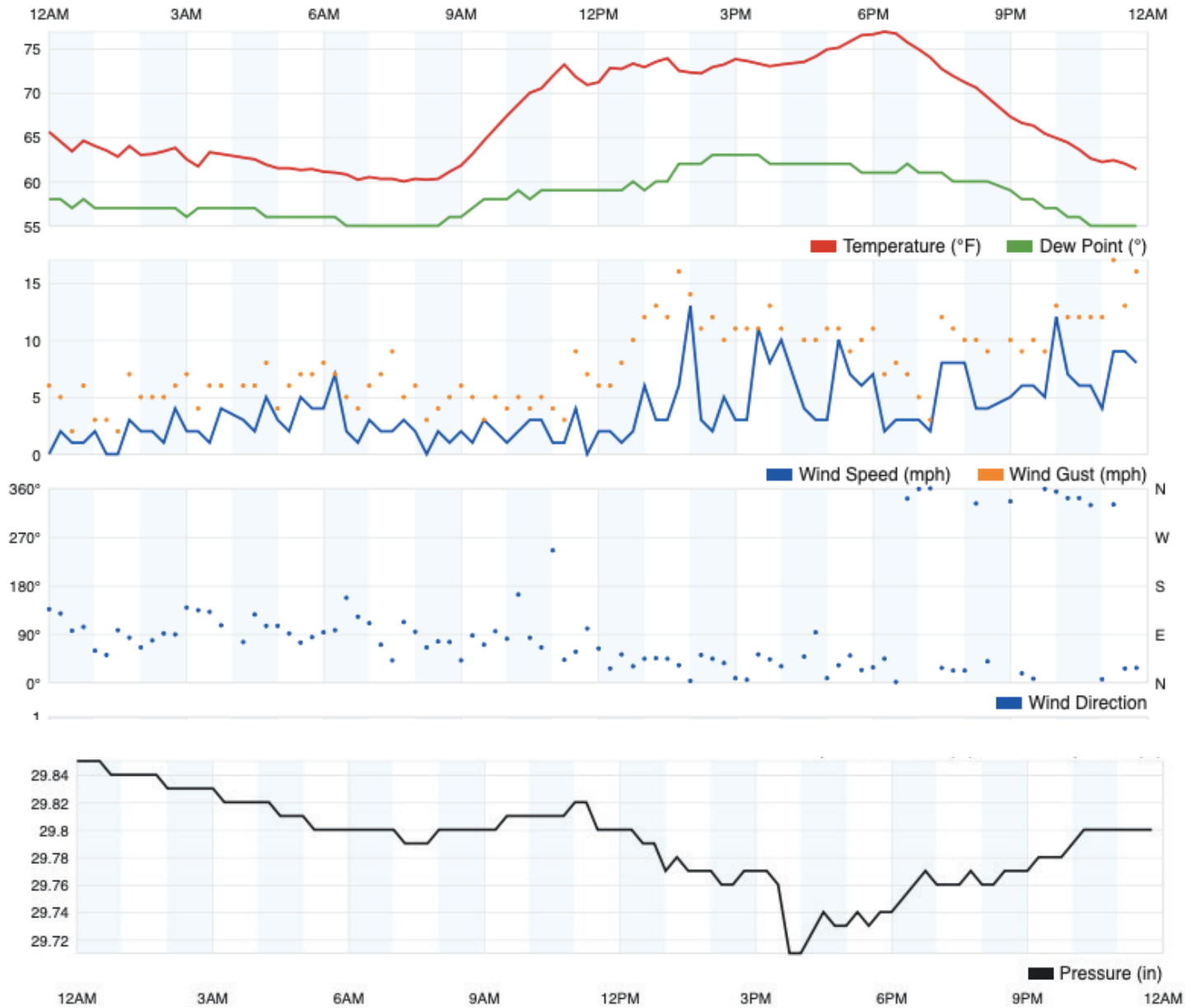
Vote for Michael Nehls for Brown County Commission (your vote **only for Mike could make a difference)**

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday
Night

Saturday



Patchy Fog
then Sunny



Partly Cloudy



Mostly Cloudy



Mostly Cloudy



Mostly Cloudy

High: 78 °F

Low: 57 °F

High: 77 °F

Low: 51 °F

High: 75 °F

Today
Breezy
Highs: Mid 70s to Upper 80s
Tonight
Breezy
Lows: Around 60

Friday
Breezy
Highs: Mid to Upper 70s
Saturday
Breezy
Lows: Low to Mid 50s

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr
Graphic Created
9/24/2020 3:33 AM

We continue to see unseasonably warm temperatures and dry conditions across the state. Breezy winds will also stick with us as we continue through the end of the work week and into the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

September 24, 1986: Thunderstorms brought high winds along with several tornados to parts of western and central South Dakota from the late evening in the morning hours of the 25th. Winds were estimated up to 80 mph. Many trees and power poles were downed along with damage to many buildings. The tornadoes occurred near Newell, east of Cedar Butte, west of Murdo, 20 miles northwest of Pierre, and northwest of Ridgeview in Dewey County.

September 24, 1992: South winds gusting to 50 to 55 mph across northeast South Dakota during the day toppled several trees and light poles. In Aberdeen, a front window was blown out of a store.

1926: The temperature at Yellowstone Park drops to 9 degrees below zero, making it the coldest September reading ever recorded in the US.

1939: A thunderstorm on this day dropped 6.45 inches in six hours at Indio, CA. This rainfall preceded "El Cordonazo" or "The Lash of St. Francis", an actual tropical storm. For the entire storm, which started on this day and ended on the 26th, four inches of rain fell across the deserts and mountains as a dying tropical cyclone moved across Baja California into southwestern Arizona. This storm was the second tropical cyclone to impact California during this month. A strong El Niño may have contributed to the activity. The tropical storm produced 50 mph winds over the ocean and estimated seas of 40 feet. September rain records were set in Los Angeles with 5.66 inches and 11.6 inches at Mt. Wilson. 45 people died from sinking boats, and harbors were damaged. Total damage was estimated at \$2 million. Californians were unprepared and were alerted to their vulnerability to tropical storms. In response, the weather bureau established a forecast office for Southern California, which began operations in February of 1940.

1956: Hurricane Flossy made landfall near Destin, Florida as a Category 1 storm.

1986: An F2 tornado, unusually strong for one in California, touched down just southeast of Vina on this day and traveled two miles through an agricultural area. A mobile home was destroyed, injuring a 22-year-old occupant. Eleven other buildings were damaged or demolished, and 50 acres of walnut orchards were flattened.

2001: A weak, F0 tornado passed in the sight of the Washington Monument. Soon after, an F3 tornado struck College Park, Maryland.

2005: Early on the morning of September 24, 2005, Major Hurricane Rita came ashore near the Texas/Louisiana border.

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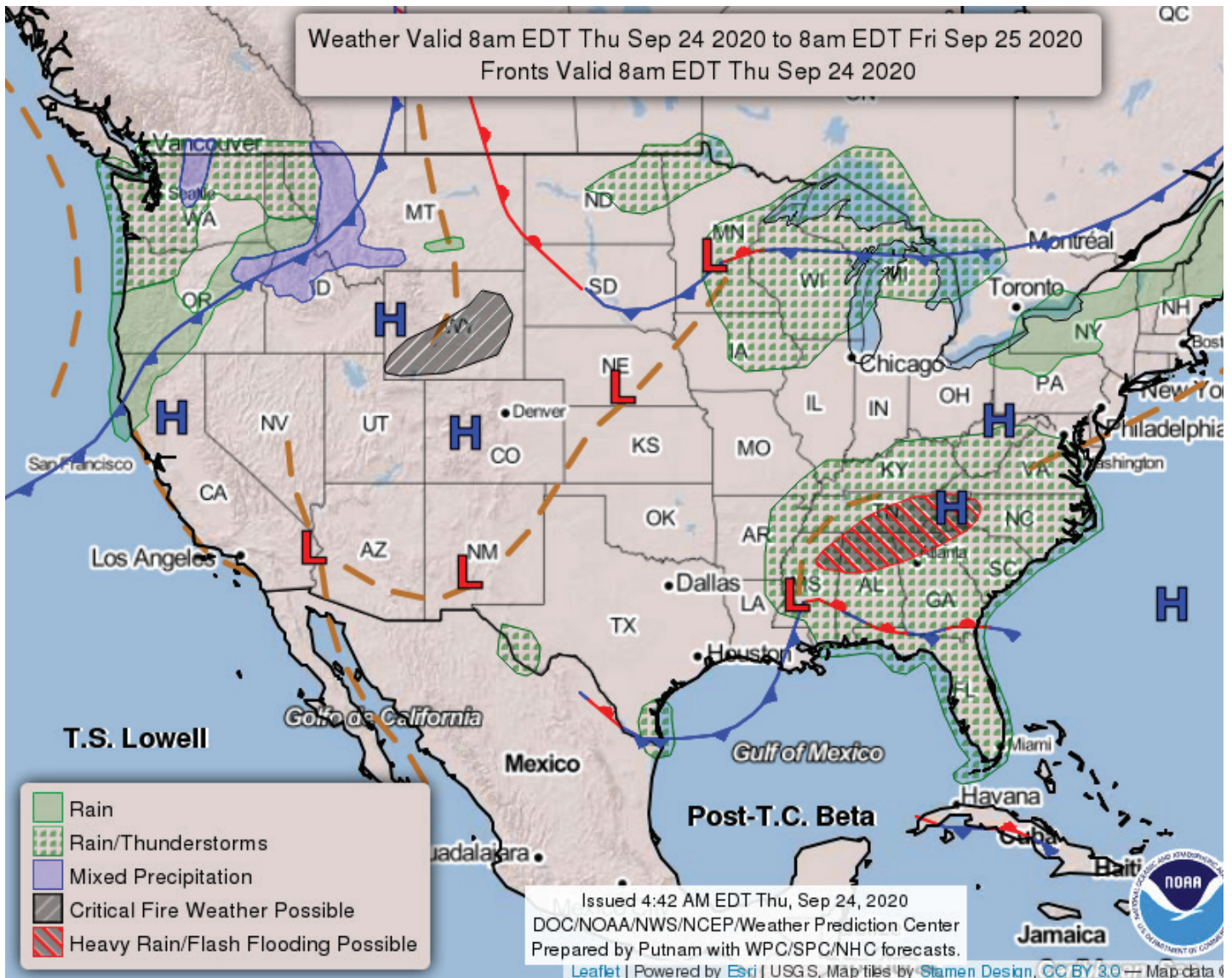
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77 °F at 6:09 PM
Low Temp: 60 °F at 7:48 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 11:06 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 90° in 1935
Record Low: 23° in 2000
Average High: 68°F
Average Low: 42°F
Average Precip in Sept...: 1.69
Precip to date in Sept.: 1.52
Average Precip to date: 17.98
Precip Year to Date: 14.87
Sunset Tonight: 7:26 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:25 a.m.



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THE SOURCE

Niccolo Paganini began his musical career later than most musicians. However, he developed his talents so rapidly, and was so gifted, that his skills exceeded most of his instructors in a short amount of time. He was the most celebrated violinist of his day and is recognized as one of the greatest virtuosos who ever lived.

One evening as he walked on the stage for a concert, he felt that something was wrong. He looked around and could see nothing unusual that would cause this feeling. Then he looked at his instrument and realized that he was handed the wrong violin as he walked on stage. As the orchestra conductor lifted his baton to begin the concert, he realized that it was too late to exchange violins.

Later that evening, those who heard him play his violin said that it was his greatest performance. When asked about the violin, he said, "Today I learned the most important lesson of my career. I thought the music was in the instrument. Today I learned it is in me."

Jesus said that if we remain in Him, as a branch remains in a tree, we will have life. Once a branch is no longer connected to the tree, it withers and dies. If we desire to live like Christ we must remain in Christ. We must stay connected to Him by staying in His Word, by spending time with Him in prayer, and by being obedient to Him in keeping His commands.

Prayer: We ask, Heavenly Father, that our love for You will be so intense that we will live a life that is centered in Your Word, in prayer, and in obedience to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- **CANCELLED** Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
- **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- **POSTPONED** Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
- **CANCELLED** Father/Daughter dance.
- **CANCELLED** Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
- **CANCELLED** Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
- 07/24/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ferney Open Golf Tourney
- 07/25/2020 City-Wide Rummage Sales
- **CANCELLED** State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
- 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 09/12-13/2020 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In at the Groton Airport north of Groton
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
- 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/30/2020 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

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

03-13-17-19-24

(three, thirteen, seventeen, nineteen, twenty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$198,000

Lotto America

06-15-37-41-42, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 5

(six, fifteen, thirty-seven, forty-one, forty-two; Star Ball: six; ASB: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.45 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$24 million

Powerball

08-17-49-52-59, Powerball: 1, Power Play: 2

(eight, seventeen, forty-nine, fifty-two, fifty-nine; Powerball: one; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Lawmakers push schools to consider transgender sports policy

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republican lawmakers pushed the state's high school activities association Wednesday to reconsider its policy of allowing transgender students to compete as the gender with which they identify.

The association currently allows transgender athletes to get an exemption to compete as the gender that is different from that on their birth certificate. But a similar policy in Connecticut is being challenged by the U.S. Department of Education and by a federal lawsuit brought by the families of three cisgender female high school runners who competed against transgender athletes.

Dan Swartos, the executive director of the South Dakota High School Activities Association, said the association would like to see the outcome of that lawsuit before reconsidering its policy.

But Republican lawmakers on the Government Operations and Audit Committee asked him in a Wednesday meeting to consider sending a legal analysis of the association's policy to school boards and having them weigh in. Swartos said he would consider it.

School boards across South Dakota would need to vote on any change to rules on athletic participation. The Legislature could also pass a bill to ban transgender athletes from competing as the gender with which they identify.

Currently, there are no transgender high school athletes competing in girls sports, according to Swartos. There are a small number of transgender athletes competing in boys sports.

The lawsuit in Connecticut arose after lawyers from the conservative nonprofit Alliance Defending Freedom filed a Title IX complaint on behalf of high school athletes who lost to two transgender competitors in girls track. The complaint contends that the transgender girls have an unfair physical advantage that violates Title IX, the federal law designed to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls in education, including athletics.

The Department of Education has threatened to withhold federal funding over Connecticut's policy. But transgender rights activists have called the threat an effort by the Trump administration to attack transgender students.

Speaker Steven Haugaard, a Sioux Falls Republican, has said he is looking into the South Dakota policy

to ensure that schools are aware of their legal and financial liability.

Swartos presented lawmakers with the results of a survey he sent to school administrators in summer 2019. Over 80% of administrators who responded supported the current policy.

But Haugaard took issue with how Swartos conducted the survey and asked him to send schools legal analysis and give school boards an opportunity to respond.

Sen. Susan Wismer, one of two Democrats on the committee, said the pressure on the issue amounted to unnecessary targeting of transgender children.

"I find this obsession with the potential of a transgender athlete creating unfair competition in interscholastic athletics petty, mystifying and obnoxious," said Wismer, who is from Britton.

But Rep. Sue Peterson, a Republican from Sioux Falls and the committee chair, said that the policy deserved attention because developments at the national level could affect schools in the state.

"This is not petty," she said. "This is not minute."

3 suspects sought after about 40 guns stolen in Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities are searching for three suspects after about 40 guns were stolen early Wednesday morning from a Rapid City gun shop.

Officers responded about 3:30 a.m. to a report of an alarm and discovered that a glass door on the shop's main entrance had been shattered. Surveillance video shows two suspects inside the store, including one person shattering various display cases with a baseball bat, police said. A third suspect is seen outside.

Police are working with the business to determine the specific firearms taken during the burglary. The release does not name the gun shop.

"Any time you have a large-scale gun theft like this, it's highly concerning for local law enforcement," said Rapid City Police Capt. John Olson, commander of the the department's Criminal Investigations Division. "We have around 40 guns that are now unaccounted for in the hands of our criminal element."

South Dakota reports single-day high for COVID-19 infections

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota on Wednesday reported 445 new cases of COVID-19, the highest number in a single day since the pandemic started.

The state has seen the nation's second-highest number of new cases per capita over the last two weeks. The rolling average of daily new cases has increased by nearly a third in that time. But Gov. Kristi Noem has continued to say that the state is "in good shape" when it comes to hospital capacity.

The Department of Health also reported a record number of people hospitalized by COVID-19 on Wednesday with 192 needing hospital care. Those people are occupying 8% of hospital beds in the state, and 41% of hospital beds are open.

In a Tuesday tweet, Noem said, "It looks like South Dakota's #COVID19 spread peaked the latest of just about any state."

But coronavirus cases do not appear to be declining in the state.

The state's seven-day average for COVID-19 test positivity remains among the highest in the nation, with nearly 18% of tests returning positive, according to the COVID Tracking Project. Tuesday's positivity rate was even higher, with nearly 25% of tests returning positive, a sign that many people have infections that are not being detected by testing.

No deaths from COVID-19 were reported.

The Department of Health warned that someone who attended a Sioux Falls church conference that started two weeks ago could have transmitted the virus to others. The person attended meetings at Faith Family Church from Sept. 9 to Sept. 11.

Meanwhile, as the coronavirus crisis upended university plans across the state this fall, South Dakota public universities reported fall enrollment has declined by 2.8% from last year.

The enrollment decline was less than the Board of Regents anticipated, said Brian Maher, the regents'

executive director. But the drop in students is a continuation of a trend that started in 2018 that has put a financial squeeze on the state's public universities.

"Our primary funding source is tuition fees so certainly there will be an impact," Maher said.

But he said the financial impact will not be felt until next year.

Maher also pointed to an increase in the retention rate of undergraduate students to 81% as a silver lining in the latest enrollment figures. Universities worked to keep students, especially those who live in South Dakota, even as the economic uncertainty of the pandemic caused mass layoffs during the spring.

As students returned to campus, the state has seen a surge in COVID-19 cases. The Department of Health has reported 1,172 cases tied to universities, according to the latest update released on Monday. 1,043 of those people have fully recovered.

Maher said, "The biggest thing we could do to help enrollment is to clear the public health situation up."

Man assaults deputy, steals patrol SUV, 2 other vehicles

TEA, S.D. (AP) — Sheriff's officials say they're searching a man who assaulted a Turner County deputy and stole the deputy's patrol vehicle while he was being transported to the Minnehaha County Jail.

The assault happened Tuesday afternoon near the Tea exit on Interstate 29. The deputy was taken to Sanford Health with minor injuries, according to authorities.

The man dumped the patrol SUV and stole a pickup truck near Worthing, then abandoned that vehicle near Steen, Minnesota and took a silver Chrysler minivan, according to the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office.

Authorities say a second inmate being transported is cooperating.

The man who escaped was arrested and charged earlier this month for his role in a "multi-county crime spree" after he led authorities on a pursuit in Lincoln County.

Over 360 more detained in Belarus in protests against leader

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Over 360 more people have been detained in Belarus during protests against the country's authoritarian president, who was unexpectedly sworn in to his sixth term in office after an election the opposition says was rigged.

Thousands of Belarusians took to the streets of the capital of Minsk and other cities on Wednesday evening, protesting the unannounced inauguration of President Alexander Lukashenko that took place in the morning. Police fiercely dispersed the crowds; in Minsk, officers used truncheons and water cannons, leaving dozens injured.

The country's Interior Ministry said Thursday that 364 people were detained the previous night, including 252 in Minsk. The vast majority of them remain in custody, awaiting a court hearing.

Despite the crackdown, rallies continued Thursday morning, with hundreds in Minsk forming human chains of solidarity in parts of the city and obstructing road traffic by driving slowly or stopping altogether, honking in protest.

Lukashenko's inauguration hadn't been announced in advance and came as a surprise for many after nearly seven weeks of mass protests against his disputed reelection. Opposition leaders dismissed the ceremony that had been prepared in secrecy as "a farce", and many European officials refused to recognize Lukashenko as the country's legitimate president.

Lukashenko on Thursday argued that the inauguration wasn't prepared in secret and bristled at Western criticism.

"You know, about 2,000 people, together with the military, were invited to the inauguration. It is practically impossible to keep it secret," he was quoted by the state news agency Belta as saying.

"You know, we didn't ask anyone to recognize or not recognize our election, the legitimacy of the newly elected president ... the important thing is that it's in accordance with the Constitution," Lukashenko said.

Lukashenko, a 66-year-old former state farm director, 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 given him

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80% of the vote, with his strongest opponent, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, getting 10% support. But both opposition members and some poll workers say the vote was rigged.

Tsikhanouskaya has not accepted the outcome of the election as valid, and neither have the thousands of her supporters who have been demanding Lukashenko's resignation at daily rallies all over the country for nearly seven weeks in a row.

The United States and the European Union condemned the election as neither free nor fair and criticized the violent police crackdown on post-election protests in Belarus. The EU has been pondering sanctions against the Belarusian leadership, but failed to agree on imposing them this week.

Anti-Lukashenko protests have rocked the country daily since the election, with the largest rallies in Minsk attracting up to 200,000 people. In the first days of protests, police used tear gas, truncheons and rubber bullets to disperse crowds. Several protesters died, many were injured and nearly 7,000 were detained.

Amid international outrage over the violent suppression of the protests, Belarusian authorities switched to prosecuting top activists. 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.

This week the crackdown on street demonstrators has intensified as well, with police detaining hundreds and injuring many.

The country's Prosecutor General Andrei Shved on Thursday threatened protesters with "significant" fines and said authorities are seeking to adopt stricter punishments for parents "who are involving children in protest actions."

Prosecutors in Minsk have already handed 140 warnings to families that took children to anti-government rallies.

Daria Litvinova in Moscow contributed to this report.

Election 2020 Today: Trump's power move; Biden courted

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Thursday in Election 2020, 40 days until Election Day:

ON THE TRAIL: President Donald Trump visits North Carolina and Florida and Vice President Mike Pence visits Wisconsin and Minnesota.

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

TODAY'S TOP STORIES:

TRUMP BALKS: Trump is declining to commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he loses the Nov. 3 presidential election. Trump told reporters he would "have to see what happens" when asked about the matter. His Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, responded by asking, "What country are we in?"

BIDEN'S COURT: Some leading progressives are pressing Biden to endorse expanding the number of high court justices should he win the White House and Democrats take control of the Senate. But Biden, who ran a relatively centrist primary campaign, hasn't embraced those calls, worried they may intensify the nation's partisan split.

POMPEO STUMPS: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is ignoring criticism and forging ahead with events that have overtly political overtones ahead of the presidential election. Pompeo is casting aside a long tradition of the nation's top diplomat shunning partisan politics.

"NAKED BALLOTS": Democrats are launching a digital ad targeting Pennsylvanians voting by mail to explain how to correctly fill out and return the ballots, hoping to avert worried predictions that 100,000 votes or more could be invalidated because the ballots aren't put in the proper envelope.

VISION 2020: Are the nation's voting systems secure? The nation's intelligence chiefs continue to warn that Russia, China and others remain interested in interfering in November's U.S. elections. Read more in Vision 2020, a new series of stories answering questions from our audience about the election.

ICYMI:

GOP senators see political, principle gain in court fight

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Dear Donald, Dear Mr. President: A Trump-Nixon '80s tale
High court fight adds to pile of issues weighing on voters

Many more likely sought US jobless aid as layoffs persist

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government will provide its latest snapshot Thursday of the pace of layoffs, which have remained elevated but have been declining as some sectors of the economy have rebounded in the six months since the viral pandemic erupted.

The number of people seeking unemployment benefits each week is still high, and the economy has recovered only about half the 22 million jobs that were lost to the pandemic. Many employers, especially small retailers, hotels, restaurants, airlines and entertainment venues, are struggling. And millions of Americans are facing unemployment with vastly diminished aid since the expiration of a \$600-a-week federal benefit this summer.

At the same time, some newly laid-off people are facing delays in receiving unemployment benefits as some state agencies intensify efforts to combat fraudulent applications and clear their pipelines of backlogged claims. California, the largest state, has said it will stop processing new applications for two weeks as it seeks to reduce backlogs and pursue suspected fraud.

Sir Harold Evans, crusading publisher and author, dies at 92

By HILLEL ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Sir Harold Evans, the charismatic publisher, author and muckraker who was a bold-faced name for decades for exposing wrongdoing in 1960s London to publishing such 1990s best-sellers as "Primary Colors," has died, his wife said Thursday. He was 92.

His wife, fellow author-publisher Tina Brown, said he died Wednesday in New York of congestive heart failure.

A vision of British erudition and sass, Evans was a high-profile go-getter, starting in the 1960s as an editor of the Northern Echo and the Sunday Times of London and continuing into the 1990s as president of Random House. Married since 1981 to Brown, their union was a paradigm of media clout and A-list access.

A defender of literature and print journalism well into the digital age, Evans was one of the all-time newspaper editors, startling British society with revelations of espionage, corporate wrongdoing and government scandal. In the U.S., he published such attention-getters as the mysterious political novel "Primary Colors" and memoirs by such unlikely authors as Manuel Noriega and Marlon Brando.

He was knighted by his native Britain in 2004 for his contributions to journalism.

He held his own, and more, with the world's elite, but was mindful of his working class background: a locomotive driver's son, born in Lancashire, English, on June 28, 1928. As a teen, he was evacuated to Wales during World War II. After serving in the Royal Air Force, he studied politics and economics at Durham University and received a master's in foreign policy.

His drive to report and expose dated back to his teens, when he discovered that newspapers had wildly romanticized the Battle of Dunkirk between German and British soldiers.

"A newspaper is an argument on the way to a deadline," he once wrote. He was just 16 when he got his first journalism job, at a local newspaper in Lancashire, and after graduating from college he became an assistant editor at the Manchester Evening News. In his early 30s, he was hired to edit the Daily Echo and began attracting national attention with crusades such as government funding for cancer smear tests for women.

He had yet to turn 40 when he became editor of the Sunday Times, where he reigned and rebelled for 14 years until he was pushed out by a new boss, Rupert Murdoch. Notable stories included publishing the diaries of former Labour Minister Richard Crossman; taking on the manufacturers of the drug Thalidomide, which caused birth defects in children; and revealing that Britain's Kim Philby was a Soviet spy.

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"There have been many times when I have found that what was presented as truth did not square with what I discovered as a reporter, or later as an editor, learned from good shoe-leather reporters," he observed in "My Paper Chase," published in 2009. "We all understand in an age of terrorism that refraining from exposing a lie may be necessary for the protection of innocents. But 'national interest' is an elastic concept that if stretched can snap with a sting."

Meanwhile, the then-married Evans became infatuated with an irreverent blonde just out of Oxford, Tina Brown, and soon began a long-distance correspondence — he in London, she in New York — that grew intimate enough for Evans to "fall in love by post." They were married in East Hampton, New York, in 1981. The Washington Post's Ben Bradlee was best man, Nora Ephron was among the guests.

With Brown, Evans had two children, adding to the two children he had with his first wife.

Their garden apartment on Manhattan's exclusive Sutton Place became a mini-media dynasty: He the champion of justice, rogues and belles lettres, she the award-winning provocateur and chronicler of the famous — as head of Tatler in England, then Vanity Fair and The New Yorker, and as author of a best-selling book about Princess Diana.

Evans emigrated to the U.S. in 1984, initially serving as editorial director of U.S. News & World Report, and was hired six years later by Random House. He published William Styron's best-selling account of his near-suicidal depression, "Darkness Visible," and winked at Washington with "Primary Colors," a roman a clef about then-candidate Bill Clinton that was published anonymously and set off a capitol guessing game, ended when The Washington Post unmasked magazine correspondent Joe Klein.

Evans had a friendly synergist at The New Yorker, where Brown serialized works by Monica Crowley, Edward Jay Epstein and other Random House authors. A special beneficiary was Jeffrey Toobin, a court reporter for The New Yorker who received a Random House deal for a book on the O.J. Simpson trial that was duly excerpted in Brown's magazine.

Evans took on memoirs by the respected — Colin Powell — as well as the disgraced: Clinton advisor and alleged call girl client Dick Morris. He visited Noriega's jail cell in pursuit of a memoir by the deposed Panamanian dictator. In 1994, he risked \$40,000 for a book by a community organizer and law school graduate, a bargain for what became former President Barack Obama's "Dreams from My Father."

Evans' more notable follies included a disparaged, Random House-generated list of the 100 greatest novels of the 20th century, for which judges acknowledged they had no ideal how the books were ranked, and Brando's "Songs My Mother Taught Me."

As Evans recalled in "My Paper Chase," he met with Brando in California, first for dinner at a restaurant where the ever-suspicious actor accused Evans of working for the CIA. Then they were back at Brando's Beverly Hills mansion, where Brando advocated for Native Americans and intimated that he had sex with Jacqueline Kennedy at the White House.

After a follow-up meeting the next afternoon — they played chess, Brando recited Shakespeare — the actor signed on, wrote what Evans found a "highly readable" memoir. He then subverted it by kissing CNN's Larry King on the lips, "stopping the book dead in its tracks," Evans recalled.

Evans left Random House in 1997 to take over as editorial director and vice president of Morton B. Zuckerman's many publications, including U.S. News & World Report and The Atlantic, but stepped down in 2000 to devote more time to speeches and books.

More recently, he served as a contributing editor to U.S. News and editor at large for the magazine The Week. In 2011, he became an editor-at-large for Reuters. His guidebook for writers, "Do I Make Myself Clear?," was published in 2017.

"I wrote the book because I thought I had to speak up for clarity," he told The Daily Beast at the time. "When I go into a cafe in the morning for breakfast and I'm reading the paper, I'm editing. I can't help it. I can't stop. I still go through the paper and mark it up as I read. It's a compulsion, actually."

The Latest: Swiss university's undergrads all quarantined

By The Associated Press undefined

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Swiss health authorities have ordered a quarantine for 2,500 students at a prestigious hospitality management school after "significant outbreaks" of the coronavirus that are a suspected byproduct of off-campus partying.

Authorities in Switzerland's Vaud canton, or region, said all undergraduates at the Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne, known as the Lausanne Hospitality Management University in English, have been ordered to quarantine both on- and off-campus because the number of COVID-19 outbreaks meant targeted closures were not possible.

School administrators were taking "all necessary measures" to ensure that classes were continuing online, the regional office said in a statement.

University spokesman Sherif Mamdouh said Thursday that the situation was "not ideal" but that the university took precautions in recent months. He said that 11 students had tested positive for the coronavirus and none required hospitalization.

The World Health Organization, national health authorities and others have cautioned that young people have been a key driver for the continued spread of the coronavirus in recent weeks, particularly in Europe.

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

— Is it the flu? With cold weather coming to the Northern Hemisphere, people want to know how to distinguish symptoms

— Many at U.N. summit plead for a COVID-19 vaccine to be available and affordable to all, but their appeals are likely in vain

— Huge study of a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine underway as U.S. health officials try to assure trust in any shot that is approved

— Beijing auto show, the year's biggest sales event for a struggling global industry, is forging ahead with virus controls in place

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

TOKYO — At least 70 employees from a food processing factory in eastern Tokyo have tested positive for the coronavirus two weeks after a first case was found at the plant.

The Takara-Butz company said Thursday that the first case surfaced on Sept. 9 at its Kasai sandwich factory. The company said in a statement that had the plant disinfected and took other prevention measures under the supervision of local health officials.

Dozens of workers who were suspected of having close contacts with the first infected person patient were told to self-quarantine, and 30 eventually tested positive. By Thursday, the rest of the plant's 300 workers were tested and 39 were found to have the virus, bringing the total confirmed cases to 70.

Takara-Butz said none of the workers had serious cases and all would return to work after they are confirmed to be free of the virus.

As of Thursday, Japan had reported a total of 80,041 confirmed cases, including 24,453 in Tokyo, and 1,520 deaths in the pandemic.

JERUSALEM — Israel has moved to further tighten its second countrywide lockdown as coronavirus cases continue to soar.

The Cabinet voted early Thursday to close all nonessential businesses, including open-air markets. It agreed that prayers and political demonstrations should be limited to open spaces and no more than 20 people, and that participants would not be able to travel more than a kilometer (0.6 miles) from home to attend either.

The measures are set to go into force on Friday afternoon, as the country shuts down for the weekly

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Sabbath.

The restrictions on demonstrations are subject to approval by the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and the limits on both prayers and protests could spark a backlash.

Israel is currently reporting nearly 7,000 new cases daily, making the outbreak in the country of 9 million people among the worst in the world on a per capita basis.

LONDON — Top officials of two firms developing COVID-19 vaccines say pharmaceutical companies are working together to see how much information they can release to the public about their testing regimes as drug makers and public health officials try to boost confidence that any vaccine approved by regulators will be safe to use.

AstraZeneca CEO Pascal Soriot and Paul Stoffels, chief scientific officer of Johnson & Johnson, said Thursday during a panel discussion sponsored by the World Economic Forum. The two said they recognize the coronavirus emergency demands increased transparency from vaccine developers to ensure the public has faith in the end product. But they stressed that there are limits because companies and scientists must protect patient confidentiality and the integrity of their research.

Soriot said the public ultimately will have to trust regulators around the world and the independent experts that oversee drug trials.

"At the end of the day, you've got to trust that the experts whose job it is to monitor these trials and these developments are doing a good job," he said. "Medicine should not be practiced for the media, it should be practiced by experts."

BRUSSELS — Belgium's health minister said Thursday that a COVID-19 vaccine should be available in the country and other European Union member countries in March.

Speaking to La Premiere radio, Health Minister Maggie De Block said the vaccine will be provided by French pharmaceutical company Sanofi. The EU's executive commission announced a deal last week with Sanofi and GSK that allows its 27 members to buy up to 300 million doses of a potential COVID-19 vaccine.

"Normally, the first vaccine will be Sanofi's and will arrive in March," De Block said, adding that the shots will be delivered in monthly batches.

She says health authorities are recommending that caregivers and people considered vulnerable to COVID-19 be given priority for vaccinations.

Belgium, which has a population of 11.5 million, has reported more than 100,000 confirmed virus cases and almost 10,000 deaths.

LONDON — Britain's top treasury official is preparing to announce new plans to help workers hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak is expected to unveil an income support program Thursday under which the government would subsidize the wages of workers whose hours have been cut due to the pandemic. He is scheduled to announce his plans in a speech to the House of Commons at around 11:45 a.m. BST (10:45 GMT).

The plan would replace a furlough program which is due to expire next month. Under that program, the government pays 80% of the wages of workers who were placed on leave.

The Times of London reports that the new wage subsidy program will be part of larger package of measures to support the U.K. economy, including a cut in the value-added tax and increased loans for businesses hurt by the pandemic.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Denmark's education minister is urging parents and schools to cancel "all social events," including camps but also private gatherings like birthday parties to which classmates are invited.

Education Minister Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil said in a letter on Wednesday the children's social activities should be suspended because "an active effort is needed to ensure that we can keep up schools open."

Rosenkrantz-Theil said that of the increasing number of coronavirus cases Denmark is seeing, a large

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proportion of them are in children and young people aged 10-29.

"Only by helping each other, we can slow down the infection again," the minister said. "We did it in the spring. Now is the time for us to roll up our sleeves again."

Denmark has reported a total of 24,357 confirmed virus cases, including 558 new ones from the previous day, and 643 deaths in the pandemic.

NEW DELHI — India reported another 86,508 new coronavirus cases, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi sees little merit in imposing even short local lockdowns.

India now has confirmed more than 5.7 million cases, the second-most in the world. The Health Ministry also said Thursday that 1,129 more people have died, for a total of 91,149.

India's junior Railways Minister Suresh Angadi died on Wednesday, nearly two weeks after he was admitted to a New Delhi hospital with COVID-19. He was the first federal minister and the fourth Indian lawmaker to die from the disease.

Modi on Wednesday decried short, local lockdowns imposed in some places and said the country needs to not only keep fighting the virus, but also move ahead boldly on the economic front.

He asked states to focus on testing, tracing, treatment and surveillance. He said lockdown restrictions hit smooth movement of goods and services, including medical supplies.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Gov. Gavin Newsom is allowing health officials to hide their addresses under a California program designed to protect people from harassment or violence.

Newsom signed an executive order Wednesday permitting the secretary of state to make the Safe at Home program available to local health officers and other public health officials.

The program provides substitute mailing addresses for sexual assault and domestic violence victims, among others.

The governor's office says making public health officials eligible can protect those on the front lines of fighting the virus.

BEIJING — Foreigners holding certain types of visas and residence permits will be permitted to return to China starting next week as the threat of coronavirus continues to recede.

The new regulation lifts a months-long blanket suspension covering most foreigners apart from diplomats and those in special circumstances.

Beginning Monday, foreign nationals holding valid Chinese visas and residence permits for work, personal matters and family reunions will be permitted to enter China without needing to apply for new visas, according to the regulation.

Those whose permits have expired can reapply.

Returnees must undergo two weeks of quarantine. The announcement was made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Immigration Administration on Wednesday.

China has confirmed 85,314 cases of COVID-19 since the virus was detected in Wuhan late last year. The seven new cases reported Thursday were all imported, marking 39 days since the country has reported a case of domestic transmission.

Quarantine ordered for 2,500 students at elite Swiss school

By NADINE ACHOUI-LESAGE and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — Swiss health authorities have ordered a quarantine for a staggering 2,500 students at a prestigious hospitality management school in the city of Lausanne after "significant outbreaks" of the coronavirus that are a suspected byproduct of off-campus partying.

Authorities in Switzerland's Vaud canton, or region, said all undergraduates at the Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne, known as the Lausanne Hospitality Management University in English, have been ordered to

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quarantine both on- and off-campus because the number of COVID-19 outbreaks because targeted closures were not possible.

The World Health Organization, national health authorities and others have cautioned that young people, who tend to have milder COVID-19 symptoms than older demographic groups, have been a key driver for the continued spread of the coronavirus in recent weeks, particularly in Europe.

"Significant outbreaks of infection have appeared at several levels of training, making a more targeted closure impossible that that involving the 2,500 students affected," the Vaud regional office said in a statement. "Until Sept. 28, the students must stay home. For some, that means not leaving their housing on the hospitality school site."

It noted that an early investigation showed that "one or more parties was at the origin of these many outbreaks of infection," and reiterated authorities previous call for a "responsible attitude" among partygoers such as by wearing masks, tracing their contacts, keeping alert for symptoms, and "social distancing."

School administrators were taking "all necessary measures" to ensure that classes were continuing online, the statement said.

University spokesman Sherif Mamdouh said Thursday that the situation was "not ideal" but that the university took precautions in recent months. He said that 11 students had tested positive for the coronavirus and none required hospitalization.

Mamdouh said the quarantine affects 2,500 undergraduates. The university has a total student body of about 3,500, including people pursuing advanced degrees. He said hundreds of students living in on-campus dormitories on campus will be subject to the quarantine.

Switzerland is not alone. The latest government figures in neighboring France show that 22% of the country's currently active virus clusters emerged at schools are universities. The United States has also seen clusters linked to college students.

World Health Organization spokeswoman Margaret Harris said that while it is "unfair to just put it on the young people," it's also unsurprising that teenagers and young adults might assume they don't need to worry about succumbing to the virus.

"Perceptions do indicate that they don't feel they are as at-risk as older groups" Harris said, particularly in the wake of data showing younger people typically have less-severe cases of COVID-19.

"The message they have heard is: 'You are out of jail, go out and play,'" she said. "We don't want to be the fun police, but we want people to have fun safely."

Keaten reported from Geneva.

Asia Today: China to let in more foreigners as virus recedes

BEIJING (AP) — Foreigners holding certain types of visas and residence permits will be permitted to return to China starting next week as the threat of the coronavirus continues to recede.

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Beginning Monday, foreign nationals holding valid Chinese visas and residence permits for work, personal matters and family reunions will be permitted to enter China without needing to apply for new visas, according to the regulation.

Those whose permits have expired can reapply. Returnees must undergo two weeks of quarantine and follow other anti-epidemic measures, the regulation said.

Some exceptions may still be made, with the foreign ministry communicating to some journalists that the regulation may not apply to them. Journalist visas have recently opened up as a new front in the diplomatic confrontation between Washington and Beijing.

The announcement was made jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Immigration Administration on Wednesday.

China announced seven new cases of coronavirus on Thursday, all of them imported, marking 39 days

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since the country has reported a case of domestic transmission. China has confirmed 85,314 cases of COVID-19 since the virus was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

In other developments around the Asia-Pacific region:

— At least 70 employees of a sandwich factory in Tokyo have been infected with the coronavirus, the company said Thursday. After the first case appeared at the Takara-Butz Co. factory on Sept. 9, the company disinfected the plant and took preventive measures under the supervision of local health officials, the company said. Dozens of workers suspected of having had close contact with the patient were told to self-isolate in their homes, but 30 later tested positive. By Thursday, the rest of the plant's 300 workers were tested and 39 more were found to be infected, the company said. It said the patients are not in serious condition and will return to work after they are confirmed to be free of the virus. Japan has reported 80,041 cases, including 24,453 in Tokyo, and 1,520 deaths as of Thursday, according to the health ministry.

— India reported another 86,508 new coronavirus cases, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi sees little merit in imposing even short local lockdowns. India now has confirmed more than 5.7 million cases, the second-most in the world. The Health Ministry also said Thursday that 1,129 more people have died, for a total of 91,149. India's junior Railways Minister Suresh Angadi died on Wednesday, nearly two weeks after he was admitted to a New Delhi hospital with COVID-19. He was the first federal minister and the fourth Indian lawmaker to die from the disease. Modi on Wednesday decried short, local lockdowns imposed in some places and said the country needs to not only keep fighting the virus, but also move ahead boldly on the economic front. He asked states to focus on testing, tracing, treatment and surveillance. He said lockdown restrictions hit the smooth movement of goods and services, including medical supplies.

— Auto executives have flown in early to wait out a coronavirus quarantine ahead of the Beijing auto show, the year's biggest sales event for a global industry that is struggling with tumbling sales and layoffs. Others plan to hold news conferences by video link from their home countries during the show, which begins Saturday. Brands are going ahead with plans to unveil new models in a sign of the importance of China's market, the world's biggest. Sales have revived while U.S. and European demand remains weak. Organizers say they will impose intensive anti-disease controls on crowds and monitor visitors and employees for signs of infection.

88 whales rescued from Australia's worst mass beaching

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Authorities have rescued 88 pilot whales and are attempting to free 20 others that survived Australia's worst mass stranding, as crews prepare to remove 380 decomposing carcasses from the shallows of Tasmania state, officials said Thursday.

Crews found the 20 whales that are still alive on the fourth day of the rescue operation, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service Manager Nic Deka said.

"Whenever we've got live animals that have a chance and we have the resources, then we'll certainly give in a go," Deka said.

Almost 500 whales were discovered on Monday and Wednesday beached on the shore and sand bars along the remote west coast of the island state near the town of Strahan.

The task of removing hundreds of tons of whale carcasses begins Friday and is likely to take days, Marine Conservation Program wildlife biologist Kris Carlyon said.

Methods under consideration include towing the carcasses or loading them on barges to take them out to sea to be dumped somewhere where they will not drift ashore or create navigational hazards.

Carlyon said rescue crews were working 12-hour days.

"Everyone's tired, feeling the fatigue, long days," Carlyon said. "The emotional toll can be significant."

Why the whales ran aground is a mystery. Theories include that the pod followed sick whales or made a navigational error.

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.

Tasmania's previous largest stranding involved 294 whales on the northwest coast in 1935.

Wildfires taint West Coast vineyards with taste of smoke

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

TURNER, Ore. (AP) — Smoke from the West Coast wildfires has tainted grapes in some of the nation's most celebrated wine regions with an ashy flavor that could spell disaster for the 2020 vintage.

Wineries in California, Oregon and Washington have survived severe wildfires before, but the smoke from this year's blazes has been especially bad — thick enough to obscure vineyards drooping with clusters of grapes almost ready for harvest. Day after day, some West Coast cities endured some of the worst air quality in the world.

No one knows the extent of the smoke damage to the crop, and growers are trying to assess the severity. If tainted grapes are made into wine without steps to minimize the harm or weed out the damaged fruit, the result could be wine so bad that it cannot be marketed.

The wildfires are likely to be "without question the single worst disaster the wine-grape growing community has ever faced," said John Aguirre, president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers.

Winemakers around the world are already adapting to climate change, including rising temperatures and more frequent, more severe droughts. Those near fire-prone forests face the additional risk that smoke could ruin everything.

"Unfortunately, climate experts are telling us this is going to be a problem," said Anita Oberholster, a wine expert at the University of California, Davis. "And so we need to do better. We need to do loads more research."

With this year's harvest underway, some wineries are not accepting grapes they had agreed to purchase unless they have been tested for smoke taint, Aguirre said. But laboratories are too backed up to analyze new orders in time.

ETS Laboratories, in the Napa Valley town of St. Helena, California, says test results on grape samples received now will not be ready until November. New clients will have to wait even longer for results, according to the lab's website.

In every grape he has come across, Noah Dorrance, owner of Reeve Wines in Healdsburg, California, told the San Francisco Chronicle, "you could already taste and smell this ashy, barbecued flavor, kind of like a campfire."

Aguirre recalled sampling smoke-damaged wine during a tasting. One description on a tasting card compared the flavor to "fecal plastic."

"I tasted it and I went, 'Oh, my God. Bingo,'" Aguirre said.

The issue comes down to compounds called volatile phenols, which are released when wood burns and can be absorbed by grapes, Oberholster said.

The compounds are naturally present in grapes. But when their levels get too high, they can impart the foul tastes, "and obviously that's not a character most people want in their wine," Oberholster said.

Australian wine researchers were the first to notice the risks. In 2003, they linked smoke in the atmosphere to a taint in wine, said Mark Krstic, managing director of the Australian Wine Research Institute. From then until 2015, Australian producers lost more than \$286 million (\$400 million Australian) in grapes and wine revenue as a result of smoke.

The problems continue. Australia's most recent fire season was "horrific," Krstic said.

"Basically the eastern seaboard of Australia was pretty much on fire and extended across many wine regions," he said in a phone interview.

In the forested foothills bordering Oregon's Willamette Valley, flames smothered the region, famous for its cool-climate pinot noirs, in thick yellow-brown smoke.

"Pinot noir is a very thin-skinned grape, meaning it's very delicate in nature, and you can't mask any

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type of flaws in the growing condition or in the winery," said Christine Clair, winery director of Willamette Valley Vineyards in Turner, Oregon.

Jim Bernau, founder of Willamette Valley Vineyards, said of the smoke: "I've been here growing wine grapes for over 38 years, and I have never experienced or seen anything like this as a wine grower."

By last weekend, rain and shifting winds had cleared the skies. Bernau believed many Oregon wineries would escape damage because the smoke did not linger too long.

His winery has been fermenting small samples to gauge whether smoke affects the resulting wine. In the samples for white and rosé wines, yeast is introduced into juice that was hand-squeezed from the grapes, with the skins immediately removed.

"After just about two days, you can have a pretty good idea if that juice that now became wine is viable," Clair said. The results indicated a low risk of smoke taint for the whites and rosés.

In fermenting red samples, the skin is left on. Initial results are also promising, but the winery is prepared to turn some of the grapes with heavier smoke exposure into rosé instead of red wine, Clair said.

The wine industry had already been hammered this year by the coronavirus and shutdown of restaurants, bars and wine tasting rooms.

"I'm fully expecting a plague of locusts to descend and maybe 40 days of night," Aguirre said. "I mean, it's just nuts."

But the West Coast's 2020 "wildfire vintage" — as some winemakers are already calling it — might not be so bad.

In 2018, a California company abruptly canceled contracts to buy grapes worth millions of dollars from southern Oregon vineyards, claiming fears they were tainted by wildfire smoke. Four Oregon wineries stepped in, bought the grapes and produced "Oregon Solidarity" wines.

They got good reviews.

Associated Press writers Nicholas K. Geranios in Spokane, Washington, and Haven Daley in Davis, California, contributed to this report.

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Probe of gang rape case that shocked Egypt ensnares many

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — An announcement last month that Egypt's top prosecutor would investigate an alleged 2014 gang rape of a 17-year-old girl at a luxury Cairo hotel marked a rare moment of triumph for human rights activists.

Those hopes were quickly dispelled after authorities detained possible witnesses and some of their acquaintances, who could face separate charges under the country's vague morality laws. A media campaign has targeted both potential witnesses and the alleged perpetrators.

"It's frightening and terrifying," said Azza Soliman, an attorney who runs the Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance. She worries the government is making an example of those who came forward with information about the alleged rape and that this will discourage other victims and witnesses from speaking out.

Activists say the sharp turn in the case highlights how a patriarchal legal system often blames victims of sexual violence and shames others who fall outside traditional mores, including the country's hounded LGBT community.

The case has also captivated many in Egypt as it exposed free-wheeling practices of alcohol- and drug-fueled partying among a small subsection of the country's very wealthy youth.

In conservative Egypt, authorities present themselves as guardians of traditional values. Sexual harassment on the street remains common and women who defy conservative notions of proper behavior are widely seen as inviting or even deserving sexual abuse.

In the suspected gang rape case, potential witnesses and acquaintances have faced forced virginity

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tests and anal examinations by authorities as private, explicit videos purportedly from their phones have circulated via private messenger apps and were described in local media.

The detention of witnesses has sent shivers down the collective spine of those hoping for justice in the rape case. Most activists and lawyers following the witnesses' case insisted on speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

The government maintains it has a responsibility to investigate all criminality in the case, including the possible violation of morality laws, which include vague terms such as debauchery. The prosecutor's office also hinted it might bring charges of drug use.

The alleged gang rape involves a group of young men from wealthy and powerful families. They allegedly drugged the teen at a party at a five-star Cairo hotel, then took turns raping her. They wrote their initials on her body and circulated a video of the act, according to the victim's account and a judicial official investigating the case.

Six years later, accounts of the assault surfaced amid a renewed #MeToo campaign on social media that swept Egypt this summer, encouraging more women to speak out against sexual misconduct.

On Aug. 26, almost a month after accounts of the 2014 alleged gang rape emerged on social media, Egypt's public prosecutor announced it had identified nine suspects, but that seven had already fled the country. Two others were arrested in Egypt.

Five of the seven fugitives escaped to Lebanon, where three were later arrested and two remained at large.

Lawyers involved in the case have said little.

Mohammed Hamouda, a lawyer hired by the National Council for Women to represent the victim, said in televised comments that his client was 17 years old at the time of the rape. He said the assault resulted in pregnancy. He declined comment when reached by the AP.

Tarik Gamil Said, a lawyer identified as representing some of the suspects, did not return multiple calls seeking comment. Authorities have not identified other lawyers involved in the case.

Days after the first suspect was apprehended, at least four possible witnesses and acquaintances of the victim were also detained as part of the investigation.

Soon after, graphic videos and photos circulated on private messaging apps showing sex acts between same-sex partners and nude photos, purportedly taken from the phones of witnesses and suspects. On Aug. 31, a pro-government media site ran a salacious report about "group sex parties" organized to promote gay and lesbian sex at the same hotel. The report and subsequent media stories shocked and captivated conservative Egyptian society.

It is unclear how the images were leaked, but many blame the police. The prosecutor's office said it had seized phones from those detained to examine whether they contained evidence for the investigation.

Both suspects and witnesses could now face charges under the country's morality laws, along with the main case, the alleged gang rape.

"Probing the rape crime does not mean turning a blind eye to other possible crimes," said one Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters.

Two male witnesses were subjected to anal examination and one woman to a virginity test, according to Human Rights Watch and a lawyer following the case. Egyptians have in the past claimed the invasive procedures are necessary for investigations. The World Health Organization has decried such examinations and activists say the practice itself amounts to sexual abuse.

Also on Aug. 31, prosecutors ordered the release of four suspects and said three other people are to remain in custody pending an investigation into "incidents" related to the alleged gang rape probe. It remains unclear whether among the released are suspects in the rape or those suspected of only violating the country's morality laws. It is believed that some who had given testimony against the alleged rapists remain in custody.

Egypt's conservative culture typically ties female chastity to a family's reputation. In courts, the burden of proof lies heavily on the victims of sex crimes.

Homosexuality is taboo in Egypt among Muslims and Christians alike, although not explicitly prohibited

by law. It is often prosecuted under the charges of "debauchery" and "immorality."

Activists contend that authorities fashioned the case into a nationwide scandal in order to tarnish prospective witnesses and further the crackdown by President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi's government on personal rights.

"It is horrifying that Egyptian authorities have arrested the witnesses to a gang rape after encouraging them to come forward instead of protecting them and prosecuting the attackers," said Rothna Begum, a senior women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch.

The recent wave of #MeToo allegations spurred Egypt's parliament to pass an amendment to the country's criminal law to protect the identities of sexual assault victims, but it still needs el-Sissi's signature to become law.

Activist Mozn Hassan, founder and director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, said the country's public prosecutor has played on much of the society's conservative beliefs to act as some sort of moral police, distracting from the real crime. She says sweeping change of the penal code is needed.

"There must be a system of accountability for offenders; a system to help and protect witnesses and whistleblowers," she said.

Amnesty: Migrants face 'vicious cycle of cruelty' in Libya

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Amnesty International said Thursday that thousands of Europe-bound migrants who were intercepted and returned to Libyan shores this year were forcefully disappeared after being taken out of unofficial detention centers run by militias allied with the U.N.-supported government in the capital, Tripoli.

In its latest report, the group also said that rival authorities in eastern Libya forcibly expelled several thousand migrants "without due process or the opportunity to challenge their deportation."

Libya, which descended into chaos following the 2011 uprising that toppled and killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi, has emerged as a major transit point for African and Arab migrants fleeing war and poverty to Europe.

Most migrants make the perilous journey in ill-equipped and unsafe rubber boats. In recent years, the European Union has partnered with Libya's coast guard and other Libyan forces to stop the flow of migrants and thousands have been intercepted at sea and returned to Libya.

Officials in Libya's east and west did not respond to repeated phone calls seeking comment.

Amnesty said about 8,500 migrants, including women and children, were intercepted and brought back to Libya between Jan. 1 and Sep. 14. Since 2016, an estimated 60,000 men, women and children have been captured at sea and taken to Libya where they disembarked, it said.

"The EU and its member states continue to implement policies trapping tens of thousands of men, women and children in a vicious cycle of abuse, showing a callous disregard for people's lives and dignity," said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty's deputy regional director.

Thousands have been subjected to enforced disappearances in 2020, after being taken to unofficial detention centers in western Libya, including to the so-called Tobacco Factory in Tripoli, run by a government-allied militia, Amnesty said.

There, the migrants and refugees face a "constant risk" of being abducted by militias, armed groups and traffickers.

They are "trapped in a vicious cycle of cruelty with little to no hope of finding safe and legal pathways out," the report said. "Some are tortured, or raped until their families pay ransoms to secure their release. Others die in custody as a result of violence, torture, starvation or medical neglect."

Eltahawy urged the EU to "completely reconsider" its cooperation with Libyan authorities and make "any further support conditional on immediate action to stop horrific abuses against refugees and migrants."

In 2020, eastern Libya authorities forcibly expelled over 5,000 refugees and migrants, citing their alleged carrying of "contagious diseases" among reasons cited for the deportations.

Amnesty cited an incident, without saying when it happened, in which eastern Libyan forces blocked a

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bus from entering the southeastern city of Kufra unless three Chadian nationals got off. They were ordered to take a COVID-19 test and left in the desert outside the city, while other passengers, all of them Libyans, were allowed to enter without further checks or testing.

Palm oil labor abuses linked to world's top brands, banks

By MARGIE MASON and ROBIN McDOWELL Associated Press

PENINSULAR, Malaysia (AP) — Jum's words tumble out over the phone, his voice growing ever more frantic.

Between sobs, he says he's trapped on a Malaysian plantation run by government-owned Felda, one of the world's largest palm oil companies. His boss confiscated and then lost his Indonesian passport, he says, leaving him vulnerable to arrest. Night after night, he has been forced to hide from authorities, sleeping on the jungle floor, exposed to the wind and the rain. His biggest fear: the roaming tigers.

All the while, Jum says his supervisor demanded he keep working, tending the heavy reddish-orange palm oil fruit that has made its way into the supply chains of the planet's most iconic food and cosmetics companies like Unilever, L'Oreal, Nestle and Procter & Gamble.

"I am not a free man anymore," he says, his voice cracking. "I desperately want to see my mom and dad. I want to go home!"

An Associated Press investigation found many like Jum in Malaysia and neighboring Indonesia — an invisible workforce consisting of millions of laborers from some of the poorest corners of Asia, many of them enduring various forms of exploitation, with the most serious abuses including child labor, outright slavery and allegations of rape. Together, the two countries produce about 85 percent of the world's estimated \$65 billion palm oil supply.

Palm oil is virtually impossible to avoid. Often disguised on labels as an ingredient listed by more than 200 names, it can be found in roughly half the products on supermarket shelves and in most cosmetic brands. It's in paints, plywood, pesticides and pills. It's also present in animal feed, biofuels and even hand sanitizer.

The AP interviewed more than 130 current and former workers from two dozen palm oil companies who came from eight countries and labored on plantations across wide swaths of Malaysia and Indonesia. Almost all had complaints about their treatment, with some saying they were cheated, threatened, held against their will or forced to work off unsurmountable debts. Others said they were regularly harassed by authorities, swept up in raids and detained in government facilities.

They included members of Myanmar's long-persecuted Rohingya minority, who fled ethnic cleansing in their homeland only to be sold into the palm oil industry. Fishermen who escaped years of slavery on boats also described coming ashore in search of help, but instead ending up being trafficked onto plantations — sometimes with police involvement.

The AP used the most recently published data from producers, traders and buyers of the world's most-consumed vegetable oil, as well as U.S. Customs records, to link the laborers' palm oil and its derivatives from the mills that process it to the supply chains of top Western companies like the makers of Oreo cookies, Lysol cleaners and Hershey's chocolate treats.

Reporters witnessed some abuses firsthand and reviewed police reports, complaints made to labor unions, videos and photos smuggled out of plantations and local media stories to corroborate accounts wherever possible. In some cases, reporters tracked down people who helped enslaved workers escape. More than a hundred rights advocates, academics, clergy members, activists and government officials also were interviewed.

This story was funded in part by the McGraw Center for Business Journalism at CUNY's Newmark Graduate School of Journalism

Though labor issues have largely been ignored, the punishing effects of palm oil on the environment have

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been decried for years. Still, giant Western financial institutions like Deutsche Bank, BNY Mellon, Citigroup, HSBC and the Vanguard Group have continued to help fuel a crop that has exploded globally, soaring from just 5 million tons in 1999 to 72 million today, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The U.S. alone has seen a 900 percent spike in demand during that same time.

Sometimes they invest directly but, increasingly, third parties are used like Malaysia-based Maybank, one of the world's biggest palm oil financiers, which not only provides capital to growers but, in some cases, processes the plantations' payrolls. Financial crimes experts say that in an industry rife with a history of problems, banks should flag arbitrary and inconsistent wage deductions as potential indicators of forced labor.

"This has been the industry's hidden secret for decades," said Gemma Tillack of the U.S.-based Rainforest Action Network, which has exposed labor abuses on palm oil plantations. "The buck stops with the banks. It is their funding that makes this system of exploitation possible."

As global demand for palm oil surges, plantations are struggling to find enough laborers, frequently relying on brokers who prey on the most at-risk people. Many foreign workers end up fleeced by a syndicate of recruiters and corrupt officials and often are unable to speak the local language, rendering them especially susceptible to trafficking and other abuses.

They sometimes pay up to \$5,000 just to get their jobs, an amount that could take years to earn in their home countries, often showing up for work already crushed by debt. Many have their passports seized by company officials to keep them from running away, which the United Nations recognizes as a potential flag of forced labor.

Countless others remain off the books and are especially scared of speaking out. They include migrants working without documentation and children who AP reporters witnessed squatting in the fields like crabs, picking up loose fruit alongside their parents. Many women also work for free or on a day-to-day basis, earning the equivalent of as little as \$2 a day, sometimes for decades.

The AP is not identifying most of the workers or their specific plantations to protect their safety, based on previous instances of retaliation. Many of the interviews took place secretly in homes or coffeeshops in towns and villages near the plantations, sometimes late at night.

The Malaysian government was contacted by the AP repeatedly over the course of a week, but issued no comment. Felde also did not respond, but its commercial arm, FGV Holdings Berhad, said it had been working to address workers' complaints on its own plantations, including making improvements in recruitment practices and ensuring that foreign laborers have access to their passports.

Indonesians such as Jum make up the vast majority of palm oil workers worldwide, including in Malaysia, where most locals shun the dirty, low-paying jobs. The two nations share a similar language and a porous border, but their close ties do not guarantee safe employment.

Unable to find a job at home, Jum says he went to Malaysia in 2013, signing a contract through an agent to work on a Felde plantation for three years. He endured the harsh conditions because his family needed the money, but says he asked to leave as soon as his time was up. Instead, he says, his contract was extended twice against his will.

He says he initially was housed with other Indonesians in a crude metal shipping container, sweltering in the tropical heat. Later, his bed consisted of a bamboo mat next to a campfire, with no protection from the elements and the snakes and other deadly animals foraging in the jungle.

"Sometimes I sleep under thousands of stars, but other nights it is totally dark. The wind is very cold, like thousands of razors piercing my skin, especially during a downpour," he says. "I feel that I was deliberately abandoned by the company. Now, my hope is only one: Get back home."

He has lived this way too long, he tells the AP over the phone -- scared to stay, and scared to leave.

"Please help me!" he begs.

A half-century ago, palm oil was just another commodity that thrived in the tropics. Many Western countries relied on their own crops like soybean and corn for cooking, until major retailers discovered the cheap oil from Southeast Asia had almost magical qualities. It had a long shelf life, remained nearly solid

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at room temperature and didn't smoke up kitchens, even when used for deep-frying.

When researchers started warning that trans fats like those found in margarine posed serious health risks, demand for palm oil soared even higher.

Just about every part of the fruit is used in manufacturing, from the outer flesh to the inner kernel, and the versatility of the oil itself and its derivatives seem endless.

It helps keep oily substances from separating and turns instant noodles into steaming cups of soup, just by adding hot water. It's used in baby formula, non-dairy creamers and supplements and is listed on the labels of everything from Jif Natural peanut butter to Kit Kat candy bars.

Often hidden amid a list of scientific names on labels, it's equally useful in a host of cleansers and makeup products. It bubbles in shampoo, foams in Colgate toothpaste, moisturizes Dove soap and helps keep lipstick from melting.

But the convenience comes with a cost: For workers, harvesting the fruit can be brutal.

The uneven jungle terrain is rough and sometimes flooded. The palms themselves serve as a wind barrier, creating sauna-like conditions, and harvesters need incredible strength to hoist long poles with sickles into the towering trees.

Each day, they must balance the tool while carefully slicing down spiky fruit bunches heavy enough to maim or kill, tending hundreds of trees over expanses that can stretch beyond 10 football fields. Those who fail to meet impossibly high quotas can see their wages reduced, sometimes forcing entire families into the fields to make the daily number.

"I work as a helper with my husband to pick up loose fruit. I do not get paid," said Yuliana, who labors on a plantation owned by London Sumatra, which has a history of labor issues and is owned by one of the world's largest instant-noodle makers.

Muhamad Waras, head of sustainability at London Sumatra, responded that wage issues and daily harvesting quotas are regularly discussed and that workers without documents are prohibited.

The AP talked to some female workers from other companies who said they were sexually harassed and even raped in the fields, including some minors.

Workers also complained about a lack of access to medical care or clean water, sometimes collecting rain runoff to wash the residue from their bodies after spraying dangerous pesticides or scattering fertilizer.

While previous media reports have mostly focused on a single company or plantation, the AP investigation is the most comprehensive dive into labor abuses industrywide.

It found widespread problems on plantations big and small, including some that meet certification standards set by the global Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, an association that promotes ethical production -- including the treatment of workers -- and whose members include growers, buyers, traders and environmental watchdogs.

Some of the same companies that display the RSPO's green palm logo signifying its seal of approval are accused of continuing to grab land from indigenous people and destroying virgin rainforests that are home to orangutans and other critically endangered species. They contribute to climate change by cutting down trees, draining carbon-rich peatlands and using illegal slash-and-burn clearing that routinely blankets parts of Southeast Asia in a thick haze.

When asked for comment, some product manufacturers acknowledged the industry's history of labor and environmental problems, and all said they do not tolerate any human rights abuses, including unpaid wages and forced labor. Most stressed they were working toward obtaining only ethically sourced palm oil, pushing governments to make systemic changes, and taking immediate steps to investigate when alerted to troubling issues and suspending relationships with palm oil producers that fail to address grievances.

Nestle, Unilever and LOreal were among the companies that noted they had stopped purchasing directly from Felda or its commercial affiliate, FGV. Eliminating tainted palm oil is difficult, however, because labor problems are so endemic and most big buyers are dependent on a tangled network of third-party suppliers.

While some companies, such as Ikea, Colgate-Palmolive and Unilever, directly confirmed the use of palm oil or its derivatives in their products, others refused to say or provided minimal information, sometimes even when "palm oil" was clearly listed on labels. Others said it was difficult to know if their products

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contained the ingredient because, in items such as cosmetics and cleaning supplies, some names listed on labels could instead be derived from coconut oil or a synthetic form.

"I understand why companies are struggling because palm oil has such a bad reputation," said Didier Bergeret, director of social sustainability at the Consumer Goods Forum, a global industry group. "Even if it's sustainable, they don't feel like talking about it whatsoever."

In response to the criticism, Malaysia and Indonesia have long touted the golden crop as vital to alleviating poverty, saying small-time farmers are able to grow their own palm oil and large industrial estates provide much-needed jobs to workers from poor areas.

Nageeb Wahab, head of the Malaysian Palm oil Association, a government-supported umbrella group, called the allegations against the industry unwarranted. He noted that all the companies in his association, which are most of the country's mid- and larger operations, must meet certification standards.

"I am surprised with all the allegations made. All of them are not true," he said. "There may be violations by some, but definitely it is isolated and not from our members' plantations."

But Soes Hindharno, spokesman for the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, told the AP that many Indonesian workers who cross over to Malaysia illegally to work on plantations "are easily intimidated, their wages are cut or they are threatened with reporting and deportation." Some have their passports seized by their employers, he said.

He added that many of the concerns raised by AP about labor conditions in Indonesia had not been brought to his level, but said any company found not following government rules and regulations could face sanctions, including having their operations shut down.

The AP traveled to Jum's Felda plantation in Malaysia earlier this year to meet with him, but calls to his cell phone went unanswered. Fellow workers confirmed he no longer slept in the barracks and instead, vulnerable with no identity papers, had to hide from the police.

Jum's co-workers at least had a roof covering their heads, but their shelter resembled a barn. The filthy kitchen had a hotplate and just a few pots and pans. Only two outdoor squat toilets were functional, forcing many men to share, and a mold-covered cement trough served as a communal basin for washing. Pesticide sprayers were stacked along the metal walls, just feet from their bunks.

The men said they were forced to work unpaid overtime every day. One complained of abdominal pain, saying he was too sick to go to the fields and had been asking the company to give him back his passport so he could return home. He said he was told he must pay more than \$700 to leave – money he did not have.

"We work until we are dying," said a worker sitting in a room with two other colleagues. Their eyes filled with tears after learning Felde was one of the world's largest palm oil producers.

"They use this palm oil to make all these products," he said. "It makes us very sad."

And the global pandemic has only complicated matters, limiting the flow of workers and contributing to even greater labor shortages in Malaysia.

The workers AP interviewed came from Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, the Philippines and Cambodia, along with Myanmar, which represents the newest army of exploited laborers.

Among the latter are stateless Rohingya Muslims such as Sayed.

Decades of oppression and outbreaks of violence have sent nearly a million Rohingya fleeing Myanmar in the last five years. Sayed was among those who escaped by boat -- only to be held hostage, he said, and tortured by human traffickers in a jungle camp in Thailand.

After his relatives paid a ransom, Sayed said he was sent to Muslim-majority Malaysia, where thousands of Rohingya have sought refuge. He heard about a job paying workers without permits the equivalent of \$14 a day, so he jumped into the back of a truck with eight other men and watched for hours as the busy highways narrowed to a dirt mountain track surrounded by an endless green carpet of palm oil trees.

Once on the plantation, Sayed said he lived in an isolated lean-to, dependent on his boss to bring what little rice and dried fish he was given to eat. He said he escaped after working a month and was later arrested, spending a year and a half in an immigration detention center, where guards beat him.

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"There is no justice," he said. "People here say, 'This is not your country, we will do whatever we want.'" Shamshu, who also is Rohingya, said he, too, made a run from his plantation after realizing he would never get paid. But that didn't end his troubles.

Shamshu had a U.N.-issued refugee card, which can provide some protection even though Malaysia does not recognize it as a legal document, but he and others said it's common for authorities to tear them up. He said he was stopped by police and spent four months in prison and then six months in an immigration detention center, where he was flogged.

During one beating, he described how a guard smashed his face against a wall, while two others pinned his arms and legs. Similar stories were repeated to the AP by several other migrant workers, including Vannak Anan Prum, a Cambodian who published a graphic novel in 2018 depicting his abuse.

"There is still a scar ... and I still have pain," Shamshu said of his caning. "I think it was connected to electricity because I passed out."

In some of the worst cases of abuse, migrant workers said they fled one kind of servitude for another, detailing how they were trafficked, sold and enslaved not once, but twice.

Five men from Cambodia and Myanmar told the AP strikingly similar stories about being forced to work on Thai fishing boats for years at different times. They said they managed to break free while docking in Sarawak, Malaysia, before being scooped up by police and quickly sold again onto plantations.

"In Cambodia, I often heard my parents talking about the hardship of their lives under the Khmer Rouge regime, but I myself have met this hardship, too, when I worked at the Thai fishing boat and at the Malaysian palm oil plantation," said Sren Brohim, 48, who escaped by offering to fish for free in exchange for a boat ride home. "Working at these two places was like working in hell."

Rights groups confirmed being double-trafficked is not uncommon, especially five to 10 years ago, when recruiters and human traffickers would wait along the coast for runaway fishermen.

Last year in Malaysia, another Cambodian man who said he spent five years enslaved at sea and four more on plantations was among those who surfaced. Instead of being repatriated as a victim of human trafficking, rights groups said he was jailed for months for being in the country illegally.

A Burmese man, Zin Ko Ko Htwe, said he also was brought to a plantation after escaping from a boat in 2008 and spent several months working there, without being paid. He decided to run one day, but said his supervisors chased him down, pulled out a gun and surrounded him.

"Come out!" he recalled them yelling. "If you don't, we will kill you!"

Ko Htwe was taken back to the plantation, where he said his bosses tied his hands together and, at gunpoint, told him to kneel before the other workers as a warning. He eventually managed to escape, but didn't make it home until 2016 -- nearly a decade after he left.

"We gave our sweat and blood for palm oil," Ko Htwe said. "We were forced to work and were abused."

When Americans and Europeans see palm oil is listed as an ingredient in their snacks, he said, they should know "it's the same as consuming our sweat and blood."

The palm industry's dominance is perhaps best grasped by viewing its footprint from 35,000 feet in the air. Trees planted in neat rows stretch across miles of flatlands in both countries, straddling coffee-colored rivers and eventually ringing terraced mountains for as far as the eye can see, creating a patchwork of green nearly the size of Kansas.

It's easy to understand the allure, considering that crops like rapeseed, sesame and corn require a lot more land while producing far less oil.

Malaysia and Indonesia started ramping up commercial production in the 1960s and '70s, supported by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which saw palm oil as an engine for economic growth in the developing world. Today, following advances in transportation and capabilities in refining, the two countries have a near-monopoly on the global supply, even as production expands across Africa and Latin America, where a litany of labor abuses also have been reported.

China and India have become major customers, and the crop now is being eyed as a potential energy

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source for power plants, ships and airplanes, which would create even more demand.

"If the whole Western world would stop using palm oil, I don't think that would make any difference," said Gerrit van Duijn, a former refineries manager at Unilever, one of the world's largest palm oil buyers for food and personal care products.

The trees take only three or four years to mature and then bear fruit year-round for up to three decades. But most companies can't maintain the pace of expansion without outside funding. Every 10,000 acres of new planting requires up to \$50 million, van Duijn estimates.

Asian banks are by far the most robust financiers of the plantations, but Western lenders and investment companies have poured almost \$12 billion into palm oil plantations in the last five years alone, allowing for the razing and replanting of ever-expanding tracts of land, according to Forest and Finance, a database run by six nonprofit organizations that track money flowing to palm oil companies. The U.S. institutions BNY Mellon, Charles Schwab Corp., Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase & Co., and Citigroup Inc., along with Europe's HSBC, Standard Chartered, Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse and Prudential, together account for \$3.5 billion of that, according to the data.

Other contributors include U.S. state pensions and teachers' unions, including CalPERS, California's massive public employees fund, and insurance companies such as State Farm, meaning that even conscientious consumers many unwittingly be supporting the industry just by visiting ATMs, mortgaging homes, insuring cars or investing in 401K retirement accounts.

Bank of America, HSBC, Standard Chartered, Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse, CalPERS and State Farm responded by noting their policies vowing to support sustainability practices in the palm oil industry, with many also incorporating human rights into their guidelines. JPMorgan Chase declined comment, and BNY Mellon, Citigroup and Prudential did not respond. Charles Schwab called its investment "small."

Some, including Norway's government pension -- the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, worth about \$1 trillion -- have divested or distanced themselves from palm oil companies in recent years.

But Norway and many other big-name banks and financial institutions around the globe continue to maintain ties with Malaysia's biggest bank, Malayan Banking Berhad. More commonly known as Maybank, it has provided almost \$4 billion in financing to Southeast Asia's palm oil industry between 2015 and 2020, or about 10 percent of all loans and underwriting services, according to Forests and Finance.

Though the group accuses Maybank of having some of the loosest social and environmental assessment policies in the industry, its shareholders include institutions such as the Vanguard Group, BlackRock and State Street Corp.

The biggest gains for banks affiliated with palm oil come from big-ticket financial services, such as corporate loans. But some of the same institutions also offer banking services for workers, handling payrolls and installing ATM machines inside plantations.

"And this is where banks, such as Maybank, may find themselves at the heart of a forced-labor problem," said Duncan Jepson, managing director of the global anti-trafficking nonprofit group Liberty Shared. "Financial institutions have ethical and contractual obligations to all their clients, as set out in the customer charters. In this case, that means both the palm oil company and its workers."

Jepson said abnormal paycheck deductions are commonplace industry-wide, which should trigger investigations by the banks' risk management teams into possible money-laundering.

In a statement, Maybank expressed surprise at the criticism of its standards, saying that "we reject any insinuation that Maybank may be involved in any unethical behavior." The bank said it had not received any complaints about worker paychecks and "does not arbitrarily make deductions to client accounts unless instructed or authorized to do so by the account holder." It said it would immediately investigate any complaints brought forward. It also pushed back against allegations that it has loose social governance standards.

Asked for comment on their investments, BlackRock reiterated its commitment to sustainable practices, Vanguard said it monitors companies in its portfolio for human rights abuses, and State Street did not respond.

Jepson's organization filed a petition with the U.S. government earlier this year, citing allegations of

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child and forced labor, and seeking a ban on all palm oil imports from Sime Darby Plantation. The giant Malaysian-based producer told the AP that it has taken several steps to address labor concerns, including setting up a multilingual worker helpline. Two similar petitions were filed last year by other groups against FGV Holdings Berhad, the commercial arm of Felda.

FGV Holdings, which employs nearly 30,000 foreign workers and manages about 1 million acres, has a 50/50 joint-venture with American consumer goods giant Procter & Gamble Company. FGV Holdings has been under fire for labor abuses and was sanctioned by the RSPO certification group two years ago.

Nurul Hasanah Ahamed Hassain Malim, FGV's head of sustainability, noted that while the company is striving to make improvements, the issues raised stretch beyond just FGV and that the government also should play a role in protecting migrant workers.

"It is an industry issue. And I would say that it's not only specific to plantations -- you would see that in other sectors as well," she said.

Several workers at different companies, including Jum's plantation, showed the AP their pay stubs and ledgers documenting daily wages. Some noted they were regularly docked for not meeting quotas or shorted on their salaries every month, sometimes for years, to pay off the brokers who recruited them. In one case, more than 40 percent was subtracted from a Malaysian employee's earnings, including a deduction for electricity.

Some months, Jum and the others said they made as little as \$10 a day. Most labored the same hours, doing identical jobs, but said they never knew what amount to expect until checking the Maybank accounts where their salaries were deposited each month.

Karim, a Bangladeshi worker who arrived in Malaysia legally 12 years ago after being promised a position in an electronics company, said he wound up working for a subcontractor on many large plantations owned by the biggest companies.

"I have been cheated five times in six years," he said, adding that once when he asked for his unpaid wages, his boss "threatened to run me over with his car."

Many of these conditions should not be a surprise to companies buying palm oil and those helping finance the plantations.

The U.S. State Department has long linked the palm oil industry in Malaysia and Indonesia to exploitation and trafficking. And a 2018 report released by the Consumer Goods Forum found indicators of forced labor on estates in both countries -- essentially putting the network's 400 CEOs on alert. Its members include palm oil customers like Nestle, General Mills Inc., PepsiCo Inc., Colgate-Palmolive Company and Johnson & Johnson.

Many large suppliers have pledged to root out labor abuses after pressure from buyers who have denounced it. But some workers said they are told to hide or coached on what to say during auditors' scheduled visits when only the best conditions are often showcased for sustainability certification.

It's a system that keeps those like Jum from ever being seen.

Soon after his phone call with the AP pleading for help, Jum decides to slip away from his plantation, without even telling his friends goodbye. Instead, he sends them an abrupt text saying he's had enough and will try to find an illegal boat home to Indonesia.

It's a dangerous plan. The risk of getting caught or dying at sea is all too real. He could simply disappear.

Days pass with no word. But finally, Jum emerges: He has reached the Malaysian coast, but doesn't have enough money to pay smugglers for the trip home. He is huddled in a small metal hut to avoid being spotted, wiping away tears and running his hands through thick tangles of black hair.

"If I get caught," he tells the AP on a video call, "I'm afraid that I will not be able to see my mother again."

Jum is hiding in a popular corridor for migrants without papers, and authorities are aggressively patrolling the area. Smooth-talking brokers also are on the hunt, waiting to pounce on vulnerable workers and promising safe passage for a price that often climbs once a trip begins.

Jum has always shielded his family from his troubles and the thought of turning to them for help fills him with shame. But as the days continue, he has no choice: He makes the call and they borrow the money

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needed to finally bring him home.

When it's time to go, Jum spends the night in the forest with a group of fellow Indonesians also nervous about the risky crossing. He readies himself to plunge into the disorienting blackness of the South China Sea before dawn to swim to the waiting boat, one of the most treacherous legs of the journey.

Once Jum climbs aboard, totally spent, he quickly realizes to his horror that the man who extracted \$600 in exchange for transport all the way to his village has disappeared. He tries to ask what happened, but is silenced and told to hand over his phone unless he wants it tossed into the water.

"No questions!" the captain screams at him. "Do you want to live or die?"

Jum spends the journey relentlessly scanning the water for lights from border patrol vessels that could catch them as the boat is slammed by waves powerful enough to capsize it. He doesn't relax until he touches Indonesian sand.

He is safe. But he also is broke, and his family remains thousands of miles away. He looks for work, but no one will hire him without proper identification papers -- his Indonesian ID card, which says he is 32, expired years ago -- so he relies on strangers for food and shelter.

After a stretch of silence, Jum finally reaches out to the AP again -- crying, wracked with hunger. The AP asks if he wants to be put in touch with the local International Organization for Migration office, which takes him to a shelter and designates him as a victim of trafficking. He is quarantined due to a mounting number of coronavirus cases until at last -- three months after fleeing his plantation -- he is placed on a plane home.

His excitement at seeing his family is muted by the humiliation he feels returning empty-handed after working on the plantation for seven years. But it doesn't matter to them.

"For my parents, the most important thing was that I came back home safe and healthy," he says. "I felt so relieved when my feet stepped back in my home village. It's a great relief, like someone who just escaped punishment. ... I feel like a free man!"

With just an elementary school education, Jum's only job now is tending a neighbor's rice fields for almost no money. It's a problem many migrant workers face: Are their families better off when they're away? At least then there's one less mouth to feed, and they're able to send a little cash home.

Brokers often jump on those who have returned home to such little opportunity, trying to lure them away again with renewed promises of riches.

So it's no surprise when the phone call comes from an agent in Malaysia who already has obtained Jum's new number.

Come back, the agent assures him. Things will be better this time. Just come back.

Associated Press reporters Sopheng Cheang and Gemunu Amarasinghe contributed to this report.

'Are people to be left to die?' Vaccine pleas fill UN summit

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — If the United Nations was created from the ashes of World War II, what will be born from the global crisis of COVID-19?

Many world leaders at this week's virtual U.N. summit hope it will be a vaccine made available and affordable to all countries, rich and poor. But with the U.S., China and Russia opting out of a collaborative effort to develop and distribute a vaccine, and some rich nations striking deals with pharmaceutical companies to secure millions of potential doses, the U.N. pleas are plentiful but likely in vain.

"Are people to be left to die?" Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, a COVID-19 survivor, said of the uncertain way forward.

More than 150 countries have joined COVAX, in which richer countries agree to buy into potential vaccines and help finance access for poorer ones. But the absence of Washington, Beijing and Moscow means the response to a health crisis unlike any other in the U.N.'s 75 years is short of truly being global. Instead, the three powers have made vague pledges of sharing any vaccine they develop, likely after helping their

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own citizens first.

This week's U.N. gathering could serve as a wake-up call, said Gayle Smith, president of the ONE Campaign, a nonprofit fighting preventable disease that's developing scorecards to measure how the world's most powerful nations are contributing to vaccine equity.

"It's not enough for only some G20 countries to realize that an equitable vaccine is the key to ending this virus and reopening the global economy," she said.

With weeks remaining before a deadline for countries to join COVAX, which is co-led by the U.N.'s World Health Organization, many heads of state are using the U.N. meeting as a high-profile chance to wheedle, persuade and even shame.

Ghana's president, Nana Akufo-Addo, pointed out the illusory nature of borders and wealth: "The virus has taught us that we are all at risk, and there is no special protection for the rich or a particular class."

The president of the COVID-free Pacific island nation of Palau, Tommy Remengesau Jr., warned against selfishness: "Vaccine hoarding will harm us all."

And Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame, appealed to the universal desire for a return to normal: "Ensuring equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics will speed up the end of the pandemic for everyone."

Just two days into nearly 200 speeches by world leaders, it was clear the urgent need for a vaccine would be mentioned by almost everyone. Considering the mind-popping challenges ahead, that's no surprise.

"We've never dealt with a situation where 7.8 billion people in the world are needing a vaccine at almost the same time," John Nkengasong, head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said this month.

That has led to difficult questions: Who will get vaccine doses first? Who is making private deals to get them? This week's speeches make clear that such questions have existential meaning.

The vaccine quest must not be a "purely mercantile act," Iraq said. Nor "an issue of competition," Turkey said.

"We must take the politics out of the vaccine," Kazakhstan said. "We need true globalization of compassion," Slovakia said.

The Dominican Republic deployed all-caps in a statement: "WE DEMAND this vaccine be available to all human beings on the planet." More gently, Mozambique warned that "nationalism and isolationism in the face of a pandemic are, as far as we are concerned, a prescription for failure."

No matter their reputation at home or on the global stage, leaders are finding a shred of common ground as the world nears a staggering 1 million confirmed deaths from the pandemic.

"The COVID-19 vaccine must be considered a global public good. Let us be clear on this," said Rodrigo Duterte, president of the Philippines.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres kicked off the General Assembly by declaring in an interview with the U.N.'s media arm: "To think that we can preserve the rich people, and let the poor people suffer, is a stupid mistake."

It's not clear if the world leaders' remarks, delivered not in a diplomatic scrum at U.N. headquarters but in videos recorded from national capitals, will make a difference. Health experts, activists and others anxiously watching the issue raised a collective eyebrow.

"It's important we continue to be making these speeches, but ultimately, speeches alone won't have an effect if there are no real measures put in place to make sure poor countries, and within them the poorest of poor, have access" to the vaccine, said Tendai Mafuma with the South Africa-based social justice group Section 27. It's part of a coalition pressing to make medicines more affordable and accessible.

South Africa, along with many African countries, knows the deadly consequences of having to wait. Health experts say 12 million Africans died during the decade it took for affordable HIV drugs to reach the continent.

Mafuma's countryman Shabir Madhi, lead researcher on a clinical trial in South Africa of the vaccine that Oxford University is developing with pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, was a bit more optimistic. That most of the world's richest countries have joined COVAX "is promising," he said.

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But whether this week's impassioned speeches at the U.N. will make any difference, Madhi said, is still "difficult to tell."

Associated Press reporter Andrew Meldrum in Johannesburg contributed.

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

Dismay over Breonna Taylor spills into America's streets

By DYLAN LOVAN, PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN and JOHN MINCHILLO Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Anger, frustration and sadness over the decision not to charge Kentucky police officers for Breonna Taylor's death poured into America's streets as protesters lashed out at a criminal justice system they say is stacked against Black people. Violence seized the demonstrations in her hometown of Louisville as gunfire rang out and wounded two police officers.

Activists, celebrities and everyday Americans have been calling for charges since Taylor, an emergency medical worker, was shot multiple times by white officers who entered her home during a narcotics investigation in March. While the officers had a no-knock warrant, the investigation showed they announced themselves before entering, said state Attorney General Daniel Cameron, a Republican and the state's first Black top prosecutor.

A grand jury returned three charges of wanton endangerment Wednesday against fired Officer Brett Hankison over shooting into a home next to Taylor's with people inside.

Hundreds of demonstrators chanted Taylor's name and marched in cities including New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Las Vegas and Portland, Oregon. People gathered in downtown Chicago's Millennium Park, chanting demands for justice as drivers on Michigan Avenue honked their horns. Police in Atlanta unleashed chemical agents and made arrests after some protesters tried to climb on a SWAT vehicle. In Wisconsin, peaceful marchers blocked traffic on an interstate and spoke about Taylor on the steps of the state Capitol.

Nearly 100 people were arrested in Louisville, police said, after what had been peaceful protests. Police said vehicles were damaged, fires were set in garbage cans and several stores were looted. Two officers were shot, and Interim Police Chief Robert Schroeder said both are expected to recover. One was undergoing surgery. Schroeder said a suspect was in custody, offering no details about whether that person was participating in the protests.

Taylor's case has exposed the wide gulf between public opinion on justice for those who kill Black Americans and the laws under which those officers are charged, which regularly favor police and do not often result in steep criminal accusations.

Carmen Jones has protested in downtown Louisville every day for nearly three months. She said she feels despair after the grand jury's decision and doesn't know what's coming.

"We're tired of being hashtags. We're tired of paying for history in our blood and our bodies and being told to respond to this violence and aggression with peace," she said. "We did it the Martin way for the entire summer, and it got us nowhere. Maybe it's time to do things the Malcolm way."

Jones said she still hopes their demonstrations will lead to systemwide change in the U.S., but the decision in Taylor's case makes her feel like her life doesn't matter in America.

"I don't think I'll sleep the same ever again, cause it would happen to any of us," she said. "The system does not care about Black people. The system chews Black people up and spits us out."

Along with George Floyd, a Black man killed by police in Minneapolis in May, Taylor's name became a rallying cry during nationwide protests that called attention to entrenched racism and demanded police reform. Her image is painted on streets, emblazoned on protest signs and silk-screened on T-shirts worn by celebrities.

The FBI is still investigating potential violations of federal law in connection with the raid at Taylor's home on March 13.

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After the announcement, Ben Crump, a lawyer for Taylor's family, denounced the decision as "outrageous and offensive." Protesters shouting, "No justice, no peace!" took to the streets, while others sat quietly and wept.

Morgan Julianna Lee, a high school student in Charlotte, North Carolina, watched the announcement at home.

"It's almost like a slap in the face," the 15-year-old said by phone. "If I, as a Black woman, ever need justice, I will never get it."

Authorities themselves expressed dismay. At a news conference, Cameron, the attorney general, said, "Criminal law is not meant to respond to every sorrow and grief."

"But my heart breaks for the loss of Miss Taylor. ... My mother, if something was to happen to me, would find it very hard," he added, choking up.

However, Cameron said the officers acted in self-defense after Taylor's boyfriend fired at them. Kenneth Walker told police he heard knocking but didn't know who was coming in and fired in self-defense.

The warrant was connected to a suspect who did not live there, and no drugs were found inside. The city has since banned such warrants.

"According to Kentucky law, the use of force by (Officers Jonathan) Mattingly and (Myles) Cosgrove was justified to protect themselves," Cameron said. "This justification bars us from pursuing criminal charges in Miss Breonna Taylor's death."

President Donald Trump read a statement from Cameron, saying "justice is not often easy." He later tweeted that he was "praying for the two police officers that were shot."

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and his running mate, Kamala Harris, called for policing reform.

Biden says that while a federal investigation continues, "we do not need to wait for the final judgment of that investigation to do more to deliver justice for Breonna." He said the country should start by addressing excessive force, banning chokeholds and overhauling no-knock warrants.

"We must never stop speaking Breonna's name as we work to reform our justice system, including overhauling no-knock warrants," Harris said on Twitter.

Hankison was fired on June 23. The three wanton endangerment charges he faces each carry a sentence of up to five years. A termination letter said he had violated procedures by showing "extreme indifference to the value of human life" when he "wantonly and blindly" fired his weapon.

CNN reported that his attorney, David Lightty, declined to comment.

Last week, the city settled a lawsuit against the three officers brought by Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, agreeing to pay her \$12 million and enact police reforms.

Lovan reported from Frankfort, Kentucky. Associated Press writers Claire Galofaro, Bruce Schreiner and Rebecca Reynolds Yonker in Louisville, Kentucky, Kevin Freking in Washington, Aaron Morrison in New York and Haleluya Hadero in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, contributed.

Hudsbeth Blackburn is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

2 Louisville officers shot amid Breonna Taylor protests

By DYLAN LOVAN, PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN and JOHN MINCHILLO Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Hours after a Kentucky grand jury brought no charges against Louisville police for Breonna Taylor's death and protesters took to the streets, authorities said two officers were shot and wounded Wednesday night during the demonstrations expressing anger over the killings of Black people at the hands of police.

Interim Louisville Police Chief Robert Schroeder said a suspect was in custody but did not offer details

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about whether that person was participating in the demonstrations. He says both officers are expected to recover, and one is undergoing surgery.

He says the officers were shot after investigating reports of gunfire at an intersection where there was a large crowd.

Several shots rang out as protesters in downtown Louisville tried to avoid police blockades, moving down an alleyway as officers lobbed pepper balls, according to an Associated Press journalist. People covered their ears, ran away and frantically looked for places to hide. Police with long guns swarmed the area, then officers in riot gear and military-style vehicles blocked off roadways.

The violence comes after prosecutors said two officers who fired their weapons at Taylor, a Black woman, were justified in using force to protect themselves after they faced gunfire from her boyfriend. The only charges were three counts of wanton endangerment against fired Officer Brett Hankison for shooting into a home next to Taylor's with people inside.

The FBI is still investigating potential violations of federal law in connection with the raid at Taylor's home on March 13.

Ben Crump, a lawyer for Taylor's family, denounced the decision as "outrageous and offensive," and protesters shouting, "No justice, no peace!" immediately marched through the streets.

Scuffles broke out between police and protesters, and some were arrested. Officers fired flash bangs and a few small fires burned in a square that's been at the center of protests, but it had largely cleared out ahead of a nighttime curfew as demonstrators marched through other parts of downtown Louisville. Dozens of patrol cars blocked the city's major thoroughfare.

Demonstrators also marched in cities like New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Philadelphia.

Taylor, an emergency medical worker, was shot multiple times by white officers who entered her home during a narcotics investigation. State Attorney General Daniel Cameron said that while the officers had a no-knock warrant, the investigation showed they announced themselves before entering. The warrant used to search her home was connected to a suspect who did not live there, and no drugs were found inside.

Along with the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, Taylor's case became a major touchstone for nationwide protests that have drawn attention to entrenched racism and demanded police reform. Taylor's image has been painted on streets, emblazoned on protest signs and silk-screened on T-shirts worn by celebrities. Several prominent African American celebrities joined those urging that the officers be charged.

The announcement drew sadness, frustration and anger that the grand jury did not go further. The wanton endangerment charges each carry a sentence of up to five years.

Morgan Julianna Lee, a high school student in Charlotte, North Carolina, watched the announcement at home.

"It's almost like a slap in the face," the 15-year-old said by phone. "If I, as a Black woman, ever need justice, I will never get it."

Gov. Andy Beshear, a Democrat, said he authorized a limited deployment of the National Guard. He also urged Cameron, the state attorney general, to post online all the evidence that could be released without affecting the charges filed.

"Those that are currently feeling frustration, feeling hurt, they deserve to know more," he said.

The case exposed the wide gulf between public opinion on justice for those who kill Black Americans and the laws under which those officers are charged, which regularly favor police and do not often result in steep criminal accusations.

At a news conference, Cameron spoke to that disconnect: "Criminal law is not meant to respond to every sorrow and grief."

"But my heart breaks for the loss of Miss Taylor. ... My mother, if something was to happen to me, would find it very hard," he added, choking up.

But Cameron, who is the state's first Black attorney general, said the officers acted in self-defense after Taylor's boyfriend fired at them. He added that Hankison and the two other officers who entered Taylor's apartment announced themselves before entering — and so did not execute the warrant as "no knock,"

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according to the investigation. The city has since banned such warrants.

"According to Kentucky law, the use of force by (Officers Jonathan) Mattingly and (Myles) Cosgrove was justified to protect themselves," he said. "This justification bars us from pursuing criminal charges in Miss Breonna Taylor's death."

Cameron said an FBI crime lab determined that Cosgrove fired the bullet that killed Taylor.

Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, opened fire when police burst in, hitting Mattingly. Walker told police he heard knocking but didn't know who was coming in and fired in self-defense.

Cameron, who is a Republican, is a protégé of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and has been tagged by some as his heir apparent. His was also one of 20 names on President Donald Trump's list to fill a future Supreme Court vacancy.

At a news conference, Trump read a statement from Cameron, saying "justice is not often easy." He later tweeted that he was "praying for the two police officers that were shot."

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and his running mate, Kamala Harris, are calling for policing reform.

Biden says that while a federal investigation continues, "we do not need to wait for the final judgment of that investigation to do more to deliver justice for Breonna." He said the country should start by addressing excessive force, banning chokeholds and overhauling no-knock warrants.

"We must never stop speaking Breonna's name as we work to reform our justice system, including overhauling no-knock warrants," Harris said on Twitter.

Hankison was fired on June 23. A termination letter sent by interim Louisville Police Chief Robert Schroeder said he had violated procedures by showing "extreme indifference to the value of human life" when he "wantonly and blindly" fired his weapon.

Mattingly, Cosgrove and the detective who sought the warrant, Joshua Jaynes, were placed administrative reassignment.

Last week, the city settled a lawsuit against the three officers brought by Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, agreeing to pay her \$12 million and enact police reforms.

Lovan reported from Frankfort, Kentucky. Associated Press writers Claire Galofaro, Bruce Schreiner and Rebecca Reynolds Yonker in Louisville, Kentucky, Kevin Freking in Washington, Aaron Morrison in New York and Haleluya Hadero in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, contributed.

Hudsbeth Blackburn is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

This story has been updated to clarify that, according to the investigation, officers did not execute the warrant as a no-knock warrant, not that they didn't use a no-knock warrant. It also has been edited to clarify that the shots fired by Hankison entered another home with people inside, not several homes.

Trump won't commit to peaceful transfer of power if he loses

By AAMER MADHANI and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump again declined to commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he loses the Nov. 3 presidential election.

"We're going to have to see what happens," Trump said Wednesday at a news conference, responding to a question about whether he'd commit to a peaceful transfer of power. "You know that I've been complaining very strongly about the ballots, and the ballots are a disaster."

It is highly unusual that a sitting president would express less than complete confidence in the American democracy's electoral process. But he also declined four years ago to commit to honoring the election results if his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, won.

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His current Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, was asked about Trump's comment after landing in Wilmington, Delaware, on Wednesday night.

"What country are we in?" Biden asked incredulously, adding: "I'm being facetious. Look, he says the most irrational things. I don't know what to say about it. But it doesn't surprise me."

Trump has been pressing a monthslong campaign against mail-in voting this November by tweeting and speaking out critically about the practice. More states are encouraging mail-in voting to keep voters safe amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The president, who uses mail-in voting himself, has tried to distinguish between states that automatically send mail ballots to all registered voters and those, like Florida, that send them only to voters who request a mail ballot.

Trump has baselessly claimed widespread mail voting will lead to massive fraud. The five states that routinely send mail ballots to all voters have seen no significant fraud.

Trump on Wednesday appeared to suggest that if states got "rid of" the unsolicited mailing of ballots there would be no concern about fraud or peaceful transfers of power.

"You'll have a very peaceful — there won't be a transfer frankly," Trump said. "There'll be a continuation. The ballots are out of control, you know it, and you know, who knows it better than anybody else? The Democrats know it better than anybody else."

In a July interview, Trump similarly refused to commit to accepting the results.

"I have to see. Look ... I have to see," Trump told Chris Wallace during a wide-ranging July interview on "Fox News Sunday." "No, I'm not going to just say yes. I'm not going to say no, and I didn't last time either."

The Biden campaign responded Wednesday: "The American people will decide this election. And the United States government is perfectly capable of escorting trespassers out of the White House."

The American Civil Liberties Union also protested Trump's remarks. "The peaceful transfer of power is essential to a functioning democracy," National Legal Director David Cole said. "This statement from the president of the United States should trouble every American."

Trump made similar comments ahead of the 2016 election. When asked during an October debate whether he would abide by the voters' will, Trump responded that he would "keep you in suspense."

It's unlikely that any chaos in states with universal mail-in voting will cause the election result to be inaccurately tabulated, as Trump has suggested.

The five states that already have such balloting have had time to ramp up their systems, while four states newly adopting it — California, New Jersey, Nevada and Vermont — have not. Washington, D.C., is also newly adopting it.

Of those nine states, only Nevada is a battleground, worth six electoral votes and likely to be pivotal only in a national presidential deadlock.

California, New Jersey, Vermont and D.C. are overwhelmingly Democratic and likely to be won by Biden.

Madhani reported from Chicago. Associated Press writer Alexandra Jaffe in Wilmington, Del., contributed to this report.

GOP senators see political, principle gain in court fight

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump marveled at a rally this week about how important Supreme Court nominations are to voters.

But Senate Republicans are with the voters on that. Despite Democratic cries of hypocrisy, they're hoping the battle over replacing Ruth Bader Ginsburg will help them keep their Senate majority as well as Trump's job in the White House.

Beyond the Nov. 3 elections, some feel the generational goal of a solidly conservative court is worth the potential blowback.

"Most of us came to the Senate, ran for the Senate, in a lot of ways for big moments like this — for an

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opportunity to fill seats on the Supreme Court," said Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., the GOP whip who is not up for reelection this year.

And whatever their personal views of Trump and his presidency, Republicans also see a political payoff in sticking with him and plunging ahead to confirm his pick to fill the court vacancy before the election.

By Wednesday, as mourners gathered to view Ginsburg's casket on the court's iconic steps, objections from Democrats that the presidential winner should name the nominee had slipped by GOP senators. They were preparing for confirmation hearings as soon as Oct. 12, with a possible full Senate vote Oct. 29. Trump is to announce his choice Saturday.

"The process is going to go very quickly," Trump said at the White House.

The president suggested doing away with confirmation hearings, and said later he wants the new justice confirmed before the election. "It's better," he said about the timing.

Democrats, led by presidential nominee Joe Biden, argue Republicans are stalling a fresh round of COVID-19 relief — as the nation reaches the grim milestone of 200,000 deaths from the coronavirus — but rushing the court nomination ahead of the election. They remind that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell led Republicans in refusing to consider a nominee of President Barack Obama nominee in February 2016, long before that year's election. No Supreme Court nominee in U.S. history has been confirmed by the Senate so close to balloting.

But Republicans are eagerly running into the election year fight, sensing a reward greater than the risk.

A third Trump justice is certain to tip the court rightward, likely to revisit landmark decisions on abortion, health care, gun rights and other issues. A liberal icon, Ginsburg would be replaced by a justice more in line with Trump's earlier nominees, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. Even without fresh polling this week, almost all Republicans backed McConnell's push for a quick vote.

"It's a really exciting time," said Carrie Severino, president of the conservative advocacy group Judicial Crisis Network. "This is a new era."

The top contender for Trump's nomination is Amy Coney Barrett, a judge of the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in the Midwest. The president had suggested he might meet Friday with Judge Barbara Lagoa in battleground Florida, but on Wednesday he said they didn't have a meeting planned.

As early presidential voting is underway in several states, only two Republican senators, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine, have objected to the speedy timetable.

There's little the Democrats can do to block it. The Senate is controlled by Republicans, 53-47, with a simple majority needed for confirmation. Under Senate rules, Vice President Mike Pence can break a tie.

Biden won't say whom he might pick, denying Trump and Republicans an opportunity to shift attention. "We should go to the American people, make the case why this is a gigantic mistake and abuse of power," Biden said of the GOP effort before heading to a campaign event in North Carolina.

At a rally late Tuesday in Pittsburgh, Trump told supporters how surprised he was in 2016 over voter reaction to the Supreme Court. That February, just before a crucial presidential primary debate in South Carolina, the sudden death of conservative Justice Antonin Scalia sent shockwaves through Washington.

Republicans remember the moment well: Trump on the debate stage started naming possible replacements. It was a jaw-dropping instant for advocates who have been working to restructure the courts since the Reagan era. And all the more stunning from Trump, a newcomer to politics who had supported abortion access just years earlier but was now naming conservative judicial champions.

"I was like, wow, I didn't see that coming," said Severino.

Now, as Republicans strain to hold their slim majority in the Senate, they believe the court battle in the countdown weeks to the 2020 election will similarly bring wayward Trump voters back into the fold — or at least they'll go down in defeat having secured the long-sought goal.

One by one, GOP senators facing tough reelections — Martha McSally in Arizona, Thom Tillis in North Carolina, Steve Daines in Montana and Joni Ernst in Iowa — all threw their support behind voting on Trump's choice. Sen. Lindsey Graham, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee who faces his own tough race in South Carolina, estimated it will help him in win.

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Even in Colorado, where the politics are more uncertain, Sen. Cory Gardner joined the push for a new justice — better to be seen as part of the movement, despite the political risks. Only the most independent senators — Murkowski and Collins, who faces her own reelection in Maine — declined.

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

But Democrats are also fired up against what they see as Trump "stealing" another court seat, as Democratic leader Chuck Schumer puts it.

Several Democratic senators spoke well into the night from the chamber floor against voting now. It is one of the quickest confirmation efforts in recent times.

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

Associated Press writers Mark Sherman, Kevin Freking, Andrew Taylor and Matthew Daly in Washington; Darlene Superville in Pittsburgh; Alex Jaffe in Wilmington, Delaware; and Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this report.

Stamkos scores, leaves, Lightning beat Stars 5-2 in Game 3

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

EDMONTON, Alberta (AP) — As soon as Steven Stamkos scored on his first shot since February, his Tampa Bay Lightning celebrated on the ice and the bench with 211 days of pent up excitement.

Even after Stamkos left with injury, they didn't let up and dominated without him, blowing the Dallas Stars out of an empty arena with a 5-2 rout in Game 3 of the Stanley Cup Final on Wednesday night to take the lead in the series. Even though he only skated five shifts for 2:47, the longtime Lightning captain making his 2020 playoff debut 211 days after he last played in an NHL game gave the Lightning a jolt.

"Just to be able to get out into a game and have an impact on a game, which a month ago may have never been possible" a smiling Stamkos said. "It's been such a long time. At this time of the year, you want to do anything you can to help your team win. I've watched these guys be so committed to what our end goal is, and to be part of it tonight, it was a dream come true."

Stamkos made the most of limited ice time, scoring a vintage goal going around Esa Lindell and sniping a shot past Anton Khudobin. Defenseman Victor Hedman, who fed the puck to Stamkos, lost track of it until he saw it in the back of the net.

The Lightning the bench broke into a spontaneous celebration perhaps unlike any goal during the playoffs.

"I think that the cheer was just a little bit louder," coach Jon Cooper said.

Stamkos skated off gingerly at the end of his final shift in the first period and was not on the bench for the start of the second. He returned to the bench and took a few twirls to test out the injury but did not return.

The Lightning were just fine with Stamkos offering moral support sitting in the middle of the bench. Just his present meant so much.

"Unexpected, but just the lift he gave us A) being able to dress and play and B) scoring, I don't think the guys were going to be denied," Cooper said.

That's because the Lightning got goals from all three of their first-line forwards, their top defenseman and their captain and big saves from their Vezina Trophy finalist goaltender, while the Stars' best players were quiet once again or made big mistakes to contribute to the loss. Nikita Kucherov, Stamkos, Victor Hedman, Brayden Point and Ondrej Palat all scored for Tampa Bay, which was the better team from the start of the second period on.

"They made two good shots early," Stars captain Jamie Benn said. "They capitalized on their chances and we didn't."

Khudobin was under pressure most of the night and allowed five goals on 29 shots before coach Rick Bowness replaced him at the start of the third with rookie Jake Oettinger. Khudobin said it was Bowness'

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choice and that he didn't ask for the rest.

At the other end, Andrei Vasilevskiy made a few big saves among his 31, including a brilliant left pad stop on Corey Perry early in the game.

The game was everything that has made Tampa Bay one of the best teams in hockey for more than half of the last decade. That included the return of Stamkos, the Lightning's leader who has been forced to watch while rehabbing a core muscle injury.

Stamkos, who last played Feb. 25, had surgery in early March and aggravated the injury at least once over the summer, didn't want to go into detail about what happened then or Wednesday night.

"I wanted to play as much as I could," Stamkos said. "Obviously there was an issue that I've been working through. We'll see what happens from here."

The Lightning rolled with and without Stamkos. Minutes after Hedman prevented a breakaway goal by speedy Stars forward Denis Gurianov, Kucherov took advantage of a brutal turnover by 21-year-old budding star Miro Heiskanen and scored on a breakaway of his own.

Hedman scored his own goal in the second, his 10th to put him third all-time in goals by defenseman during a single postseason. Only Paul Coffey and Brian Leetch have more.

"I think Kuch said it after the last game: We're not here for our personal stats," Hedman said. "We're here for one thing, and that's winning the Stanley Cup."

Dallas' stars not being at their best won't help their attempt to win it. Beyond Heiskanen's turnover, top-line winger Alexander Radulov took two bad penalties, while Tyler Seguin's goal drought reached a career-worst 12 games and Kluempfel was shaky.

"We lost our team play, we lost our intensity and we lost our focus," Bowness said. "When you do that, a team like that is going to make you look real bad, which they did."

Fourth-liner Jason Dickinson scored the Stars' only goal before the game was out of hand, and Heiskanen's in the third period didn't make up for putting the puck right on Kucherov's stick for the breakaway.

While Tampa Bay got a significant talent back, Dallas was without a key veteran role player. Forward Blake Comeau was ruled unfit to play after appearing to injure his right shoulder on a hit by Ryan McDonagh in Game 2.

Nick Caamano made his NHL playoff debut in Comeau's place. He also last played — in the minors — 196 days ago.

Stamkos' return was emotional in many ways, coming the week after he joined the Lightning on the ice to celebrate reaching the final.

"I'm so proud of these guys, and to be able to share that moment with them and just even be on the bench and watch how well we played tonight, I have told these guys before: It's inspiring," Stamkos said. "It was great to be part of."

NOTES: Oettinger stopped the two shots he faced in relief. ... To make room for Stamkos, Tampa Bay scratched Carter Verhaeghe. ... Along with Comeau being out, goalie Ben Bishop, forward Radek Faksa and defenseman Stephen Johns remained unfit to play.

UP NEXT

Stamkos said it's too early to tell if he'll play in Game 4 Friday night.

More AP NHL: <https://apnews.com/NHL> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Progressives pledge to keep pushing Biden to expand court

By WILL WEISSERT and CHEYANNE MUMPHREY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Since Joe Biden ran away with the Democratic presidential nomination in March, leading progressives have accepted him — sometimes grudgingly — as their party's leader. But, in the final weeks of the campaign, the Supreme Court vacancy is threatening to inflame old divides.

Some leading activists on the left are pressing Biden to endorse expanding the number of high court justices should he win the White House and Democrats take control of the Senate. But Biden, who ran a

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relatively centrist primary campaign, hasn't embraced those calls, worried they may intensify the nation's partisan split.

There's little indication that large swaths of progressives will abandon Biden or back third-party candidates, moves that wounded Democrat Hillary Clinton's 2016 bid. But activists insist they will keep pressure on Biden to pursue dramatic reforms to the Supreme Court if Republicans move forward with a plan to quickly approve President Donald Trump's pick to replace the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

"The majority of Berniecrats will most likely vote for Vice President Joe Biden," said Nina Turner, a former Ohio state senator and top adviser to progressive Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns. "That doesn't mean that they are not going to raise hell all the way."

"Biden should make it clear that he will fight back by expanding the court if he wins," said Turner, who is founding a firm to advance progressive causes, Amare Public Affairs.

The Constitution doesn't mandate the number of Supreme Court justices, which has changed over time. In 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt promoted legislation to "pack the court" by expanding its number of justices, an effort that stalled once the justices began to rule in his favor on policies tied to the New Deal.

Since then, the makeup of the court hasn't been a prominent issue in national politics. That began to change after Justice Brett Kavanaugh's contentious 2018 nomination fight. Calls to add more seats to the court grew much louder this week in response to the GOP's rush to fill Ginsburg's seat before the election, which would leave the court with six conservatives and three liberals.

"The politics of this are moving very, very fast," said Aaron Belkin, director of Take Back the Court, which advocates for increasing the number of justices. "And under a Biden administration, when the court has the administration handcuffed on Day One, I think the politics are going to be changing even more quickly."

That puts Biden in a tough spot. As someone who spent 36 years in the Senate, he built a career revering Washington's institutions. During the 2020 primary, he pointedly declined to join rivals such as Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren or California Sen. Kamala Harris, who is now his running mate, in backing a court expansion.

During his first extended comments Sunday about Ginsburg's death, Biden appealed to the few remaining moderate Senate Republicans to buck their party's leadership, rather than to progressives looking for him to support larger court.

Since then, Biden has largely sought to avoid the issue as he's campaigned in battleground states, preferring instead to focus on Trump's handling of the pandemic and high unemployment.

He ducked a question about changes to the court during a Monday interview with a Wisconsin television station, saying a response would "shift all the focus."

As he headed to North Carolina on Wednesday, Biden said Democrats should concentrate on making the case to voters about why the GOP push to quickly fill Ginsburg's seat is a "gigantic mistake and abuse of power."

Some leading progressives said Ginsburg's death underscored the stakes of the election and their support for Biden.

"I understand why people say, 'I don't vote. What's the point?' I really empathize with it," New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said on Instagram last week. "Voting for Joe Biden is not about whether you agree with him. It's a vote to let our democracy live another day."

Ocasio-Cortez also spent months expressing skepticism toward Biden but also was co-leader of a task force on climate change that top Biden supporters and advisers formed with their counterparts from Sanders' unsuccessful presidential campaign to try to better reach consensus on top issues. Those groups made policy recommendations that helped shape the Democratic Party platform, which was adopted at its national convention last month and was meant to avoid the ideological clashes that Clinton endured four years ago.

Sanders, who opposes Supreme Court expansion, and Warren, who supports it, have also used Ginsburg's death as a rally cry.

"Democracy as we know it is in danger," Warren said at a virtual event with Virginia leaders, calling

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Republican court efforts “the last gasp of a desperate party that is overrepresented in the hall of power.”

Sanders plans to deliver a speech Thursday spelling out what he sees as the major threat Trump poses to American democracy.

Just getting Biden elected might not be enough for everyone, though. Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, called the coming Senate nomination fight Biden’s chance to offer a “first big show of force as leader of the Democratic Party.”

“He can quickly unify Democrats in saying no confirmation until after inauguration,” Green said. “And promising to expand the court if Republicans do an end run around democracy.”

Mumphrey reported from Phoenix.

AP’s Advance Voting guide brings you the facts about voting early, by mail or absentee from each state: <https://interactives.ap.org/advance-voting-2020/>

Long lines of mourners pay respects to Ginsburg at court

By MARK SHERMAN and MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With crowds of admirers swelling outside, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was remembered Wednesday at the court by grieving family, colleagues and friends as a prophet for justice who persevered against long odds to become an American icon.

The court’s eight justices, masked along with everyone else because of the coronavirus pandemic, gathered for the first time in more than six months for the ceremony to mark Ginsburg’s death from cancer last week at age 87 after 27 years on the court.

Washington already is consumed with talk of Ginsburg’s replacement, but Chief Justice John Roberts focused on his longtime colleague.

The best words to describe Ginsburg are “tough, brave, a fighter, a winner,” Roberts said, but also “thoughtful, careful, compassionate, honest.”

The woman who late in life became known in admiration as the Notorious RBG “wanted to be an opera virtuoso, but became a rock star instead,” Roberts said. Ginsburg’s two children, Jane and James, and other family members sat on one side of the casket, across from the justices.

With her portrait on display nearby, Ginsburg’s flag-draped casket sat in the court’s Great Hall for the private service before it was moved outside so the public could honor her. Health precautions because of the pandemic led the court to limit the number of people inside the building, which has been closed to the public since March.

Through the day, thousands of people paid their respects to the women’s rights champion and leader of the court’s liberal bloc. As darkness fell, the line stretched nearly half a mile from the court as people filed past. The casket was to be on public view until 10 p.m. Wednesday and from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday.

Inside earlier, the members of the court were arrayed in their seats in order of seniority, now changed by Ginsburg’s death so that Justices Clarence Thomas and Stephen Breyer flanked Roberts. Breyer took the spot Ginsburg held when the court last gathered for a justice’s memorial, in 2019 following the death of John Paul Stevens.

Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt of Washington, D.C., compared Ginsburg to a prophet who imagined a world of greater equality and then worked to make it happen.

“This was Justice Ginsburg’s life’s work. To insist that the Constitution deliver on its promise, that we the people would include all the people. She carried out that work in every chapter of her life,” said Holtzblatt, whose husband, Ari, once worked as a law clerk to Ginsburg.

Outside, some people waiting to pass by the casket said they had driven through the night. One of those in line, Heather Setzler, a physician assistant from Raleigh, North Carolina, said she named her two cats Hillary Ruth and Kiki, in honor of Ginsburg’s childhood nickname.

“There was just something about her. She was so diminutive yet turned out to be such a giant,” Setzler

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said, wearing a face mask adorned with small portraits of Ginsburg.

Rachel Linderman and Rychelle Weseman of Olean, New York, traveled to the nation's capital because they said they wanted to be counted among Ginsburg's followers and demonstrate how important her legacy is to Americans.

"They said they were buoyed as they waited in line to be surrounded by people who felt the same way. 'I liked that I was with like-minded people,'" Linderman said. "I feel energized."

"Where we live, we're usually in the minority," Weseman said.

Prominent visitors Wednesday included Vice President Mike Pence and his wife, Karen, along with former President Bill Clinton, who appointed Ginsburg to the court in 1993, and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whom Ginsburg had hoped would name her successor. President Donald Trump, who traded insults with Ginsburg four years ago, planned to pay his respects Thursday.

Since Ginsburg's death Friday evening, people have been leaving flowers, notes, placards and all manner of Ginsburg paraphernalia outside the court in tribute. Court workers cleared away the items and cleaned the court plaza and sidewalk in advance of Wednesday's ceremony.

Inside, 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.

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 not 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 her son and daughter, four grandchildren, two step-grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

Ginsburg's death 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. President Abraham Lincoln waited until December to nominate his replacement, Salmon Chase, who was confirmed the same day.

When Justice Antonin 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.

Associated Press writer Jessica Gresko contributed to this report.

Carole Baskin of 'Tiger King' fame sued for defamation

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Carole Baskin, who became a pop culture sensation due to Netflix's docuseries "Tiger King," is being sued for defamation by a former assistant. As part of the lawsuit, the daughters of Baskin's former husband are seeking more information about what happened to their father, who disappeared mysteriously more than two decades ago.

The amended complaint to an earlier lawsuit was filed Tuesday in state court in Tampa by Don Lewis' three daughters, Donna Pettis, Lynda Sanchez, and Gale Rathbone, as well as his former assistant, Anne McQueen. It also names Baskin's current husband and her tiger rescue sanctuary as defendants.

The lawsuit said that Baskin defamed McQueen by posting a video diary entry on YouTube earlier this month in which she says McQueen played a role in Lewis' disappearance. Those statements and embezzlement allegations also were made on Baskin's website, "bigcatrescue.org," the lawsuit said.

The lawsuit also is seeking what is known as a "pure bill of discovery," which allows information in a case to be gathered before a civil complaint is filed.

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"Despite contentions to the contrary, the truth has never been explored in any court and there is a good faith basis to believe the truth will open up many viable remedies," the lawsuit said.

The pure bill of discovery "will be useful to identify potential defendants and theories of liability and to obtain information necessary for meeting a condition precedent to filing suit," the lawsuit said.

Lewis's disappearance remains an open case. In March, Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister announced that his office was seeking new leads following the popularity of Netflix's "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness."

The documentary is about Joseph Maldonado-Passage, also known as "Joe Exotic," a former Oklahoma zookeeper. He was convicted of trying to hire someone to kill Baskin, who had tried to shut him down, accusing the Oklahoma zoo of abusing animals and selling big cat cubs.

In retaliation, Maldonado-Passage raised questions about Lewis' disappearance. The documentary extensively covered Maldonado-Passage's repeated accusations that Baskin killed her husband and possibly fed him to her tigers. Baskin, who founded Big Cat Rescue, has never been charged with any crime and released a statement refuting the accusations made in the series.

Baskin, who is a contestant on the show, "Dancing With The Stars" this season, said nothing when judges of the TV dance competition made references in jest to the belief that Lewis was killed and fed to the tigers at her sanctuary, the lawsuit said.

Lawyers for Baskin said Wednesday they couldn't comment on pending litigation. In an email to The Associated Press late Wednesday, Baskin said she never would joke about the loss of her husband.

"I didn't kill him or have him killed, so there's no way I'd associate losing him with that word or concept," Baskin said. "Any Tiger King reference to killing or murder is strictly based on the fact that so many animal abusers have tried unsuccessfully to kill me either by rallying their minions or hiring hit men."

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

For NBA players, Taylor grand jury decision 'not enough'

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (AP) — LeBron James sent the word to the Los Angeles Lakers in a group text on Wednesday afternoon, and basketball suddenly seemed irrelevant.

A grand jury in Kentucky had finally spoken. And James was letting his team know that NBA players, who have spent months seeking justice for Breonna Taylor, did not get what they wanted.

"Something was done," Lakers guard Danny Green said, "but it wasn't enough."

Wednesday's decision by the grand jury, which brought no charges against Louisville police for Taylor's killing and only three counts of wanton endangerment against fired Officer Brett Hankison for shooting into Taylor's neighbors' homes, was not unexpected by many NBA players and coaches. While there were no drugs in Taylor's apartment, her boyfriend shot and wounded a police officer. State Attorney General Daniel Cameron said the officers' shots that killed Taylor were fired in self-defense.

"I know we've been using our platform down here to try to bring about education and a voice in a lot of players on our team, especially also spoken out on justice for Breonna Taylor," Denver coach Michael Malone said. "We have not gotten that justice."

Teams came to Walt Disney World to finish the season and crown a champion, and hoping that the platform of the NBA's restart bubble could help amplify calls for change. Players and coaches have used the NBA spotlight to make statements at a time when the demand for racial equality and an end to police brutality is resonating as loudly as it has in generations.

And Taylor's story — the tale of a 26-year-old Black woman who was killed March 13 by police in Louisville when they burst into her apartment on a no-knock warrant during a narcotics investigation centered around a suspect who did not live there — has captivated NBA players. There were no drugs in Taylor's apartment. Her boyfriend shot and wounded a police officer during the raid and Kentucky State Attorney General Daniel Cameron said the officers' shots that killed Taylor were fired in self-defense.

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Many NBA players have met, virtually, with members of her family to offer support. They say her name in news conferences, wear it on shirts, scrawl it onto their sneakers.

"We have moms. We have sisters, nieces, aunties. And just like men of color have experienced traumatic instances, so have women," Boston forward Jaylen Brown said. "That is an example of some things that happen to women in our country. So, we wanted to stand alongside them, but also make it that it's not just us. I think the future is female, so it's important to show our sisters that we care. That's why it's been important."

Even for teams not in the bubble, it mattered. Atlanta coach Lloyd Pierce leads a committee of NBA coaches tasked with finding new ways to use their own platform to create change, and he's encouraged his own players — Black and white alike — to speak out and take action, whether in Atlanta or their own community.

Pierce took Wednesday's news hard.

"Yeah, there was a grand jury and yeah, they went through the information and yeah, they have facts to support whatever the claims may be," Pierce said. "But that doesn't provide any justice for those that are on the outside, those that feel like the police and law enforcement are there to protect them. ... What currently is happening isn't good enough."

National Basketball Players Association executive director Michele Roberts went a step further. "Sadly, there was no justice today for Breonna Taylor," Roberts said. "Her killing was the result of a string of callous and careless decisions made with a lack of regard for humanity, ultimately resulting in the death of an innocent and beautiful woman with her entire life ahead of her."

The league shut down for three days last month when a boycott that was started by the Milwaukee Bucks — in response to the shooting by police of a Black man, Jacob Blake, in Kenosha, Wisconsin — nearly caused players to end the season because they felt their pleas for change were not being taken seriously enough.

And Wednesday's news was another disappointment for them.

"We feel like we've taken a step back, that we haven't made the progress we were seeking," Green said. "Our voices aren't being heard loud enough. But we're not going to stop. We're going to continue. We're going to continue fighting, we're going to continue to push, we're going to continue to use our voices."

More AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/NBA> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

World leaders criticize haphazard response to pandemic

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — World leaders gathering remotely Wednesday criticized a haphazard global response to a microscopic virus that has unleashed economic havoc and taken nearly 1 million lives in its march across the globe. In the words of Kazakhstan's president, it was "a critical collapse of global cooperation."

"Our world has been turned upside down," said Ghana's president, Nana Akufo-Addo. "We all fell together and looked into the abyss together."

The coronavirus pandemic and its consequences topped the list of concerns on the second day of pre-recorded speeches by world leaders at the General Assembly's first virtual high-level meeting. Countries large and small spoke about struggling to deal with its impact without international coordination.

Pleas for the world to work together to combat the scourge and other global problems have taken the forefront at this week's U.N. gathering that itself was altered by the virus.

"A pandemic is by definition a global challenge" and requires a global response, but COVID-19 "has unfortunately revealed how we are tempted to react to immediate threats — nationally, not internationally," said Finland's president, Sauli Niinisto.

Instead of uniting behind multilateral efforts to tackle the coronavirus, he said, "we witnessed a series of national responses," which "raise concerns on how we will be able to combat other global challenges."

Kazakhstan's president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, warned that the world is "coming close to what some

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have already called a state of 'global disfunction'" as a result of the pandemic, and the global system is now "on the verge of dramatic upheavals that may lead to irreversible consequences."

"Now is a make-or-break moment for the humankind," he warned.

Tokayev called for upgrading national health institutions, taking politics out of the development of a coronavirus vaccine, and revising regulations to improve the World Health Organization and enable all countries to prevent and respond to diseases.

The Kazakh leader proposed establishing an International Agency for Biological Safety based on the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention that would be accountable to the U.N. Security Council. And he suggested creating a network of regional centers for disease control and biosafety under U.N. auspices.

Many leaders also called for any COVID-19 vaccine that is developed to be shared equally, with Sefik Dzaferovic, chairman of Bosnia's three-member presidency, saying it must be available "to the entire mankind."

Dzaferovic said the past few years have seen "a very strong crisis of multilateralism" at international organizations including the United Nations, which has become "an object of strong challenging and even dispute."

But the pandemic has shown "their extraordinary significance in today's globalized world," he said, and has also shown that "the largest problems of today can no longer be solved by one, three or five states individually."

As the global death toll from the virus approaches 1 million, many leaders spoke about how dramatically lives have changed in their countries.

Ghana's Akufo-Addo said people everywhere have learned not to shake hands or hug loved ones, not to sing in groups because it's become "a dangerous activity" and to worry about the safety of sending children to school.

And "for many people, the most difficult thing to deal with in these uncertain and unsettling times has been the silence forced on churches, mosques, temples and other places of worship," he said.

COVID-19's economic impact has been felt around the world, even in the tiny Pacific island nation of Palau that has remained coronavirus-free. President Tommy Remengesau Jr. said the pandemic is affecting the archipelago's economy and has put the country of about 18,000 "into a level of isolation we have not known for many, many years."

Palau is struggling with disrupted supply chains for food and medicine, getting life-saving treatments for patients who used to travel to larger countries as well as keeping families united, college students in school and people working.

"Private sector unemployment is approaching 50%, and it will take years to recover what we have lost in months," Remengesau said.

The Palau leader, who said he will soon return to life as a fisherman, recalled attending the General Assembly's high-level meeting in 2001, two months after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. He called then for the unity and cooperation it inspired to be nurtured.

"We do not see human evil in this pandemic in the way we did in the perpetrators of 9/11," he said. "But the challenge of our response is not so different ... to unite in the face of a shared crisis in a way that might have seemed unlikely a year or two ago."

The pandemic also "has shone a crude light on inequality in the world," said Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, a COVID-19 survivor.

Switzerland's President Simonetta Sommaruga, one of the few women leaders to speak, said the pandemic "has caused untold suffering in the world," with the most vulnerable hit hardest.

"If every crisis is a suffering, it is also a moment of change that allows us to reinvent ourselves," she said. "So let's reinvent ourselves."

Some nations, like Iraq, called for more assistance to flow to countries that have less than others.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman, in the first address to the U.N. by a Saudi monarch since his father's in 1957, said that as chairman of the Group of 20 major industrialized nations, the kingdom held a summit of its leaders in March and pledged \$500 million "to combat this pandemic and curb its humanitarian and

economic impacts.”

Reflecting a wish of all leaders, Iraqi President Barham Saleh said, “We pray to the almighty God that the next meeting can be held in a pandemic-free world.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, a former actor who won the presidency in 2019, spoke of closed borders, the Summer Olympics postponed and the current high-level meeting happening online.

“A year ago, we would have said that this was the script of an apocalyptic blockbuster, and not the reality of 2020,” Zelenskiy said.

In Taylor case, limits of law overcome calls for justice

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

“Arrest the cops who killed Breonna Taylor” became a rallying cry this summer, emblazoned on T-shirts worn by celebrities and sports stars while protesters filled the streets demanding police accountability. In the end, none of the officers were charged with Taylor’s killing, although one was indicted for shooting into a neighboring home that had people inside.

The outcome demonstrates the vast disconnect between widespread public expectation of justice and the limits of the law when police use deadly force.

“Criminal law is not meant to respond to every sorrow and grief,” Attorney General Daniel Cameron, the first African American elected to the job in Kentucky, told reporters after the grand jury announced its decision on Wednesday. “And that is, that is true here. But my heart breaks for the loss of Miss Taylor.”

Taylor, a 26-year-old Louisville emergency medical worker studying to become a nurse, was shot several times in her hallway after three plainclothes narcotics detectives busted down the door of her apartment after midnight on March 13. The officers entered the home as part of an investigation into a suspect who lived across town. No drugs were found at Taylor’s home.

Taylor’s boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, was with her at the apartment and fired a shot at Louisville police Sgt. Jonathan Mattingly after the door was broken down. Walker has said he fired because he feared he was being robbed or that it might be an ex-boyfriend of Taylor’s trying to get in. Mattingly was struck in the leg and returned fire, along with other officers who were outside the apartment.

But the officers who opened fire on Taylor were determined by prosecutors to be justified in using force because they acted in self defense. The officer who shot into a neighbor’s apartment was the one who was charged with a felony. Brett Hankison faces up to five years in prison on each of the three wanton endangerment charges.

The grand jury’s decision was swiftly condemned by activists, celebrities and others as a shocking miscarriage of justice. Minutes after the announcement, demonstrators began to march down one of the main Louisville thoroughfares, chanting “No justice, no peace.”

“The rallying cries that have been echoing throughout the nation have been once again ignored by a justice system that claims to serve the people,” said attorney Ben Crump, who is representing Taylor’s family. “But when a justice system only acts in the best interest of the most privileged and whitest among us, it has failed.”

The long-awaited decision came amid calls for police reform across the U.S. spurred by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other Black Americans by law enforcement. It also happened against the backdrop of a divisive election season that includes a fight over an open Supreme Court seat and repeated comments from President Donald Trump portraying demonstrators as violent mobs.

The outcome came as no surprise to legal experts, who said murder charges would never stand up in court because the officers were fired at first. Police are shielded by laws and longstanding court rulings that give them wide latitude to use deadly force to protect themselves or others. It’s been rare to charge police with crimes in the death of civilians, and winning a conviction is harder.

“You can’t get justice from a tragedy. What we have is a series of events that culminated in the use of self defense” both by Taylor’s boyfriend and the officers, said Jan Waddell, a Louisville defense attorney. “Just because Breonna was in caught the middle of that and she was the victim of a shooting doesn’t

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mean that either one of those parties engaged in criminal activity," he said.

The fact that the officers were not only fired upon first but had a warrant allowing them to legally enter the apartment would have provided them with a powerful defense, experts said. That made Taylor's case less clear cut than other recent killings that have stirred outrage, like that of Floyd, who died in May after a Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into his neck for several minutes.

Prosecutors will likely even face challenges in securing a conviction against Hankison for wanton endangerment, observers said. The FBI is still investigating potential violations of federal law in the case.

"We see this over and over again where an officer is a criminal defendant in one of these cases ... and when they take the witness stand it seems that juries are very reluctant to second guess the split-second life or death decisions of police officers in potentially violent encounters," said Philip Stinson, a former police officer and criminologist at Bowling Green State University. "I think that's going to be a difficult case for the prosecution to prevail on if this goes to trial," he said.

This story has been corrected to reflect that Walker said he shot at the officers because he feared he was being robbed, not because he was being robbed. It has also been edited to clarify that the shots fired by Hankison entered another home with people inside, not several homes.

GOP senators see political, principle gain in court fight

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump marveled at a rally this week about how important Supreme Court nominations are to voters.

But Senate Republicans are with the voters on that. Despite Democratic cries of hypocrisy, they're hoping the battle over replacing Ruth Bader Ginsburg will help them keep their Senate majority as well as Trump's job in the White House.

Beyond the Nov. 3 elections, some feel the generational goal of a solidly conservative court is worth the potential blowback.

"Most of us came to the Senate, ran for the Senate, in a lot of ways for big moments like this — for an opportunity to fill seats on the Supreme Court," said Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., the GOP whip who is not up for reelection this year.

And whatever their personal views of Trump and his presidency, Republicans also see a political payoff in sticking with him and plunging ahead to confirm his pick to fill the court vacancy before the election.

By Wednesday, as mourners gathered to view Ginsburg's casket on the court's iconic steps, objections from Democrats that the presidential winner should name the nominee had slipped by GOP senators. They were preparing for confirmation hearings as soon as Oct. 12, with a possible full Senate vote Oct. 29. Trump is to announce his choice Saturday.

"The process is going to go very quickly," Trump said at the White House.

The president suggested doing away with confirmation hearings, and said later he wants the new justice confirmed before the election. "It's better," he said about the timing.

Democrats, led by presidential nominee Joe Biden, argue Republicans are stalling a fresh round of COVID-19 relief — as the nation reaches the grim milestone of 200,000 deaths from the coronavirus — but rushing the court nomination ahead of the election. They remind that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell led Republicans in refusing to consider a nominee of President Barack Obama in February 2016, long before that year's election. No Supreme Court nominee in U.S. history has been confirmed by the Senate so close to balloting.

But Republicans are eagerly running into the election year fight, sensing a reward greater than the risk.

A third Trump justice is certain to tip the court rightward, likely to revisit landmark decisions on abortion, health care, gun rights and other issues. A liberal icon, Ginsburg would be replaced by a justice more in line with Trump's earlier nominees, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. Even without fresh polling this week, almost all Republicans backed McConnell's push for a quick vote.

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"It's a really exciting time," said Carrie Severino, president of the conservative advocacy group Judicial Crisis Network. "This is a new era."

The top contender for Trump's nomination is Amy Coney Barrett, a judge of the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in the Midwest. The president had suggested he might meet Friday with Judge Barbara Lagoa in battleground Florida, but on Wednesday he said they didn't have a meeting planned.

As early presidential voting is underway in several states, only two Republican senators, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine, have objected to the speedy timetable.

There's little the Democrats can do to block it. The Senate is controlled by Republicans, 53-47, with a simple majority needed for confirmation. Under Senate rules, Vice President Mike Pence can break a tie.

Biden won't say whom he might pick, denying Trump and Republicans an opportunity to shift attention. "We should go to the American people, make the case why this is a gigantic mistake and abuse of power," Biden said of the GOP effort before heading to a campaign event in North Carolina.

At a rally late Tuesday in Pittsburgh, Trump told supporters how surprised he was in 2016 over voter reaction to the Supreme Court. That February, just before a crucial presidential primary debate in South Carolina, the sudden death of conservative Justice Antonin Scalia sent shockwaves through Washington.

Republicans remember the moment well: Trump on the debate stage started naming possible replacements. It was a jaw-dropping instant for advocates who have been working to restructure the courts since the Reagan era. And all the more stunning from Trump, a newcomer to politics who had supported abortion access just years earlier but was now naming conservative judicial champions.

"I was like, wow, I didn't see that coming," said Severino.

Now, as Republicans strain to hold their slim majority in the Senate, they believe the court battle in the countdown weeks to the 2020 election will similarly bring wayward Trump voters back into the fold — or at least they'll go down in defeat having secured the long-sought goal.

One by one, GOP senators facing tough reelections — Martha McSally in Arizona, Thom Tillis in North Carolina, Steve Daines in Montana and Joni Ernst in Iowa — all threw their support behind voting on Trump's choice. Sen. Lindsey Graham, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee who faces his own tough race in South Carolina, estimated it will help him in win.

Even in Colorado, where the politics are more uncertain, Sen. Cory Gardner joined the push for a new justice — better to be seen as part of the movement, despite the political risks. Only the most independent senators — Murkowski and Collins, who faces her own reelection in Maine — declined.

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

But Democrats are also fired up against what they see as Trump "stealing" another court seat, as Democratic leader Chuck Schumer puts it.

Several Democratic senators spoke well into the night from the chamber floor against voting now. It is one of the quickest confirmation efforts in recent times.

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

Associated Press writers Mark Sherman, Kevin Freking, Andrew Taylor and Matthew Daly in Washington, Darlene Superville in Pittsburgh, Alex Jaffe in Wilmington, Delaware, and Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this report.

Sayers, Piccolo friendship lives on in 'Brian's Song'

By The Associated Press undefined

When Chicago Bears teammates Gale Sayers and Brian Piccolo became roommates in 1967, the first time NFL players of different colors shared accommodations on the road, it hardly looked like a good fit.

Sayers, 24 at the time, was already an established star, a soft-spoken Black man who generally raised his voice only when matters of social justice were discussed. Piccolo, the same age, was white, an inveterate

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talker and joker who was competing with Sayers for playing time in the backfield after being undrafted and clambering from the taxi squad onto the game-day roster.

But the enduring friendship that formed between the two became the subject of "Brian's Song," a 1971 made-for-TV movie that remains one of the most popular sports movies of all time. It rarely resonated more than it did Wednesday, following the announcement of Sayers' death at age 77.

"It just amazes me," Joy Piccolo O'Connell said in an interview from her Wisconsin home. "It was 50 years ago."

The two grew close in 1968, when Piccolo unselfishly supported Sayers' attempt to come back from the first of several knee injuries that eventually shortened his career. When Piccolo received a diagnosis of late-stage testicular cancer the following year, Sayers unfailingly remained by his side.

Piccolo lost his battle with the disease in 1970, less than a month after Sayers received the league's George S. Halas Courage Award and gave the speech that became the centerpiece of the film:

"He has the heart of a giant and that rare form of courage that allows him to kid himself and his opponent — cancer," Sayers said at the awards dinner, a scene reprised in the ABC movie by actor Billy Dee Williams.

"He has the mental attitude that makes me proud to have a friend who spells out the word 'courage' 24 hours a day, every day of his life. You flatter me by giving me this award, but I tell you that I accept it for Brian Piccolo. It is mine tonight, it is Brian Piccolo's tomorrow. ... I love Brian Piccolo, and I'd like all of you to love him too. Tonight, when you hit your knees," Sayers concluded, "please ask God to love him."

Williams tweeted Wednesday that "my heart is broken over the loss of my dear friend, Gale Sayers. Portraying Gale in Brian's Song was a true honor and one of the nightlights of my career. He was an extraordinary human being with the the kindest heart."

In 1967, hotel-room assignments were generally done by position and running back was the only slot on the Bears team where players of different colors would be thrown together. But then-general manager Ed McCaskey, a Halas family member who was running the club, gave the move his blessing — and with good reason.

As a senior at Wake Forest, in a 1963 game against Maryland, Piccolo walked to the Terrapins sideline and brought Maryland running back Darryl Hill — the only Black player in the league at the time — with him to the front of the student section. Then he threw an arm across Hill's shoulders, silencing the crowd.

But Joy Piccolo O'Connell, who has remarried, thinks the biggest obstacle to the friendship between Piccolo and Sayers had to do more to do with personality than color.

"Brian loved being with people, loved to talk and couldn't do enough public speaking," she said, "and Gale was so extremely quiet."

Indeed, Sayers said in a 2001 interview that Piccolo's constant joking put him off at first. Piccolo, likewise, told biographer Jeannie Morris that he thought Sayers was "arrogant ... I didn't see him speak to a soul the whole week we were together."

From that rocky beginning, Sayers and Piccolo forged a bond strong enough to weather injury and illness and push back against the lazy assumption that men of different colors, from different backgrounds, couldn't care about — and for — each other like brothers.

"They showed the movie the other night," Piccolo O'Connell said, "and we'll get inquiries through the (Piccolo) foundation ..."

"But it's amazing," she concluded "how the story continues and continues."

AP Writer Don Babwin in Chicago contributed to this report.

US experts vow 'no cutting corners' as vaccine tests expand

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A huge international study of a COVID-19 vaccine that aims to work with just one dose is getting underway as top U.S. health officials sought Wednesday to assure a skeptical Congress and public that they can trust any shots the government ultimately approves.

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Hopes are high that answers about at least one of several candidates being tested in the U.S. could come by year's end, maybe sooner.

"We feel cautiously optimistic that we will be able to have a safe and effective vaccine, although there is never a guarantee of that," Dr. Anthony Fauci, infectious disease chief at the National Institutes of Health, told a Senate committee.

President Donald Trump is pushing for a faster timeline, which many experts say is risky and may not allow for adequate testing. On Wednesday he tweeted a link to news about the new Johnson & Johnson vaccine study and said the Food and Drug Administration "must move quickly!"

"President Trump is still trying to sabotage the work of our scientists and public health experts for his own political ends," Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington state, said before ticking off examples of pressure on the FDA.

FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn pledged that career scientists, not politicians, will decide whether any coronavirus vaccine meets clearly stated standards that it works and is safe. Vaccine development usually takes years but scientists have been racing to shorten that time, in part by manufacturing doses that will have to be thrown away if studies find they don't work.

"Science will guide our decisions. FDA will not permit any pressure from anyone to change that," Hahn said. "I will put the interest of the American people above anything else."

FDA has faced criticism for allowing emergency use of some COVID-19 treatments backed by little evidence, but Hahn said if vaccine makers want that faster path to market, additional standards will be coming soon. Vaccines, unlike therapies, are given to healthy people and thus usually require more proof.

But Trump made clear at a Wednesday evening White House news conference that he was skeptical of any regulatory changes that might delay a vaccine's authorization, even if those changes are aimed at increasing public trust. Asked about the FDA considering stricter guidelines for emergency approval, Trump suggested the effort was politically-motivated.

"I think that was a political move more than anything else," he said, arguing that the companies testing the vaccines, such as Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson and Moderna, are capable of determining whether they work. "I have tremendous trust in these massive companies," he said.

A handful of vaccines already are in final testing in the U.S. and other countries. In one of the largest studies yet, Johnson & Johnson aims to enroll 60,000 volunteers to test its single-dose approach in the U.S., South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Other candidates in the U.S. require two shots.

J&J's vaccine is made with slightly different technology than others in late-stage testing, modeled on an Ebola vaccine the company created.

Final-stage testing of one experimental vaccine, made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, remains on hold in the U.S. as officials examine whether it poses a safety risk.

As for the testing of vaccine candidates, Fauci added: "There is no cutting corners."

Beyond vaccines, Trump regularly undercuts confidence in his own public health agencies, such as falsely tweeting about a "deep state, or whoever at FDA" — and in recent weeks, some political appointees were forced out after allegations they interfered with scientific advice.

Conspiracy theories are sapping the morale of disease fighters working 24/7 at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Robert Redfield, its director, told the Senate committee on health, education, labor and pensions.

"It's offensive to me when I hear this type of comment," said Redfield, noting that CDC, like the military, strives to be nonpartisan.

Yet Redfield struggled to defend against criticism that CDC bowed to political pressure with guidelines that discouraged testing of people without COVID-19 symptoms. Asymptomatic people do spread the virus and CDC, under fire, later changed the guidelines' wording. Redfield insisted it all amounted to misinterpretation and stressed Wednesday: "More tests will actually lead to less cases."

More than 200,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 so far this year, and in many states, infections

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still are climbing. The U.S. is confirming an average of 41,968 new daily cases, up 13% compared with the average two weeks ago.

Fauci was blunt: More lives could have been saved if everyone in the country better followed recommendations to wear masks, avoid crowds and keep 6 feet apart.

"We know some states did a good job. Some states did not so good a job. Some states tried to do a good job but people didn't listen," he said, singling out mask-less crowds in bars. Going forward, "we need uniformity throughout the country."

In a testy exchange, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky insisted public health officials were wrong that a lock-down could change the course of the pandemic. A visibly angry Fauci accused the Republican of repeatedly misconstruing his statements.

"I don't regret saying that the only way we could have really stopped the explosion of infection was by essentially — I want to say shutting down," he said.

Fauci dismissed Paul's contention that hard-hit New York has become largely immune because so many people were infected: "If you believe 22% is herd immunity, I believe you're alone in that."

Fauci also called attention to so-called "long-haulers," COVID-19 survivors who continue to struggle with a range of symptoms such as pain, fatigue, even heart damage. He warned much remains unknown about the long-term effects of the virus.

Democrats warned those survivors are at risk of being denied insurance if the Trump administration succeeds in overturning an Obama-era health law that forbids companies from turning down people with pre-existing health problems or charging them more. The death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg means there are no longer five justices on the Supreme Court who have upheld the Affordable Care Act.

"We will see rates skyrocket for anybody who has had COVID," predicted Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn.

A vaccine "will go a giant step" in controlling infection, but Fauci warned people still will need to take those precautions for a while after the first vaccine arrives because it won't change conditions overnight.

Why? It's unusual for a vaccine to be 100% effective. There won't be enough at first for everyone, and even once there is, it will take months to get the shots into the arms of every American who wants one — an effort CDC's Redfield sees stretching into June or July.

Because of the enormous logistical challenges, CDC wants states to get ready now and on Wednesday, announced they would get \$200 million to help begin setting up those operations.

"We want to do that the instant it is approved. Not the following day but the following moment," Trump said.

Neergaard reported from Alexandria, Virginia. AP Writer Linda Johnson contributed from Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania.

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

Missouri governor, opponent of mandatory masks, has COVID-19

By DAVID A. LIEB and JIM SALTER Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Missouri Gov. Mike Parson, a Republican who has steadfastly refused to require residents to wear masks, tested positive for the coronavirus, his office said Wednesday.

Parson was tested after his wife, Teresa, tested positive earlier in the day. Teresa Parson had experienced mild symptoms, including a cough and nasal congestion, spokeswoman Kelli Jones said. She took a rapid test that came back positive and a nasal swab test later confirmed the finding. The governor's rapid test showed he tested positive and he is still awaiting results from the swab test.

"I want everybody to know that myself and the first lady are both fine," Parson said in a video posted on his Facebook page.

"Right now I feel fine. No symptoms of any kind," Parson said in the video. "But right now we just have

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to take the quarantine procedures in place.”

Gov. Parson postponed several events through the remainder of the week. He and his wife had been traveling around the state this week for events that included a ceremonial bill signing in Cape Girardeau, where a photo posted Tuesday on the governor’s Facebook page showed both of them wearing masks.

On Friday, he and several other Missouri Republican candidates appeared together at an event called the “TARGET BBQ” in Springfield. A photo posted on Parson’s Twitter pages shows Parson on a stage with four other statewide officeholders seeking reelection: Treasurer Scott Fitzpatrick, Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe, Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft and Attorney General Eric Schmitt. They appear to be a few feet apart from each other, but none are wearing masks.

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Director Randall Williams said contact tracing efforts have begun, seeking out people who have had close contact with the governor or his wife, but despite Parson’s many recent public appearances, it is believed that involves “a relatively small number of people.”

“Surprisingly it’s not as big a number as you might think because while they might be in a room with 1,000 people, the number of people who were literally with them for 15 minutes, right up next to them, is actually a smaller number,” Williams said at a news conference.

Parson is self-isolating in the governor’s mansion, Williams said. His wife is isolating at their home in Bolivar in southwestern Missouri.

Spokespeople for Schmitt, Fitzpatrick and Kehoe said those elected officials all tested negative Wednesday. A spokeswoman for Ashcroft said his “recent interactions with the Governor and First Lady fall well short of the ‘close contact’ threshold.”

Parson, 65, is facing Democratic State Auditor Nicole Galloway in the November election. The two were supposed to debate Friday in a forum hosted by the Missouri Press Association, but it has been postponed, said Mark Maassen, executive director of the association. He said the forum will be rescheduled.

“I wish Governor Parson and First Lady Teresa Parson a safe and full recovery,” Galloway said in a statement. “This is a stark reminder that this virus can reach anyone, anywhere and that this pandemic is far from over. We must all continue to do our part in preventing the spread of the virus by practicing social distancing, washing hands, and wearing a mask.”

Parson has repeatedly urged residents to wear masks and maintain social distancing, but he has been an outspoken opponent of mask mandates, sometimes appearing at functions without one. In July, speaking without a mask at a Missouri Cattlemen’s Association steak fry in Sedalia, he reiterated his stance.

“You don’t need government to tell you to wear a dang mask,” he said. “If you want to wear a dang mask, wear a mask.”

Parson’s opposition to statewide mask mandates has held strong even as the White House Coronavirus Task Force has recommended a face covering requirement in Missouri given the state’s escalating number of confirmed cases. When Parson allowed the state to reopen for business in mid-June, about 16,000 cases had been confirmed. The state health department on Wednesday added 1,580 new cases, bringing the total to 116,946 since the pandemic began.

The state also has reported 1,947 deaths, including 83 reported Wednesday. That single-day total was the highest since the pandemic began. The second-highest was the 57 announced Tuesday.

Asked Wednesday whether it was time for a statewide mask mandate, Parson’s health director again deferred those decisions to local officials.

“We just think that if you’re too draconian everywhere ... it’s almost as if it creates more problems than it solves,” Williams said.

Parson would be considered a potential high-risk patient given his age and a preexisting condition. On Christmas Eve in 2016, Parson underwent heart surgery after doctors discovered a blockage during a routine checkup in Springfield.

Two other Republican governors also have tested positive for COVID-19, though one of those turned out to be a false positive. Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt in July became the first governor to announce he’d tested positive. He recovered and returned to work less than two weeks later.

In August, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced that a rapid test was positive. But a short time later,

DeWine said a more sensitive test was negative.

Parson is a former county sheriff and state representative who was elected lieutenant governor in 2016. On Tuesday, the Parsons attended the grand opening in southern Missouri of the first U.S. public golf course designed by Tiger Woods. Woods hosted an exhibition match that featured him and fellow pro golfer Justin Thomas playing against British stars Rory McIlroy and Justin Rose. Two other golf legends, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player, also were in attendance.

A spokeswoman for Big Ceder Lodge, which operates the new Payne's Valley course, said the governor and first lady were there for "a limited amount of time and did not have direct interaction with the participants."

Salter reported from O'Fallon, Missouri. Associated Press writers Summer Ballentine in Columbia, Missouri; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; and AP golf writer Doug Ferguson in Jacksonville, Florida, contributed to this report.

Former staffer: White House politicized Bolton book review

By DEB RIECHMANN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Trump administration officials repeatedly exerted political pressure in an unsuccessful effort to block the release of former national security adviser John Bolton's tell-all book, a career government records professional said in a court filing Wednesday.

After Bolton submitted his book for prepublication review last last year, it was Ellen Knight's job at the White House to make sure it did not contain classified information that could possibly threaten U.S. national security.

For the first time, Knight recounted the monthslong prepublication review process that she says was replete with delay tactics, legal maneuverings and a shadow review by a political appointee who had no experience in that area. She contends the actions were aimed at discrediting her work and blocking the publication of Bolton's book, "The Room Where It Happened."

Bolton's book, offering a behind-the-scenes account of Trump's interactions with foreign leaders, went on sale earlier this year. The Trump administration maintains that it contains classified information, and the Justice Department has launched a criminal investigation into its release.

Earlier, the Justice Department sued unsuccessfully to block the release of the book. A federal judge rejected the suit, partly because hundreds of thousands of copies had already been distributed. But the judge expressed concern that Bolton published the book before receiving a formal clearance letter, which Knight said was blocked by the White House.

Knight asked her attorney, Ken Wainstein, to write a letter for the court to give her first-hand account of the controversial review.

"As a career professional in the field of classified information management, Ms. Knight is very concerned about the politicization — or even the perceived politicization — of the prepublication review process," Wainstein wrote.

If authors lose confidence in the process, they might try to publish without submitting manuscripts for review, which "could result in unchecked disclosures of sensitive information and the potential for serious damage to our national security," he wrote.

Justice Department spokesperson Kerri Kupec said Knight's court filing confirms that Bolton did not receive the required written, prepublication approval before publishing.

"Mr. Bolton chose to publish a manuscript that four senior national security officials have stated, under penalty of perjury, contains classified information," she said in a statement.

Knight was detailed from the National Archives and Records Administration to the National Security Council from August 2018 to August 2020. During that time, she and her staff handled more than 135 prepublication review requests, perusing more than 10,000 pages of manuscripts.

Knight and her colleague spent hundreds of hours over four months reviewing and researching infor-

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mation found in Bolton's more than 500-page manuscript. Knight met with Bolton for a total of 14 hours and spoke on the phone with him 10 times, including two calls that lasted several hours, the filing said.

After completing her review in late April, she gave the manuscript to her superior, who confirmed that all sensitive or classified information she had determined was in the original manuscript had been removed.

Knight said that when she advised NSC lawyers on April 28 that she was prepared to clear the manuscript for publication, she was told to take no action. Knight said NSC lawyers told her to tell Bolton that the process was "ongoing." She says she was once told that COVID-19 issues were delaying the process.

When Bolton's lawyer asked the White House to "prioritize the Ukraine chapter" for prepublication review to make it publicly available during Trump's impeachment trial, then-deputy NSC legal adviser Michael Ellis instructed her to "temporarily withhold any response," she said.

Knight said the NSC lawyers regularly instructed her "not to use email in her communications" with them to discuss her interactions with Bolton or his lawyer "and instead use the telephone."

Worried that others might be able to read the Bolton manuscript on the records management computer systems and possibly leak its contents, she said Ellis had her check to see whether the information technology staff could track anyone who accessed and printed the manuscript.

Six weeks after she determined that the manuscript was ready for clearance, she was called to a series of meetings with White House and Justice Department officials.

In one meeting on June 8, NSC legal adviser John Eisenberg asked her to review a letter to Bolton's lawyer saying the manuscript still contained classified material. Knight said she disagreed.

Two days later, in a White House Situation Room meeting with four Justice Department attorneys, she learned for the first time that Ellis, a political appointee with no prepublication review experience, had been ordered to conduct a second review.

Between May 2 and June 9, Ellis reviewed the manuscript and flagged hundreds of passages that he believed were still classified. Knight disagreed, saying that Ellis was treating the book like a government document being classified, not a book written by an author with First Amendment rights.

On June 22, Knight received an email advising her that her time at the NSC would end in 60 days. She has returned to the National Archives.

Charles Cooper, an attorney for Bolton, said he never solicited the letter from Knight's attorney, which he received as a "complete surprise" late Tuesday night. He said he was still assessing its implications for the Justice Department's lawsuit against Bolton.

eBay workers who sent spiders to couple to plead guilty

BOSTON (AP) — Four former eBay Inc. employees have agreed to plead guilty to their roles in a campaign of intimidation that included sending live spiders and cockroaches to the home of a Massachusetts couple who ran an online newsletter critical of the auction site, federal prosecutors said Wednesday.

"Four former employees of #eBay are scheduled to plead guilty on Oct. 8 at 2pm via zoom in federal court in #Boston," according to a tweet from the official account of the U.S. attorney's office in Massachusetts. "The defendants are charged w/ participating in a cyberstalking campaign that targeted a Massachusetts couple."

The four expected to plead guilty are Brian Gilbert, 51; Stephanie Popp, 32; Stephanie Stockwell, 26; and Veronica Zea, 26, according to The Boston Globe.

All live in San Jose, California, except for Stockwell, who lives in Redwood City, California.

They are among seven former eBay employees charged in the case, in which the Massachusetts couple had other disturbing items sent to their home, including a funeral wreath and a bloody pig Halloween mask.

They are all charged with conspiracy to commit cyberstalking and conspiracy to tamper with a witness. Their lawyers either declined to comment or didn't immediately return emails seeking comment Wednesday.

The employees also sent pornographic magazines with the husband's name on them to their neighbor's house, planned to break into the couple's garage to install a GPS device on their car, and posted the couple's names and address online, advertising things like yard sales and encouraging strangers to knock on the door if the pair wasn't outside, officials said.

The suspects engaged in a "systematic campaign fueled by the resources of a Fortune 500 company to emotionally and psychologically terrorize this middle-aged couple in Natick," U.S. Attorney Andrew Lelling said at a news conference when charges were announced in June.

An internal investigation was launched after San Jose, California-based eBay was notified by law enforcement of "suspicious actions by its security personnel," company officials wrote in a prepared statement. The employees were ultimately fired, the company said.

Popp was a senior manager of global intelligence at eBay; Gilbert was senior manager of special operations for eBay's Global Security Team; Stockwell was manager of eBay's Global Intelligence Center; and Zea was an eBay contractor who worked as an intelligence analyst in the Global Intelligence Center. Authorities say they were working at eBay at the time of the alleged harassment.

Court documents say the couple was targeted after their newsletter published an article in August 2019 about a lawsuit filed by eBay accusing Amazon of poaching its sellers.

Utility equipment eyed as possible source of fire near LA

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Federal investigators are looking into whether a huge wildfire near Los Angeles was sparked by Southern California Edison utility equipment, according to the company.

Edison has turned over a section of an overhead conductor from its transmission facility in the area where the Bobcat Fire started more than two weeks ago, company spokesman David Song said Wednesday.

The initial report of fire was near Cogswell Dam in the San Gabriel Mountains at 12:21 p.m. on Sept. 6.

In an incident report filed with the state Public Utilities Commission last week, Edison said its nearby equipment experienced an issue five minutes earlier, 12:16 p.m.

A circuit at a nearby substation experienced a "relay operation," indicating its equipment detected some kind of disturbance or event, Song said.

Cameras captured smoke developing in the area around 12:10 p.m., prior to the activity on Edison's circuit, he said.

Edison will assist the U.S. Forest Service in its investigation of the fire that has burned more than two dozen homes and other buildings on its way to becoming one of the largest blazes in Los Angeles County history.

"Southern California Edison understands this is a difficult time for the many people who are being impacted by the Bobcat fire," Song said. "Our thoughts are also with those affected by the wildfires currently burning across the western United States."

The Forest Service and the Public Utilities Commission didn't immediately respond to emails seeking more information.

In recent years California utilities have strategically shut off power to some areas in order to prevent its equipment from sparking wildfires. Edison did not have any planned shutoffs in the days before the Bobcat fire erupted.

Firefighters are finally starting to tame the blaze, with containment on Wednesday hitting 38% — a jump from just 17% a day earlier.

Crews took advantage of two days of calmer weather after erratic winds last weekend pushed flames out of the Angeles National Forest and into communities in the desert foothills, fire spokesman Larry Smith said Wednesday.

"Because the fire transferred out of the timber and into the light fuels near the desert, we were able to make some real progress," Smith said. Crews will shore up containment lines ahead of hotter, gusty weather predicted for the weekend, he said.

Thousands of residents remain under evacuation orders and warnings. It's one of dozens of other major wildfires across the West, including five in California that are among the largest in state history.

A major fire in the northern part of the state, the CZU Lightning Complex in San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties, was 100% contained, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire, said

Tuesday evening. The fire was ignited during a barrage of lightning on Aug. 16 and the cluster of blazes went on to destroy 925 homes and kill one person.

Firefighters have also controlled several other lightning-sparked wildfires burning for more than a month in Northern California.

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.

Lebanon asks world's help 'trying to rise from its rubble'

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Facing an economic meltdown and other crises, Lebanon's president on Wednesday asked for the world's help to rebuild the capital's main port and neighborhoods that were blown away in last month's catastrophic explosion.

President Michel Aoun made the plea in a prerecorded speech to the U.N. General Assembly's virtual summit, telling world leaders that Lebanon's many challenges are posing an unprecedented threat to its very existence.

Most urgently, the country needs the international community's support to rebuild its economy and its destroyed port. Aoun suggested breaking up the damaged parts of the city into separate areas and so that countries that wish to help can each commit to rebuilding one.

"Beirut today is trying to rise from its rubble, and it is with the solidarity of all the Lebanese and your support that it will heal its wounds and rise as it has previously risen repeatedly throughout history," Aoun said. "There is a great need for the international community to support the reconstruction of destroyed neighborhoods and facilities."

The massive Aug. 4 explosion happened when about 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrates — which had been rotting in a port warehouse for more than six years — ignited. Nearly 200 people were killed, 6,500 injured and a quarter of a million people were left with homes that were not fit to live in.

The cause of the blaze that ignited the chemicals still isn't known, but the explosion is widely seen as the culmination of decades of corruption and mismanagement by Lebanon's ruling class.

It came on top of an unprecedented economic crisis which has seen the local currency lose up to 80 percent of its value and decimated people's savings, feeding despair among a population that has long ago given up on its leaders. Poverty and unemployment are soaring, made worse by the coronavirus pandemic.

A local investigation into the blast is underway, but no one has been held accountable so far.

Aoun said Lebanon had requested technical assistance from certain countries, particularly soil samples and satellite images from the moment of the explosion.

"Teams from several countries came for technical assistance and to carry out the necessary research and we are still waiting for their information... as well as the satellite images to clear the ambiguity in this part of the investigation," he added.

Earlier Wednesday, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for swift formation of a government to be followed by tangible steps to implement economic, social and political reforms.

Lebanon's government resigned under pressure in the wake of the port explosion, and Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib has been unable to form a new government amid a political impasse over which faction gets to have the Finance Ministry, as well as other disputes.

Guterres said the disastrous port explosion "must be a wake-up call."

"Without such action, the country's ability to recover and rebuild will be jeopardized, adding to the turmoil and hardship of the Lebanese people," Guterres added.

Guterres made his remarks during a meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon held on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meetings.

Belarus president sworn in at unannounced inaugural ceremony

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By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus was sworn in Wednesday to his sixth term in office at an inaugural ceremony that was not announced in advance amid weeks of huge protests of the authoritarian leader's reelection, which the opposition says was rigged.

One opposition leader called the secretive ceremony "a farce," and several European countries reiterated that they don't recognize the results of the election and refuse to regard Lukashenko as the legitimate president. In the evening, thousands of people took to the streets in the capital of Minsk to protest the inauguration and were met with a strong response from police.

The ceremony was held in front of several hundred dignitaries at the ornate Palace of Independence in Minsk, the state news agency Belta said. Police and other security forces blocked off parts of the city and public transportation was suspended.

Lukashenko, 66, took the oath of office in Belarusian with his right hand on the constitution, and the head of the 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," he said. "We were not just electing the president of the country — we were defending our values, our peaceful life, sovereignty and independence."

The absence of public involvement in the inauguration only proved that Lukashenko lacked a valid mandate to continue leading the country, according to his political opponents and European officials.

"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," said Steffen Seibert, spokesman for German Chancellor Angela Merkel. He added that the secrecy surrounding the swearing-in was "very telling."

Lukashenko has run Belarus, a former 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 in neighboring Lithuania after being forced to leave Belarus, says the outcome was invalid, as have the tens of thousands of her supporters who continue to demand Lukashenko's resignation during more than six weeks of mass protests.

"The people haven't handed him a new mandate," she said, calling the inauguration was "a farce" and an attempt by Lukashenko to "proclaim himself legitimate."

"I, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, am the only leader that has been elected by the Belarusian people. And our goal right now is to build the new Belarus together," she said in a video from Lithuania's capital, Vilnius.

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. The EU is pondering sanctions against top Belarusian officials, but failed to agree on imposing them this week.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius called the inauguration "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 tweeted.

Other European officials echoed the sentiment.

In neighboring Poland, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki called for an "honest election," saying on Facebook that the secretive nature of the swearing in "only confirms that Lukashenko is aware of what he has done, rigging the results of the election."

"He is aware that he has no backing from his own nation and that the aggression that he is allowing himself against the people of Belarus is inadmissible," Morawiecki said.

Czech Foreign Minister Tomas Petricek tweeted that "the elections in Belarus were neither free nor fair. The result is therefore illegitimate, which is why today's inauguration of Alexander Lukashenko is also illegitimate."

Latvian Foreign Ministry press secretary Janis Bekeris told the Baltic News Service agency that they believe the unexpected inauguration will only deepen the Belarus political crisis, and Latvia will "leave open diplomatic channels for cooperation with Belarus at the technical level."

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The Kremlin refused to comment on the inauguration. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said he wouldn't comment on "an absolutely sovereign, internal decision of the Belarusian leadership."

Anti-Lukashenko protests have rocked the country daily since the election, with the largest rallies in Minsk attracting up to 200,000 people. In the first three days of protests, police used tear gas, truncheons and rubber bullets to disperse crowds. Several protesters died, many were injured and more than 7,000 were detained.

The Viasna human rights group said several protesters were detained near the palace on Wednesday morning, holding banners that said, "The king has no clothes" and "Victory (will belong to) the people."

In the evening, thousands of people took to the streets in different parts of Minsk to denounce the inauguration. They were met with a heavy response from police, who blocked off some areas of the city center and used water cannons and truncheons to disperse them. Over 140 people were detained, according to the Viasna group, and dozens were injured in the clashes.

Protests continued into late evening despite the crackdown, with groups of demonstrators blocking roads in various parts of the capital.

Rallies also took place in Brest, Vitebsk, Grondo and other cities.

Alexander Klaskousky, an independent Minsk-based analyst, said the secrecy surrounding the inaugural ceremony illustrated the threat the 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 has bristled at suggestions of starting a dialogue with the opposition. Amid international outrage over the violent crackdown on the protests, Belarusian authorities switched to prosecuting top activists. 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 council member, Pavel Latushko, compared the inauguration to a "gathering of thieves" and refused to recognize Lukashenko as president.

"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!"

Associated Press writers Daria Litvinova in Moscow, Liudas Dapkus in Vilnius, Lithuania, Karel Janicek in Prague, Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark, Geir Moulson in Berlin, and Monika Scislawska in Warsaw, Poland, contributed.

Follow AP's coverage of Belarus at <https://apnews.com/hub/belarus>

Saudi king's rare address to UN showcases monarch in charge

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia's King Salman made a rare address to the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday, using the moment to highlight the foundational notions of his regime — his steadfast commitment to the Palestinians, his stature as custodian of Islam's holiest sites and his assertion that Iran is responsible for much of the region's instability.

The prerecorded speech to world leaders suggested that the 84-year-old king, who delivers only a handful of public remarks each year, retains oversight of high-level policies despite the immense powers amassed by his son, the crown prince.

In delivering his remarks, he became only the second Saudi king to deliver a speech to the world assembly. The first was his late brother, King Saud, in 1957 at U.N. headquarters in New York. And like his brother's speech 63 years prior, King Salman noted the sacred role of Islam in Saudi Arabia and the importance that entails.

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"We in the kingdom, due to our position in the Muslim world, bear a special and historic responsibility to protect our tolerant Islamic faith from attempts by terrorist organizations and extremist groups to pervert it," Salman said.

He emphasized at the top of his speech that he was speaking from "the birthplace of Islam, the home of its revelation" — a reference to the Muslim belief that the word of God was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad some 1,400 years ago in the mountainous caves of Mecca.

Those words carry political undertones as well. Saudi rivals Turkey and Iran also profess to champion Muslim causes worldwide as part of a broader struggle for leadership of Muslims globally.

The king oversees a nation that is the Arab world's biggest economy and the planet's most prolific oil producer. Saudi Arabia has long been a close U.S. ally in the region and a strategic partner, though some in American politics worry where the relationship will go in coming years given the unpredictability of the brash Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Reading from a piece of paper and seated at a desk under a large portrait of his father, King Abdulaziz, the current monarch reiterated his support for Palestinian statehood as a prerequisite for recognition of Israel.

He said the Arab Peace Initiative, which offers Israel full ties with Arab states in exchange for concessions that lead to a Palestinian state, provides a basis for resolving the region's longest-running conflict. That 2002 initiative stands in stark contrast to the White House's Middle East Peace plan, which has been rejected outright by the Palestinians as one-sided in favor of Israel.

The king made no mention of recent deals struck by neighboring United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to formalize ties with Israel. The agreements were brokered by the Trump administration and branded by the Palestinians as acts of betrayal.

Despite the appearance Wednesday that Salman was in control of major policies, there are indications that change is already underway with Israel under the guidance of the crown prince. The divergent messages on the possibility of Saudi ties with Israel reflect what analysts call a generational divide between the world views of the prince and the king.

Salman hails from an era of leadership that holds with high regard the ideals of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic multilateralism. He was born just four years after his father founded the country by unifying tribes and establishing control over the western Hijaz region, where Mecca is located. He also witnessed the country's oil-fueled transformation, and as the governor of Riyadh helped to turn the desert capital into a city teeming with skyscrapers, highways, universities and malls. His reign marks the final chapter of power being passed from brother to brother from among the sons of King Abdulaziz as a new generation prepares for the throne.

The crown prince, on the other hand, reflects a cohort of younger Gulf Arab rulers whose policies prioritize national interests and greater self-reliance. He's pushed for localizing the production of defense equipment, transforming the economy to be less dependent on oil exports and overseen efforts to supplant a religiously conservative Saudi identity with one rooted in hyper-nationalism.

King Salman has backed his son by elevating him from near obscurity and handing him day-to-day decision making powers. He's stood by him amid the protracted Yemen war, international fallout from the killing of Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 and as Prince Mohammed moved to crackdown on dissidents, businessmen and sideline more experienced and senior royals in the line of succession.

It's unclear how much the king knows about controversies, such as the November 2017 debacle with then-Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, whom top Lebanese officials at the time said had been forced to resign and was being held in Saudi Arabia against his will before France's president personally intervened.

What was clear as Salman spoke Wednesday, though, was that his nation's views on nearby Iran remained unwavering. He blamed Iran for targeting Saudi oil facilities with missiles and drones last year, saying: "It demonstrated that this regime has total disregard for the stability of the global economy or stability of oil supplies to international markets."

Yemeni rebel Houthis claimed responsibility for that attack and Iran has denied involvement. A U.N.

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probe concluded the missiles were of Iranian origin. The king said Iran interfered in Yemen by backing the Houthis when they ousted the internationally-backed government from the capital in late 2014, prompting the Saudi-led war there.

Salman said Saudi Arabia has tried to extend its hand over the years to Iran, "but to no avail."

For observers of the kingdom with no access to the inner workings of the royal court, the U.N. speech was Salman's first public statement before cameras since he was discharged from the hospital for gall bladder surgery in late July.

Follow Dubai-based Associated Press journalist Aya Batrawy on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/ayaelb>.

Americans load up on candy, trick or treat - or not

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Americans may not know if trick or treating will happen this year because of the pandemic, but they're buying a lot of Halloween candy while they wait to find out.

U.S. sales of Halloween candy were up 13% over last year in the month ending Sept. 6, according to data from market research firm IRI and the National Confectioners Association. That's a bigger jump than the usual single-digit increases. Sales of Halloween chocolate alone are up 25%.

Earlier Halloween displays at some chains, like dollar stores, Meijer and ShopRite, likely helped boost sales. But Americans may also be in a mood to celebrate after months of pandemic anxiety.

Cassandra Ambrosius, who lives in central Wisconsin, was surprised to see bags of Halloween candy at the grocery in early September; her husband snapped one up. She expects to buy more bags as Halloween gets closer, because she thinks people in her neighborhood will figure out how to trick or treat safely. "I'm sure people are just excited for a little sense of normalcy," Ambrosius said.

That enthusiasm is good news for candy companies, which rely on the 10-week Halloween period for nearly 14% of their annual \$36 billion in U.S. sales. Halloween is the biggest holiday of the year for candy makers, followed closely by Christmas and Easter. Valentine's Day is a distant fourth.

Ferrara Candy Co., which makes Brach's Candy Corn, says it saw online demand three months earlier than usual. Some stores also asked Ferrara for earlier shipments.

But while early demand are strong, sales in late October could suffer if the coronavirus clamps down on trick or treat. Fifty-five percent of Mars Wrigley's Halloween candy sales usually happen in the last two weeks of October, says Tim LeBel, the company's chief Halloween officer and head of U.S. sales.

New York's governor recently announced that he won't ban trick or treating in the state. But some cities, like Springfield, Massachusetts, and Antigo, Wisconsin, have called it off. Big Halloween events at places like Disney World and Salem, Massachusetts aren't happening.

Ben Reed, of Arlington, Texas, takes pride in giving out full-size candy bars for Halloween. He usually buys between 160 and 200 candy bars.

"This year I have no idea how many to purchase," he said. "I do not want to disappoint the kids, but on the other hand, I do not want to be stuck with too many and add more COVID pounds to myself."

Numerator, a market research firm, surveyed 2,000 consumers in early August and found that 52% planned to buy less candy this year than they usually do. Just 11% planned to buy more.

Candy companies have been making some changes to deal with all the uncertainty around Halloween. Hershey is selling fewer large Halloween-themed bags of candy and shifting more candy to smaller, everyday bags that can still be sold after the holiday, said Phil Stanley, Hershey's global chief sales officer.

Mars is customizing bag sizes. A place like Los Angeles County, which is discouraging trick or treating, may get smaller bags, for example.

"We're trying to cover all the bases because each market is going to celebrate a little bit differently," LeBel said.

CVS Caremark says it's reduced the number of large and giant bags of candy stores will receive. It's also expanded its assortment of "instant consumable" sized candy and gum that parents can pick up to treat

themselves. Target says it's cut back its assortment of Halloween candy in anticipation of a reduction of trick or treating this year.

Still, online sales could give candy companies a boost as the pandemic changed shopping habits. Digital sales more than doubled at Easter, LeBel said, and that could happen again at Halloween.

Companies have also shifted their marketing in response to the pandemic. Mars is launching a Treat Town website that will let people trick or treat virtually and earn credits toward real candy. Hershey has a map showing COVID risk by county on its website.

Miranda Leon of Albany, Georgia, still plans to buy Halloween candy in mid-October and make treat bags for her three kids' classrooms. There's no official word on Halloween in her city, but she plans to take her kids trick or treating and hand out candy.

"So much has been taken from our kids this year — classes cut short, sports cancelled, summer camps cancelled," she said. "I refuse to take away the joy of trick or treating from my kids."

AP Business Writer Anne D'Innocenzio contributed from New York.

Pence, Ivanka bring law-and-order tour to city of Floyd

By AMY FORLITI and MOHAMED IBRAHIM Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Vice President Mike Pence and Ivanka Trump are bringing President Donald Trump's law-and-order campaign message to Minneapolis on Thursday, showing support for law enforcement in the city where George Floyd's death sparked angry and sometimes violent protests that spread around the world.

Pence and President Trump's daughter planned to host a listening session with a "Cops for Trump" group, as well as with residents who the Trump reelection campaign says have been "negatively impacted by crime and violent extremism."

The visit comes about a month after Donald Trump met with small-business owners whose stores in Minneapolis were damaged in violence that erupted after Floyd's death. Trump did not visit the scene of protests nor the site where police held Floyd down as they tried to arrest him for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill at a convenience store; the schedule for Thursday doesn't include those places either.

The visit also will be a day after a Kentucky grand jury weighing charges in Breonna Taylor's death indicted a single former police officer on charges of shooting into neighboring apartments, but chose not to indict any officers directly in her death.

Trump is eager to put Minnesota in play four years after he narrowly lost the state to Hillary Clinton, with a strategy that depends largely on driving up turnout in the rural areas where he runs strongest. For some in Minneapolis, the campaign's law-and-order message is calculated, divisive and damaging.

"Hate and fear are good for getting votes, but it's not good for governing," said Paul Eaves, a Minneapolis resident who regularly tends to artwork and flowers at the intersection that has become a memorial to Floyd.

Eaves, 72 and white, called the president a "vile politician."

Floyd died after a white police officer pressed his knee into the handcuffed Black man's neck on May 25 during an arrest attempt that was captured on bystander video. His death set off protests around the world, including some that became violent. Property damage in Minneapolis is estimated at roughly \$100 million.

After Floyd's death, a majority of City Council members pledged to abolish the Police Department and replace it with a new agency that would take a more socially minded approach. Their hopes of taking the idea to voters in November was blocked by a city commission and won't happen before 2021, if ever.

The talk of abolishing police came as Minneapolis this summer saw spiking violent crime, as many other big cities did, and as some residents complained that police response times had slowed. Some of the same council members who supported ending the department pressed Police Chief Medaria Arradondo last week to address the rising crime.

Police union President Bob Kroll did not respond to a message seeking comment for this story. He has

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complained that city leaders have abandoned rank-and-file officers. Roughly 175 officers are seeking work-related disability, according to an attorney helping file the claims, with post-traumatic stress disorder being cited as a main reason for most departures.

A Star Tribune analysis found that as of last week, violent crimes such as homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assaults were up 17% from the five-year average. Serious assaults, including shootings and stabbings, were up 25%.

Belal Hijazi, owner of the Full Stop gas station in north Minneapolis, spent a night protecting his business while others around him burned during the height of the unrest that followed Floyd's death. Since then, he said, he's seen people taking advantage of a reduced police presence to more freely deal drugs, loiter and shoplift around his station.

"If you try to talk to these guys, they show you guns sometimes," said Hijazi, who hired an off-duty officer to help with security. "To be honest with you, the police — it looks like they gave up too. ... I'm afraid. I'm stressed. I have a dream to move to a different spot. I have six kids, and they need me."

Jeanelle Austin, 35, a racial justice leadership coach, has emerged as a lead caretaker of the George Floyd Memorial. Austin, who is Black, said Trump's law-and-order message is code for increased law enforcement aiming to "make white people feel safe, but it is a direct threat to Black and brown communities," she said.

Rozenia Fuller, a pastor at Good News Baptist Church in Minneapolis, called the visit from Pence and Ivanka Trump a "good idea" because she said interaction can change how the current social justice movement is perceived and further its goals.

"I think that proximity is everything. I think that they need to be here, boots on the ground, because they are receiving a false narrative about who we really are and what we really want," said Fuller, who is Black. "I think any movement that cannot withstand the scrutiny of outside forces is a myth, so they are welcome. Everybody is welcome in this space."

Mohamed Ibrahim is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

High court fight adds to pile of issues weighing on voters

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

JOHNSTOWN, Pa. (AP) — The Republican Party headquarters in this former steel town was buzzing Saturday as supporters filed in to pick up Trump 2020 stickers and yard signs, including ones declaring: "Your pro-life vote matters."

But even as coverage of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death played on Fox News on an office television, the political fight brewing in Washington over her replacement felt like a world away to some.

"I don't really pay attention to the news much," said Dan Thomas, a 24-year-old from Johnstown, in western Pennsylvania, after he filled out paperwork to vote for the first time. It wasn't the court that brought Thomas in. (When a friend tried to convince him it was a big deal, he shrugged: "Oh, OK. Whoopie.")

Instead, he's convinced that President Donald Trump is fighting for working-class voters like him in a tough economy and is "the best shot this country has."

In dozens of conversations here and in other battleground states since Ginsburg's death of cancer Friday, the bitter debate over the court was buried under a pile of other, more pressing concerns. Most voters were quick to name health care, the economy and personal complaints about Trump, a Republican, and his Democratic rival, Joe Biden, as driving their votes — well before the Supreme Court vacancy. And those who were fired up about the issue were already strongly committed to voting for either Trump or Biden, reflecting stark polarization in a country where only a sliver of the electorate remains undecided.

With so many people already locked in and in the middle of so much upheaval — from the ongoing pandemic to the economic recession to the reckoning over racial justice and policing — the interviews

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suggest the vacancy could be a less decisive factor than it might have been in a less extraordinary year. And they revealed the challenge ahead for both parties as they try to use the fight to their advantage.

To be sure, the court debate could shift quickly once Trump names his nominee Saturday and specifics emerge about her personal background and past decisions. For now, the key question appears to be whether voters approve of Trump and Republicans' rush to fill the seat.

"It depends on how it's framed," said Frank Luntz, a longtime Republican pollster. "If it looks like a blatant political power play (by Trump and Republicans), it will help the Democrats. If it's framed as helping the court do its job, it will help the Republicans. Framing is everything."

Both sides believe the fight could play to their advantage, with Trump's campaign banking on a confirmation battle energizing conservative voters who may be on the fence about Trump but care deeply about the courts.

Biden's aides concede that's likely the case, but also believe it will energize their voters, including women and young people, who may be especially concerned about future court decisions affecting abortion rights and climate change. As evidence, they point to the record-breaking \$91 million-plus they raised in online donations in just over a day after Ginsburg's death.

Biden's team also plans to tie the vacancy to the fight over health care. One week after the election, the Supreme Court is due to hear a case — backed by the Trump administration — that could do away with the Affordable Care Act.

Several polls ahead of the 2016 presidential election suggested Trump supporters were at least somewhat more likely to say Supreme Court nominations mattered to them. But more recent polling shows the gap between Trump and Biden voters has narrowed — or even reversed.

Before Ginsburg's death, a Pew Research Center poll found roughly as many Biden backers, 66%, as Trump supporters, 61%, listed Supreme Court appointments as "very important" to their choice. And an August CNN poll found 47% of Biden supporters, but just 32% of Trump supporters, labeled nominations as "extremely" important to them.

Trump and his aides have long pointed to the contentious clash over Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination just before the 2018 midterm elections as a seminal moment, believing it energized Republicans and helped the party expand its Senate majority, even as it lost control of the House.

But AP VoteCast polling of the electorate found that voters who said that court fight was "very important" to their vote backed Democrats over Republicans in congressional races by a wide margin, 58% to 42%.

Suzana Hutz, a 70-year-old retired software engineer from Tempe, Arizona, said she didn't need any extra motivation to vote against Trump — a vote she's been waiting to cast for the last four years. She's already giving money to Biden and local Democrats, including Mark Kelly, who is running against Republican Sen. Martha McSally in a race that could help decide control of the Senate.

If Republicans confirm another Supreme Court justice, "this country is going to go backwards 50 years in all the social programs and everything that they accomplished so far," Hutz said.

For others, the fight was persuasive. James Kirkpatrick, an independent, held his nose four years ago, he said, when he voted for Democrat Hillary Clinton. Up until recently, he supported the Green Party's candidate for president, Howie Hawkins.

But with a Supreme Court vacancy, he again is swallowing hard to support Biden in November. He worries that Trump's court pick could thwart rights for Native Americans, women and communities of color, as well as side with corporate interests at the expense of working-class Americans.

"I'm voting for Biden as a lesser of two evils, when it comes to the Supreme Court pick," said Kirkpatrick, a 24-year-old state worker in Florida's capital city of Tallahassee.

Republicans, he said, should follow the precedent they set when they refused to confirm President Barack Obama's final nominee to the high court, Merrick Garland, arguing it was too close to an election to start the confirmation process. Obama nominated Garland in March 2016.

"If you're going to start a precedent, you should stick to it," he said.

But many Trump supporters backed the president's push to fill the seat now, hypocrisy be damned.

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John Fischetti, a 51-year-old swim coach living in Raleigh, North Carolina, said he thinks replacing Ginsburg now will inflame tensions at a time when political division is already so high. But he still backed Trump in nominating someone before the election, when control of the Senate and presidency lies with the Republicans.

"It's his right. He's the president. That's what they do," Fischetti said as he waited in line for more than 2 1/2 hours for a Trump rally in Fayetteville on Saturday.

Mark Leonard, 64, a Republican who lives on a livestock farm near Holstein, Iowa, said he "can admit there may have been a bit of a stretch in 2016" when Republicans declined to consider Obama's nominee. But, he added, that's politics.

"Either party can throw their weight around, and sometimes you're going to get beat by it when the other party has more weight. That's just the way life goes," he said. "Is life fair? No, not really."

Meanwhile, with so much else going on, the battle is already growing tiring to some.

"I just think it's a very unfortunate thing to have been thrown into the polarized divide that the country has. It's just one more thing," said Gloria Mazza, 67, a Republican activist and Trump supporter who lives in Clive, Iowa, a liberal-leaning, growing suburb west of Des Moines of about 17,000 people.

Back in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Fran Jacobs, a 76-year-old retiree, was similarly dispirited by the fight ahead. The Biden supporter said she and her friends recently had an "RGB party" to watch the Hollywood movie about Ginsburg's life. Still, she doesn't expect the vacancy to affect the race.

"No, amongst my friends, we've talked about it," she said. "She's my hero now. ... But it won't make any difference."

Associated Press writers Jonathan J. Cooper in Tempe, Ariz., Bobby Caina Calvin in Tallahassee, Fla., Bryan Anderson in Fayetteville, N.C., David Pitt in Des Moines, Iowa, and Alexandra Jaffe and Hannah Fingerhut in Washington contributed to this report.

Trump, social media, right-wing news stir up antifa scares

By CLAIRE GALOFARO and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

LEITCHFIELD, Ky. (AP) — The group gathered around the town square, waiting for the arrival of what has become a new American boogeyman: antifa.

Michael Johnson and others were certain that school buses full of radical left-wing extremists from big cities were coming to Leitchfield, Kentucky, where about 50 of their neighbors had gathered on the courthouse lawn to chant, "Black lives matter!" and wave signs in solidarity with the nation's surging protest movement.

The June 10 protest ended peacefully with no sign of any antifascist activists in the town of less than 7,000 people, but Johnson and his son sat awake outside their house all night, armed with a shotgun, just in case the antifa rumors he saw circulating online were true.

"There's no reason not to believe it after you watch TV, what's going on," said Johnson, 53.

It's a scene that has unfolded in many other cities and small towns this year, the product of fear and conflict stoked by bogus posts on social media, right-wing news outlets and even some of the nation's most powerful leaders.

President Donald Trump has said the federal government would designate antifa as a "terrorist organization" and has blamed it for violence at protests against racial injustice and police brutality. Attorney General William Barr has claimed groups using "antifa-like tactics" fueled violent clashes in Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd, a black man who died after a white police officer pressed a knee into his neck for several minutes.

However, FBI Director Christopher Wray told a congressional panel last Thursday that antifa is more of an ideology or a movement than an organization. While the FBI has had domestic terrorism investigations of "violent anarchist extremists, any number of whom self identify with the antifa movement," Wray noted that extremists driven by white supremacist or anti-government ideologies have been responsible for

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most deadly attacks in the U.S. over the past few years.

A man suspected of fatally shooting a Trump supporter after a pro-Trump caravan in Portland, Oregon, last month had described himself in a social media post as "100% ANTIFA." Federal agents later shot and killed the suspect, Michael Forest Reinoehl, in Washington state.

But federal arrest records of more than 300 people at protests across the country include very few obvious mentions of the word antifa. They could be hard to identify, however, because there is no domestic terrorism statute under which to charge protesters involved in violence or vandalism.

Louisville, Kentucky-based attorney David Mour has represented many protesters involved in demonstrations over the killing of Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician who was shot by Louisville police officers when they barged into her house in the middle of the night to serve a search warrant. Protesters have occupied a square in downtown Louisville for more than three months. All along, Mour has dealt with wild rumors that antifa is somehow involved.

"It's constant. These people are just trying to generate fear and frenzy. They're trying to blame all this stuff on antifa, and I'm like, 'Who exactly is antifa? Where are they? Who are you talking about?' It's insane," he said.

Rutgers University historian Mark Bray, author of the book "Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook," said there are well organized, tightly knit antifa groups that have operated for years.

"But that's different from saying that the politics of antifa is just one single, monolithic organization, which is obviously false," said Bray, whose book traces the history and evolution of the movement.

Many Americans had never heard of antifa before Trump's election and the violent clashes between far-right extremists and counterprotesters at a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. Bray said Trump's campaign and presidency stimulated far-right organizing and the antifascist response to it. He believes Trump and his allies are demonizing antifa for political gain.

"The portrayal they present serves their purposes of using it as a boogeyman to rally support and to kind of redirect attention away from the legitimate grievances behind the Black Lives Matter protests," he said.

Adam Klein, an associate professor of communication studies at Pace University, analyzed social media posts by far-right extremists and antifascist activists leading up to the Charlottesville rally three years ago. He found antifascists have a "pretty loose" communication network.

"You don't get the sense online that there is an organization as much as there are some prominent (social media) accounts associated with antifa," he said.

Lindsay Ayling, a 32-year-old doctoral student at the University of North Carolina's flagship Chapel Hill campus, is a fixture at counterprotests against neo-Confederates and other far-right group members. They often call her "antifa," a label she accepts "in the sense that I oppose fascism and I am willing to go and confront fascists on the streets."

"The thing that's so dangerous about labeling anyone who is antifascist as a terrorist is that it's criminalizing thought," she said. "Not just thought, but it's criminalizing active resistance to fascism."

Ayling said the first person to call her an antifa leader was a Florida man, Daniel McMahon, who dubbed himself "the Antifa hunter" online. McMahon was sentenced to more than three years in prison after pleading guilty in April to using social media to threaten a Black activist to deter the man from running for office in Charlottesville.

Far-right extremists aren't the only ones who use the term against her, Ayling said. Last week, she posted a video of herself asking Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson why he and his deputies were "breaking the law" by not wearing masks at the scene of a protest in North Carolina.

"Ma'am, why are you breaking the law? We know you're with antifa," the sheriff responded.

Rumors of antifa invading Leitchfield, Kentucky, started on Facebook and quickly spread through the community. Stephanie Ann Fulkerson, who had organized the demonstration, was stunned. She usually keeps to herself but felt strongly enough about the Black Lives Matter movement that she decided to plan something in the small town in Grayson County about 70 miles south of Louisville.

"This is the first time I've really spoke up for anything. I'm a stay-at-home mom that's very anti-social. That's the crazy part of all this," she said.

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As the protest got underway, residents lined up in front of businesses to guard against vandalism, some of them on motorcycles. A handful heckled the protesters. At one point, one of them stormed across the street toward the demonstration, but law enforcement restrained him.

The buses didn't show, but that didn't mean everyone accepted it was just a baseless rumor. Johnson said he heard that 15 antifa members in a Winnebago were stopped in town by local residents and law enforcement and complied with a command to go home.

Grayson County Sheriff Norman Chaffins said that didn't happen.

"That's a rumor," the sheriff said. "People are pretty detailed when they make up stories."

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press reporter Michael Biesecker contributed to this story.

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 to the general public until summer or fall of 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.

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

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"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.

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 pronounce-

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ments 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

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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.

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."

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"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 multilateralism 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."

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Vision 2020: Are the nation's voting systems secure?

By The Associated Press undefined

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Election Question: What steps have been taken to protect the nation's election systems from potential interference by foreign powers like Russia? Have voting systems been "hardened" in any way?

Answer: Federal, state and local officials prioritized securing voting systems after Russia interfered in the 2016 election, breaking down bureaucracy to improve communication of potential threats, conducting security reviews and installing network sentinels to detect known cyberthreats and suspicious activity.

A key step was the January 2017 decision by the outgoing Obama administration to designate the election systems as "critical infrastructure" on par with nuclear reactors, banks and the electrical grid. The Department of Homeland Security and its cybersecurity agency have since worked to build relationships with election officials, giving top state election officials security clearances so they can quickly receive sensitive threat intelligence.

After the 2016 interference, state election officials complained that they were not alerted until nearly a year later that Russians had conducted extensive scanning of election systems, specifically targeting voter registration systems.

Communication is vastly improved heading into November, though the threat is unchanged. U.S. intelligence chiefs continue to warn Russia, China and others could interfere in the presidential election beyond so-called "information operations." There is been no indication as yet of any cyber-related attacks directed at election systems.

One of the most feared threats is a well-timed ransomware attack that could scramble or impede access to voter registration data. State election officials have been working to build redundancies into their systems so they can recover quickly in the event of an attack.

Beyond providing comprehensive security assessments, federal officials also offer routine scanning for vulnerabilities and training around best practices. While experts say improvements have been made, they are most concerned about smaller election offices with limited IT and cybersecurity budgets.

Layers of security, including firewalls, threat-detection sensors and multi-factor authentication protocols, have been added to protect voter registration systems. Federal officials noted this summer, however, that adoption of best practices in some places was lagging and it was taking longer in some cases to fix problems identified in federal security reviews.

Vision 2020 is a new series from the AP dedicated to answering commonly asked questions from our audience about the 2020 U.S. presidential election. AP's Advance Voting guide brings you the facts about voting early, by mail or absentee from each state: <https://interactives.ap.org/advance-voting-2020/>

'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 authori-

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ties. 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.

Brazil is No. 2 with about 137,000 deaths, followed by India with approximately 89,000 and Mexico with around 74,000. Only 10 countries 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

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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 science 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.

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

This story was first published Sept. 22, 2020. It was updated on Sept. 23, 2020, to correct that the number countries that have experienced more deaths per capita than the U.S. is 10, not five.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 24, the 268th day of 2020. There are 98 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On September 24, 1789, President George Washington signed a Judiciary Act establishing America's federal court system and creating the post of attorney general.

On this date:

In 1869, thousands of businessmen were ruined in a Wall Street panic known as "Black Friday" after financiers Jay Gould and James Fisk attempted to corner the gold market.

In 1890, the president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Wilford Woodruff, wrote a manifesto renouncing the practice of plural marriage, or polygamy.

In 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower suffered a heart attack while on vacation in Denver.

In 1960, the USS Enterprise, the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, was launched at Newport News, Virginia. "The Howdy Doody Show" ended a nearly 13-year run with its final telecast on NBC.

In 1964, the situation comedy "The Munsters" premiered on CBS television. The adventures series "Daniel Boone," starring Fess Parker, debuted on NBC.

In 1969, the trial of the Chicago Eight (later seven) began. (Five were later convicted of crossing state lines to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic convention, but the convictions were ultimately overturned.)

In 1976, former hostage Patricia Hearst was sentenced to seven years in prison for her part in a 1974 bank robbery in San Francisco carried out by the Symbionese Liberation Army. (Hearst was released after 22 months after receiving clemency from President Jimmy Carter.)

In 1988, Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson won the men's 100-meter dash at the Seoul (sohl) Summer

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Olympics — but he was disqualified three days later for using anabolic steroids. Members of the eastern Massachusetts Episcopal diocese elected Barbara C. Harris the first female bishop in the church's history.

In 1996, the United States and 70 other countries became the first to sign a treaty at the United Nations to end all testing and development of nuclear weapons. (The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has yet to enter into force because of the refusal so far of eight nations — including the United States — to ratify it.)

In 2001, President George W. Bush ordered a freeze on the assets of 27 people and organizations with suspected links to terrorism, including Islamic militant Osama bin Laden, and urged other nations to do likewise.

In 2007, United Auto Workers walked off the job at General Motors plants in the first nationwide strike during auto contract negotiations since 1976; a tentative pact ended the walkout two days later.

In 2018, China and the United States imposed new tariff hikes on each other's goods; U.S. regulators went ahead with a planned 10 percent tax on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports, and China said it responded with taxes on \$60 billion in American goods.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama and Southeast Asian leaders meeting in New York sent China a firm message over territorial disputes between Beijing and its neighbors, calling for freedom of navigation in seas that China claimed as its own. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg pledged \$100 million over the next five years to Newark, New Jersey, schools a week before the release of the biographical movie "The Social Network." Gennady Yanayev, 73, a leader of the abortive 1991 coup who had briefly declared himself Soviet president, died in Moscow.

Five years ago: A stampede and crush of Muslim pilgrims occurred at an intersection near a holy site in Saudi Arabia; The Associated Press estimated that more than 2,400 people were killed, while the official Saudi toll stood at 769. Pope Francis finished his whirlwind visit to the nation's capital, becoming the first pope to address a joint meeting of Congress and calling on the lawmakers to help immigrants "and embrace the stranger in our midst." The pope then traveled to New York for an evening prayer service in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Washington, where he and President Barack Obama met for dinner at Blair House, the guest residence near the White House. A repurposed military "duck boat" carrying passengers swerved into an oncoming charter bus on Seattle's Aurora Bridge; five international college students were killed in the crash.

One year ago: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi launched a formal impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump; the probe focused partly on whether Trump abused his presidential powers and sought help from the government of Ukraine to undermine Democratic foe Joe Biden. The Metropolitan Opera announced that Plácido Domingo had agreed to withdraw from his slate of scheduled performances following allegations of sexual harassment. Britain's highest court ruled unanimously that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had broken the law by suspending Parliament in a way that had suppressed legitimate scrutiny of his Brexit plan; the ruling upended Johnson's plan to keep lawmakers away for two weeks before Britain was due to leave the EU.

Today's Birthdays: Rhythm-and-blues singer Sonny Turner (The Platters) is 81. Singer Barbara Allbut Brown (The Angels) is 80. Singer Phyllis "Jiggs" Allbut Sirico (The Angels) is 78. Singer Gerry Marsden (Gerry and the Pacemakers) is 78. News anchor Lou Dobbs is 75. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Joe Greene is 74. Actor Gordon Clapp is 72. Actor Harriet Walter is 70. Songwriter Holly Knight is 64. Actor Kevin Sorbo is 62. Christian/jazz singer Cedric Dent is 58. Actor-writer Nia Vardalos is 58. Rock musician Shawn Crahan (AKA Clown) (Slipknot) is 51. Country musician Marty Mitchell is 51. Actor Megan Ward is 51. Singer-musician Marty Cintron (No Mercy) is 49. Contemporary Christian musician Juan DeVevo (Casting Crowns) is 45. Actor Ian Bohen is 44. Actor Justin Bruening is 41. Olympic gold medal gymnast Paul Hamm (hahm) is 38. Actor Erik Stocklin is 38. Actor Spencer Treat Clark is 33. Actor Grey Damon is 33. Actor Kyle Sullivan is 32. Actor Ben Platt is 27.