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POPS Concert is Sunday - Note updated times

The Groton Area High School music department will present its annual POPS Concert on Sunday, April 11th, at 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. in the high school gym. Please note the afternoon show is a time change from previous years. Tickets are five dollars. Advance tickets are available at the High School Office.

The concert will feature performances from the award-winning groups Prismatic Sensations Show Choir as well as many talented soloists, and some smaller ensembles. They will all be performing old and new popular music that you are sure to enjoy! There will be no reserved seating, and seats do fill up quickly, so plan on arriving early to get a great view of the show! The doors will open one hour prior to show time. This concert is one of the highlights of the year for the music department, and you do not want to miss it!

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Three Prominent Women in South Dakota

March was Women's History Month, a time to celebrate the women who helped push South Dakota forward. Here we spotlight three, past and present, who have played prominent roles in politics and law.



Gladys Pyle

Becoming the first woman elected to the South Dakota Legislature was just the beginning of the late Gladys Pyle's accomplishments. When the results of the 1922 primary election showed Pyle (1890-1989) losing by a small number of votes, she requested a recount, which she won. She then went on to win in the general election as a Republican to represent Beadle County in the state House of Representatives. She was re-elected to the House in 1924.

Since Pyle, 201 more women have served as state legislators, according to the South Dakota Legislative Research Council.

In 1926, Pyle was elected South Dakota Secretary of State, the first woman to be elected to a state constitutional office. The next 14 South Dakota Secretaries of State were all women, until Chris Nelson was elected in 2002.

Pyle became the first Republican woman elected to the U.S. Senate and the first South Dakota woman elected to either house in Congress when she won a special election to serve in the U.S. Senate from November 1938 to January 1939, after the death of U.S. Senator Peter Norbeck. The U.S. Senate did not meet during her brief tenure.

Pyle was also the first woman to serve on a state commission, to nominate a presidential candidate at a national political convention, and served on the first jury in the state to include women.

Karen Schreier



Karen Schreier of Sioux Falls was a partner in a law firm when she was nominated by President Bill Clinton to serve as U.S. Attorney for South Dakota. Schreier had to decide whether to stay with the "sure thing" in the law practice or take a risk by accepting the appointment, knowing that the appointment would only last as long as the president was in office. She accepted the appointment, and in 1993 became the first woman to serve as U.S. Attorney in South Dakota. Schreier served in that capacity until she was appointed U.S. District Judge of the United States District Court for the District of South Dakota in 1999, the first female appointed by a U.S. President to serve as a federal judge. She served as the chief judge of the district court from 2006 to 2013, and continues to serve as a U.S. District Judge.

"When I graduated from law school, there were very few female lawyers who were practicing law in South Dakota," Schreier said. "There was only one female state circuit judge, no female judges on the South Dakota Supreme Court or federal district court, and no female states attorneys. Without seeing a female in those roles, it was hard to imagine ever being selected to serve in either role. I feel very fortunate to have been selected to serve in both of these roles."

Schreier has hired almost 30 law clerks during her time as a judge. The law clerks are recent law school graduates, and Schreier becomes a mentor to them during the two years they work for her before going into the practice of law.

"Judge Schreier was 'leaning in' before it was trendy for women to do so, and she's been a daily example

SOUTH DAKOTA

HISTORY & HERITAGE

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for me that there's no substitution for hard work," said Jennifer Mammenga of Sioux Falls. As Assistant U.S. Attorney, Mammenga has multiple hearings each week in Schreier's courtroom and has tried many cases before her.

Jennifer Mammenga



Jennifer Mammenga started her legal career in 2010 as an assistant attorney general in the South Dakota Attorney General's office. She began work in 2016 as an Assistant United States Attorney in the District of South Dakota Office of the United States Attorney and currently serves as the district's opioid coordinator. She received a regional award for her work prosecuting drug crimes in 2016.

Mammenga sees more women becoming attorneys and believes it is a great career for women. Of the 2,686 currently licensed active attorneys in South Dakota, approximately 32 percent are women, according to the State Bar of South Dakota.

"We have so many fantastic female judges and attorneys in South Dakota who are willing to mentor younger female attorneys as they are coming up," she said. "The list of the women in the legal profession who have helped shape my career is long, and I owe them all much gratitude for the trails they blazed and examples they have set for me."

Her work as a prosecutor has allowed Mammenga to have both an interesting career and her family.

"I absolutely love what I do at the U.S. Attorney's Office and would be happy to continue in this role as long as they will let me! I have a passion for public service and community safety, and I hope that my legal career will continue to be a reflection of those values," Mammenga said.

This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at www.sdhsf.org. Contact us at info@sdhsf.org to submit a story idea.

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#407 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I've seen this before, three times. First there are increases in cases, growing over a period of weeks. Lagging that by one to two weeks we see hospitalizations swell. And then another couple of weeks later, the deaths start. We're in the period before the deaths. Each time when the worst is over, we're at a new higher plateau, accepting as pretty good numbers of cases and deaths that, just a few weeks or months ago, we found horrifying. The other times I saw this were March, 2020; June, 2020, and September/October, 2020. You know what followed every single time, right? I have a bad, bad feeling about this.

There were 54,800 new cases reported today. This has been rising for about four weeks. We're at 30,784,900 total cases in the US in this pandemic, some 02% more than yesterday's total. Hospitalizations are down slightly from yesterday's holiday report at 40,823. This has been rising from a most recent low for about a week, right on schedule following on the increase in cases. Deaths, on the other hand, are down—as expected. Give it another week, although I expect this might not rise commensurate with what we've seen in the past because we have so many of our old and vulnerable vaccinated; at least this should blunt the worst of the effects. We'll know soon. Today, 371 deaths were reported, which is a remarkably low number. This is probably still holiday weekend effect, but I want to point out that our seven-day average hasn't been this low since late October/early November. Small blessings, but we'll take it. Total deaths are up to 554,929; this is 0.07% above yesterday's total.

On April 5, 2020, one year ago today, we were at 336,776 cases, which represented a drastic slow-down in rate of increase. We'd been posting increases of 28 percent and more; this was only 8.2 percent. New York was still the epicenter with New Jersey close behind; Louisiana was gaining followed by Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Michigan; the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania were coming up behind. We had 38 states below 50 daily new cases per 100,000 residents with positivity rates below 5 percent, so only a dozen were carrying nearly all of the load. The New York metro area, New Jersey, Louisiana, and Washington were all increasing at a rate faster than Italy and Spain, so even though we were slowing down, we weren't out of the woods yet. (Of course, we now know just how out-of-the-woods we weren't; but back then, there was plenty of hope.) We were beginning to see enough data to recognize disproportionate cases in communities of color in the US. Deaths were up to 9655, still setting a new record every day.

A hydroxychloroquine clinical trial was finally getting underway in Detroit. The VA opened beds to civilians to ease the strain on civilian hospitals. The CDC released instructions for making cloth face masks, and folks who sew set to work. The Department of Defense issued regulations requiring mask-wearing on its property around the world, excluding only a service member's personal residence on military property. A tiger at the Bronx Zoo was diagnosed with Covid-19, and we speculated on the relationship between this virus and domestic animals. With what Christians call Holy Week underway, churches in many states defied public health orders to hold special pre-Easter superspreader events, even before that word had entered the common parlance; as it turns out, churches had quite a lot to do with making the concept famous. Death Valley National Park was closed. Tests, personal protective equipment, and ventilators were all in short supply. New Orleans had run out of places to put the bodies of the deceased.

There had been more than 1.2 million cases and 68,000 deaths worldwide. Cases and deaths were finally declining in Italy and Spain. Boris Johnson, British Prime Minister was hospitalized with Covid-19.

The CDC has, at long last, updated its recommendations for cleaning surfaces. We've known approximately forever that soap and water kill this virus on surfaces and that spread via fomites (objects) is a very limited proposition; still we're months and months into the thing before they've acknowledged this. The new guidance says regular cleaning with soap and water is sufficient for routine situations; disinfection is needed only when there has been a suspected or confirmed case within the past 24 hours. Handwashing is, of course, still recommended.

There are three additional federally-run mass vaccination sites going into operation. These will be in South Carolina, Colorado, and Minnesota and bring the total of federal mass vaccination sites to 28. All will be in areas where the population is considered to be at high risk and underserved.

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One thing we're still good at in this country is throwing a good superspreader event. Our most recent demonstration of our skills in this regard is a bar opening in Illinois held indoors with no windows open, poor masking, and little physical distancing. The count is currently 46 cases, one hospitalization, and a school closure affecting 650 children, so it must have been quite a good party. The folks who were actually at the bar had identified 71 close contacts, two of whom were students engaged in sports at the local school who then exposed their teams at indoor practices and their classmates at school. Once enough school staff got sick, the school had to close for a couple of weeks. You can holler all you want about opening schools; if you have to have big bar parties, the virus is going to make you pay. The average virus hasn't read the Constitution about your rights and all. There were actually three cases in nursing home residents; only one required hospitalization. Given several people refused to cooperate with contact tracers, the actual reach of the event has almost certainly been underestimated. Even so, in a bar rated for 100 occupants, this is pretty impressive work.

There's a letter published in JAMA Pediatrics today describing the outcome of a new modeling project. Here's the takeaway: "The number of children experiencing a parent dying of Covid-19 is staggering, with an estimated 37,300 to 43,000 already affected. Black children are disproportionately affected, comprising only 14% of children in the US but 20% of those losing a parent to Covid-19." They estimate a 17.5 to 20.2 percent increase in parental bereavement, not even including nonparental primary caregivers. This tracks pretty well with the preliminary cause-of-death findings the CCD released recently which showed a 15 percent increase in deaths. A quarter of these children are under the age of 10, and a fair proportion of them have also lost grandparents; so the problems of loss and grief, as well as finding caretakers are compounded for many.

There was lots of Easter travel over the weekend. The TSA has yesterday as our second-busiest day since the pandemic began. Six million have flown since Thursday. I would expect some increase in cases around family gatherings; the travel should exacerbate that. We'll give it one to two weeks to show up fully in the numbers. I don't think the magnitude of the effect will be as great as we saw from travel over the winter holidays because we have so many people vaccinated; but we don't have enough vaccinated to wipe out the holiday effect either. Mark your calendars: Next big opportunity for spread will be Memorial Day. That's May 31: Maybe we can squeeze in a few more funerals before we clean this thing up.

Something we should mention with respect to this latest wave of new infections: It is largely driven by a new variant, mostly B.1.1.7, which we know is far more easily transmissible than the other dominant variant, D614G. In addition to this higher transmissibility, we are also seeing a demographic shift to a younger age group. Some of this is undoubtedly due to the success we've had vaccinating older Americans; over 75 percent of over-65s have received at least one dose of vaccine. It is looking, though, like B.1.1.7, which we have reason to believe is also more lethal, is better at infecting young people too. Cases and hospitalizations have risen for four consecutive weeks, and the big increases seem to be in people in their 30s and 40s; even children are turning up infected in larger numbers. It's not just diagnosed cases either: In various locations around the country, hospitalizations in people under 40 and under 50 are up by 25 to almost 50 percent while hospitalizations of older people are up less than 10 percent. Many of the outbreaks are associated with schools and sports activities. Some of the increase in incidence among young people may be associated with school reopenings; but the increased hospitalizations speak to the likelihood that we have something more sinister going on as well.

We know how to blunt this increase: doubling down on all the precautions we've been talking about throughout the pandemic. So masking, distancing, staying home are still viable strategies, ones we're going to have to practice if we want this thing to end sooner. Of course, I don't think we'll actually do that, but I thought I might as well mention it. You know, in case folks have had enough.

Amidst the troubled rollout of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe, as well as the company's plans to bring it as a candidate to the FDA—likely this week, it's easy to forget there are other candidates in the pipeline. One in phase 3 trials in the US and Mexico and expecting data this month is Novavax. We haven't been hearing a lot of news from this trial—which at this point actually feels like something of a blessing—so we'll have to see what we have when the early readouts are available. The vaccines already

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in the news use very different platforms, so I thought it would be helpful to discuss this one a bit tonight.

As I think we're all aware at this stage of the game, the first two vaccines to receive emergency use authorization (EUA) in this country, the one from Moderna and the one from Pfizer/BioNTech, are mRNA vaccines. They contain a short piece of viral RNA which codes for the spike (S) protein of the virus. When that RNA gets into our cells, it acts as a template for our cell to make viral S protein, which then elicits an immune response. That response is the point of giving vaccine in the first place; it leaves us prepared to deal with the actual virus should we later encounter it. Then the next two candidates to hit the news, the already authorized Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine and the troubled Oxford/AstraZeneca candidate are adenovirus-vectored DNA vaccines. What happens here is that a harmless and nonreplicating version of an adenovirus, a kind of cold virus, is used as a vector, or carrier, of genetic material. The adenovirus has a double-stranded piece of viral DNA coding for the S protein engineered into it. Because the DNA, a tougher chemical to begin with, is also all tucked away inside its protective adenovirus vector, it is less fragile than the more or less naked nucleic acid in the mRNA vaccines; that makes this vaccine easier to store and transport—no super-cold storage required. Once injected, the vaccine's adenovirus effects entry to host cells, then makes its way to the cell's nucleus where it discharges its DNA payload. That gene gets read by the cell and used to make a template for viral S protein production; and then our immune system is stimulated by the presence of that foreign protein to produce an immune response.

This Novavax candidate is a different breed of cat entirely—no nucleic acid at all. It is called a protein subunit vaccine. Believe it or not, the primary focus of interest is still that same class of viral S proteins; however, this vaccine is produced in a very different way, although it starts, once again, with the genetic sequence for the S protein. This time the gene was engineered into a baculovirus, one of a family of viruses that infect insects. This particular virus was used to infect cultures of moth cells (armyworm moth, if you're interested), which the scientists then use as sort of a living protein factory. The infected moth cells replicate the virus, just like infected host cells in any viral infection; and part of that replication process is the production of S proteins. We scoop up the S protein made by the moth cells and tuck it into a bubble about the size of a coronavirus. That's what goes into this vaccine. (And if you're not simply gobsmacked at the ingenuity of these vaccine researchers, then I guess nothing at all impresses you.) Now, don't misunderstand: This virus-sized bubble is not a virus, doesn't have most of the parts, can't infect you, can't replicate; but to your cells it looks like the sort of thing they ought to be paying attention to—having an immune response to. And that's just what happens. Now this vaccine candidate is not talking your cells into producing proteins themselves on an ongoing basis to extend and increase the immune response; that means it has to rely on the fixed supply of protein injected at the start for its entire antigenic stimulus. For that reason, the vaccine contains an adjuvant, a chemical intended to increase and prolong the immune response to these proteins. (If you need a refresher on adjuvants—something that's likely to come up again, see my Update #166 posted August 7 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3846639405352437>. And if you're one of those people who freaks out when you hear about adjuvants—because aluminum!!!—this adjuvant is a saponin, which is not at all the same thing, so stand down please.)

Phase 3 results for a UK trial of the Novavax candidate were released a few weeks ago, and so we have from those a hint of what to expect in the US-Mexico trial. In that trial, the efficacy in preventing mild, moderate, and severe disease was 89.7 percent. This trial, because of its timing and location, included many cases of B.1.1.7, so we know what we have there as well and B.1.1.7 didn't appear to give it even a hiccup. It did have reduced efficacy against mild, moderate, and severe disease in a small South African trial against B.1.351, but importantly, even in South Africa where B.1.351 is the flavor of the month, the protection against hospitalization and death was 100 percent—as in no one was hospitalized or died. No one. The safety profile has looked good through those trials as well. This is a two-dose vaccine with a prime-boost interval of 21 days. It seems likely we'll have another contributor to our efforts within a few months. As always, we have a whole world to protect since none of us is safe until all of us are safe; so more vaccines is better. I hope it goes well for this one.

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The Yazidis are an ethnic subgroup who have lived in the autonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq, as well as parts of Turkey, Armenia, and Syria. Distinguished from Kurds and other surrounding peoples by their religion which is non-Islamic, they are a distinct minority numbering, depending on who you ask between 70,000 and 500,000 in Iraq. They've been subjected to repeated genocides throughout their history and were targeted by Saddam Hussein for forcible relocation and the destruction of many of their villages during his years in power. In 2014, they were once again forced from their villages by the fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as they stormed through in their attempt to establish their ill-fated Caliphate. Several tens of thousands of Yazidi who had fled the invaders were trapped by ISIL fighters and facing starvation on Mount Sinjar; thousands died or were slaughtered. It took a significant humanitarian effort to keep the rest of them alive and to eventually establish a corridor through which Kurdish soldiers could rescue them to safety.

There are probably only a few hundred thousand Yazidis left in the world today; the pressures on this population have been crushing. Around 14,000 of them are still living in a refugee camp in northern Iraq today. Most of the children in the camp have no memory of their home; many of them were born in the camps. Living in rows of tents connected by dirt roads, they once again face an utterly disrupted life. Thousands of them lost family members and friends; some of them watched the slaughter; more thousands are simply missing. Women, in particular, were subjected to sexual violence that is simply incomprehensible to those of us who have lived relatively safe and secure lives. But after the trauma of seeing their villages destroyed, their men shot, and their women and children raped and enslaved, they are at least safe here. Their culture is maybe not so safe; separated from the mountain they consider sacred and the holy sites which are directly connected to their experience of their religion. Their lands are highly sought after by various competing interests, and so it isn't safe to go home yet. It may never be safe again. So their families are scattered throughout Europe as people receive asylum in various countries. This fragile culture is seriously endangered because there are few written records of any kind: Nearly the entire history and religion of this group is contained in their music. No books, no sacred texts, no scrolls: The entire culture rests on an oral tradition. One member of this minority who is studying music at the University of Dohuk now told NPR, "This folk music, it's also a kind of affiliation of our religion. There are special songs only the Yazidis sing." Some songs are for religious festivals, some are historical, some are for entertainment. And as the people of a village are dispersed to other countries for permanent resettlement, this oral tradition is as threatened as their family groups, their historical and cultural record with it.

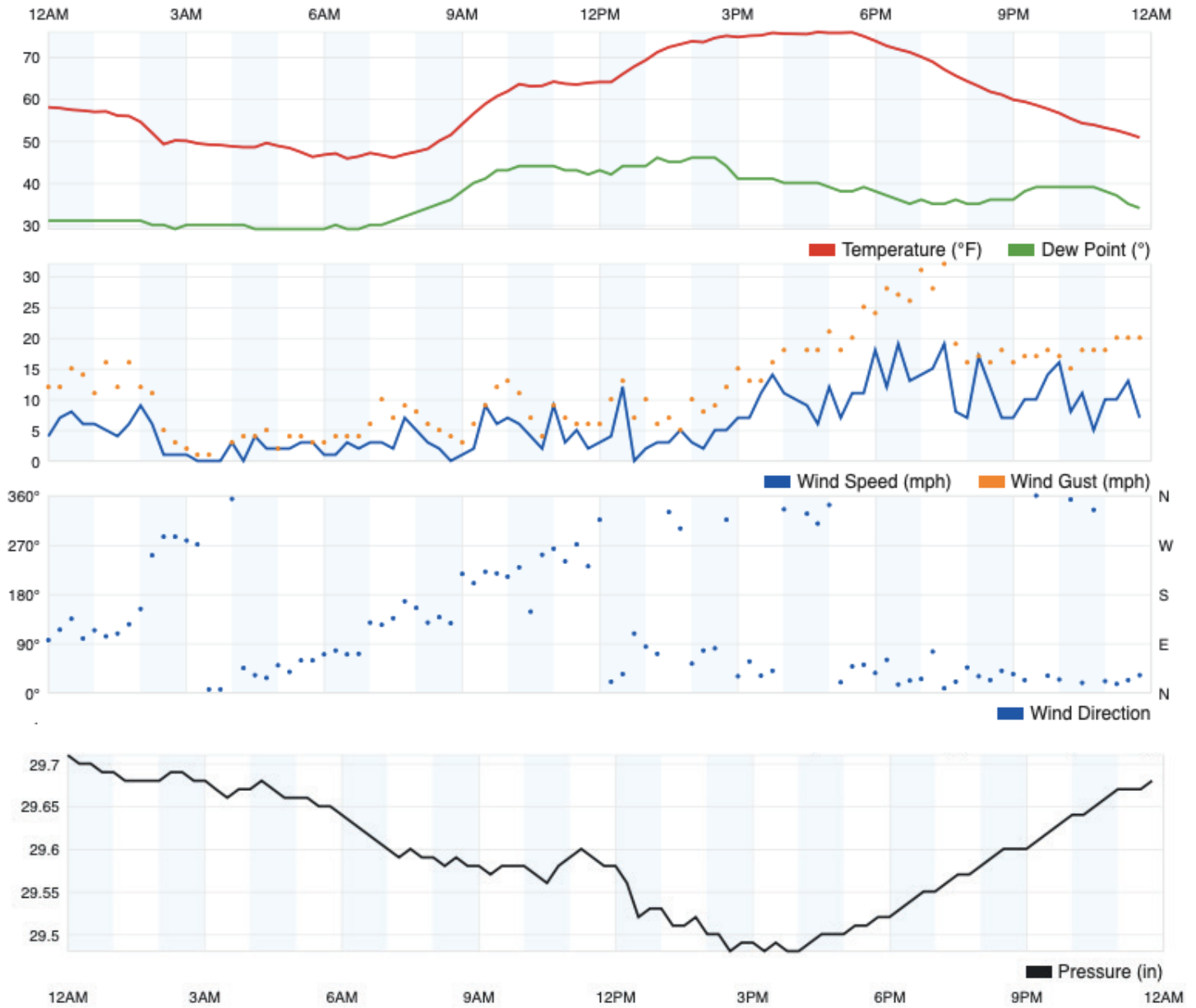
There is, however, interest in preserving it. Young people are showing an interest in their heritage. The AMAR Foundation, a British charity has been busy recording Yazidi folk songs and sacred music, archiving these recordings. And AMAR is providing support to an effort in the camps, a women's group called the Ashti (Peace) Choir. That effort was spearheaded by a 22-year-old named Rana Sulaiman Halo. Her family is a family of musicians, and she came to see the choir as a way for women, especially those who were kidnapped and enslaved and tortured, to deal with the trauma of their losses, their captivity, and their present lives in the camps. The choir provides music therapy to members who have been subjected to sexual violence. And they seek to preserve their heritage in song. Young people are learning the music again in villages as well as the camps. People are using the music to heal themselves and their communities. Some families still can't bear to hear the music, but one choir member says singing is an act of resistance. "We are here to send a message to ISIS that we will never break." This kind of resilience after everything these individuals making the music have suffered shames those of us who are sitting around our living rooms bitching because our concert was postponed. Let's scale that back, OK?

Be well. We'll talk again.

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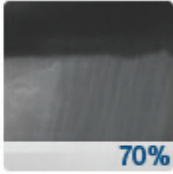
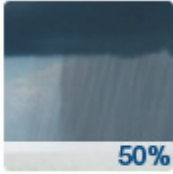
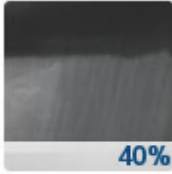

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Breezy. Mostly Cloudy then Showers Likely	Showers Likely	Chance Showers and Breezy	Chance Showers	Slight Chance Showers
High: 53 °F	Low: 38 °F	High: 51 °F	Low: 39 °F	High: 56 °F

Rainy and Cooler

 Today: Rain and Isolated Tstorms Spreading North and East. Breezy.
Highs: Mid 40s to Upper 50s

 Wednesday: Rain. Breezy.
Highs: Mid 40s to Upper 50s

 Thursday: Rain in the east. Breezy.

Rain and a few thunderstorms will spread north and east through the day today. Rain will be slow to exit, lingering across eastern SD and west central MN into Thursday.

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Today in Weather History

April 6, 1959: Dust storms impacted much of the state of South Dakota beginning on the 6th and on into the 7th. The preceding drought period had left a little moisture in the soil, so the fall-plowed fields in exposed locations eroded severely. Strong winds on the 6th and 7th lifted the loose soil, creating areas of blowing dust. In the localities, visibility was less than a quarter mile for short periods. Some observers stated that it was the worst dust event since the 1930s.

April 6, 2006: Severe thunderstorms the morning of the 6th produced large hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter near Miller in Hand County. Later on, heavy rains of 3 to 6 inches fell causing flash flooding across parts of Spink, Clark, and Day counties. Many county and township roads were flooded with several of the roads damaged or thoroughly washed out. Areas around Frankfort, Doland, Turton, Conde, Crandall, Raymond, Butler and Bristol were most affected. Many roads were closed. Also, several basements were flooded, and sewers were backed up.

April 6, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across South Dakota spread heavy snow of 6 to 15 inches across much of central, north central, and northeast South Dakota. Also, strong winds gusting to 25 to 40 mph caused some blowing and drifting snow. Many activities were canceled and roads became treacherous. Many vehicles went into the ditch, and several accidents also occurred. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Mission Ridge, Isabel, Mellette, and Britton, 7 inches at Faulkton, Andover, Columbia, Timber Lake, and Eureka, 8 inches at Bath, Selby, Mobridge, and Leola, 9 inches at Hosmer, 10 inches at Ipswich, 11 inches at Mound City, and 6 miles east of Hayes. Locations with a foot or more of snow included 12 inches at Roscoe and Elm Lake, 13 inches at Eagle Butte, Onaka, and 23 miles north of Highmore, and 15 inches at Bowdle.

1909: American explorer Robert Peary and five others reached what they determined to be the North Pole on this day. Historical analysis suggests he fell a few miles short of achieving his goal. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History.com.

1973: On this date through the 8th, a major spring snowstorm dumped 11.6 inches of snow across Denver, Colorado. Most of the heavy wet snow of 10.1 inches fell on the 7th when temperatures remained in the 20s. The low temperature of 5 degrees on the 8th was a new record low for the date and the lowest for so late in the season.

2007: In Cleveland, Ohio on the 6th to the 9th:

The opening-season series between the Indians and Minnesota Twins is wiped out by a snowstorm and a cold snap. The Indians led 4-0 when their home opener Friday on the 6th was called off by umpires because of heavy snow. The grounds crew who tried to make the field playable with backpack blowers and brooms spent more time on the field than the players during nearly three hours of stoppages. About a foot of snow remained on the ground Monday afternoon the 9th.

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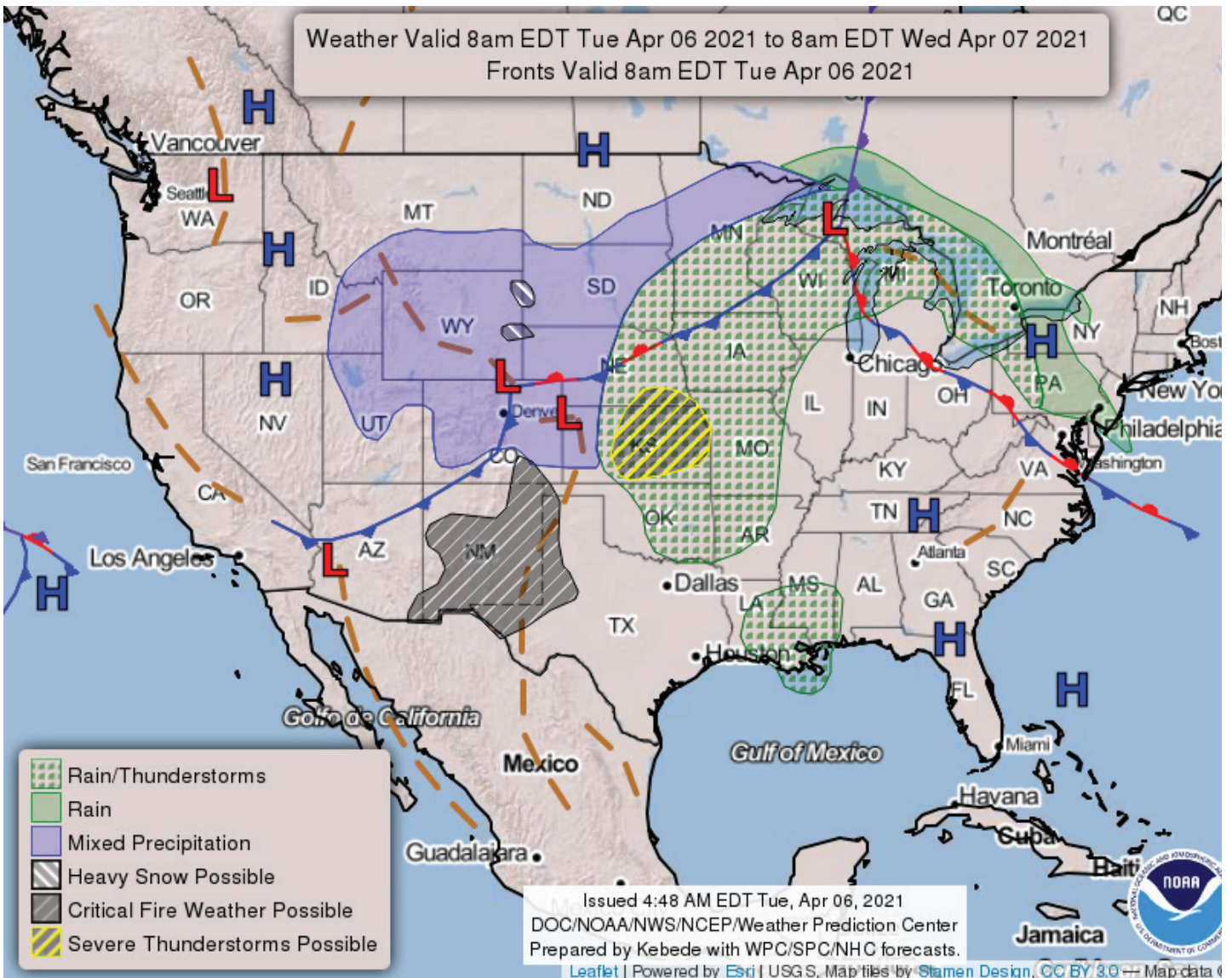
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 3:40 PM
Low Temp: 46 °F at 6:27 AM
Wind: 28 mph at 6:05 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 85° in 1991
Record Low: 5° in 2018
Average High: 52°F
Average Low: 28°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 1.38
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.36
Average Precip to date: 2.40
Precip Year to Date: 0.54
Sunset Tonight: 8:09 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:02 a.m.



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UNCEASING PRAISE

Sunday evenings were always a special time in our small church in Lorain, Ohio. After singing a few hymns, Pastor Stanley would walk to the pulpit and ask, "Who would like to stand up tonight and thank the Lord publicly for His goodness and blessings during the last week?" We would all wait anxiously to hear what God had "been doing" since last Sunday evening. It was a time of sharing and rejoicing. We were always happy when someone was healed or helped. God got all the credit but we all rejoiced with the one whom He had honored. We believed that when we asked, God would answer. And when He answered, we all enjoyed the results and gave thanks together.

God always heard and answered David's prayer. But the nature of his prayers or the problems he was facing is not always defined. However, in his concluding remarks, he writes of God being "delighted in the well-being of His servant." Well-being includes everything and anything that concerns us. Big or little, large or small. Whatever concerns us concerned God first because His goodness and grace have no limit. They exceed our imagination, and unfortunately, in most instances, our faith.

For David, when God answered his prayers, it was the beginning of an important event in his life. He did not go quietly to his room and thank God by himself. No! He insisted on sharing his joy with others and said, "Come and join me. Let those who are happy with God's blessings on me rejoice with me – all day!" What a way to grow.

After God answers our prayers, let's get in a group and give Him a "shout!" Amen?

Prayer: Help us, Father, to sing and shout when we see Your goodness and grace at work in our lives. May we praise You loudly and publicly! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But give great joy to those who came to my defense. Let them continually say, "Great is the Lord, who delights in blessing his servant with peace!" Psalm 35:27

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2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
- 03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS
- 06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
- 06/19/2021 Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon
- 07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
- 07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
- 08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
- 09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

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News from the  Associated Press

South Dakota-South Dakota State game nixed due to COVID-19

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — The Missouri Valley Football Conference says the game scheduled Saturday between South Dakota and South Dakota State has been canceled due to the coronavirus.

Conference officials said the move was necessary because of positive COVID-19 test results and subsequent contact tracing among South Dakota's players, coaches, managers and staff.

The game that was set to be played in Brookings cannot be rescheduled because the teams do not share any future open weekends.

Several conference games have either been scratched or rescheduled because of the virus.

Noem gets vaccine, marks opening of vaccine eligibility

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem marked the occasion of the state opening vaccines to adults 16 and older Monday by receiving her first dose of the vaccine.

The governor, who has taken a mostly hands-off approach to restrictions during the pandemic, has encouraged people to get the vaccine, saying she is "trusting people to do the right thing."

Health officials reported that 46% of the state's population has received one dose of a vaccine. South Dakota also has one of the nation's highest rates of people fully vaccinated — about 25% of the population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The rolling average number of daily new infections has also decreased by about 10% over the last two weeks. However, health officials have warned that new variants of the virus spread infections more easily.

The Department of Health reported 156 new cases Monday and tracked 2,485 active infections statewide. Hospitalizations dropped to 88, and no new deaths were reported. The state's 1,938 COVID-19 related deaths during the pandemic mark the nation's eighth-highest rate of deaths per capita.

E. Carolina primed to make another run at ending CWS drought

By ERIC OLSON AP Sports Writer

East Carolina continues to show it's one of the most complete teams in college baseball, going 5-0 last week with a four-game sweep of Cincinnati in its American Athletic Conference opening series.

The Pirates have been consistent winners under seventh-year coach Cliff Godwin. They came up just short of a College World Series appearance in 2016, had 44- and 47-win seasons in 2018-19 and were 13-4 when the pandemic shut down the season last year.

East Carolina is 22-5 going into this week's series against Memphis, the program's best start since 2009.

"We said from the beginning, we're as good as any team we've ever had here on paper," Godwin said Monday. "But as you know, paper doesn't mean anything. Our guys, with a hiccup here and there, are showing up with great intent and energy and executing whatever our plan is for that day. If we continue to do that, I think we'll be in good shape."

East Carolina was ranked as high as No. 8 in the polls this week after five straight home wins. The week started with an 11-10 walk-off win over North Carolina — avenging an 8-1 loss in Chapel Hill on March 23 — and ended with four straight against Cincinnati.

The Pirates batted .352 in the five games, with five homers and nine doubles. Against Cincinnati, the bullpen combined for 15 shutout innings with 25 strikeouts, and the defense was strong throughout.

East Carolina has five everyday players batting at least .309, and the team average of .297 ranks in the top 20. Connor Norby is batting .438 with eight homers and 28 RBIs, and Seth Cadell has nine homers and 32 RBIs.

Freshman left-hander Carson Whisenhunt is 4-0 in six starts, Jake Kuchmaner has a better than 10-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio, freshman C.J. Mayhue is 2-1 with five saves and the staff is among the national

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leaders with 11.1 strikeouts per nine innings.

The lineup should get a boost this week with the return of right fielder Lane Hoover, an offensive catalyst who was injured in an outfield collision Feb. 27.

The Pirates were one hit away from winning their super regional at Texas Tech five years ago and reaching the College World Series for the first time. They have the nation's longest drought of 30 NCAA regional appearances without making the CWS.

"We're not going to be judged if we make it to Omaha or not," Godwin said, "because no team here has gotten there. That's where we all want to go, and we all want to compete for a national championship. If we develop the young men in our program to the best of our ability, us getting to the College World Series will take care of itself."

IN THE POLLS

Vanderbilt (23-3) got two more dominant starts from Kumar Rocker and Jack Leiter in a three-game sweep of LSU and remained No. 1 in the D1Baseball.com and Collegiate Baseball newspaper rankings.

Arkansas (22-4) is No. 1 by Baseball America and No. 2 by D1Baseball and Collegiate Baseball.

Mississippi (21-6) is No. 3 by D1Baseball and Baseball America, and Texas (20-8) is No. 3 by Collegiate Baseball.

BAIER BLASTS AWAY

Sam Baier of Division II Augustana (South Dakota) hit seven home runs in a doubleheader against Bemidji (Minnesota) State on Friday.

The fifth-year senior from Springfield, Minnesota, in the opener became the 25th player in NCAA history to hit four homers in a game. He went deep three more times in the nightcap, and the Vikings finished the 21-0 and 24-0 wins with 15 homers.

Baier, the Vikings' shortstop and cleanup hitter, went 11 for 15 with 10 runs, 16 RBIs and two doubles in addition to the seven homers in the three-game series. His season batting average went from .311 to .417, and he now has 18 homers in 206 career games.

K IS THE WAY FOR LONSWAY

Ohio State lefty Seth Lonsway struck out a career-high 17 and allowed two hits in a seven-inning 6-0 win over Indiana on Saturday. Buckeyes pitchers combined for 11 more strikeouts in a 5-2 win in the second game of the doubleheader. The Buckeyes posted a four-game sweep against the Hoosiers, who had entered the weekend leading the Big Ten.

BIG BOUNCE-BACK

Kansas State rebounded from a 17-1 loss in the opener to take two of three games from a top-five Texas Tech team.

Jordan Wicks, the sophomore lefty who came into the season as a projected first-round draft pick, had his second straight tough outing for the Wildcats. He worked out of trouble the first two innings, then gave up back-to-back homers in the third and left after five innings having allowed five runs.

The Wildcats came back to win 7-2 and 10-4, getting a combined 23 hits and walking 11 times.

Indications SD tourist season shaping up to be a strong one

PIERRE undefined

South Dakota tourism officials there are indications the summer tourist season is shaping up to be a strong one following a year of limited travel due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Traffic on the state's tourism website is "through the roof" and tracking 55% ahead of last year, according to Tourism Secretary Jim Hagen.

In addition, the Department of Tourism's vacation guide has been downloaded at record numbers, electronic newsletter subscriptions are up 29% and referrals from tourism partners have increased 40% this year, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Tourism is one of South Dakota's top industries and generated about \$3 billion in spending last year, down from a record \$4 billion in 2019. Hagen says the industry employs about 55,000 workers and brings

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more than a billion into their households.

Canyon Lake Resort in Rapid City is experiencing more activity this spring than ever before, according to owner Mike Derby.

"People are ready to come to the Black Hills. We're all booked up, and we're always very full during the summer," he said.

Canyon Lake Resort is on the western shore of Canyon Lake and has easy access to trails and walking and bike paths as well as lakes and camping areas.

"The biggest growth is in outdoor adventure. There's really becoming a big business for tourism in the Black Hills," Derby said.

The state had a record-breaking 14 million visitors in 2019, according to tourism officials.

Wildfire in Theodore Roosevelt National Park triples in size

MEDORA, N.D. (AP) — Firefighters worked Monday to further contain a wildfire in Theodore Roosevelt National Park that tripled in size on Easter, according to the North Dakota Forest Service.

Crews worked through the night in the park's North Unit, where the fire threatens some park staff housing, maintenance buildings and the CCC Campground, according to the Forest Service's acting outreach and education manager, Beth Hill.

The North Unit remained closed Monday, Hill said. High winds and dangerously dry conditions fueled the fire Sunday, when it grew to nearly 4.7 square miles (12 square kilometers) and was 30% contained.

"This fire is particularly difficult because of the rough, inaccessible terrain," Hill said.

Two air tankers were brought in from South Dakota over the weekend to help.

In the park's South Unit — where residents of the small tourist town of Medora were evacuated last week — the outlook is better. Firefighters were working to completely extinguish that fire Monday or Tuesday, according to Hill. No structural damage was reported in that fire, which burned 3.5 square miles (9 square kilometers).

Along with a red flag warning for critical fire weather conditions in the western half of North Dakota, record high temperatures in the 70s and 80s were reported over the weekend.

Wildfires have burned more than nearly 47 square miles (121 square kilometers) in North Dakota already this spring, compared with fewer than 15.6 square miles (40 square kilometers) in all of last year.

Nearly all counties have implemented some form of outdoors burning restrictions. All counties on Sunday were either in the "high" or "very high" fire danger category. Gov. Doug Burgum has warned that the state is headed into a "tough fire season."

Israeli president picks Netanyahu to try and form government

By LAURIE KELLMAN and ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's president on Tuesday handed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the difficult task of trying to form a government from the country's splintered parliament, giving the embattled leader a chance to prolong his lengthy term in office while on trial for corruption charges.

In his announcement, President Reuven Rivlin acknowledged that no party leader had the necessary support to form a majority coalition in the 120-seat Knesset. He also noted that many believe Netanyahu is unfit to serve in light of his legal problems.

Nonetheless, Rivlin said that there was nothing in the law preventing Netanyahu from serving as prime minister. After consulting with the 13 parties in the newly elected parliament, Rivlin said that Netanyahu had the best chance of any candidate of forming a new government.

"No candidate has a realistic chance of forming a government that will have the confidence of the Knesset," Rivlin said. But, he added, Netanyahu has a "slightly higher chance" of being able to.

"I have decided to entrust him with the task," Rivlin said from Jerusalem. Rivlin added that the choice was "not an easy decision on a moral and ethical basis."

With that, Rivlin nudged forward the twin dramas over the country's future and Netanyahu's fate, giving

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Israel's longest-serving premier a fresh chance to try to salvage his career. Netanyahu now has up to six weeks to try to cobble together a coalition during his trial.

Early reactions from the premier's sworn rivals highlighted the difficult road ahead.

Yair Lapid, leader of the party that won the second-highest number of seats, acknowledged that the law left Rivlin "no choice," but in the same tweet denounced the development as "a shameful disgrace that tarnishes Israel."

A court ruling could be months or even years away. The proceedings are expected to take place up to three days a week, an embarrassing and time-consuming distraction that will shadow Netanyahu's appeals to his rivals.

Netanyahu holds the most support — 52 seats — in Israel's Knesset. But that is still short of a 61-seat majority. He is likely to use his powers of persuasion to try to lure a number of opponents, including a number of former close aides who have vowed never to serve under him again, with generous offers of powerful government ministries or legislative committees.

Parties representing 45 members supported Yair Lapid, while Yamina, with seven seats, nominated its own leader, Naftali Bennett. Three parties holding a total of 16 seats made no recommendation.

Rivlin's decision merges questions of Netanyahu's legal and political future in what's perhaps the starkest political challenge of his career.

In court, he faces fraud, breach of trust and bribery charges in three separate cases. Proceedings resumed Tuesday, though the premier was not expected to appear in court.

A key witness on Monday cast Netanyahu as an image-obsessed leader who forced a prominent news site to help his family and smear his opponents.

Netanyahu denies all charges and in an nationally televised address accused prosecutors of persecuting him in an effort to drive him out of office.

"This is what a coup attempt looks like," he said.

Monday's court session focused on the most serious case against Netanyahu — in which he is accused of promoting regulations that delivered hundreds of millions of dollars of profits to the Bezeq telecom company in exchange for positive coverage on the firm's popular news site, Walla.

Ilan Yeshua, Walla's former chief editor, described a system in which Bezeq's owners, Shaul and Iris Elovitch, repeatedly pressured him to publish favorable things about Netanyahu and smear the prime minister's rivals.

The explanation he was given by the couple? "That's what the prime minister wanted," he said.

EXPLAINER: Why is North Korea skipping the Tokyo Olympics?

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea, citing the coronavirus, has become the world's first country to drop out of the Tokyo Olympics.

It's true that the North is extremely sensitive about COVID-19, knowing that a widespread outbreak in a country with an already battered health system could be disaster.

But North Korea also has previously used big sporting events to set up diplomacy with the United States meant to win it much-needed sanctions relief in return for nuclear disarmament pledges. Some see pulling out of the Olympics as the North sending Washington a message.

Here's a look at the North Korean decision and what it might mean.

LEGITIMATE VIRUS FEARS

A state-run website said Tuesday that North Korea's Olympic Committee has decided not to take part in the Tokyo Games slated to begin in July "to protect players from the world public health crisis caused by COVID-19."

North Korea has previously boycotted Olympics and other international sports events for political reasons or failed to appear when none of its athletes or teams qualified. But this is the first time North Korea has

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pulled out of a major international sports event citing an infectious disease, according to Seoul's Unification Ministry.

Pyongyang has developed a reputation for withdrawing from talks with Seoul and Washington before returning at the last minute to boost its bargaining power. But given that the country has been on high alert over COVID-19, experts say there is little chance that it will reverse its Olympics decision.

North Korea has shown "a coronavirus-related neurosis since it declared an emergency anti-virus system in January last year," said Park Won Gon, a professor of North Korea studies at Seoul's Ewha Womans University.

Park said it's highly unlikely that North Korea will secure enough vaccines for its 26 million people or report major progress in its anti-virus fight by July.

North Korean officials know how disastrous a major virus outbreak would be in a nation with public healthcare infrastructure that has been in shambles for decades. North Korea has so far taken some of the world's most draconian anti-virus steps, including a 15-month-long closure of its international borders and the departure of foreign nationals.

North Korea still officially claims to be coronavirus free, an assertion many foreign experts dispute.

North Korea's decision to skip the Olympics shows that it "thinks contact with foreigners is the most dangerous thing now," said Seo Yu-Seok at the Seoul-based Institute of North Korean Studies.

A MESSAGE FOR WASHINGTON

The North Korean announcement, three months before the Games begin, could signal that Pyongyang is rejecting a repeated push by Seoul to use the Olympics to create a mood for dialogue. It could also show a determination to boost pressure on the new administration of U.S. President Joe Biden.

North Korea is sending the message that it wants to deal directly with the U.S. now rather than using the Olympics as a venue to reach out to Washington for talks, said Kwak Gil Sup, head of One Korea Center, a website specializing in North Korea affairs.

Now-deadlocked nuclear talks between Pyongyang and Washington began in 2018 after a reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula following North Korea's participation in the Pyeongchang Winter Games in the South earlier that year.

During those Olympics, athletes from the Koreas marched together under a single unification flag during the opening ceremony and formed the Koreas' first-ever joint team in women's ice hockey. Kim Yo Jong, the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, became the first member of the North's ruling family to visit South Korea since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

There's been little progress in nuclear talks the past two years. North Korea recently fired two ballistic missiles into the sea in the first such weapons tests in a year. Kim Yo Jong has warned Washington not to "cause a stink" and called South Korea's president "a parrot raised by America."

Experts say North Korea eventually wants talks with the Biden administration to win sanctions relief and achieve better ties because its economy has been devastated by the pandemic, U.S.-led sanctions and natural disasters last year.

Analyst Seo said North Korea likely wasn't sure about the benefits of attending the Tokyo Games because Biden has made it clear that he won't engage in made-for-TV summits with Kim Jong Un like his predecessor Donald Trump did.

"They knew that they would return home empty-handed from Tokyo," Seo said.

But North Korea's domestic difficulties may push it to pursue talks with the United States soon.

Seo said North Korea could perform big weapons tests, such as an intercontinental ballistic missile launch, in coming months if it's not satisfied with the Biden government's North Korea policy review expected to be completed soon.

Florida dismisses 2nd breach risk at phosphate reservoir

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

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ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Engineers and dam safety specialists evaluating the danger of a catastrophic flood from a leaking Florida wastewater reservoir determined that the threat of a possible second breach was “unsubstantiated,” the Florida Department of Environmental Protection said.

Officials had said Monday that a drone discovered a possible second breach in the reservoir, whose east wall continues to show “concentrated seepage.” But by Monday evening, experts from four government agencies and outside engineers concluded that this second site was safe to continue working on, the agency announced.

Meanwhile, the agency said dozens of pumps and 10 vacuum trucks have been deployed to remove 35 million gallons (132 million liters) of wastewater per day into the Tampa Bay estuary, where 11 different sampling operations are monitoring water quality and considering ways of minimizing algae blooms that kill marine life and make beachgoing hazardous to humans in the tourism-dependent state.

“All water quality information concludes that this water is NOT radioactive,” the agency tweeted.

U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, a Republican, toured the area by helicopter Monday and said federal resources were committed to assisting the effort to control the 77-acre (33-hectare) Piney Point reservoir in Manatee County, just south of the Tampa Bay area.

Among those are the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers, Buchanan said at a news conference.

“I think we are making some progress,” Buchanan said. “This is something that has been going on too long. Now, I think everybody is focused on this.”

Fears of a complete breach at an old phosphate plant led authorities to evacuate more than 300 homes, close portions of a major highway and move several hundred jail inmates nearby to a second floor of the facility.

The primary concern is that a total breach of the reservoir would cause major flooding to nearby homes and businesses, officials said. The pumps are meant to slowly drain the water and divert it to Tampa Bay, which could lead to negative environmental consequences such as fish kills and algae blooms.

Melissa Fitzsimmons lives with her husband and 19-month-old daughter in Palmetto, Florida, on the edge of the evacuation zone. Fitzsimmons said that for the past four days she has been terrified since she found out about the leak. While her house is on a hill and may not be directly affected by the water if the leak continues to grow, Fitzsimmons said her family is preparing for the worst.

“Within 24 hours it escalated to like a catastrophic evacuation, and we really didn’t know anything until we saw that there was an evacuation and then suddenly an evacuation within the block of our house,” Fitzsimmons said. “We’re not in the full on evacuation zone so we didn’t make the decision to leave, but we are certainly ready to go, I would say within like a 10-second notice, we can be out the door.”

Scott Hopes, the Manatee County administrator, said the additional pumps should increase the capacity for controlled wastewater releases to as much as 100 million gallons (379 million liters) a day.

“This has become a very focused local, state and national issue,” Hopes said.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection says the water in the pond is primarily salt water mixed with wastewater and storm water. It has elevated levels of phosphorous and nitrogen and is acidic, but not expected to be toxic, the agency says.

The ponds sit in stacks of phosphogypsum, a solid radioactive byproduct from manufacturing fertilizer. State authorities say the water in the breached pond is not radioactive.

Still, the EPA says too much nitrogen in the wastewater causes algae to grow faster, leading to fish kills. Some such blooms can also harm humans who come into contact with polluted waters, or eat tainted fish.

The Piney Point reservoir, and others like it storing the phosphogypsum byproduct, have been left undressed for far too long, environmental groups say.

“This environmental disaster is made worse by the fact it was entirely foreseeable and preventable,” said Jaclyn Lopez, Florida director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “With 24 more phosphogypsum stacks storing more than 1 billion tons of this dangerous, radioactive waste in Florida, the EPA needs to step in right now.”

Dale Rucker, a hydrologist and former editor of the Journal of Environmental and Engineering Geophys-

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ics, says the leak is a reminder that governments need to pay attention to aging infrastructure that could endanger the environment and put communities at serious risk.

"Continued neglect can have serious environmental consequences like we are seeing," Rucker said. "These environmental catastrophes are going to happen with higher probability."

Capitol officer remembered for humor, paying ultimate price

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The 18-year U.S. Capitol Police veteran killed in the line of duty is being remembered as a man with a sense of humor who loved baseball and golf and was most proud of one particular title: Dad.

William "Billy" Evans, 41, was killed Friday when a vehicle rammed into Evans and another officer at a barricade just 100 yards from the Capitol. The driver, Noah Green, 25, came out of the car with a knife and was shot to death by police, officials said. Investigators believe Green had been delusional and increasingly having suicidal thoughts. Capitol Police released few personal details about Evans, saying his family had requested privacy.

Evans, a father of two, grew up in North Adams, Massachusetts, a close-knit town of about 13,000 in the northwest part of the state.

Jason LaForest knew Evans for more than 30 years. He was a close friend of Evans' older sister, Julie, and recalled Evans as a prankster who made sure the subjects of his jokes laughed as well.

"As a young kid, Billy, of course, was the annoying little brother of one of my best friends, a title which he held on to for most of his life," said LaForest, a North Adams city councilman. "But it was a joy to watch him grow up and become a talented athlete and a dedicated police officer, and, of course, the role in life that he loved the most, which was a dad."

Sports, particularly baseball, was another important part of Evans' life.

"He came from a long line of family members that loved baseball and especially the Boston Red Sox," LaForest said. "He excelled in baseball and enjoyed playing baseball most of his life. It's a passion that he instilled in his children."

Evans' father, Howard, died about seven years ago. His mother, Janice, still lives in Massachusetts.

He attended Western New England University, graduating in 2002 as a criminal justice major. He joined the Capitol Police the next year.

Robert E. Johnson, the university's president, said in a statement that Evans was a member of the school's baseball and bowling teams and the campus activities board. He said that Evans' friends at the university described him as "extremely welcoming and friendly, humble, and always willing to help others."

John Claffey, a professor of criminal justice, said that when news of Evans' death first aired, he had the sense that he knew that smile. "I immediately said that's a face I recognize," Claffey said.

He recalled Evans as a student who knew what he wanted to do — a "very focused kid."

Over the weekend, Claffey received four calls from former students who just wanted to talk to him about Evans.

"This has shaken a lot of people's worlds," he said. "A lot of people from Western New England, who haven't been here in 18 years, it's still having an impact on them."

The death of Evans came nearly three months after the Jan. 6 rioting at the Capitol that left five people dead, including Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick. He died a day after the insurrection.

Lawmakers issued a wave of statements offering their condolences and gratitude to Evans after the attack. Capitol Hill aides and members of the press corps that cover Capitol Hill also weighed in, recalling him as friendly and professional.

LaForest said Evans never wanted to be known as a hero.

"He wanted to serve his country as a Capitol police officer and looked forward to seeing lawmakers and visitors who came to the Capitol every day, many of whom became friends of Billy's in large part because of his good-natured sense of humor," LaForest said. "And, unfortunately, Billy paid the ultimate

price defending his country.”

As states expand vaccines, prisoners still lack access

By KATIE PARK and ARIEL GOODMAN of The Marshall Project and KIMBERLEE KRUESI of The Associated Press

This week, Florida expanded eligibility for COVID-19 vaccines to all residents 16 and older. But across the state, more than 70,000 people still don't have access to the vaccine. Those men and women are Florida state prisoners.

More than half the country has opened up vaccine eligibility, vastly expanding the ability for most Americans to get the shots, whatever their age or medical conditions. But inside prisons, it's a different story: Prisoners, not free to seek out vaccines, still lack access on the whole.

Nationwide, less than 20% of state and federal prisoners have been vaccinated, according to data collected by The Marshall Project and The Associated Press. In some states, prisoners and advocates have resorted to lawsuits to get access. And even when they are eligible, they aren't receiving important education about the vaccine.

And it's not just the prisoners. Public health experts widely agree that people who live and work in correctional facilities face an increased risk of contracting and dying from the coronavirus. Since the pandemic first reached prisons in March 2020, about 3 in 10 prisoners have tested positive and 2,500 have died. Prisons are often overcrowded, with limited access to health care and protective gear, and populations inside are more likely to have preexisting medical conditions.

“This is about a public health strategy,” said Jaimie Meyer, an associate professor of medicine and public health at Yale University. “If you want to see an end to the pandemic, you've got to vaccinate the people in the places where there are the largest clusters and the most cases.”

This story is a collaboration between The Associated Press and The Marshall Project exploring the state of the prison system in the coronavirus pandemic. Keri Blakinger contributed reporting from the Marshall Project.

In some facilities, basic supplies like soap and toilet paper have been scarce, and mask-wearing is inconsistently enforced among both prisoners and guards. Prisoners spend time in communal spaces, and open-bar cells do little to contain the virus. Prisoners describe entire dormitories being sick with COVID-19 symptoms.

Some prisoners hesitate to report symptoms out of fear they will be placed in solitary confinement and not receive proper care. Others report waiting days for medical care, sometimes being turned away or provided only with aspirin.

And the vaccine rollout has been uneven, despite guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that states should prioritize corrections staff and people in prisons and jails. By the end of March, Arkansas and Florida had not yet begun vaccinating prisoners, while a few states say they have offered vaccination to every adult in their prisons. Eight states have not reported how many prisoners have been vaccinated.

In some states, vaccine supplies for prisons have been limited by infrastructure and by political demands. Even as more vaccines start to become available to corrections systems, prison officials, public health experts and prisoner advocates say there is widespread hesitancy among prisoners over receiving the vaccine.

According to the CDC, 40% of adults in the United States have gotten at least one vaccine shot, and President Joe Biden has promised that all Americans will be eligible for vaccination by May 1. But vaccination rates behind bars still trail the general population in two-thirds of states.

In Georgia, roughly 700 prisoners had been vaccinated by March 30, according to Department of Corrections spokesperson Joan Heath. That number, about 1.5% of the state's prison population, is expected to jump by mid-April when the agency anticipates receiving 2,000 doses per week.

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"Our goal is to ensure every offender in our custody is offered and receives a COVID vaccine," she said, adding that the state is asking anyone with "incarcerated friends or loved ones, to encourage them to accept the vaccine when offered."

Correction officials in Maine said they had just begun vaccinating "age-eligible residents," with 125 prisoners, about 7% of the prison population, immunized by the end of March.

In Tennessee, prisoners had to wait months before they could begin receiving the lifesaving dose after an influential state advisory group determined that inoculating them too early could result in a "public relations nightmare" and "lots of media inquiries." That decision came although some of the United States' largest coronavirus clusters were inside Tennessee's prisons, with hundreds of active cases in multiple facilities.

Tennessee's top health officials eventually announced in March that some in the prison population could get the vaccine if they qualified by age or had certain health conditions.

To date, about one-third of Tennessee prisoners have tested positive for the virus since the outbreak began to spread. More than 40 have died.

By April 5, more than 6,900 prisoners — out of roughly 19,400 in the state — had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Starting Monday, Tennessee began to allow all residents 16 and older to receive the vaccine, meaning the remaining state prisoners would be eligible.

In some states, prisoners and advocates have resorted to lawsuits to speed up the pace of vaccinations. In February, a federal judge ordered Oregon officials to offer the vaccine to all state prisoners, which the state says it has now done. Washington state prisoners filed a similar lawsuit in late March, demanding additional protection from correctional staff who refused the vaccine. Last week, a New York Supreme Court justice ruled that that state must vaccinate all people incarcerated in prisons and jails.

Texas vaccinated its first 600 prisoners only because of an accident. After a freezer problem at the Darrington Unit left unrefrigerated hundreds of doses meant for correctional officers, officials offered the vaccine first to staff and then to high-risk prisoners to avoid the doses going to waste.

Vaccine availability is not the only factor corrections officials must grapple with to get shots in arms. Carrie Shipp, whose 21-year-old son Matthew is incarcerated at Ruben M. Torres Unit in Texas, said her son decided not to get vaccinated out of fear and distrust of prison medical staff. Shipp's son encouraged her and her daughter to be vaccinated, but he does not want to receive the vaccine himself.

"It's not like he doesn't believe in science, he's just fearful of what they might do to him, what they might give him," Shipp said. "To have your child, someone you took care of, be afraid of something that would protect them. ... I will lose sleep over it."

In a Marshall Project survey of 136 prisoners earlier this year, many respondents expressed a deep distrust of prison medical systems, citing misinformation spread by staff and previous experiences of not receiving care.

Among the public, information about the COVID-19 vaccine has been publicized by news media, government officials and health care providers. But prisoners seeking such information must rely on limited news sources, personal correspondence and corrections staff, who prisoners say are not always willing to answer questions.

State prisons in Tennessee have displayed posters, distributed informational sheets and held town hall meetings among the prisoners to discuss the vaccine rollout. The Department of Corrections plans to "circle back" to the more than 3,100 prisoners who have refused the vaccine so far, said agency spokesperson Dorinda Carter.

Some prisoners in Georgia said they didn't receive information about the vaccine until they were asked to sign a form indicating whether they wanted to receive it. Fifty-one-year-old Michael McCoy, who is serving a 50-year sentence in Autry State Prison, said a staff member came to his dorm and put the consent forms on a table in the middle of the room.

"She said, 'I've got 96 vaccine forms. I need 96 signatures. Right now!'"

But when prisoners began to ask questions, McCoy said, "she refused to answer anything. She might not have known."

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Heath, the spokesperson for Georgia's Department of Corrections, said prisoners received information printed from the CDC website, but she did not respond to questions about whether it was available before they received vaccination consent forms.

Shannon Ross is working with medical experts to fill information gaps through his newsletter, The Community, which he distributes to prisoners in Wisconsin and some federal facilities. Ross, who was released from prison in September, said it is crucial to involve prisoners in the development of informational materials because they have unique concerns and are more likely to trust information from people who have experienced incarceration.

He said the state correction departments have some information, "but they don't really hit home at a lot of the doubts and concerns and the breadth of issues that are popping up with this vaccine," Ross said. "There's no commentary from people who are out here that are respected in fighting the system, to say, 'I've gotten it, I trust it.'"

Because many states have yet to vaccinate the majority of their prison populations, the actual magnitude of vaccine hesitancy among prisoners is not yet clear.

Marc Stern, a correctional health consultant and professor at the University of Washington's School of Public Health, did a survey of prisoners and those in jail late last year and found only 45% willing to get vaccinated. He said the potential for low vaccine acceptance could amplify existing inequities in prisoner health. Black people make up a disproportionately large segment of the prison population and people with severe COVID-19 outcomes, and his survey found that 37% of Black respondents were willing to receive the vaccine compared to 45% of all respondents.

On a brighter side, the four states that say they have offered the vaccine to every adult in their state prisons — Massachusetts, Oregon, Rhode Island and Virginia — have seen more prisoners take it, averaging about 70%. Meyer said that was a positive sign, but likely to be lower in many other states.

"In many prisons ... the annual uptake of a flu vaccine is around 30%," Meyer said. "Now you throw in that this is a newly developed technology that people may or may not have lots of information about, you have to anticipate that uptake might be as low as 30%."

Complicating the equation are concerns about prison staff refusing vaccines in high numbers. Unlike prisoners, staff can receive vaccines from providers other than the corrections department, which can make staff levels difficult to track. Staff vaccination is particularly important, said Monik Jiménez, an assistant professor at Harvard University's School of Public Health, because employees can travel between prisons and the outside community. She stressed that both staff and prisoners need high vaccine coverage in order to effectively reduce COVID-19 transmission.

"When you have a place with high rates of transmission, then the vaccine has to work even harder," Jiménez said. "You need more people vaccinated."

To encourage prisoners to receive the vaccine, some states have turned to incentives, ranging from \$25 in commissary credit in Pennsylvania, to "a little bag of Famous Amos cookies" in Mississippi.

In Georgia, McCoy says that he and his dorm mates felt belittled when the warden announced that anyone who opted to take the vaccine would be rewarded with a "warden's pack," which usually includes an assortment of chips, cakes and candy.

"Instead of with confidence and trust, you're going to bribe them with cookies and chips?" McCoy said. "What does he think we are?"

US, Iran expected to begin indirect nuclear talks in Vienna

VIENNA (AP) — Efforts to bring the United States back into the 2015 deal on Iran's nuclear program are to step up a gear on Tuesday as Iran and the five world powers remaining in the accord meet in Vienna while the U.S. is due to start indirect talks with Tehran.

Friday's announcement that Washington and Tehran would begin indirect talks through intermediaries was one of the first signs of tangible progress in efforts to return both nations to the terms of the accord, which bound Iran to restrictions in return for relief from U.S. and international sanctions.

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Then-President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the accord in 2018, opting for what he called a maximum-pressure campaign of stepped-up U.S. sanctions.

Since then, Iran has been steadily violating the restrictions of the deal, like the amount of enriched uranium it can stockpile and the purity to which it can enrich it. Tehran's moves have been calculated to put pressure on the other nations in the deal — Russia, China, France, Germany and Britain — to do more to offset crippling sanctions reimposed under Trump.

President Joe Biden came into office saying that getting back into the accord and getting Iran's nuclear program back under international restrictions was a priority. But Iran and the United States have disagreed over Iran's demands that sanctions be lifted first.

Senior foreign ministry officials from the countries still in the accord, the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, are holding a European Union-chaired meeting Tuesday in Vienna.

Also due in the Austrian capital is a U.S. delegation headed by the administration's special envoy for Iran, Rob Malley. State Department spokesman Ned Price said talks will be structured around working groups that the Europeans will form with the other parties to the accord.

Price said on Monday the talks are a "healthy step forward" but added that "we don't anticipate an early or immediate breakthrough as these discussions, we fully expect, will be difficult."

"We don't anticipate at present that there will be direct talks with Iran," he said. "Though of course we remain open to them. And so we'll have to see how things go starting early this week."

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on Twitter Friday: "No Iran-US meeting. Unnecessary."

A statement issued after parties to the accord met virtually on Friday said the aim of their meeting Tuesday is to "clearly identify sanctions lifting and nuclear implementation measures, including through convening meetings of the relevant expert groups."

Ahead of Tuesday's talks, an Iranian prosecutor said 10 officials have been indicted over last year's military shooting-down of a Ukrainian passenger plane in which 176 people died.

Iran faced withering international criticism last month for releasing a final report that blamed human error but named no one responsible.

Iran prosecutor says 10 indicted for Ukraine plane shutdown

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Ten officials have been indicted in Iran over the 2020 military shutdown of a Ukrainian passenger plane that killed 176 people, a prosecutor said Tuesday, an announcement coming just as Tehran begins indirect negotiations with the West over its collapsed nuclear deal with world powers.

The timing of the announcement comes after Iran faced withering international criticism last month for releasing a final report into the shutdown of Ukraine International Airlines flight No. PS752 that blamed human error but named no one responsible for the incident.

Tehran military prosecutor Gholamabbas Toriki similarly avoided naming those responsible when he announced the indictments Tuesday while handing over his office to Nasser Seraj. The semiofficial ISNA news agency and the Iranian judiciary's Mizan news agency both reported his remarks.

"The indictment of the case of the Ukrainian plane was also issued and a serious and accurate investigation was carried out and indictments were issued for 10 people who were at fault," Mizan quoted Toriki as saying, without elaborating.

Following three days of denial in January 2020 in the face of mounting evidence, Iran finally acknowledged that its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard mistakenly downed the Ukrainian jetliner with two surface-to-air missiles. In preliminary reports on the disaster last year, Iranian authorities blamed an air defense operator who they said mistook the Boeing 737-800 for an American cruise missile.

The shutdown happened the same day Iran launched a ballistic missile attack on U.S. troops in Iraq in retaliation for an American drone strike that killed a top Iranian general. While Guard officials publicly

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apologized for the incident, the hesitancy of Iran to elaborate on what happened in the incident shows the power the force wields.

Following the release of Iran's final investigative report, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba lambasted the findings as a "cynical attempt to hide the true causes of the downing of our passenger aircraft." He accused Iran of conducting a "biased" probe into the disaster that resulted in "deceptive" conclusions.

Many on the flight planned to connect in Kyiv to fly onto Canada, which is home to a large Iranian population. Canada's foreign and transport ministers similarly criticized the report, saying that it "has no hard facts or evidence" and "makes no attempt to answer critical questions about what truly happened."

The announcement came just hours before Iran and the five world powers remaining in its atomic accord meet in Vienna, where the U.S. is due to start indirect talks with Tehran.

France to open archive for period covering Rwandan genocide

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's role before and during the 1994 Rwandan genocide was a "monumental failure" that the country must acknowledge, the lead author of a report commissioned by President Emmanuel Macron said, as the country is about to open its archives from this period to the public.

The report, published in March, concluded that French authorities remained blind to the preparations for genocide as they supported the "racist" and "violent" government of then-Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and then reacted too slowly in appreciating the extent of the killings. But it cleared them of complicity in the slaughter that left over 800,000 people dead, mainly ethnic Tutsis and the Hutus who tried to protect them.

Macron's decision to commission the report — and open the archives to the public — are part of his efforts to more fully confront the French role in the genocide and to improve relations with Rwanda, including making April 7, the day the massacre began, a day of commemoration. While long overdue, the moves may finally help the two countries reconcile.

Historian Vincent Duclert, who led the commission that studied France's actions in Rwanda between 1990 and 1994, told The Associated Press that "for 30 years, the debate on Rwanda was full of lies, violence, manipulations, threats of trials. That was a suffocating atmosphere."

Duclert said it was important to acknowledge France's role for what it was: a "monumental failure."

"Now we must speak the truth," he added. "And that truth will allow, we hope, (France) to get a dialogue and a reconciliation with Rwanda and Africa."

Macron said in a statement that the report marks "a major step forward" toward understanding France's actions in Rwanda.

About 8,000 archive documents that the commission examined for two years, including some that were previously classified, will be made accessible to the general public starting Wednesday, the 27th anniversary of the start of the killings.

Duclert said documents — mostly from the French presidency and the prime minister's office — show how then-President Francois Mitterrand and the small group of diplomats and military officials surrounding him shared views inherited from colonial times, including the desire to maintain influence on a French-speaking country, that led them to keep supporting Habyarimana despite warning signs, including through delivery of weapons and military training in the years prior to the genocide.

"Instead of ultimately supporting the democratization and peace in Rwanda, the French authorities in Rwanda supported the ethnicization, the radicalization of (Habyarimana's) government," Duclert stressed.

France was "not complicit in the criminal act of genocide," he said, but "its action contributed to strengthening (the genocide's) mechanisms."

"And that's an enormous intellectual responsibility," he said.

The report also criticized France's "passive policy" in April and May 1994, at the height of the genocide.

That was a "terrible lost opportunity," Duclert noted. "In 1994, there was a possibility to stop the genocide ... and it did not happen. France and the world bear a considerable guilt."

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Eventually they did step in. Operation Turquoise, a French-led military intervention backed by the U.N., started on June 22.

Duclert said that France's "blindness must be questioned and, maybe, brought to trial," though he insisted it was not the commission's role to suggest charges.

The report was welcomed as an important step by activists who had long hoped France would officially acknowledge its responsibilities in the genocide. On a visit to Rwanda in 2010, then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy admitted that his country had made "errors of judgment" and "political errors" regarding the genocide — but the report may allow Macron to go further.

Dafroza Gauthier, a Rwandan who lost more than 80 members of her family in the mass killing, welcomed it as a "a great document against genocide denial."

"For 27 years, or longer, we were in a kind of fog," said Gauthier, who with her husband, Alain, founded the Collective of Civil Plaintiffs for Rwanda, a French-based group that seeks the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of the genocide. "The report is clearly stating things."

There also may be a shift in the attitude of Rwandan authorities, who welcomed the report in a brief statement but have given no detailed response. They said the conclusions of their own report, to be released soon, "will complement and enrich" it.

That's different from Rwanda's firm assertions of French complicity as recently as 2017. Relations between the two countries, strained for years since the genocide, have improved under Macron's presidency.

Félicien Kabuga, a Rwandan long wanted for his alleged role in supplying machetes to the killers, was arrested outside Paris last May.

And in July an appeals court in Paris upheld a decision to end a years-long investigation into the plane crash that killed Habyarimana and set off the genocide. That probe aggravated Rwanda's government because it targeted several people close to President Paul Kagame for their alleged role, charges they denied.

It now appears Rwandan authorities will accept "the olive branch" from Paris, said Dismas Nkunda, head of the watchdog group Atrocities Watch Africa who covered the genocide as a journalist.

"Maybe they're saying, 'The past is the past. Let's move on,'" he said of Rwandan authorities.

The Gauthiers said the report and access to the archives may also help activists in their efforts to bring people involved in the genocide to justice — including potentially French officials who served at the time.

There have been three Rwandan nationals convicted of genocide so far in France, they stressed. Four others are expected to go on trial. That's out of about 30 complaints against Rwandan nationals living in France that their group has filed with authorities.

That's still "very few" compared to the more than 100 alleged perpetrators who are believed to live on French territory, they said.

North Korea says it won't participate in Tokyo Olympics

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea became the first country to drop out of the Tokyo Olympics because of coronavirus fears, a decision that underscores the challenges facing Japan as it struggles to stage a global sporting event amid a raging pandemic.

A website run by North Korea's Sports Ministry said its national Olympic Committee during a meeting on March 25 decided not to participate in the Games to protect athletes from the "world public health crisis caused by COVID-19."

The pandemic has already pushed back the Tokyo Games, which were originally scheduled for 2020, and organizers have scrambled to put in place preventive measures, such as banning international spectators, to ensure the safety of athletes and residents.

However, there's still concern that the Olympics could worsen the spread of the virus and Japan's rising caseload and slow vaccine rollout have raised public questions about whether the Games should be held at all.

Japan's Olympic Committee said Tuesday that North Korea has not yet notified it that it wouldn't par-

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ticipate in the Tokyo Games.

Katsunobu Kato, Japan's chief cabinet secretary, said the government hopes many countries will join the Olympics and he promised ample anti-virus measures.

South Korea's Unification Ministry expressed regret over the North's decision, saying it had hoped that the Tokyo Olympics would provide an opportunity to improve inter-Korean relations, which have declined amid a stalemate in larger nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang.

Choi Young-sam, a South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said the government supports Japan's efforts to push ahead with the Olympics while taking safety measures. Choi said there was still time for the North to reverse its decision and participate in the event.

North Korea sent 22 athletes to the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea, along with government officials, performance artists, journalists and a 230-member all-female cheering group.

At the Pyeongchang Games, the North and South Korean athletes jointly marched under a blue map symbolizing a unified Korean Peninsula, while the red-clad North Korean cheerleaders captivated global attention. The Koreans also fielded their first combined Olympic team in women's ice hockey, which drew passionate support from crowds despite losing all five of its games by a combined score of 28-2.

Those games were also much about politics. The North Korean contingent included the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who conveyed her brother's desire for a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, a move that helped the North initiate talks with South Korea and the United States.

Diplomatic efforts have been at a stalemate since, and North Korea's decision to sit out the Tokyo Olympics is a setback for hopes to revive it.

While North Korea has steadfastly claimed to be coronavirus-free, outsiders have expressed doubt about whether the country has escaped the pandemic entirely, given its poor health infrastructure and a porous border it shares with China, its economic lifeline.

Describing its anti-virus efforts as a "matter of national existence," North Korea has severely limited cross-border traffic, banned tourists, jettied out diplomats and mobilized health workers with quarantine tents of thousands of people who had shown symptoms.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga previously said he expected to invite U.S. President Joe Biden to the Olympics and was willing to meet with Kim Jong Un or his sister if either attended the Games. Suga, however, did not say if he will invite either of them.

Experts say pandemic border closures have further shocked North Korea's economy, already broken by decades of mismanagement, aggressive military spending and crippling U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons program.

The economic setbacks have left Kim with nothing to show for his ambitious diplomacy with former President Donald Trump, which derailed over disagreements in exchanging the release of sanctions and the North's nuclear disarmament steps.

Kim in recent political speeches has pledged to bolster his nuclear deterrent in face of U.S.-led pressure, and his government has so far rejected the Biden administration's overture for talks, demanding that Washington abandon its "hostile" policies first.

The North ended a yearlong pause in ballistic testing activity last month by firing two short-range missiles off its eastern coast, continuing a tradition of testing new U.S. administrations with weapons demonstrations aimed at measuring Washington's response and wresting concessions.

Baylor beatdown: Bears win title, hang 86-70 loss on Gonzaga

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — There was another team out there that was marching through the season undefeated, that looked unstoppable at times, that had all arrows pointing toward a national title.

COVID-19 put a halt to the undefeated dream. Nothing could stop Baylor from cutting down the nets. Not even Gonzaga.

The fresh-as-can-be Bears obliterated wobbly-legged Gonzaga's march to its own undefeated season

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Monday night. It was an 86-70 runaway that brought this once-downtrodden program's first national title back home to Waco, Texas.

Jared Butler scored 22 points and MaCio Teague had 19 for the Bears (28-2), who were ranked second or third in the AP poll all year long. But never first. That was because of one team and maybe, just maybe, because of a three-week break that put a halt to a 17-0 start and sapped some of Baylor's burgeoning momentum.

"Prior to COVID, us and Gonzaga were on the track to being undefeated," coach Scott Drew reminded everyone in the socially distanced arena, during a TV interview, while brushing off confetti.

So maybe this blowout in one of the most-anticipated finals in memory — a meeting between teams whose own regular-season matchup in December was scrapped because of a coronavirus outbreak — shouldn't come as such a shock.

The two losses that came after Baylor's COVID-19 break in February felt like a far-off memory come March. Then came April, and the feeling grew even stronger.

Baylor outscored all six of its opponents in the tournament by an average of 15 points. It beat Houston by 19 in the semifinal. Less than 5 minutes into the final, the Bears were ahead of Gonzaga by double digits.

Pounding the offensive glass — Baylor won that battle 16-5 — and winning the lion's share of the 50-50 balls, the Bears weren't about to let this one come down to a Jalen Suggs miracle. The Gonzaga freshman's buzzer-beater from near the half-court logo got the Zags to the final in a game that stood as their first true test of the season.

They passed against UCLA. Against Baylor? Not even close.

"When you come against a team that's just firing on all cylinders for 40 minutes, it's kind of hard to compete with," Zags forward Corey Kispert said.

After running to a 19-point lead early, the Bears never let Gonzaga get any closer than nine. Butler made four 3-pointers and added seven assists, and was named the Final Four's most outstanding player.

"I knew at some point, we were up big," said Butler, who insisted his team wasn't focused on the scoreboard. "We were scoring, they weren't scoring. It was just electrifying."

Guard Davion Mitchell — nicknamed "Off Night" because so many opponents encounter one when they go against him — finished with 15 points and did the best he could on Suggs. The freshman finished with 22 points, most of them after this game was out of hand, and likely will be heading to the NBA draft next.

Gonzaga's first loss in 32 games this season — 36 dating to 2019-20 — leaves Indiana's 1975-76 team as the last to go undefeated.

Baylor was up 9-0 after 2 1/2 minutes, and the Bulldogs faced only their fourth double-digit deficit of the season at 11-1. They faced their biggest deficit of the season — 15 points — with 7:10 gone. By then, Suggs had two fouls and was watching from the bench.

After the game, he was crying — burying his head on the shoulder of one teammate, then another.

"He's a winner and he lost for the first time in college basketball," Zags coach Mark Few said. "He's highly competitive and doesn't like losing. In his mind, he saw us cutting down nets."

But more than anything he did in the title game, it was Suggs' memorable basket two nights earlier that laid the groundwork for Gonzaga in this one. His bank shot at the buzzer vs. UCLA capped one of the most riveting college basketball games ever. Back on the floor about 46 hours after that emotional roller coaster, it was clear the Zags were gassed.

The sequence that best illustrated the energy gap came about six minutes into the contest when Baylor's Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua slapped the ball out of Drew Timme's hands and the Bears worked the ball ahead to Mitchell. He missed a layup, but Tchamwa Tchatchoua got the offensive rebound and fed Adam Flagler for a 3.

Gonzaga was practically just standing there for it all.

Few, now 0-2 in title games, gave full credit to Baylor, and didn't blame his own team's fatigue.

"Obviously, it's a tough turnaround, but it was more just the aggressiveness and athleticism of Baylor," Few said. "They deserved it. Quite frankly, they were terrific."

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Gonzaga briefly pulled within nine early in the second half, and saw a glimmer of hope when Tchamwa Tchatchoua joined another Baylor big man, Flo Thamba, on the bench with four fouls.

But Baylor answered with a 9-2 run punctuated by Mark Vital's rejection of Kispert, then a fast break that led to an easy 3 from Flagler.

After that, it was over. Yes, Gonzaga might have been the year's most watchable team with its dramatic run at perfection, to say nothing of the shot of the tournament.

But it was Baylor, not Suggs, jumping on top of the scorer's table and cheering for the fans at the end. And those were the Bears cutting down the nets.

"When the fans are happy, that's what makes our players happy and proud," Drew said. "They stuck with us, they've been with us through the lean years. They deserve this."

In 2003, Drew took over a roster with only seven scholarship players and a team staring at years of NCAA probation in the wake of the murder of player Patrick Dennehy by a teammate.

Drew's introductory news conference was trending after the title game. That day, formal in his coat and tie, he stood behind the lectern and proclaimed: "I did not come to go to the NCAA Tournament. We came to win games at the NCAA Tournament. We came with the chance to win a national championship at Baylor University."

Eighteen years later, Drew found himself behind a different mic.

He was sitting at a table, answering questions on Zoom in front of a background with a Final Four logo.

He was smiling wide, drenched in sweat, with a cut-down net hanging around his neck.

COVID-19 vaccine eligibility expands to 16 and over in NY

NEW YORK (AP) — New Yorkers over 16 years old can sign up for COVID-19 vaccinations starting Tuesday, a major expansion of eligibility as the state seeks to immunize as many people as possible.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo expanded eligibility to 30 and over last week and announced that people aged 16 to 29 would be eligible starting April 6.

Teens aged 16 and 17 will be limited to receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, since that is the only one that has been authorized for use by people under 18. Parental consent will be required for vaccinations of 16- and 17-year-olds, with certain exceptions including for teens who are married or are parents.

None of the available vaccines have yet been approved for people under 16.

About one in five New York state residents were fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as of Monday, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A little more than one-third of the state's residents had received at least one vaccine dose.

The new vaccination rules add 1.7 million people to the list of eligible New Yorkers, for a total of 15.9 million individuals, state Health Department officials said.

Eating our lunch: Biden points to China in development push

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pushing for trillions of dollars in development spending, President Joe Biden and Democratic lawmakers are directing Americans' eyes to the rear-view mirror, pointing to a booming, ambitious China they say is threatening to quickly overtake the United States in global clout and capacity.

It's a national security pitch for a domestic spending program: that the \$2 trillion proposal for investments in U.S. transport and energy, manufacturing, internet and other sectors will make the United States more competitive in the face of Chinese President Xi Jinping's massive infrastructure-building campaign.

The argument is that competition today with China is more about economic and technological gains than arms — and its outcome will impact the United States' financial growth and influence, its ability to defend U.S. security alliances and interests abroad, and the daily lives of Americans.

China under Xi has "an overall goal to become the leading country in the world, the wealthiest country in the world, and the most powerful country in the world," Biden said before launching his proposal last

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week. "That's not going to happen on my watch because the United States are going to continue to grow and expand."

That pitch hasn't won over Republicans. They say his proposal has been loaded down with unnecessary spending projects and that raising taxes will ultimately hurt the U.S. economy.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Republicans could support a "much more modest" approach, one that doesn't rely on corporate tax hikes to pay for it. Biden's plan is "something we're not going to do," McConnell said Monday.

To varying degrees, addressing infrastructure has bipartisan support. Americans are experiencing outages, delays and irritations on transport and power systems designed in the 1960s and earlier. Meanwhile, China's latest five-year plan calls for hundreds more airports, coal-fired power plants and other standard infrastructure projects. Xi also is calling for his country's focus on "new infrastructure," including investment in 5G networks and other digital infrastructure.

"Time and momentum are on our side," Xi told a meeting of the Communist Party last year.

China spends more on infrastructure projects in other countries than the United States spends at home, said Jonathan Hillman, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. That and China's long-running economic boom, fueled in part by its domestic infrastructure spending, are helping China become more influential internationally, and may give it more confidence as it makes claims over Taiwan and other contested territory or advances its interests, some argue.

Using urgent warnings of a rival's advances to press for more infrastructure and research spending is a Cold War-tested technique. Past American presidents pointed to the Soviet Union while building up the U.S. highway system, space program and arms stockpiles.

And in the case of infrastructure, Biden's repeated warnings that China and other countries are "eating our lunch" are borne out by many crucial metrics, and by the observations of almost anyone who's traveled abroad much.

"Almost every day" in the U.S., service providers somewhere announce "the power is out, the wi-fi is out," said Min Ye, a researcher at Boston University whose work focuses on China and the intersection of economics and security.

Pointing to her two decades living in the Boston area, Ye says she has seen no really big upgrades to tired local road networks, no bus route upgrades that would help her get into the city more easily, no rail upkeep that would make a train trip to New York to see friends more enticing.

While Ye was glad to see Boston Logan International Airport launch projects to spiff up its interior and parking, it's been more than a quarter-century since the United States last built a new major airport, in Denver. Academic studies and economists claim the lost hours of delays in the air and on roads and rails cost billions of dollars in lost productivity.

And the federal government estimates 18 million Americans lack internet. What internet there is is expensive, compared to that of other big economies. It all led to scenes of U.S. workers and schoolchildren sitting in fast-food parking lots to do their work online this year as the pandemic shut down offices and schools.

Research done for the Group of 20 rich and developing nations estimates China's infrastructure spending as a percentage of domestic production on track to be more than three times that of the United States.

In Congress, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is pushing legislation intended to pour technology research and development funding into the National Science Foundation and Commerce Department, to build U.S. semiconductor production, and to strengthen domestic technology supply chains.

Schumer's aim, he says: "Bolster American competitiveness and counter the growing economic threats we face across the globe, especially from the Chinese Communist Party."

Ordinary Americans could start to feel the impact of China's investment in infrastructure and other support for the digital economy vs. the United States in ways big and small, said Hillman, the CSIS researcher. There could be minor annoyances, like one day finding it tough to track down a USB cable with the right metal bit that fits their laptop, because design standards could start following those of China's booming market, not the United States', Hillman said.

But “ultimately it will result in fewer jobs” in the United States, Hillman said. “That’s the thing that is going to be most immediate in day to day life.”

Ryan Hass, a former China director for the National Security Council in the Obama administration, cautions against overstating the threat that China’s rise poses to the United States. China is facing its own problems with debt, an aging population, and slowing gains in worker productivity, Hass said.

“If the United States makes progress in fixing some of its own problems, including its infrastructure deficit, it will remain highly competitive with China,” Hass said.

Biden boosted by Senate rules as GOP bucks infrastructure

By LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With an appeal to think big, President Joe Biden is promoting his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan directly to Americans, summoning public support to push past the Republicans lining up against the massive effort they sum up as big taxes, big spending and big government.

Republicans in Congress are making the politically brazen bet that it’s more advantageous to oppose the costly American Jobs Plan, saddling the Democrats with ownership of the sweeping proposal and the corporate tax hike Biden says is needed to pay for it. He wants the investments in roads, schools, broadband and clean energy approved by summer.

On Monday, Biden received a boost from an unexpected source. The Senate parliamentarian greenlighted a strategy that would allow Democrats in the evenly split 50-50 chamber to rely on a 51-vote threshold to advance some bills, rather than the typical 60 votes typically needed. The so-called budget reconciliation rules can now be used more often than expected — giving Democrats a fresh new path around the GOP blockade.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer’s spokesman welcomed the parliamentarian’s opinion as “an important step forward.” Spokesman Justin Goodman said no decisions have been made on the process ahead, but “this key pathway is available to Democrats if needed.”

The prospects for a massive infrastructure investment, once a bipartisan source of unity on Capitol Hill, have cracked and groaned under the weight of political polarization. Where Biden sees an urgency in going big, Republicans want a narrow plan that focuses on roads and bridges, and warn that any corporate tax increase would crush economic growth.

“They know we need it,” Biden said of the Republicans as he returned to Washington on Monday. “Everybody around the world is investing billions and billions of dollars in infrastructure, and we’re going to do it here.”

The standoff almost ensures a months-long slog as Congress hunkers down to begin drafting legislation and the White House keeps the door open to working across the aisle with Republicans, hoping that continued public attention will drum up support.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell declared plainly on Monday that Biden’s plan is “something we’re not going to do.”

Speaking to reporters in Kentucky, McConnell said Republicans could support a “much more modest” approach, and one that doesn’t rely on corporate tax hikes to pay for it.

A core dividing line is Biden’s effort to pay for infrastructure by undoing Donald Trump’s tax break for corporations, a signature achievement of the Trump White House and its partners in Congress.

The 2017 GOP tax bill, which all the Republicans voted for, slashed the corporate rate from 35% to 21%. It was supposed to usher in a new era of American investment and job creation, yet growth never came close to the promised levels and the economy fell into a recession because of the pandemic.

Biden proposes raising the rate to 28% and instituting a global minimum rate to dissuade companies from relocating in lower-tax havens. Democratic senators led by Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, unveiled their own framework for an international taxation overhaul Monday that could provide an opening to Biden’s approach.

“We desperately need reform,” said Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., one of those involved in the effort.

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Shepherding Biden's proposal through Congress remains a work in progress, particularly in the evenly-divided 50-50 Senate, where Democrats have the majority because the vice president from their party, Kamala Harris, can cast a tie-breaking vote.

But a single senator can break ranks to influence the size and shape of the package. On Monday, Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., indicated he would prefer a corporate tax rate at 25%, lower than what Biden is proposing.

Seizing on Democratic divisions, Republicans have signaled zero interest in undoing the tax cuts they approved with Trump, and instead prefer a smaller infrastructure package paid for by user fees on drivers or other public-private partnerships that share the costs.

Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., a member of Senate GOP leadership, said Sunday a smaller infrastructure package of about \$615 billion, or 30% of what Biden is proposing, could draw bipartisan support.

Administration officials have encouraged Republicans to talk more fully about what they dislike and would do instead, under the opinion that a battle of ideas will only help Biden gain support with voters.

The president has already met twice with bipartisan groups of lawmakers in the Oval Office, and members of Biden's Cabinet leading the charge on infrastructure have also have placed dozens of calls to lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

Yet the White House has a fundamental disagreement with Republicans on the definition of infrastructure, such that any outreach is unlikely to yield an agreement.

"Infrastructure is not just the roads we get a horse and buggy across," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at a Monday briefing. "Infrastructure is about broadband. It's about replacing lead pipes so people have water. It's about rebuilding our schools."

That leaves Biden and congressional Republicans on a collision course, the outcome of which could define the parties and his presidency.

The GOP strategy is reminiscent of its Obama-era stance more than a decade ago, when the Republicans opposed the 2009 rescue after the economic crisis, framing it as government overreach that piled on debt — an argument they used in 2010 to win back control of Congress.

But it's not at all certain the GOP playbook that worked more than a decade ago will produce the same political gains this time. Biden is banking on polling that suggests his infrastructure package is popular among voters of both parties, making it easier to bypass any GOP blockade on Capitol Hill.

Touring a water treatment plant Monday in California, Harris said access to clean water was about a broader issue of fairness.

With the state's governor, Gavin Newsom, Harris noted that families in Iowa and parts of the Midwest needed federal help to upgrade the wells on their properties, while parts of California needed reliable access to fight wildfires.

"We must understand the equities and inequities of distribution and access to clean water, especially clean drinking water," Harris said.

Police chief: Fired cop broke policy in pinning Floyd

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minneapolis police chief who called George Floyd's death "murder" soon after it happened testified that Officer Derek Chauvin had clearly violated department policy when he pinned Floyd's neck beneath his knee for more than 9 minutes.

Continuing to kneel on Floyd's neck once he was handcuffed behind his back and lying on his stomach was "in no way, shape or form" part of department policy or training, "and it is certainly not part of our ethics or our values," Police Chief Medaria Arradondo said Monday on Day Six of Chauvin's murder trial.

Arradondo, the city's first Black chief, fired Chauvin and three other officers the day after Floyd's death last May, and in June called it "murder."

While police have long been accused of closing ranks to protect fellow members of the force charged with wrongdoing — the "blue wall of silence," as it's known — some of the most experienced officers in

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the Minneapolis department have taken the stand to openly condemn Chauvin's treatment of Floyd.

As jurors watched in rapt attention and scribbled notes, Arradondo testified not only that Chauvin, a 19-year veteran of the force, should have let Floyd up sooner, but that the pressure on Floyd's neck did not appear to be light to moderate, as called for under the department's neck-restraint policy; that Chauvin failed in his duty to render first aid before the ambulance arrived; and that he violated policy requiring officers to de-escalate tense situations with no or minimal force if they can.

"That action is not de-escalation," the police chief said. "And when we talk about the framework of our sanctity of life and when we talk about our principles and the values that we have, that action goes contrary to what we are talking about."

Arradondo's testimony came after the emergency room doctor who pronounced Floyd dead said he theorized at the time that Floyd's heart most likely stopped because of a lack of oxygen.

Dr. Bradford Langenfeld, who was a senior resident on duty that night at Hennepin County Medical Center and tried to resuscitate Floyd, took the stand as prosecutors sought to establish that it was Chauvin's knee on the Black man's neck that killed him.

Langenfeld said Floyd's heart had stopped by the time he arrived at the hospital. The doctor said that he was not told of any efforts at the scene by bystanders or police to resuscitate Floyd but that paramedics told him they had tried for about 30 minutes and that he tried for another 30 minutes.

Under questioning by prosecutors, Langenfeld said that based on the information he had, it was "more likely than the other possibilities" that Floyd's cardiac arrest — the stopping of his heart — was caused by asphyxia, or insufficient oxygen.

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death May 25. The white officer is accused of pressing his knee into the 46-year-old man's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, outside a corner market where Floyd had been arrested on suspicion of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill for a pack of cigarettes.

Floyd's treatment by police was captured on widely seen bystander video that sparked protests around the U.S. that descended into violence in some cases.

The defense has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do and that Floyd's use of illegal drugs and his underlying health conditions caused his death.

Nelson, Chauvin's attorney, asked Langenfeld whether some drugs can cause hypoxia, or insufficient oxygen. The doctor acknowledged that fentanyl and methamphetamine, both of which were found in Floyd's body, can do so.

The county medical examiner's office ultimately classified Floyd's death a homicide — a death caused by someone else.

The report said Floyd died of "cardiopulmonary arrest, complicating law enforcement subdual, restraint, and neck compression." A summary report listed fentanyl intoxication and recent methamphetamine use under "other significant conditions" but not under "cause of death."

Prosecutor Steve Schleicher noted that while some people may become more dangerous under the influence of drugs or alcohol, some may actually be "more vulnerable." Arradondo agreed and acknowledged that this must also be taken into consideration when officers decide to use force.

Before he was pinned to the ground, a frantic Floyd struggled with police who were trying to put him in a squad car, saying he was claustrophobic.

Arradondo said officers are trained in basic first aid, including chest compressions, and department policy requires them to request medical assistance and provide necessary aid as soon as possible before paramedics arrive.

"We absolutely have a duty to render that," he said.

Officers kept restraining Floyd — with Chauvin kneeling on his neck, another kneeling on Floyd's back and a third holding his feet — until the ambulance got there, even after he became unresponsive, according to testimony and video footage.

The officers also rebuffed offers of help from an off-duty Minneapolis firefighter who wanted to admin-

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ister aid or tell officers how to do it.

Langenfeld testified that for people who go into cardiac arrest, there is an approximately 10% to 15% decrease in survival for every minute that CPR is not administered.

Nelson noted on cross-examination that department policies direct officers to do what is reasonable in a given situation. He asked whether officers need to take the actions of a crowd into account, and Arradondo agreed. Nelson has suggested that onlookers — many of whom were shouting at Chauvin — might have affected officers' response.

Nelson also questioned whether Chauvin's knee was on Floyd's neck, playing a few seconds of bystander video side-by-side with footage from an officer's body camera that Arradondo agreed appeared to show Chauvin's knee on Floyd's shoulder blade.

But prosecutors quickly got Arradondo to note that the clip played by Nelson depicted only the few seconds before Floyd was moved onto a stretcher.

Minneapolis police Inspector Katie Blackwell, commander of the training division at the time of Floyd's death, also took the stand Monday.

She said Chauvin, whom she's known for about 20 years, received annual training in defensive tactics and use of force, and would have been trained to use one or two arms — not his knee — in a neck restraint.

"I don't know what kind of improvised position that is," she said, after being shown a photo of Chauvin with his knee on Floyd's neck.

She said Chauvin also was a field-training officer, receiving additional training so he would know what prospective officers were learning in the academy.

The city moved soon after Floyd's death to ban police chokeholds and neck restraints. Arradondo and Mayor Jacob Frey also made several policy changes, including expanded reporting of use-of-force incidents and attempts to de-escalate situations.

Myanmar's online pop-up markets raise funds for protest

By JERRY HARMER Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — With security forces in Myanmar having shot dead at least 570 protesters and bystanders in the past two months, many of the country's residents see venturing out onto the street as a brave but foolhardy act.

Online, many have found a safer, more substantive way to show their defiance against February's military takeover — virtual rummage sales whose proceeds go to the protest movement's shadow government and other related political causes.

Everything from clothes and toys, to music lessons and outdoor adventures are on sale. Foreign friends are encouraged to donate, but fundraising inside Myanmar also serves the purpose of raising political consciousness for challenging the ousting of Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government.

Facebook users have taken to the social network to sell off their possessions, advertising that all the money raised will go to fund the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, formed by elected members of Parliament who were blocked from taking their seats by the coup.

The committee styles itself as the sole legitimate government of the country, rejecting the ruling junta as without legal standing. In turn, the junta has outlawed the committee and declared it treasonous, threatening to jail not just its members but anyone supporting it.

Formed from scratch shortly after the Feb. 1 coup, the CRPH needs money to carry on its organizing activities inside the country and diplomatic efforts abroad.

Even as the authorities keep narrowing access to the internet, lately limited to a relatively small number of households with fiber broadband connections, deals are still available.

Last week, one young woman was offering her collection of K-Pop music and memorabilia, especially of the band Exo. Anyone interested had to show her a receipt for a donation to CRPH, and the item would go to whoever gave the most.

Another put his collection of LEGO Marvel Super Heroes up for sale.

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"It is not very pricey but difficult to collect. If you show me your CRPH donation slip, choose anything and I will give it to you," his message read.

One group of friends advertised their collection of novels, poems and motivational books, with proceeds again going to the democracy fight and delivery "when everything becomes stable."

And it isn't just goods that are being hawked. Services are also on offer to help bankroll the struggle.

A quick check through Facebook notices turned up a seamstress offering to sew a traditional Myanmar dress for free to those who donate \$25, a musician offering lifetime guitar and ukulele lessons and an outdoor expedition leader offering to take five people on an adventure holiday.

The expedition would go to the winner of a lucky draw from among receipts for donations to either the CPRH, the Civil Disobedience Movement that organizes the daily resistance activities or to help thousands of internally displaced people.

However, there's one small caveat to that last offer — it's advertised as being redeemable "after the revolution."

EXPLAINER: Minneapolis chief has sought to reform department

By TAMMY WEBBER, AMY FORLITI and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo was a star witness for the prosecution Monday at the trial of a former officer charged with killing George Floyd, repeating the criticism he levied after Floyd's death.

Arradondo, the city's first Black chief, fired Derek Chauvin and three other officers the day after Floyd died, and soon afterward labelled it "murder." He testified Monday that Chauvin's actions were counter to his training and to department values.

It's a familiar message. Arradondo has spent the months since Floyd's death trying to transform a police department derided by critics as brutal and resistant to change, while fighting to preserve it from a liberal City Council that wants to replace it with a public safety unit or cut the number of officers.

FROM PATROL OFFICER TO POLICE CHIEF

Arradondo, a fifth-generation Minnesotan, joined the Minneapolis Police Department as a patrol officer, eventually working his way up to precinct inspector and head of the Internal Affairs Unit, which investigates officer misconduct allegations. Along the way, he and four other Black officers successfully sued the department for discrimination in promotions, pay and discipline. His predecessor, Janee Harteau, promoted him to assistant chief in early 2017.

He took over months later, after Harteau was forced out over the fatal shooting of Australia native Justine Ruszczyk Damond, who had called 911 to report a possible sexual assault behind her house. The Black officer in that case was convicted of third-degree murder and is serving a 12 1/2-year term. Damond's death came two years after 24-year-old Jamar Clark, who was Black, was killed in a scuffle with two white police officers, setting off weeks of protests; neither officer was charged.

BECOMING POLICE CHIEF

When Arradondo was tapped to lead the Minneapolis Police Department in 2017, he faced a public newly outraged by Damond's death and still carrying deep mistrust over the killing of Clark.

Civil rights advocates say Arradondo inherited a department with a history of misconduct spanning decades.

Many hoped he could change the culture of a department that critics said too frequently used excessive force and discriminated against people of color. He spoke of restoring trust during a swearing-in ceremony that became a community celebration featuring song, dance and prayer.

Arradondo made some quick changes, including toughening department policy on use of body cameras and requiring all officers to go through training that stresses respectful interaction with the public. But he was criticized following Floyd's death. Council member Steve Fletcher said Arradondo was lenient in his first year as chief as he worked to build department morale, which made it more difficult to get rid of problem officers later.

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AFTER FLOYD'S DEATH

Arradondo quickly fired the four officers at the scene of Floyd's death.

Derek Chauvin, the white officer seen on video pressing his knee into Floyd's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, was charged with second-degree murder and other counts. City records show he had 17 complaints against him, only one of which resulted in discipline. He also shot two people during his 19-year career and was never charged.

The other three officers face charges of aiding and abetting second-degree murder.

Arradondo and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey pushed for sweeping policy changes: Banning police chokeholds and neck restraints; requiring officers to try to stop any other officers they see using improper force; and preventing officers involved in using deadly force from reviewing body camera footage before completing an initial police report.

But they also faced efforts from the City Council to disband the police department altogether — a move that was eventually blocked from appearing on November ballots.

Minneapolis agreed to pay \$27 million to Floyd's family to settle a federal civil rights lawsuit alleging the city allowed a culture of excessive force, racism and impunity to flourish in its police force.

Arkansas governor vetoes transgender youth treatment ban

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson on Monday vetoed legislation that would have made his state the first to ban gender confirming treatments or surgery for transgender youth, though lawmakers could enact the restriction over his objections.

The Republican governor rejected legislation that would have prohibited doctors from providing gender confirming hormone treatment, puberty blockers or surgery to anyone under 18 years old, or from referring them to other providers for the treatment.

"If (the bill) becomes law, then we are creating new standards of legislative interference with physicians and parents as they deal with some of the most complex and sensitive matters involving young people," Hutchinson said at a news conference.

The Republican Legislature could still enact the measure, since it only takes a simple majority of the House and Senate to override a governor's veto in Arkansas. Hutchinson said he believed an override was likely.

Hutchinson's veto follows pleas from pediatricians, social workers and the parents of transgender youth who said the measure would harm a community already at risk for depression and suicide. Hutchinson said he met with doctors and transgender people as he considered whether to sign the measure.

He said he would have signed if it had just focused on gender confirming surgery, which currently isn't performed on minors in the state. He noted it wouldn't have exempted youth who are already undergoing treatment.

"The bill is over broad, extreme and does not grandfather those young people who are currently under hormone treatment," he said "In other words, the young people who are currently under a doctor's care will be without treatment when this law goes into effect."

Sponsors of the measure did not say when they planned to seek an override or whether they had enough votes secured to enact the measure despite Hutchinson's objection.

"These children need to be protected," Republican Rep. Robin Lundstrum told reporters.

Hutchinson said he hopes lawmakers would come up with a "more restrained approach." Conservative groups urged the legislature to enact the ban.

"The Arkansas Legislature needs to step up and override the governor's veto to make sure this good bill becomes law," Family Council President Jerry Cox said.

Arkansas is one of a handful of states where it only takes a simple legislative majority to override a governor's veto. The only veto override attempt this year — over a bill Hutchinson rejected that would have required the state to refund fines levied on businesses for violating coronavirus safety rules — failed last month.

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The treatment ban was the latest measure targeting transgender people that easily advanced in the Arkansas Legislature and other states this year. Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee's governors have signed laws banning transgender girls and women from competing on school sports teams consistent with the gender identity.

In South Dakota, a transgender sports bill died after Republican Gov. Kristi Noem issued a partial veto. She issued an executive order immediately after the bill died that pushed public schools to issue bans, but critics say the order is merely a recommendation intended to salvage her reputation with social conservatives. Noem has promised to call a special legislative session to have lawmakers take up the issue again.

Hutchinson recently signed a measure allowing doctors to refuse to treat someone because of moral or religious objections, a law that opponents have said could be used to turn away LGBTQ patients.

The head of the nation's largest LGBTQ rights group said Hutchinson's veto should be a "warning" to other states considering similar bans. Similar treatment bans have proposed in at least 20 states.

"The repercussions were too much for Arkansas, and they will be just as severe for any state weighing this type of legislation," Human Rights Campaign President Alphonso David said in a statement.

It isn't the first time Hutchinson has pushed back on measures targeting the LGBTQ community.

In 2017, he opposed legislation that would have prohibited transgender people from using government bathrooms consistent with their gender identity. That bathroom bill, which was opposed by tourism groups, never advanced beyond a Senate committee.

Hutchinson in 2015 urged lawmakers to rework a religious objections measure criticized by some of state's largest employers as anti-gay. The governor ultimately signed a version of the measure that was revised to address those concerns.

Biden boosted by Senate rules as GOP bucks infrastructure

By LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

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"Infrastructure is not just the roads we get a horse and buggy across," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at a Monday briefing. "Infrastructure is about broadband. It's about replacing lead pipes so people have water. It's about rebuilding our schools."

That leaves Biden and congressional Republicans on a collision course, the outcome of which could define the parties and his presidency.

The GOP strategy is reminiscent of its Obama-era stance more than a decade ago, when the Republicans opposed the 2009 rescue after the economic crisis, framing it as government overreach that piled on debt — an argument they used in 2010 to win back control of Congress.

But it's not at all certain the GOP playbook that worked more than a decade ago will produce the same political gains this time. Biden is banking on polling that suggests his infrastructure package is popular among voters of both parties, making it easier to bypass any GOP blockade on Capitol Hill.

Touring a water treatment plant Monday in California, Harris said access to clean water was about a broader issue of fairness.

With the state's governor, Gavin Newsom, Harris noted that families in Iowa and parts of the Midwest needed federal help to upgrade the wells on their properties, while parts of California needed reliable access to fight wildfires.

"We must understand the equities and inequities of distribution and access to clean water, especially clean drinking water," Harris said.

Police chief: Kneeling on Floyd's neck violated policy

By AMY FORLITI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minneapolis police chief testified Monday that now-fired Officer Derek Chauvin violated departmental policy — and went against “our principles and the values that we have” — in pressing his knee on George Floyd’s neck and keeping him down after Floyd had stopped resisting and was in distress.

Continuing to kneel on Floyd’s neck once he was handcuffed behind his back and lying on his stomach was “in no way, shape or form” part of department policy or training, “and it is certainly not part of our ethics or our values,” Police Chief Medaria Arradondo said on Day Six of Chauvin’s murder trial.

Arradondo, the city’s first Black chief, fired Chauvin and three other officers the day after Floyd’s death last May, and in June called it “murder.”

While police have long been accused of closing ranks to protect fellow members of the force charged with wrongdoing — the “blue wall of silence,” as it’s known — some of the most experienced officers in the Minneapolis department have taken the stand to openly condemn Chauvin’s treatment of Floyd.

As jurors watched in rapt attention and scribbled notes, Arradondo testified not only that Chauvin, a 19-year veteran of the force, should have let Floyd up sooner, but that the pressure on Floyd’s neck did not appear to be light to moderate, as called for under the department’s neck-restraint policy; that Chauvin failed in his duty to render first aid before the ambulance arrived; and that he violated policy requiring officers to de-escalate tense situations with no or minimal force if they can.

“That action is not de-escalation,” the police chief said. “And when we talk about the framework of our sanctity of life and when we talk about our principles and the values that we have, that action goes contrary to what we are talking about.”

Arradondo’s testimony came after the emergency room doctor who pronounced Floyd dead said he theorized at the time that Floyd’s heart most likely stopped because of a lack of oxygen.

Dr. Bradford Langenfeld, who was a senior resident on duty that night at Hennepin County Medical Center and tried to resuscitate Floyd, took the stand as prosecutors sought to establish that it was Chauvin’s knee on the Black man’s neck that killed him.

Langenfeld said Floyd’s heart had stopped by the time he arrived at the hospital. The doctor said that he was not told of any efforts at the scene by bystanders or police to resuscitate Floyd but that paramedics told him they had tried for about 30 minutes and that he tried for another 30 minutes.

Under questioning by prosecutors, Langenfeld said that based on the information he had, it was “more likely than the other possibilities” that Floyd’s cardiac arrest — the stopping of his heart — was caused by asphyxia, or insufficient oxygen.

Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd’s death May 25. The white officer is accused of pressing his knee into the 46-year-old man’s neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, outside a corner market where Floyd had been arrested on suspicion of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill for a pack of cigarettes.

Floyd’s treatment by police was captured on widely seen bystander video that sparked protests around the U.S. that descended into violence in some cases.

The defense has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do and that Floyd’s use of illegal drugs and his underlying health conditions caused his death.

Nelson, Chauvin’s attorney, asked Langenfeld whether some drugs can cause hypoxia, or insufficient oxygen. The doctor acknowledged that fentanyl and methamphetamine, both of which were found in Floyd’s body, can do so.

The county medical examiner’s office ultimately classified Floyd’s death a homicide — a death caused by someone else.

The report said Floyd died of “cardiopulmonary arrest, complicating law enforcement subdual, restraint, and neck compression.” A summary report listed fentanyl intoxication and recent methamphetamine use under “other significant conditions” but not under “cause of death.”

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Prosecutor Steve Schleicher noted that while some people may become more dangerous under the influence of drugs or alcohol, some may actually be “more vulnerable.” Arradondo agreed and acknowledged that this must also be taken into consideration when officers decide to use force.

Before he was pinned to the ground, a frantic Floyd struggled with police who were trying to put him in a squad car, saying he was claustrophobic.

Arradondo said officers are trained in basic first aid, including chest compressions, and department policy requires them to request medical assistance and provide necessary aid as soon as possible before paramedics arrive.

“We absolutely have a duty to render that,” he said.

Officers kept restraining Floyd — with Chauvin kneeling on his neck, another kneeling on Floyd’s back and a third holding his feet — until the ambulance got there, even after he became unresponsive, according to testimony and video footage.

The officers also rebuffed offers of help from an off-duty Minneapolis firefighter who wanted to administer aid or tell officers how to do it.

Langenfeld testified that for people who go into cardiac arrest, there is an approximately 10% to 15% decrease in survival for every minute that CPR is not administered.

Nelson noted on cross-examination that department policies direct officers to do what is reasonable in a given situation. He asked whether officers need to take the actions of a crowd into account, and Arradondo agreed. Nelson has suggested that onlookers — many of whom were shouting at Chauvin — might have affected officers’ response.

Nelson also questioned whether Chauvin’s knee was on Floyd’s neck, playing a few seconds of bystander video side-by-side with footage from an officer’s body camera that Arradondo agreed appeared to show Chauvin’s knee on Floyd’s shoulder blade.

But prosecutors quickly got Arradondo to note that the clip played by Nelson depicted only the few seconds before Floyd was moved onto a stretcher.

Minneapolis police Inspector Katie Blackwell, commander of the training division at the time of Floyd’s death, also took the stand Monday.

She said Chauvin, whom she’s known for about 20 years, received annual training in defensive tactics and use of force, and would have been trained to use one or two arms — not his knee — in a neck restraint.

“I don’t know what kind of improvised position that is,” she said, after being shown a photo of Chauvin with his knee on Floyd’s neck.

She said Chauvin also was a field-training officer, receiving additional training so he would know what prospective officers were learning in the academy.

The city moved soon after Floyd’s death to ban police chokeholds and neck restraints. Arradondo and Mayor Jacob Frey also made several policy changes, including expanded reporting of use-of-force incidents and attempts to de-escalate situations.

See ya Sam: Jets trade Darnold to Panthers for 3 draft picks

By DENNIS WASZAK Jr. AP Pro Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sam Darnold was the face of a hopeful franchise, a promising playmaker who might just be the New York Jets’ quarterback for at least the next decade.

It took only three years for that dream to fizzle and fade into disappointment.

Darnold was traded Monday to the Carolina Panthers, ending months of speculation and a stint in New York that was marked by a few flashes of brilliance, inconsistent play and unfortunate injuries.

And with the rebooting Jets holding the No. 2 overall pick in the NFL draft, they’re likely moving on to another young signal-caller — perhaps BYU’s Zach Wilson or Ohio State’s Justin Fields — who they hope will deliver the team back to respectability.

New York acquired a sixth-round pick in this year’s draft and second- and fourth-round picks in the 2022 draft. That gives them 21 selections over the next two drafts, with seven of them coming in the first two

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rounds.

Meanwhile, the 23-year-old Darnold gets a much-needed change of scenery and a new opportunity in Carolina, where he'll also be reunited with wide receiver Robby Anderson. The quarterback could also quickly seek some measure of revenge this season when the Panthers host the Jets.

"I like his toughness," Panthers general manager Scott Fitterer said. "He can move in the pocket and make plays down the field with his arm. All of those really stood out about him. I think in this offense with Matt Rhule and Joe Brady, that he can really take that next step."

Darnold was considered an untouchable player on the Jets' roster in his second season, but it became clear they could move on when GM Joe Douglas backed off that stance in March. Douglas praised Darnold, but acknowledged he would answer calls from teams interested in acquiring him.

The market for Darnold didn't appear as robust as the Jets had hoped. But the speculation New York would move on from the young QB only intensified when Douglas, new coach Robert Saleh and offensive coordinator Mike LaFleur all traveled to Provo, Utah, to watch quarterback Wilson's impressive passing display at BYU's pro day on March 26.

With Darnold's future uncertain, New York had also long been among the teams mentioned as possible suitors for Deshaun Watson, who requested a trade from Houston. But he's currently dealing with legal issues as he is accused of sexual assault and harassment in lawsuits filed by 21 women.

"I want to publicly acknowledge the commitment, dedication, and professionalism Sam displayed while with the Jets. He is a tough-minded, talented football player whose NFL story has not been written yet," Douglas said in a statement. "While all these things are true, this move is in the short- and long-term best interests for both this team and him.

"We thank Sam for all of his work on behalf of this organization and wish him well as he continues his career."

Then-GM Mike Maccagnan traded up to select Darnold with the No. 3 overall pick in 2018 out of USC. Darnold's California cool personality played well in New York and he seemed unfazed by the lofty expectations and the Big Apple spotlight.

But a foot injury as a rookie, a bout with mononucleosis in his second year and a shoulder injury last season sidelined him for stints. And when he did play, Darnold's mistakes overshadowed the positives. That led to serious doubts as to whether he could ever truly lift the franchise. Former coach Adam Gase also acknowledged he didn't help Darnold enough to thrive in their two seasons together, and the Jets lacked playmaking talent to help him take the next step in his development.

Another likely determining factor was his contract. Darnold was entering the fourth year of his rookie deal and was scheduled to count \$9.8 million against the Jets' salary cap. Instead, they will get \$4.8 million in relief and a \$5 million "dead" charge for 2021. New York would have had until May 3 to decide whether to exercise Darnold's fifth-year option — which would have cost the Jets \$18.9 million, fully guaranteed.

And that was a price — and a risk — that proved too high.

A person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press the Panthers will discuss picking up the fifth-year option for Darnold with his agent. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the team hadn't announced its plans.

Douglas is in his third season as the Jets' GM, but is overseeing just his second full offseason. With a new coaching staff in place and soon a new quarterback, the entire franchise can fully reset as New York tries to end a 10-season playoff drought — the longest active streak in the NFL.

In 38 games with the Jets — all starts — he threw for 45 touchdowns and 39 interceptions. Darnold is also coming off his worst statistical season with just nine touchdowns and 11 interceptions. He's the first quarterback taken in the top five picks to not make it to a fourth season with the team that drafted him since JaMarcus Russell, who went No. 1 overall to the Raiders in 2007.

For Carolina, the trade further clouds the future of Teddy Bridgewater, who was 4-11 last season as a starter and struggled to win close games down the stretch. Bridgewater completed 69.1% of his passes, throwing for 15 touchdown passes and 11 interceptions. The team's primary backups last season were

P.J. Walker and Will Grier.

After the season, Rhule said of Bridgewater: "He's our quarterback." But the Panthers attempted to trade for Detroit's Matthew Stafford, who wound up with the Los Angeles Rams, and also were interested in Watson. Bridgewater has two years remaining on a three-year, \$63 million contract that he signed in 2020.

"There are things that we have to work through, obviously," Fitterer said. "We're going to talk to Teddy's agent and find the right place, whether it is here or wherever it may be. We will figure things out, contract-side as well."

The Panthers have the eighth overall pick in the draft and it was widely suspected they could use the selection on a quarterback. But with Darnold in the fold, the Panthers are likely to target other areas of need including offensive tackle, linebacker, tight end or cornerback.

EXPLAINER: Was officer's knee on Floyd's neck authorized?

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — A critical factor for jurors to consider at a former Minneapolis police officer's trial in George Floyd's death is whether he violated the department's policy on neck restraints when he knelt on Floyd's neck.

The Minneapolis Police Department banned all forms of neck restraints and chokeholds weeks after Floyd's death, but at the time of his May 25 arrest by Derek Chauvin and other officers, certain neck restraints were permitted — provided certain guidelines and conditions were followed.

Here is a look at the policy, which was a focus of testimony Monday, and how it could factor into a verdict for Chauvin, who is charged with murder and manslaughter:

WHAT NECK RESTRAINTS DID MINNEAPOLIS POLICE AUTHORIZE?

The department policy, in place for at least eight years at the time, divided permissible neck restraints into two categories, according to court filings and testimony Monday by the city police chief, Medaria Arradondo. Neck restraints were defined in the policy as a "non-deadly force option."

One, called a "conscious neck restraint," was for light pressure applied to the neck to help control a person without rendering unconsciousness. It was permitted for a person actively resisting.

The other was an "unconscious neck restraint," in which officers could use their arms or legs to knock out a person by pressing carotid arteries on either side of the neck, blocking blood flow to the brain. The policy called for it to be used only for a person "exhibiting active aggression" or actively resisting when lesser attempts to control the person had failed or were likely to fail.

Police guidelines also instructed officers, at the first possible opportunity, to turn people on their sides once they were handcuffed and under control to avoid "positional asphyxia," in which breathing becomes labored in a prone position and can lead to death. The city had pledged to emphasize to officers the dangers of positional asphyxia as part of a \$3 million settlement in the 2010 death of David Smith. Minneapolis officers subdued Smith with a Taser and pinned him face down on the floor for several minutes with their knees on his back.

Training manuals also instructed officers to be attentive to whether a suspect was having difficulty breathing. Chauvin and the other officers never turned Floyd on his side, even as he said he couldn't breathe 27 times before his body went limp.

WHAT DO ATTORNEYS SAY?

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson, in a pretrial filing, said Chauvin followed policy and "did exactly as he was trained to do." The filing included a photo in department training materials of a trainer with a knee on the neck of an instructor playing a suspect.

Prosecutors have already put supervisory officers on the stand to testify that, even if Chauvin pinning Floyd with his knee fell within policy, doing so for 9 minutes, 29 seconds did not. In their pretrial filing, they said Chauvin and two other officers held their positions for four minutes after Floyd lost consciousness — and two minutes beyond when he no longer had a pulse.

Witnesses also testified to the danger of Floyd's position and to frequent department training on the im-

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portance of moving someone as quickly as possible into a recovery position. The photo included in Nelson's filing included text that read: "Place the subject in the recovery position to alleviate positional asphyxia."

Prosecutors highlighted video from Officer Thomas Lane's body camera on which he can be heard suggesting to Chauvin after Floyd lost consciousness that he be turned on his side, showing that Lane seemed to grasp the danger. Chauvin responded: "Stay ... put where you got him."

WHICH TYPE OF RESTRAINT WAS CHAUVIN TRYING TO PERFORM?

That's unclear. Donald Williams, a former mixed martial arts fighter who saw Chauvin restraining Floyd, testified last week that he believed Chauvin was attempting what he and other MMA fighters know as a blood choke — a permitted move in competitions in which carotid arteries are pressed for no more than 10 seconds to render an opponent unconscious.

"The officer on top was shimmying to actually get the final choke in," Williams told jurors.

The police chief testified Monday he believed Chauvin was attempting a conscious neck restraint but held it far longer than department policy allowed.

HOW MUCH PRESSURE WAS CHAUVIN APPLYING?

That's also in dispute.

One witness testified she saw Chauvin lift his right leg at one point, shifting his full weight onto Floyd's neck with his left leg. Another said Chauvin never eased up, either by putting a hand on the ground or leaning on a squad car next to him.

Nelson said a medical examiner found no bruising of Floyd's neck or any injury to neck structures. "Clearly, Mr. Chauvin was cautious about the amount of pressure he used to restrain Mr. Floyd," one defense filing said.

Nelson has also made clear he will argue that Floyd died because of drugs he had taken, not because of Chauvin's actions. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in Floyd's system.

EXPERTS ON THE NECK RESTRAINT

Jack Ryan, a Rhode Island lawyer and former police officer trained in chokeholds who was an expert for plaintiffs in the Smith family lawsuit, questioned in a phone interview whether it ever made sense for Minneapolis and other police departments to allow blood chokes. When officers try to execute one on a flailing suspect, it can go wrong quickly, with officers inadvertently blocking a suspect's airway.

A consensus has grown over the years, accelerated by Floyd's case, that it's not practical to provide officers the constant training they need to master and maintain the art of the blood choke.

"It's a move that requires precision in training, which means these are very perishable skills," Scott Allen DeFoe, a former Los Angeles police officer trained in martial arts, testifying for plaintiffs in a 2019 lawsuit in California against police who used choke holds.

Gaetz says he won't resign over 'false' sex allegations

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Matt Gaetz said Monday he will not leave Congress and denied that he "slept with" an underage girl, suggesting that accusations against him stem from political foes angry that he "loathes the swamp."

The Florida Republican, starting his fifth year in Congress, has been battling to preserve his political career since reports last week that he is under federal investigation for possible sex crimes. In a column in the Washington Examiner, a conservative news outlet, Gaetz predicted that "some of my feckless colleagues in Congress" will call for him to step down.

"No, I am absolutely not resigning," he wrote Monday.

An aggressive and high-profile ally of Donald Trump, Gaetz has so far received almost no public support from his congressional Republican colleagues and none from the former president.

Gaetz, 38, is under scrutiny over whether he violated federal sex trafficking laws, including if he had sex with a 17-year-old and other underage girls, paid them or offered gifts in exchange for sex. That's according to people familiar with the investigation who spoke on condition of anonymity because they

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could not discuss details publicly.

Gaetz, who has not been charged with any crimes, denied the accusations Monday.

"First, I have never, ever paid for sex," he wrote. "And second, I, as an adult man, have not slept with a 17-year-old."

Engaged since New Year's Eve, he wrote, "My lifestyle of yesteryear may be different from how I live now, but it was not and is not illegal."

Gaetz used his column to attack Democrats, news organizations and others, saying his enemies are "just repeating false allegations about a congressman who loathes the swamp and fights both sides of it on a daily basis."

He also predicted, "I'm sure some partisan crooks in Merrick Garland's Justice Department want to pervert the truth and the law to go after me."

The FBI, the Biden administration's Justice Department and "the Cheney political dynasty" were among the entities Gaetz accused of unjustly targeting him.

The Justice Department investigation began last year while Trump was still president. Gaetz helped lead an unsuccessful battle in January to depose Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, from her job as No. 3 House GOP leader. Days earlier, she was among just 10 House Republicans to vote to impeach Trump.

Gaetz's article was published the same day a former congressional aide told reporters he was interviewed last week by the FBI. Nathan Nelson, a military adviser who left Gaetz's office in October, said he was questioned about whether he'd left that job because he knew of Gaetz's "involvement in illegal activities."

"I'm here this morning to state that nothing could be farther from the truth. Neither I nor any other member of Congressman Gaetz's staff had any knowledge of illegal activities," Nelson said at his home in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida.

Nelson provided no specific details about the FBI's questioning. Without detailing them, he said he believes the charges against Gaetz are false.

Eating our lunch: Biden points to China in development push

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pushing for trillions of dollars in development spending, President Joe Biden and Democratic lawmakers are directing Americans' eyes to the rear-view mirror, pointing to a booming, ambitious China they say is threatening to quickly overtake the United States in global clout and capacity.

It's a national security pitch for a domestic spending program: that the \$2 trillion proposal for investments in U.S. transport and energy, manufacturing, internet and other sectors will make the United States more competitive in the face of Chinese President Xi Jinping's massive infrastructure-building campaign.

The argument is that competition today with China is more about economic and technological gains than arms — and its outcome will impact the United States' financial growth and influence, its ability to defend U.S. security alliances and interests abroad, and the daily lives of Americans.

China under Xi has "an overall goal to become the leading country in the world, the wealthiest country in the world, and the most powerful country in the world," Biden said before launching his proposal last week. "That's not going to happen on my watch because the United States are going to continue to grow and expand."

That pitch hasn't won over Republicans. They say his proposal has been loaded down with unnecessary spending projects and that raising taxes will ultimately hurt the U.S. economy.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Republicans could support a "much more modest" approach, one that doesn't rely on corporate tax hikes to pay for it. Biden's plan is "something we're not going to do," McConnell said Monday.

To varying degrees, addressing infrastructure has bipartisan support. Americans are experiencing outages, delays and irritations on transport and power systems designed in the 1960s and earlier. Meanwhile, China's latest five-year plan calls for hundreds more airports, coal-fired power plants and other standard

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infrastructure projects. Xi also is calling for his country's focus on "new infrastructure," including investment in 5G networks and other digital infrastructure.

"Time and momentum are on our side," Xi told a meeting of the Communist Party last year.

China spends more on infrastructure projects in other countries than the United States spends at home, said Jonathan Hillman, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. That and China's long-running economic boom, fueled in part by its domestic infrastructure spending, are helping China become more influential internationally, and may give it more confidence as it makes claims over Taiwan and other contested territory or advances its interests, some argue.

Using urgent warnings of a rival's advances to press for more infrastructure and research spending is a Cold War-tested technique. Past American presidents pointed to the Soviet Union while building up the U.S. highway system, space program and arms stockpiles.

And in the case of infrastructure, Biden's repeated warnings that China and other countries are "eating our lunch" are borne out by many crucial metrics, and by the observations of almost anyone who's traveled abroad much.

"Almost every day" in the U.S., service providers somewhere announce "the power is out, the wi-fi is out," said Min Ye, a researcher at Boston University whose work focuses on China and the intersection of economics and security.

Pointing to her two decades living in the Boston area, Ye says she has seen no really big upgrades to tired local road networks, no bus route upgrades that would help her get into the city more easily, no rail upkeep that would make a train trip to New York to see friends more enticing.

While Ye was glad to see Boston Logan International Airport launch projects to spiff up its interior and parking, it's been more than a quarter-century since the United States last built a new major airport, in Denver. Academic studies and economists claim the lost hours of delays in the air and on roads and rails cost billions of dollars in lost productivity.

And the federal government estimates 18 million Americans lack internet. What internet there is is expensive, compared to that of other big economies. It all led to scenes of U.S. workers and schoolchildren sitting in fast-food parking lots to do their work online this year as the pandemic shut down offices and schools.

Research done for the Group of 20 rich and developing nations estimates China's infrastructure spending as a percentage of domestic production on track to be more than three times that of the United States.

In Congress, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is pushing legislation intended to pour technology research and development funding into the National Science Foundation and Commerce Department, to build U.S. semiconductor production, and to strengthen domestic technology supply chains.

Schumer's aim, he says: "Bolster American competitiveness and counter the growing economic threats we face across the globe, especially from the Chinese Communist Party."

Ordinary Americans could start to feel the impact of China's investment in infrastructure and other support for the digital economy vs. the United States in ways big and small, said Hillman, the CSIS researcher. There could be minor annoyances, like one day finding it tough to track down a USB cable with the right metal bit that fits their laptop, because design standards could start following those of China's booming market, not the United States', Hillman said.

But "ultimately it will result in fewer jobs" in the United States, Hillman said. "That's the thing that is going to be most immediate in day to day life."

Ryan Hass, a former China director for the National Security Council in the Obama administration, cautions against overstating the threat that China's rise poses to the United States. China is facing its own problems with debt, an aging population, and slowing gains in worker productivity, Hass said.

"If the United States makes progress in fixing some of its own problems, including its infrastructure deficit, it will remain highly competitive with China," Hass said.

Yellen calls for minimum global corporate income tax

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By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Monday urged the adoption of a minimum global corporate income tax, an effort to at least partially offset any disadvantages that might arise from the Biden administration's proposed increase in the U.S. corporate tax rate.

Citing a "30-year race to the bottom" in which countries have slashed corporate tax rates in an effort to attract multinational businesses, Yellen said the Biden administration would work with other advanced economies in the Group of 20 to set a minimum.

"Competitiveness is about more than how U.S.-headquartered companies fare against other companies in global merger and acquisition bids," Yellen said in a virtual speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. "It is about making sure that governments have stable tax systems that raise sufficient revenue to invest in essential public goods."

The speech was Yellen's highest-profile so far on international affairs, and came just as the spring meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund began in a virtual format.

"It is important to work with other countries to end the pressures of tax competition and corporate tax base erosion," Yellen said.

President Joe Biden has proposed hiking the U.S. corporate tax rate to 28% from 21%, partially undoing the Trump administration's cut from 35% in its 2017 tax legislation. Biden also wants to set a minimum U.S. tax on overseas corporate income, and to make it harder for companies to shift earnings offshore. The increase would help pay for the White House's ambitious \$2.3 trillion infrastructure proposal.

Yellen's remarks essentially serve as an endorsement of negotiations that have been underway at the 37-nation Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development for roughly two years, said Alan Auerbach, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley.

Biden's U.S. corporate tax proposal includes an increase to the U.S. minimum tax that was included in Trump's tax law, from 10.5% to 21%. One focus of the OECD talks is whether other countries will adopt similar minimums. Biden's corporate tax measure would also penalize other countries without a minimum corporate tax by more heavily taxing their subsidiaries in the U.S.

Auerbach said that the OECD has helped foster other agreements around issues such as bank secrecy.

"There is precedent for this sort of thing," Auerbach said. "But this would be a big deal because it would get countries to coordinate their tax systems in ways they haven't before."

Also on Monday, Biden said he is "not at all" concerned that a higher corporate tax rate would cause some U.S. companies to relocate overseas, though Yellen's proposed global minimum corporate tax is intended to prevent that from happening.

"There's no evidence to that ... that's bizarre," Biden said in response to a question from reporters.

According to the Tax Foundation, a right-leaning think tank, the Trump administration's corporate tax reduction lowered the U.S. rate from the highest among the OECD countries to the 13th highest. Many analysts have argued, however, that few large U.S. multinationals paid the full tax.

"We have 51 or 52 corporations from the Fortune 500 who haven't paid a single penny a day for three years?" Biden said. "Come on."

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Penn., said that Yellen's proposal was unlikely to make much progress overseas. He also said Republicans should reverse any corporate tax hike if they regain a congressional majority in upcoming elections.

"Spoiler alert: This effort will likely fail and even if there is some sort of agreement, it will be non-binding because it is not a treaty," Toomey said.

Yellen, meanwhile, downplayed the potential for the Biden administration's domestic agenda, which also includes a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package approved last month, to spur higher inflation. Former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, among others, has raised such concerns since the relief bill passed.

"I strongly doubt that it's going to cause inflationary pressures," Yellen said, referring to the administration's infrastructure proposal. "The problem for a very long time has been inflation that's too low, not inflation that's too high."

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Yellen also said the United States will step up its efforts at home and overseas to fight climate change, "after sitting on the sidelines for four years."

Treasury will work to "promote the flow of capital toward climate-aligned investments and away from carbon-intensive investments," Yellen said. That approach has raised the ire of GOP members of Congress, who say it threatens the ability of the U.S. oil and gas industry to access needed lending.

Yellen also noted that many developing nations are lagging in vaccinating their populations, and have also experienced harsh economic consequences from the pandemic. As many as 150 million people worldwide will fall into extreme poverty this year, Yellen said.

"The result will likely be a deeper and longer-lasting crisis, with mounting problems of indebtedness, more entrenched poverty, and growing inequality," Yellen said.

The Biden administration supports the creation of \$650 billion in new lending capacity at the IMF to address such issues, she said. Many Republicans in Congress oppose the new allotment, arguing that much of the funding would flow to relatively better-off developing countries, such as China.

Yellen acknowledged that the additional credit would be distributed to each IMF member, but argued that "significant resources will go to the poorest countries most in need." Nations can also donate some of their funds to the hardest-hit countries, which she expects many will do, she added.

Hikers scramble as new fissure opens up at Icelandic volcano

REYKJAVIK, Iceland (AP) — Steam and lava spurted Monday from a new fissure at an Icelandic volcano that began erupting last month, prompting the evacuation of hundreds of hikers who had come to see the spectacle.

The new fissure, first spotted by a sightseeing helicopter, was about 500 meters (550 yards) long and about a kilometer (around a half-mile) from the original eruption site in the Geldinga Valley.

The Icelandic Department of Emergency Management announced an immediate evacuation of the area. It said there was no imminent danger to life due to the site's distance from popular hiking paths.

The Icelandic Meteorological Office said the new volcanic activity wasn't expected to affect traffic at nearby Keflavik Airport.

The long-dormant volcano on the Reykjanes Peninsula in southwest Iceland flared to life March 20 after tens of thousands of earthquakes were recorded in the area in the past three weeks. It was the area's first volcanic eruption in nearly 800 years.

The volcano's proximity to Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, about 32 kilometers (20 miles) away, has brought a steady stream of tourists to the area, even with the country in partial lockdown to combat the coronavirus. Around 30,000 people have visited the area since the eruption began, according to the Icelandic Tourist Board.

Live footage from the area showed small spouts of lava coming from the new fissure.

Geophysicist Magnus Gudmundsson said the volcanic eruption could be moving north from its original location.

"We now see less lava coming from the two original craters," he told The Associated Press. "This could be the beginning of second stage."

Iceland, located above a volcanic hot spot in the North Atlantic, averages one volcanic eruption every four to five years. The last one was at Holuhraun in 2014, when a fissure eruption spread lava the size of Manhattan over the interior highland region.

In 2010, ash from Iceland's Eyjafjallajokull volcano shut down much international air travel for several days.

Lawyer says mediation resolves feud among Jordan royals

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Mediation between Jordan's King Abdullah II and his outspoken half brother, Prince Hamzah, successfully de-escalated one of the most serious political crises in the kingdom in decades, the palace and a confidant of the prince said Monday.

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The apparent resolution of the unprecedented public feud capped a weekend of palace drama during which the king had placed Hamzah under house arrest for allegedly plotting with foreign supporters to destabilize Jordan, a key Western ally.

Jordanian authorities had accused the former crown prince of being involved in a "malicious plot," along with two senior Jordanian officials. Hamzah, 41, denied the allegations, saying he was speaking out against corruption and mismanagement.

The announcement of the successful mediation came after Abdullah's paternal uncle, Hassan, met with Hamzah on Monday.

The mediation took place at Hassan's home at the Royal Hashemite Court. Hamzah was joined by his brother Hashem and three of their cousins.

"In light of the developments of the past two days, I put myself at the disposal of His Majesty the King," said the statement signed by Hamzah. He said he would remain loyal to the king and to Jordan's constitution.

Malik R. Dahlan, a professional mediator and a friend of the family, then issued a separate statement, saying the mediation has "been successful and I expect a resolution shortly." Dahlan is the principal of Institution Quraysh for Law & Policy, of which Hamzah Al-Hussein is a council overseer.

He said that "this regrettable incident was the result of the clumsy actions of a senior security official and misrepresentation by a government official," adding that "it should have remained a family matter."

This was an apparent reference to Saturday's events when Jordan's army chief visited Hamzah and — according to the prince's description — imposed restrictions on his movement and ability to communicate with the outside world.

Earlier Monday, it appeared tensions were still running high in the kingdom, valued by the West as a stable ally in a volatile region. A recording circulated online in which Hamzah sounded defiant, saying he would not take orders from the army chief.

"The army chief of staff came to me and issued threats in the name of heads of security agencies," Hamzah said in the recording. "I recorded his comments and distributed them to my acquaintances abroad as well as my family in case something happens."

"I don't want to escalate now, but of course I will not abide when he tells me 'you are not allowed to go out, tweet or connect with people and you are only allowed to see family members,'" he said. "When an army chief of staff says that, this is something that I think is unacceptable."

The authenticity of the recording was confirmed by an individual close to the prince, speaking on condition of anonymity because of security concerns. The individual said the recording was a few days old and made after the army chief threatened the prince.

Jordan's army chief of staff, Gen. Yousef Huneiti, said Monday the country's armed forces and security agencies "have the power and experience" to deal with any developments that might happen internally or in the region.

He made his comments while taking part in "Shield of the Nation," a drill that included several brigades, special forces, border guards and the Royal Air Force in the eastern region of the kingdom, the state news agency Petra said. The exercise did not appear to be related to the weekend incidents because such drills are planned well in advance.

Huneiti said the troops will confront anyone who "tries to endanger the nation's security, terrify its citizens and threatens the security and stability of the kingdom."

Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Sunday the prince had recorded conversations and passed them to foreign sources. He did not provide specifics on the alleged plot or say what other countries were purportedly involved. But he said about 14-16 associates of Hamzah had been arrested, in addition to Bassem Awadallah, a former Cabinet minister and one-time head of the royal court, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a member of the royal family.

The U.S. and Arab governments sided quickly with Abdullah, reflecting Jordan's strategic importance. The kingdom borders Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel and the occupied West Bank.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric noted Jordan's "vital role in the Middle East, and its peace and se-

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curity and the stability of the country is critically important.”

Domestically, Hamzah’s unprecedented criticism of the ruling class — without naming the king — could lend support to growing complaints about poor governance and human rights abuses in Jordan.

Abdullah and Hamzah are both sons of King Hussein, who remains a beloved figure two decades after his death. Upon ascending to the throne in 1999, Abdullah named Hamzah as crown prince, only to revoke the title five years later. Hassan, the uncle, also had been crown prince but was removed shortly before Hussein’s death.

While Abdullah and Hamzah are said to have good relations generally, Hamzah has at times spoken out against government policies, and more recently had forged ties with powerful tribal leaders in a move seen as a threat to the king.

After new law, McConnell warns CEOs: ‘Stay out of politics’

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell says it’s a “big lie” to call the new voting law in Georgia racist and he warned big business to “stay out of politics” after major corporations and even Major League Baseball distanced themselves from the state amid vast public pressure.

McConnell particularly slammed President Joe Biden’s criticism that the Georgia bill was restrictive and a return to Jim Crow-era restrictions in the Southern states aimed limiting ballot access for Black Americans.

“It’s simply not true,” McConnell told reporters Monday.

The choice by the GOP leader to dive into voting politics lends heft to efforts nationwide to install strict new voting laws after Donald Trump’s false claims of fraud that cost him the election to Biden. The new laws are aimed at scaling back early voting and other options that became wildly popular during the pandemic.

Even more, McConnell’s warning to big business not to get involved shows the scramble Republicans face as progressive groups are shining a spotlight on corporate America to live up to its brands and values as Congress takes on voting rights, gun violence and other issues Republicans have resisted.

The Republican leader has been among the most outspoken champions of the role of big money in elections, promoting the free-flow of undisclosed dollars to campaigns as a form of Constitution-protected free speech.

But companies temporarily halted giving to many Republicans after the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol siege, when the former president urged like supporters to fight for him and hundreds stormed the Capitol.

Speaking in Kentucky, McConnell said Monday it’s simply “not accurate” to say the Georgia law is making it more difficult to vote.

McConnell also criticized Biden for criticizing the law, saying the president’s claims had been fact-checked as false.

“The President has claimed repeatedly that state-level debates over voting procedures are worse than Jim Crow or ‘Jim Crow on steroids.’ Nobody actually believes this,” McConnell said in a lengthy statement earlier Monday.

“Nobody really thinks this current dispute comes anywhere near the horrific racist brutality of segregation.”

The new law shortens the time frame between primary and general elections, which also narrows the options for early voting. Yet the new law also expands early voting on Saturdays.

Republicans had initially proposed to limit weekend voting, a time when many Black churches conduct “souls to the polls” efforts. But Republicans reversed themselves, and the measure now requires two Saturdays of early voting, in addition to options for counties to open voting on Sundays.

The law also makes it a misdemeanor to hand out food, drink or other benefits to voters waiting in long lines at polling stations. Biden criticized that move, but advocates say it is meant to discourage outside groups from influencing voters.

McConnell more pointedly warned the big business that have been responding to public pressure on their corporate actions not to give in to the advocacy campaigns.

“It’s jaw-dropping to see powerful American institutions not just permit themselves to be bullied, but

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join in the bullying themselves," he said.

Last week, Delta, Coca-Cola and other companies spoke critically of the new law in Georgia and baseball announced it was moving the All-Star Game from the state.

McConnell warned companies not to get involved in voting issues or other upcoming debates on environmental policy or gun violence heading to Congress.

European countries scramble to tamp down latest virus surge

By RAFAL NIEDZIELSKI and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

BOCHNIA, Poland (AP) — European countries scrambled Monday to tamp down a surge in COVID-19 cases and ramp up vaccinations, hoping to spare hospitals from becoming overwhelmed by the pandemic's latest deadly wave of infections.

The crush of coronavirus patients has been relentless for hospitals in Poland, where daily new infections hit records of over 35,000 on two recent days and the government ordered new restrictions to prevent large gatherings over the long Easter weekend. France's health minister warned that the number of intensive care unit patients could match levels from a year ago.

But in a sign of the disparities from one country to the next, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that barbers, gyms and outdoor bar and restaurant patios would be able to open next week after the country reported progress with vaccines and its recent lockdown. Meanwhile, the U.S. vaccination campaign kept accelerating, with 40 percent of the nation's adult population receiving at least one dose.

On Sunday, coronavirus patients filled almost all of the 120 beds at the County Hospital of Bochnia, 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the southern city of Krakow. One patient, 82-year-old Edward Szumanski, voiced concern that some people still refuse to see the virus that has killed over 2.8 million people worldwide as a threat. About 55,000 of those deaths have occurred in Poland.

"The disease is certainly there, and it is very serious. Those who have not been through it, those who do not have it in their family, may be deluding themselves, but the reality is different," he said.

The more contagious and more aggressive virus variant identified in Britain is fueling much of the increase in Europe. Meanwhile, voters in many countries are angry at the European Union's strategy but also at their own governments' handling of the pandemic and the failure to prevent repeated spikes in infections.

France's health minister, Olivier Veran, warned Monday that the number of COVID-19 patients in the country's intensive care units might match the level of the first crisis a year ago. Speaking on TF1 television, he said the country could approach the ICU saturation levels of April 2020, when French ICUs held more than 7,000 virus patients, many of whom were in temporary facilities because demand far outstripped the country's pre-pandemic ICU capacity.

Veran expressed hope that France's new infections could peak this week thanks to new partial lockdown measures. After long resisting calls for a new lockdown, the French government closed schools and shuttered all non-essential stores nationwide and imposed travel restrictions for four weeks.

"We will manage," Veran said.

The British government announced Monday that all adults and children will be able to have routine coronavirus tests twice a week as a way to stamp out new outbreaks. The tests are being introduced as Johnson announces the next steps in the country's road map out of its three-month lockdown.

Britain has recorded almost 127,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe. But both infections and deaths have fallen sharply during the lockdown and since the start of a vaccination campaign that so far has given a first dose to more than 31 million people, or 6 in 10 adults.

Authorities in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, introduced tighter lockdown restrictions following a recent spike in virus cases. All schools in the city of 3 million people will be closed for the next two weeks, and only people with special passes will be allowed on public transport.

"The hospitals are almost full. The situation is difficult," Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Elsewhere, North Macedonia has delayed mass immunization amid vaccine shortages as its hospitals fill up following record new COVID-19 infections and deaths last week.

In Greece, which is struggling to emerge from a deep recession, most retail stores were allowed to

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reopen Monday despite an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections. Lockdown measures have been in force since early November, although shops opened briefly around the Christmas season. The prolonged closures piled pressure on the economy.

Serbia also has eased measures against the coronavirus despite high numbers of infections and a slow-down in vaccinations. The government on Monday allowed bars and restaurants to serve guests outside at reduced capacity and with respect of social distancing rules.

In the U.S., a top public health official said young people are driving the latest uptick in COVID-19 cases, as the increasing rate of vaccination in older Americans prevents the most serious cases among seniors.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cited the increasing spread of variants as well as a rise in youth sports and extracurricular activities as factors contributing to the steady increase in cases over the last four weeks.

But Walensky pointed to positive developments among seniors, who are the most vulnerable age group. Senior virus deaths have fallen to their lowest level since the early fall. More than 75% of those age 65 or older nationally have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and nearly 55% are fully vaccinated.

"What we're seeing is both a decrease in emergency department visits as well as hospitalizations associated with that demographic," she said Monday.

More than 23% of all adults in the U.S. are fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

Many states are making vaccines available to younger demographics. Starting Monday, any adult in Florida is eligible to receive the vaccine. In addition, the state announced that 16- and 17-year-olds also could get the vaccine with parental permission.

Putin signs law allowing him 2 more terms as Russia's leader

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday signed a law allowing him to potentially hold onto power until 2036, a move that formalizes constitutional changes endorsed in a vote last year.

The July 1 constitutional vote included a provision that reset Putin's previous term limits, allowing him to run for president two more times. The change was rubber-stamped by the Kremlin-controlled legislature and the relevant law signed by Putin was posted Monday on an official portal of legal information.

The 68-year-old Russian president, who has been in power for more than two decades — longer than any other Kremlin leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin — said he would decide later whether to run again in 2024 when his current six-year term ends.

He has argued that resetting the term count was necessary to keep his lieutenants focused on their work instead of "darting their eyes in search for possible successors."

The constitutional amendments also emphasized the primacy of Russian law over international norms, outlawed same-sex marriages and mentioned "a belief in God" as a core value. Nearly 78% of voters approved the constitutional amendments during the balloting that lasted for a week and concluded on July 1. Turnout was 68%.

Following the vote, Russian lawmakers have methodically modified the national legislation, approving the relevant laws.

The opposition criticized the constitutional vote, arguing that it was tarnished by widespread reports of pressure on voters and other irregularities, as well as a lack of transparency and hurdles hindering independent monitoring.

In the months since the vote, Russia has imprisoned the country's most prominent opposition figure, Alexei Navalny,

The 44-year-old Navalny was arrested in January upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusation.

In February, Navalny was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating the terms of his probation while convalescing in Germany. The sentence stems from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that Navalny

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has rejected as fabricated — and which the European Court of Human Rights has ruled to be unlawful.

His team says Navalny had lost a substantial amount of weight even before he started a hunger strike Wednesday to protest authorities' failure to provide proper treatment for his back and leg pains.

Navalny complained about prison officials' refusal to give him the proper medications and to allow his doctor to visit him. He also protested the hourly checks a guard makes on him at night, saying they amount to sleep deprivation.

In an Instagram post Monday, Navalny said that three of 15 people in his room at the penal colony were diagnosed with tuberculosis. He noted that he had a strong cough and a fever of 38.1 Celsius (100.6 Fahrenheit).

Later on Monday, the newspaper Izvestia carried a statement from the state penitentiary service saying Navalny was moved to the prison colony's sanitary unit after a checkup found him having "signs of a respiratory illness, including a high fever."

In an acerbic note, Navalny said he and other inmates studied a notice on tuberculosis prevention that underlined the importance of strengthening immunity with a balanced diet — advice that contrasted with a prison ration of "glue-like porridge and frozen potatoes."

Israel's Netanyahu in court as parties weigh in on his fate

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's corruption trial resumed Monday, with a key witness painting a picture of an image-obsessed Israeli leader forcing a prominent news site to flatter his family and smear his opponents.

The testimony came as Netanyahu's chances of securing another term in office following last month's parliamentary elections appeared to be dwindling in high-stakes political talks hosted by the country's figurehead president just a few miles (kilometers) away.

In a nationally televised address, Netanyahu accused prosecutors of persecuting him in an attempt to undermine the will of the voters and to drive him out of office.

"This is what a coup attempt looks like," he said.

Taken together, the court testimony and political consultations pointed to an increasingly uphill struggle for Netanyahu as he fights for his political life.

In a post-election ritual, President Reuven Rivlin was consulting with the various parties elected to parliament before choosing a candidate to form a new government.

With both Netanyahu and his main rival, Yair Lapid, failing to gain the support of a majority of lawmakers, Rivlin faces a difficult task, and the country risks plunging into an unprecedented fifth consecutive election campaign in the coming weeks.

Late on Wednesday, Lapid called on the country's anti-Netanyahu factions — a patchwork of parties with vast ideological differences — to put aside their differences and form a unity government. He said he had even offered Naftali Bennett, leader of a small right-wing party, a power-sharing rotation, with Bennett serving first as prime minister.

"Anyone who saw Netanyahu's reckless performance today understands he can't carry on in his job," Lapid said. "We know how to bridge divides. We don't hate one another."

Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. Monday's proceedings, the first in two months, marked the beginning of the evidentiary phase, in which a long line of witnesses are to take the stand against the prime minister.

The session focused on the most serious case against Netanyahu — in which he is accused of promoting regulations that delivered hundreds of millions of dollars of profits to the Bezeq telecom company in exchange for positive coverage on the firm's popular news site, Walla.

Ilan Yeshua, Walla's former chief editor, described a system in which Bezeq's owners, Shaul and Iris Elovitch, repeatedly pressured him to publish favorable things about Netanyahu and smear the prime minister's rivals.

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The explanation he was given by the couple? "That's what the prime minister wanted," he said.

He said the pressure went on "for hours on end" over several years. The Elotviches, who are also defendants in the case, chose photos, headlines, word choice and other content.

Yeshua said they also ordered him to write unfavorable articles about Netanyahu's rivals, giving them pejorative nicknames. Naftali Bennett, a former Netanyahu ally turned rival, was known as "the naughty religious one," and former Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, who is of North African descent, was called "smiley" and "the Arab."

Yeshua said he never spoke directly to Netanyahu, and that requests also came from intermediaries, including former Netanyahu aide Nir Hefez, who has turned state's witness and is also expected to testify against the prime minister.

"It was clear that I needed to comply with Nir's requests to put up positive articles, and remove negative ones," Yeshua said.

He said his staff was furious about the pressure and one editor even nicknamed the prime minister "Kim," after the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un.

He said Shaul Elovitch referred to Netanyahu as "the big guy," and would also show him text messages from the prime minister's son, Yair, asking for articles to be changed or taken down.

At one point in the proceedings, Iris Elovitch screamed out: "How much can you lie?"

In another case, Netanyahu is accused of accepting gifts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from wealthy associates, including Hollywood film mogul Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer. In the third case, Netanyahu is accused of trying to orchestrate positive coverage in a major Israeli newspaper in exchange for curbing distribution of a free pro-Netanyahu tabloid. Netanyahu denies all charges.

In his televised statement, Netanyahu accused prosecutors of conducting a "witch hunt" against him.

"They didn't investigate a crime. They didn't look for a crime," he said. "They went after a man. They went after me."

At the beginning of Monday's session, Netanyahu sat with his lawyers as lead prosecutor Liat Ben-Ari read out the charges against him.

"The relationship between Netanyahu and the defendants became currency, something that could be traded," she said. "The currency could distort a public servant's judgment."

He then left the courthouse before Yeshua's testimony.

Outside the courtroom, dozens of supporters and opponents of the prime minister gathered to protest amid a heavy police presence, highlighting Israel's deep divisions.

While a ruling could be months or even years away, the proceedings are expected to take place up to three days a week, an embarrassing and time-consuming distraction that is certain to amplify calls for Netanyahu to step aside.

The March 23 election was seen as a referendum on Netanyahu's leadership, with his opponents saying a politician on trial for serious charges is unfit to rule. The election, Israel's fourth in two years, ended in a deadlock.

Netanyahu is desperate to stay in power, hoping to use his office as a bully pulpit to lash out against prosecutors and potentially forming a government that could grant him immunity. But that scenario was looking increasingly distant Monday.

After a day of consultations, neither Netanyahu's allies nor his foes secured a 61-seat governing majority. Parties recommending Netanyahu hold a total of 52 seats, while parties recommending Lapid hold 45 seats. Two Arab parties, holding a total of 10 seats, and the small New Hope party, led by a former Netanyahu ally who now opposes him, did not recommend any candidate.

Bennett, leader of the right-wing Yamina party, recommended himself as a compromise candidate.

Yamina has just seven seats in parliament. But Bennett is hoping he can become a consensus candidate who can bridge the deep divides between the rival factions.

Rivlin has until midnight Wednesday to choose a prime minister-designate who would be given up to six weeks to form a coalition. If he feels there is no clear choice, he also could send the issue straight to the Knesset, ordering lawmakers to choose a member as prime minister or force another election.

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Israeli law does not require prime ministers to resign while under indictment, and Netanyahu has refused to do so. Some of Netanyahu's opponents have talked about passing legislation that would bar an indicted politician from serving as prime minister in order to disqualify him ahead of another election.

Review: A new collection of stories by Haruki Murakami

By ANN LEVIN The Associated Press

"First Person Singular," by Haruki Murakami (Alfred A. Knopf)

Haruki Murakami has a new collection of stories told in the first person by an unnamed older man obsessed with baseball, music, and the porous borders between memory, reality and dreams.

He may describe himself as a "bland, run-of-the-mill guy," as in the story "Cream" — about a young man's encounter with an aging mystic — but Murakami Man is more like a walking encyclopedia who has a problem with women — mainly, that he can't seem to get past their physical appearance.

Thus, in "On a Stone Pillow," we have his memories of a melancholy poet and her "shapely round breasts"; in "With the Beatles," a first girlfriend with "small yet full lips" and a wire bra. (Both, by the way, are suicidal.) In "Carnaval," the one story where a woman has agency, we are told over and over how ugly she is.

The best story in the collection, translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel, is "Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova." It is built around the counterfactual premise that the legendary inventor of bebop jazz didn't die in 1955 at age 34 but lived into the 1960s, long enough to collaborate on a bossa nova album — a musical pairing as unlikely as that of the Carpenters and Cardi B.

At the end of the story, when Bird appears in a dream and performs "Corcovado" on his alto sax, the narrator is transported. It was music, he reflected, "that made you feel like something in the very structure of your body had been reconfigured, ever so slightly."

In "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey," an unnamed narrator with the same flat affect as all the others befriends the titular monkey at a rural inn. After a long night of drinking beer and eating snacks — another favorite pastime of these loner men—the monkey tells him about the ruse he has used to satisfy his longing for female humans in a species-appropriate way.

At first, you are carried along in the slipstream of bizarre but plausible detail — a feat Murakami achieves through the use of banal, if not clichéd, language: "Honestly, it felt odd to be seated next to a monkey, sharing a beer, but I guess you get used to it."

But if you're not a fan of Murakami's dreamy vibe and magical realism, if you think that life is confounding and interesting enough without needing to add fairy dust, then this probably isn't the book for you. You might ask yourself, why a Shinagawa monkey and not a tiger or leopard? In Murakami World, the answer would seem to be, why not?

Vaccine skepticism runs deep among white evangelicals in US

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

The president of the Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest evangelical denomination, posted a photo on Facebook last week of him getting the COVID-19 vaccine. It drew more than 1,100 comments — many of them voicing admiration for the Rev. J.D. Greear, and many others assailing him.

Some of the critics wondered if worshippers would now need "vaccine passports" to enter The Summit Church in Durham, North Carolina, where Greear is pastor. Others depicted the vaccines as satanic or unsafe, or suggested Greear was complicit in government propaganda.

The divided reaction highlighted a phenomenon that has become increasingly apparent in recent polls and surveys: Vaccine skepticism is more widespread among white evangelicals than almost any other major bloc of Americans.

In a March poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 40% of white evangelical Protestants said they likely won't get vaccinated, compared with 25% of all Americans, 28% of white mainline Protestants and 27% of nonwhite Protestants.

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The findings have aroused concern even within evangelical circles. The National Association of Evangelicals, which represents more than 45,000 local churches, is part of a new coalition that will host events, work with media outlets and distribute various public messages to build trust among wary evangelicals.

"The pathway to ending the pandemic runs through the evangelical church," said Curtis Chang, a former pastor and missionary who founded ChristiansAndTheVaccine.com, the cornerstone of the new initiative, With white evangelicals comprising an estimated 20% of the U.S. population, resistance to vaccination by half of them would seriously hamper efforts to achieve herd immunity, Chang contends.

Many evangelical leaders have spoken in support of vaccinations, ranging from Dallas megachurch pastor Robert Jeffress to the Rev. Russell Moore, head of the Southern Baptists' public policy arm.

Jeffress believes a majority of his congregation at First Baptist Dallas welcome the vaccines, while some have doubts about their safety or worry they have links to abortion. Jeffress is among numerous religious leaders who say the leading vaccines are acceptable given their remote, indirect links to lines of cells developed from aborted fetuses.

Moore expressed hope that SBC pastors would provide "wise counsel" to their congregations if members raise questions about vaccinations.

"These vaccines are cause for evangelicals to celebrate and give thanks to God," he said via email. "I am confident that pastors and lay members alike want churches full again and vaccines will help all of us get there sooner rather than later."

Other evangelical pastors have been hesitant to take a public stance.

Aaron Harris, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Junction City, Kansas, hasn't discussed the vaccine from the pulpit or decided whether he'll be vaccinated.

"We don't believe that this is a scriptural issue; it is a personal issue," said Harris, who estimates that 50% of the congregation's older adults have been vaccinated, while fewer younger members plan to do so.

"We shouldn't live in fear of the virus because we do have a faith in eternity. However, just because we aren't in fear of it, where is the line of what we ought to do?" he asked. "I'm not going to lay down in front of a bunch of alligators to show my faith in that way."

Some Christians say they prefer to leave their fate in God's hands, rather than be vaccinated.

"We are going to go through times of trials and all kinds of awful things, but we still know where we are going at the end," said Ron Holloway, 75, of Forsyth, Missouri. "And heaven is so much better than here on earth. Why would we fight leaving here?"

John Elkins, pastor at Sovereign Grace Fellowship in Brazoria, Texas, about 50 miles south of Houston, said only one person in his SBC congregation of about 50 has been vaccinated.

"We're in a very libertarian area. There's a lot of hesitancy to anything that feels like it's coming from the federal government," said Elkins, who is also forgoing the vaccine, at least for now, along with his wife.

Elkins, whose father was a professor of gynecology at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, said his congregants' doubts are not theologically based.

"It's skepticism about effectiveness," he said. "People are concerned it was rushed out too quickly."

Phillip Bethancourt, another Southern Baptist pastor in Texas, has encouraged his congregation at Central Church in College Station to get the vaccine and believes most will. The church hosted a vaccine drive for staff and volunteers at other churches; 217 people got their first doses March 22.

"Even people who might be skeptical from a medical standpoint can understand it from a missional standpoint," he said. "If it helps more people be able to serve at their church again, so more children can learn about Jesus, that's a good thing."

Bethancourt, a former vice president of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, has spoken with congregants who spurn the vaccine and say they're unafraid of dying if that's God's will.

"The sentiment doesn't trouble me on the face of it, but there's inconsistency," he said. "We don't adopt that mentality in other aspects of our life, like not wearing a seat belt."

Chang said that as a former pastor, he understands why some whose congregations are mistrustful of the government and the vaccines muzzle themselves rather than risk backlash if they urge their flock to get vaccinated.

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"There's going to be some courage required," he said.

His initiative includes a toolkit for pastors offering suggestions for how to address — within a Christian framework — the various concerns of skeptical evangelicals. They range from the extent of the vaccines' link to abortion to whether they represent "the mark of the beast," an ominous harbinger of the end times prophesized in the New Testament's Book of Revelation.

Partnering in the initiative is the Ad Council, known for iconic public service ad campaigns such as Smokey Bear and "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk."

"We know the important role faith plays in the lives of millions of people throughout the country," Ad Council president Lisa Sherman said, expressing hope that the campaign could boost their confidence in the vaccines.

As the vaccines first became available, there was widespread concern that many Black Americans would be hesitant to take them due to historic, racism-related mistrust of government health initiatives. But recent surveys show Black Protestants are more open to vaccinations than white evangelicals.

"This pandemic has hit our community like a plague — and that's made our job easier," said Bishop Timothy Clarke of First Church of God, a Black evangelical church in Columbus, Ohio. "We've done a tremendous job of educating."

Corporations gave over \$50M to voting restriction backers

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When executives from Coca-Cola and Delta Air Lines spoke out against Georgia's new voting law as unduly restrictive last week, it seemed to signal a new activism springing from corporate America.

But if leaders of the nation's most prominent companies are going to reject lawmakers who support restrictive voting measures, they will have to abruptly reverse course.

State legislators across the country who have pushed for new voting restrictions, and also seized on former President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud, have reaped more than \$50 million in corporate donations in recent years, according to a new report by Public Citizen, a Washington-based government watchdog group.

Telecom giant AT&T was the most prolific, donating over \$800,000 since 2015 to authors of proposed restrictions, cosponsors of such measures, or those who voted in favor of the bills, the report found. Other top donors during the same period include Comcast, Philip Morris USA, UnitedHealth Group, Walmart, Verizon, General Motors and Pfizer.

The money may not have been given with voting laws in mind, but it nonetheless helped cement Republican control in statehouses where many of the prohibitive measures are now moving forward.

Whether companies continue to give to these lawmakers will test how far risk-averse corporate leaders are willing to go in their increasingly forceful criticism of the restrictive efforts, which voting rights groups have excoriated as an attack on democracy.

"It really is corporate America, as a whole, that is funding these politicians," said Mike Tanglis, one of the authors of the report. "It seems many are trying to hide under a rock and hope that this issue passes."

More than 120 companies detailed in the report previously said they would rethink their donations to members of Congress who, acting on the same falsehoods as the state lawmakers, objected to the certification of President Joe Biden's win following the deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters.

The tension is most evident now in Georgia, where a far-reaching new voting law has drawn an intense national scrutiny, prompting the criticism from Delta and Coca-Cola. On Friday, MLB announced it would no longer host the 2021 All-Star Game in Atlanta.

Yet it's unclear whether this aggressive new posture will extend to corporate campaign donation practices. And early indicators show there is risk.

Georgia's Republican-controlled House voted to strip Delta of a tax break worth tens of millions of dollars annually for their criticism of the new law, though the action was rendered moot after the GOP Senate

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failed to take it up before the legislative session adjourned.

What is certain, though, is that withholding corporate donations to state-level candidates, like many companies did at the federal level, would have a far greater impact in statehouses.

"A contribution of \$5,000 to a U.S. senator who is raising \$30 million is a drop in a bucket. But in some of these state races, a few thousand dollars can buy a lot of ad time," said Tanglis. "If corporate America is going to say that (Trump's) lie is unacceptable on the federal level, what about on the state level?"

Public Citizen analyzed about 245 voting restriction bills proposed before March 1. They culled a list of sponsors and cosponsors, while also analyzing vote roll calls. Then they cross-referenced the data with state-level donation records dating back to 2015, which included money from company political action committees, as well as direct contributions from corporate treasuries.

Among their findings:

- Companies donated at least \$50 million to lawmakers who supported voting restrictions, including \$22 million in the 2020 campaign cycle.

- At least 81 Fortune 100 companies have given a combined total of \$7.7 million to supporters of the restrictions.

- Nearly half of all Fortune 500 companies donated a combined total of \$12.8 million to supporters of the restrictions.

- About three-quarters of the companies that changed their donation policies after the U.S. Capitol attack have also given to lawmakers who supported voting rights restrictions.

- More than 60 companies have given at least \$100,000 to lawmakers who supported the restrictions.

- Separately, industry groups and trade associations contributed an additional \$36 million to the lawmakers, \$16 million of which was given during the 2020 cycle.

In response, AT&T said "the right to vote is sacred" but declined to say whether the company would withhold donations to state lawmakers as they did for members of Congress who objected to Biden's win.

"We understand that election laws are complicated, not our company's expertise and ultimately the responsibility of elected officials. But, as a company, we have a responsibility to engage," AT&T CEO John Stankey said in a statement.

Verizon CEO Hans Vestberg said in a statement, "We strongly oppose the passage of any legislation or the adoption of any measure that would make it harder" to vote. But he stopped short of pledging any specific action.

Comcast said in a statement that "efforts to limit or impede access to this vital constitutional right for any citizen are not consistent with our values." The company would not comment on whether it would evaluate its giving to lawmakers who support the measures.

Altria, the parent company of Philip Morris USA, said in a statement that "every eligible voter should be able to exercise their right to vote" and pledged to monitor lawmakers' "alignment with our political contribution guiding principles when making future contribution decisions."

Other companies listed in the report declined to comment or did not respond to inquiries from The Associated Press.

On Monday, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell urged companies to resist what he called a "coordinated campaign by powerful and wealthy people to mislead and bully the American people."

"Our private sector must stop taking cues from the Outrage-Industrial Complex," the Kentucky Republican said in a statement. "Americans do not need or want big business to amplify ... or react to every manufactured controversy with frantic left-wing signaling."

Pressure has been particularly intense in Georgia, where Republican Gov. Brian Kemp recently signed a sweeping new law that bans people from handing out food or water to voters waiting in line and allows the Republican-controlled State Election Board to remove and replace county election officials, among many other provisions.

Two of the top corporate contribution recipients detailed in Public Citizen's report were among the sponsors of the measure.

Since 2015, Republican state Sen. Jeff Mullis has collected more than \$869,000 in donation from cor-

porate PACs. Among his top corporate donors were AT&T (\$15,900) and UnitedHealth Group (\$12,900), according to the report. Mullis is chair of the Georgia Senate's Rules Committee, which plays a key role in determining which bills make it to the floor for a vote.

Republican state Sen. Butch Miller, another sponsor of the bill, has received at least \$729,000 in corporate donations since 2015. Among his top corporate givers are UnitedHealth Group (\$15,700) and AT&T (\$13,600), the report states.

Miller and Mullis did not respond to requests for comment.

UK to ease lockdown next week, will test vaccine passports

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's slow but steady march out of a three-month lockdown remains on track even as coronavirus cases surge elsewhere in Europe, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced Monday, as he confirmed that businesses from barbers to bookstores will be allowed to reopen next week.

Johnson said it's too soon to decide, however, whether U.K. residents will be able to have summer trips abroad. He confirmed that the government will test out a contentious "vaccine passport" system — a way for people to offer proof they have protection from COVID-19 — as a tool to help travel and large events return safely.

Four weeks after England took its first step out of lockdown by reopening schools, Johnson said Britain's vaccination program was proceeding well and infections were falling. He said the next step would come as planned on April 12, with the reopening of hairdressers, beauty salons, gyms, nonessential shops and bar and restaurant patios.

"We set out our road map and we're sticking to it," Johnson said during a news conference.

But, he added, "We can't be complacent. We can see the waves of sickness afflicting other countries, and we've seen how this story goes."

A ban on overnight stays away from home in England will also be lifted April 12, and outdoor venues such as zoos and drive-in cinemas can operate again.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are following similar but slightly different paths out of lockdown.

Britain has recorded almost 127,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe. But infections and deaths both have fallen sharply during the current lockdown and since the start of a vaccination campaign that has given a first dose to more than 31 million people, or six in 10 adults.

The government aims to give all adults at least one shot of vaccine by July, and hopes that a combination of vaccination and mass testing will allow indoor socializing and large-scale events to return.

It says all adults and children in England will be encouraged to have routine coronavirus tests twice a week as a way to stamp out new outbreaks. The government said free lateral flow tests will be available free starting Friday by mail, from pharmacies and in workplaces.

Lateral flow tests give results in minutes but are less accurate than the PCR swab tests used to officially confirm cases of COVID-19. But the government insists they are reliable and will help find people who contract the virus but don't have symptoms.

Britons are currently banned by law from going on holiday abroad under the extraordinary powers Parliament has given the government to fight the pandemic. The government said Monday it won't lift the travel ban before May 17 — and maybe later.

"The government hopes people will be able to travel to and from the U.K. to take a summer holiday this year, but it is still too soon to know what is possible," it said in an official update.

Once travel resumes, Britain will rank countries on a traffic-light system as green, yellow or red based on their level of vaccinations, infections and worrying new virus variants. People arriving from "green" countries will have to be tested but won't face quarantine.

The government also is testing a system of "COVID-status certification" — often dubbed "vaccine passports" — that would allow people seeking to travel or attend events to show they either have received a coronavirus vaccine, tested negative for the virus, or recently had COVID-19 and therefore have some immunity.

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A series of events will start this month, including soccer matches, comedy shows and marathon races. The government said the first events will rely only on testing, "but in later pilots vaccination and acquired immunity are expected to be alternative ways to demonstrate status."

The issue of vaccine passports has been hotly debated around the world, raising questions about how much governments, employers and venues have a right to know about a person's virus status. The idea is opposed by a wide swath of British lawmakers, from left-of-center opposition politicians to members of Johnson's Conservative Party, and the policy could face stiff opposition when it is put before Parliament later this month.

Conservative legislator Graham Brady said vaccine passports would be "intrusive, costly and unnecessary." The leader of the opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, called the idea "un-British."

The government said vaccine passports were all but unavoidable, since many countries were certain to demand proof of COVID-19 status for entry. And it said barring British businesses from asking customers for similar proof would be "an unjustified intrusion on how businesses choose to make their premises safe."

The government said, however, that vaccine passports would never be needed to access "essential public services, public transport and essential shops."

Johnson acknowledged that vaccine passports raised "complicated ethical and practical issues" and stressed their introduction wasn't imminent.

"We're some way off finalizing any plans for COVID-certification in the U.K.," he said.

AP-NORC poll: Border woes dent Biden approval on immigration

By WILL WEISSERT and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More Americans disapprove than approve of how President Joe Biden is handling the sharply increasing number of unaccompanied migrant children arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, and approval of his efforts on larger immigration policy falls short of other top issues — suggesting it could be a weak point for the new administration.

A new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research also shows that solving the problem of young people at the border is among Americans' highest immigration priorities: 59% say providing safe treatment of unaccompanied children when they are apprehended should be a high priority, and 65% say the same about reuniting families separated at the border.

Former President Donald Trump built his presidency around hard-line policies that expanded and fortified border walls, made it tougher for people fleeing drug violence and other desperate circumstances in Mexico and Central America to seek U.S. asylum and separated immigrant families.

Biden has tried to seize political momentum on the issue by promising a more humane and orderly system, but his administration has struggled to cope with rising numbers of migrants coming to the border, especially unaccompanied children.

Overall, 40% of Americans disapprove of Biden's handling of children reaching the nation's southern border without their parents, compared with just 24% who approve. Thirty-five percent don't have an opinion either way.

"I don't know how to politically correctly say this: I do feel that, because there's this new administration, that people feel that they can come to the country," said Mindy Kiehl, a 40-year-old real estate agent in Erie, Pennsylvania, who otherwise approves of Biden's handling of the presidency so far.

"I get it. They're seeking refuge," Kiehl added. "But bringing these children, it's not good for the children, it's not good for the families. I don't know how that's going to solve the problem."

Biden said at a recent news conference that "we're sending back the vast majority of the families that are coming." But his struggles on the issue go beyond unaccompanied minors.

Just 42% of Americans say they approve of how the president is handling immigration in general, and a similar share, 44%, say they approve of how he's handling border security. Both are significantly lower than the 61% of Americans who say they approve of how Biden is handling his job overall and fall short of the president's rating on some other issues, including his response to the coronavirus pandemic and

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managing of the economy.

That gap comes despite the White House endorsing the most ambitious overhaul of the nation's immigration system in a generation on Biden's first day in office. It has stalled in Congress, though, and Republicans and even some top Democrats say passage will be difficult.

The plan would provide an eight-year path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million people in the U.S. illegally, but the poll shows doing so isn't high on the public's priority list. Only 29% of Americans overall, including 42% of Democrats and 14% of Republicans, called legal status for people in the country illegally a high priority.

Additionally, only a third of Americans each say that allowing refugees to come to the U.S. or expanding "guest worker" programs should be high priorities.

The gap between Biden's overall approval rating and his handling of immigration crosses party lines. Seventy-four percent of Democrats and 10% of Republicans approve of Biden's handling of immigration, compared with 96% of Democrats and 22% of Republicans who approve overall.

The difference also comes across racial and ethnic groups. Overall, 92% of Black Americans, 67% of Hispanics and 52% of white Americans say they approve of how Biden is handling his job. On immigration, 74% of Black Americans but only 50% of Hispanics and 34% of white Americans say they approve.

Jack Henes, a retiree in Sebastian, Florida, said Biden hasn't handled immigration as well as some other hot-button issues while calling what's happening on the U.S. southern border an "administrative nightmare."

While awaiting the larger legislative package, the Democratic-controlled House has passed smaller-scale reforms that face uncertain futures in a Senate split 50-50. Biden also has used executive actions to attempt to roll back many Trump administration immigration policies but has been criticized for failing to do enough fast enough.

Others feel he's already gone too far.

"My concern is that President Biden has allowed the world to feel it's OK to just come on in," said Matthew Behrs, a Trump supporter in Wisconsin.

The poll shows many Americans rank some of the major goals of the Democratic proposal as moderate priorities instead of high ones, suggesting Biden lacks a clear mandate for how best to proceed on the issue, potentially hurting his leverage with Congress.

And many want to see efforts to step up enforcement be part of the conversation: For 53%, increasing security at the border is a high priority. Some 47% of Americans also say the federal government should make strengthening policies to prevent immigrants from overstaying their visas a high priority.

Fewer, roughly a third, say penalizing companies that hire immigrants living in the U.S. illegally and deporting immigrants living in the U.S. illegally should be high priorities.

The poll also finds Americans are more likely to favor than oppose providing a way for immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children to stay legally, 53% to 24%, with 22% saying they are neither in favor nor opposed. Still, just 41% call extending legal protections to so-called Dreamers a high priority. A plan approved by the House but awaiting Senate action seeks to do just that.

Biden has now assigned Vice President Kamala Harris to work with Central American countries to try to address the root causes of illegal immigration. Henes, the retiree, suggested that Biden has given the problem to Harris as a way of buying himself some time — but that it hasn't helped.

"They're still in the huddle," Henes said. "They're not ready to call a play."

GameStop to sell 3.5M shares after stock frenzy boosts price

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AND ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

Two months after a market phenomenon took shares of GameStop to the moon, the video game retailer said Monday that it will sell up to 3.5 million of its shares.

The shares will be sold through an "at-the-market" offering, which lets companies place their stock on the market over a period of time.

The announcement sent shares of GameStop, up 850% this year, down 8% at the opening bell.

The GameStop saga has been one of the biggest stories on Wall Street this year.

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The company had been pummeled as new technology allowed people to download games, rather than buying a physical copy from GameStop or somewhere else. That shift threatened the existence of GameStop and its shares had been more than halved, to \$20 each, by the start of this year.

A number of hedge funds, believing the value of GameStop shares would fall further, shorted the company, or bet against its shares. However, a group of smaller investors who communicated largely on Reddit challenged those hedge funds, believing they were wrong or that they could catch them in a "short squeeze."

To short a stock, an investor borrows shares at the current price for a fee, and buys them back at a later date. If the shares fall, the investors pockets the difference. If it rises, it can lead to massive losses because the borrowed stock is now worth more than was paid for it, and the investor must pay the difference.

That's exactly what happened this year and shares of GameStop rocketed from \$20, to \$483, and ravaging short sellers like Citron Research.

At the same time, it made a bunch of small investors very wealthy.

Market pundits had urged the company to put more shares on the market as the price spiked. Such a stock sale would have allowed to company to pay down hefty debts and even revive the company by pursuing a new business plan.

And two weeks ago, GameStop disclosed in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission that it actually had been considering such a move since January.

Even though it did not announce the share sale when share prices peaked, GameStop could wipe existing debt of the books if it chooses.

The company's stock closed at \$191.45 last week, meaning it could raise as much as \$670 million. GameStop's net debt was around \$430 million in January. However, because the sale is "at-the-market," it gives the company more flexibility as to when the sales happen.

A company's shares typically slide after it announces it will sell more shares because it tends to water down the value of shares that are already out there. That's certainly what happened Monday.

Yet the GameStop story has veered from what most would consider reality for four months now and it remains to be seen if those smaller investors will continue to play this game. And more importantly, the volatile trading has attracted bigger players, making the trade even riskier.

Still, shares had fallen as much as 16% before the opening bell and bounced back somewhat in early trading Monday. This year, double-digit swings in the company's stock has become common.

The company, based in Grapevine, Texas, also said Monday that preliminary fiscal first-quarter to-date global sales are up about 11% from a year ago, a period when the pandemic slammed the U.S. and retailers like GameStop were forced to close its stores.

Supreme Court dismisses case over Trump and Twitter critics

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a case over former President Donald Trump's efforts to block critics from his personal Twitter account.

The court said there was nothing left to the case after Trump was permanently suspended from Twitter and ended his presidential term in January.

Twitter banned Trump two days after the deadly attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters on Jan. 6. The company said its decision was "due to the risk of further incitement of violence."

The court also formally threw out an appeals court ruling that found Trump violated the First Amendment whenever he blocked a critic to silence a viewpoint.

Justice Clarence Thomas wrote a separate opinion arguing that the bigger issue raised by the case, and especially Twitter's decision to boot Trump, is "the dominant digital platforms themselves. As Twitter made clear, the right to cut off speech lies most powerfully in the hands of private digital platforms."

Thomas agreed with his colleagues about the outcome of the case, but said the situation raises "interesting and important questions."

The case concerned the @realdonaldtrump account with more than 88 million followers and Trump's

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argument that it is his personal property. The Justice Department argued that blocking people from it was akin to elected officials who refuse to allow their opponents' yard signs on their front lawns.

But the federal appeals court in New York ruled last year that Trump used the account to make daily pronouncements and observations that are overwhelmingly official in nature.

The case had been styled Trump v. Knight First Amendment Institute, the group that originally sued to challenge Trump's decision to block his critics.

But when Trump left office, President Joe Biden replaced Trump in the case's title, though the new president had nothing to do with the lawsuit.

Sharon Cohen, much-honored AP national writer, dead at 68

By JERRY SCHWARTZ Associated Press

Sharon Cohen, a matchless reporter who told American stories with great skill and compassion over more than four decades at The Associated Press, died Monday at her Chicago home. She was 68.

At her death, more than a year after she was diagnosed with brain cancer, Cohen was a national writer, a prestigious position she had held for 20 years. From her base in Chicago, she unreeled an array of stories about the triumphs and tragedies of people both ordinary and extraordinary.

There was the story of Vashti Risdall, the foster mother of 162 children who retired at age 96 only because her 74-year-old daughter insisted. Of Marine Sgt. Merlin German, the "Miracle Man" who survived a bomb blast in Iraq, dancing with his mom after 100 surgeries. Of barber Gilbert Peppin, who lived under a shadow for 30 years, unjustly suspected of his wife's murder.

Every story got the Sharon Cohen treatment: determined reporting, zealous fact-checking, direct and evocative writing. She knew no other way.

"Sharon's genius was in capturing the stories of Americans as they lived out the intense changes and disruptions of the last 40 years — struggling when their town's factory closed, trying to pull away from drugs or violence, bewildered when they came back from war," said Sally Buzbee, the AP's senior vice president and executive editor.

"Her stories often made me cry. They always opened our minds. As a reporter and writer, she was a dream — both utterly precise and dogged and also hugely compassionate."

Cohen was an idea machine, never comfortable unless she had one story she was working on, another on deck and others in line. In the days before the internet, when she was a regional reporter covering the Midwest, Cohen subscribed to a score of small newspapers; she was always looking for that three-paragraph brief on page 38 that might turn into something special.

She gathered far more research than she could ever use, filling file cabinets throughout the Chicago bureau.

"You know the iceberg principle of writing, where most of the writer's research and knowledge is below the surface?" said former AP editor John Dowling, a longtime friend and colleague. "The bottom of Sharon's story-iceberg was more like an Antarctic ice shelf."

She wrote just about every kind of story imaginable in the course of her career, but patterns emerged. She wrote true crime stories -- a ring that used babies to smuggle drugs, for example -- but also larger pieces about women jailed because of opioids, about juveniles in prison, about the failure to investigate the disappearances of Native American women.

She wrote about American workers: struggling farms, the lives of meatpackers 100 years after Upton Sinclair wrote "The Jungle," auto workers forced to commute 500 miles to new jobs when their plants closed.

She wrote about America's fighting men and women. In 2008, she told the story of "The Long Haul" -- a 15,000-word, seven-part serial that won smashing front-page displays in newspapers across the country.

"This is the story," she wrote, "of a very long deployment of a very long war, of how members of the 1st Brigade Combat Team/34th Infantry Division lived and died in Iraq, how their families endured while they were gone, and how what happened in a far distant land still resonates today."

And she wrote about her native city.

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Cohen was a devoted daughter of Chicago. She never left it, aside from attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She worked for community newspapers, the suburban edition of the Chicago Tribune and United Press International before joining the AP in 1979.

She knew Chicago's history and its neighborhoods, loved its rambunctious politics, railed against its corruption and greatly admired its hard-working people. She also felt that it was too often stereotyped.

And so she wrote about Urban Prep, an inner-city school that had the audacious goal of sending every member of the Class of 2010 to college -- and succeeded. And one of her final stories, published last fall, was about Auburn Gresham, a Black neighborhood where people found hope despite their struggles with COVID-19, violent protests, gun violence and economic misery.

"I've tried to explain and capture the lives and voices of people who aren't in the headlines every day, because I think those are the most powerful stories," she said in 2015 upon receiving a Studs Terkel Community Media Award for her life's work.

Cohen received many other prizes, including the AP's Gramling Journalism Award in 1999. She won countless Peter Lisagor Awards from the Chicago Headline Club; no one knows just how many.

Little wonder that some colleagues called her "the Queen," according to AP National Writer Martha Irvine. Cohen was intense, and intensely private. For a long time, Irvine found this diminutive woman -- who always wore high heels, even while reporting in the oil fields of North Dakota -- hard to befriend.

"Then on one of our trips ... she walked down the aisle of the plane, dropped a chocolate bar on my tray and grinned ever so slightly as she continued on," Irvine recalled. "I'd finally made it."

Chocolate was not necessarily the most prominent of Cohen's passions -- she loved to travel, she was an avid reader, she enjoyed photography and was good at it. But this notoriously finicky eater's love of chocolate and other sweets endured nearly to her life's end, said Mike Robinson, a former AP staffer who was her partner for 40 years. (He survives her, as does her brother, Marshall Cohen of Chicago, and his wife and two children. She was predeceased by her parents, David and Esther.)

As recently as January, Robinson said, she ordered babkas from two Jewish bakeries in Brooklyn. It was a sort of experiment, to see which one was best.

Both were delicious; it was too difficult to decide. So they ate them both.

A new 'Kung Fu' debuts at a crucial time for Asian Americans

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Up-and-coming actors will sometimes claim to know a variety of skills to be considered for roles, but Olivia Liang set a boundary early in her career.

"When I started off in the industry, people would ask me why martial arts wasn't on my resume because it was such a typecast for Asians to do martial arts roles," said Liang. "So I made a promise to myself. I was like, 'I'll never learn martial arts until someone pays me to learn martial arts.'"

Liang kept that promise. She learned martial arts as the lead of The CW's new series, "Kung Fu" — and she's getting paid for it.

"Kung Fu" is inspired by the 1972 series starring David Carradine. It stars Liang as Nicky Shen, who while visiting China, joins a monastery where she is taught Shaolin values and martial arts. When her mentor is killed, she returns home to find her community disrupted by a local gang. She must use the martial arts skills she learned to protect her neighborhood and family, and soon discovers she's being targeted by the same assassin who killed her Shaolin mentor.

Liang says what makes "Kung Fu" different than the superhero shows The CW is known for is that Nicky is not a vigilante.

"Nicky is heroic, but she doesn't see herself as a hero. She doesn't have a hero complex where she is going out to find bad guys. She sees bad things happening and feels like she needs to do something about it."

The series has a mostly Asian American cast with an Asian American showrunner and executive producer, Christina M. Kim. "I'm so excited that I get to give some people this opportunity to shine," said Kim.

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"When I was on set for the first time, we did a camera test and I literally was staring at the monitor and it just hit me. I was like, 'I've never seen the screen filled with Asian American faces like this is.'"

Kim says her writers room is also diverse. She has five writers of Asian descent on staff. Half of the writers are also women, which Kim says is a novelty. "Usually it's just me and one other woman in a room."

"Kung Fu" premieres Wednesday on The CW and the pilot will be re-broadcast on TNT on Sunday.

Tzi Ma, who plays Nicky's father, Jin, says it's remarkable to have so many people with Asian backgrounds working on the show, because he doesn't have to explain the Asian experience to people who are making creative assumptions to what that's like.

"Not only is there representation on screen but we back it up from our writers room to all our guest directors. It is an amazing sight to behold. I've been doing this for a minute now and I have never seen this kind of make up," said Ma.

Ma hopes the authenticity of the series will help to change the public consciousness at a time when hate crimes against Asian Americans are on the rise.

"The camera is a very interesting instrument. I want the audience to have the opportunity finally to see what real reputation representation is like. And when they get educated... they will begin to develop their taste of what's good, what's real and what's true."

The Asian American community is also paying attention, not only to see their stories on TV but to see how they're told. Valerie Soe, a professor in the Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University, hopes the producers and writers will be careful with what imagery is presented to viewers.

"The tricky part will be for the folks who are in charge to make sure that the show doesn't veer too much into older stereotypes and tropes." She cites the gang storyline as potentially problematic because it promotes the theory "that all Asian men are gangsters and villains."

Overall, Soe says the series is a win because it's one more example of an Asian American story being told.

"There's a phrase called 'narrative plentitude' that Viet Thanh Nguyen the author uses — about having a lot of different stories out there to pick from so we don't have to just like obsessively focus on one. Like, 'Is 'Crazy Rich Asians' going to represent us accurately? Is 'Joy Luck Club' going to represent us accurately?' It's like, 'Well, if that one doesn't, then we've got this other one,'" she said.

"The more the merrier. I think not everything's going to be fabulous and not everything's going to be exactly what we want. But, if you have a lot of different choices, then you don't expect everything from one."

Stores in Greece open amid virus surge to help save economy

By DEREK GATOPOULOS and COSTAS KANTOURIS

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Retail stores across most of Greece were allowed to reopen Monday despite an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections, as the country battles to emerge from deep recession.

Stores in greater Athens opened for pickup services only but remain closed in Greece's second- and third-largest cities, Thessaloniki and Patras, because of fears of a more serious spike in infections.

Lockdown measures have been in force since early November, although shops opened briefly around the Christmas holiday season. The prolonged closures piled pressure on the economy.

Greek economic output shrank by 8.2% in 2020 while the national debt as a percentage of gross domestic product shot over 200%.

About 16% of the country's residents have received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccination but infection rates continue to rise.

"Opening retail businesses ... will provide a decompression valve for our society and will help improve the implementation of (restrictive) measures," government spokeswoman Aristoltelia Peloni said.

The center-right government has pinned its reopening policy on the mass distribution of test kits that will be provided for free on a weekly basis to help reopen schools, expected later this month, and the country's vital tourism industry in mid-May.

In Thessaloniki, in northern Greece, protesting store owners hung black banners outside business entrances, angry that they weren't allowed to reopen. Others opened their stores but didn't serve customers,

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in an act of defiance. The head of the city's chamber of commerce, Michalis Zorpidis, told the AP that it was taking the government to the country's highest administrative court.

"We feel that the decision is unfair and illegal. That's why we took legal actions against the government to reverse the decision," Zorpidis said.

The daily number of confirmed infections nationwide — a statistic affected by testing levels — reached the highest rate since the start of the pandemic in Greece at 28.5 per 100,000 residents as a seven-day rolling average. The death rate is currently above the European Union average with the cumulative total at more than 8,300.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, April 6, the 96th day of 2021. There are 269 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 6, 1909, American explorers Robert E. Peary and Matthew A. Henson and four Inuits became the first men to reach the North Pole.

On this date:

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Shiloh began in Tennessee as Confederate forces launched a surprise attack against Union troops, who beat back the Confederates the next day.

In 1886, the Canadian city of Vancouver, British Columbia, was incorporated.

In 1896, the first modern Olympic games formally opened in Athens, Greece.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I as the House joined the Senate in approving a declaration of war against Germany that was then signed by President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1945, during World War II, the Japanese warship Yamato and nine other vessels sailed on a suicide mission to attack the U.S. fleet off Okinawa; the fleet was intercepted the next day.

In 1954, Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., responding to CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow's broadside against him on "See It Now," said in remarks filmed for the program that Murrow had, in the past, "engaged in propaganda for Communist causes."

In 1968, 41 people were killed by two consecutive natural gas explosions at a sporting goods store in downtown Richmond, Indiana.

In 1974, Swedish pop group ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest held in Brighton, England, with a performance of the song "Waterloo."

In 1985, William J. Schroeder (SHRAY'-dur) became the first artificial heart recipient to be discharged from the hospital as he moved into an apartment in Louisville, Kentucky.

In 2008, Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, speaking at a private fundraiser in San Francisco, spoke of voters in Pennsylvania's Rust Belt communities who "cling to guns or religion" because of bitterness about their economic lot; Democratic rival Hillary Rodham Clinton seized on the comment, calling it "elitist."

In 2017, Don Rickles, the big-mouthed, bald-headed "Mr. Warmth" whose verbal assaults endeared him to audiences and peers and made him the acknowledged grandmaster of insult comedy, died at his Beverly Hills home at age 90.

In 2019, former South Carolina Democratic Sen. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings, who had also helped guide the state through desegregation as governor, died at the age of 97; he was the eighth-longest-serving senator in U.S. history.

Ten years ago: Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi appealed directly to President Barack Obama in a letter to end what Gadhafi called "an unjust war"; he also wished Obama good luck in his bid for re-election. Portugal became the third debt-stressed European country to need a bailout as the prime minister announced his country would request international assistance.

Five years ago: A federal judge in Charleston, West Virginia, sentenced former coal executive Don Blan-

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kenship to a year in prison for his role in the 2010 Upper Big Branch Mine explosion that killed 29 men in America's deadliest mining disaster in four decades; Blankenship maintained that he had committed no crime. Country giant Merle Haggard died in Palo Cedro, California, on his 79th birthday.

One year ago: Hours after Democratic Gov. Tony Evers issued an executive order postponing the following day's election for two months, the Wisconsin Supreme Court sided with Republicans in the state legislature who said Evers didn't have the authority to reschedule the race; the decision left Wisconsin as the only state proceeding with an April election amid the coronavirus outbreak. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was transferred to the intensive care unit of a London hospital where he was being treated for COVID-19, after his condition deteriorated. A federal judge refused to block Los Angeles officials from shutting down gun stores as nonessential businesses during the pandemic. Amid glimmers of hope that the pandemic could be slowing, stocks surged worldwide, capped by a 7% leap for the U.S. market. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced a complete lockdown over the upcoming Passover holiday to control the country's coronavirus outbreak.

Today's Birthdays: Nobel Prize-winning scientist James D. Watson is 93. Actor Billy Dee Williams is 84. Actor Roy Thinnes is 83. Movie director Barry Levinson is 79. Actor John Ratzenberger is 74. Actor Patrika Darbo is 73. Baseball Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven is 70. Actor Marilu Henner is 69. Olympic bronze medal figure skater Janet Lynn is 68. Actor Michael Rooker is 66. Former U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., is 65. Rock musician Warren Haynes is 61. Rock singer-musician Black Francis is 56. Actor Ari Meyers is 52. Actor Paul Rudd is 52. Actor-producer Jason Hervey is 49. Actor Zach Braff is 46. Actor Joel Garland is 46. Actor Candace Cameron Bure (buhr-RAY') is 45. Actor Teddy Sears is 44. Jazz and R&B musician Robert Glasper is 43. Actor Eliza Coupe is 40. Folk singer-musician Kenneth Pattengale (Milk Carton Kids) is 39. Actor Bret Harrison is 39. Actor Charlie McDermott is 31.