

Groton Daily Independent

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OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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The NFL draft begins this Thursday, April 29. To get you prepared for the draft, we're going to do a mock draft this week. The NFL draft is impossible to predict. Every team has thoroughly scouted each player in this year's draft, but each team has different requirements when it comes to positions. So whether it's a player's height/weight, skill set, medical history, or dozens of other factors, each team's draft board will look different. While it would be impossible to predict every team's draft picks, the goal of this mock draft is to give you a good idea of the route the Vikings could go this weekend. We'll be using the fanspeak.com mock draft. So let's jump right in!



By Jordan Wright

Round 1, pick 14 – Christian Darrisaw, offensive tackle, Virginia Tech. The top two offensive linemen will likely be gone by the 14th pick (Sewell, Slater), which leaves the Vikings with a choice between Darrisaw and Alijah Vera-Tucker from USC. I chose Darrisaw in this mock because he has a better chance of working out at left tackle, which is the most important position on the offensive line. Vera-Tucker could work at LT, but most people believe he will need to slide inside to guard in the NFL. The Vikings could also go with a defensive end here, or they could try and trade back, which would allow them to recoup a second-round draft pick that they traded away last offseason.

Round 3, pick 78 – Jabril Cox, linebacker, LSU. In this mock draft, there was a run on safeties and offensive linemen right before the Vikings' pick, so we went with the best value left on the board. Cox is an athletic linebacker who could step right in and be the team's third linebacker and is extra insurance in case Anthony Barr leaves next offseason.

Round 3, pick 90 – Aaron Banks, offensive guard, Notre Dame. With two holes on the offensive line, the Vikings will need to fill them early in the draft. Banks will be a solid left guard in the NFL, but his first year or two could be bumpy as he adjusts to NFL-caliber defensive linemen.

Round 4, pick 119 – Talanoa Hufanga, safety, USC. The Vikings brought in Xavier Woods to start alongside Harrison Smith, but he is only on a one-year deal. Drafting Hufanga would give the Vikings depth at the position, and a future starter when/if Woods leaves.

Round 4, pick 125 – Trey Sermon, running back, Ohio State. The Vikings are set at RB with Dalvin Cook, but the number two RB Alexander Mattison only has two years left on his deal, and Mike Boone left this offseason. Sermon would serve as a backup for two seasons, but with Cook's injury history and the value of Sermon in the fourth round, this was a pick we couldn't pass up.

Round 4, pick 134 – Osa Odigizuwa, defensive lineman, UCLA. At 280lbs, Osa is described as a "tweener". He is a little too small to play defensive tackle full time, but he would be excellent at the position on passing downs because of his quick first step. Or he could slide out to defensive end if the Vikings needed more mass on the line to stop the run.

Round 4, pick 143 – Robert Hainsey, offensive lineman, Notre Dame. After drafting Banks from Notre Dame, the Vikings draft his line-mate. Although he played offensive tackle in college, Hainsey would slide inside to guard in the NFL, giving the Vikings a solid backup along the interior of their offensive line.

Round 5, pick 157 – Charles Snowden, defensive end, Virginia. The Vikings have plenty of defensive ends on the roster, but Snowden would give Vikings' defensive line coach Andre Patterson a player who has tons of upside just waiting to be unlocked.

Round 5, pick 168 – Tre Brown, cornerback, Oklahoma. With uncertainty surrounding last year's first-round pick Jeff Gladney, the Vikings will likely draft at least one corner for depth. Brown would also flourish on special teams.

Round 6, pick 199 – Feleipe Franks, quarterback, Arkansas. The Vikings were one of the few teams to travel to Arkansas' pro day to watch Franks throw. He is a huge QB (6'7", 234lbs) who has fantastic arm strength and is mobile enough to pick up yards on the ground when needed. Franks had problems diagnosing defenses in college, so he will need a couple of years before he is ready to start, but he would be an excellent backup and developmental quarterback.

Make sure to check out the draft, which will run Thursday through Saturday. Next week we will start breaking down the Vikings' draft picks. Skol!

Delivering Health Care to the Patient

In the old days, country doctors often cared for folks by coming to the patient's homes. These house calls brought great relief to people and families that needed medical attention.

Nowadays, we are becoming familiar with telemedicine, or health care services provided electronically via the Internet. In rural settings, telemedicine helps provide specialty care to patients without the travel required for in-person visits. Access to medical care via telemedicine can greatly reduce costs and wait times for those in need. And, during the pandemic we saw how telemedicine grew tremendously, regardless of location.

Some aspects of telemedicine are almost like being together in person. For instance, according to Nobel Peace Prize recipient Dr. Bernard Lown, in about 75 percent of patient encounters, listening to the patient describe symptoms and concerns allows doctors to obtain sufficient information to make the diagnosis before performing a physical examination and tests.

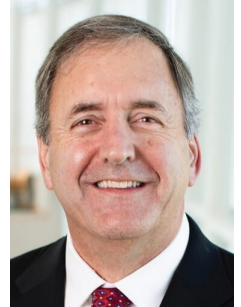
Experience has shown that listening and diagnosis can occur via telemedicine, but can empathy occur to the point of the patient feeling deeply cared for? Caring is defined as feeling or showing concern for or kindness to others. I feel caring for one another is one of the most important aspects of our life here on Mother Earth.

There has been significant research about the telemedicine patient experience. In a 2020 landmark study called the Press Ganey Report on Telehealth more than 3.5 million surveys about telemedicine were sent out in the United States and the results were supportive of this new technology.

Overall, patients considered the telehealth experience a positive. Patients also felt very cared for in their telehealth visit and they were more likely to refer their friends to a doctor who provided choice between an in-person visit or a telehealth visit. What was also interesting is that it did not matter the age of the patient. Millennials and Boomers alike gave similar positive ratings to doctors and health care facilities that provided them the option of telehealth.

Like I tell my fellow physicians and health care providers, whether in private or academic practice, or in training, we are here to serve the public. I believe telehealth is here to stay because the public wants it. Offering both a quality telehealth network visit and the more traditional in-person visits gives patients the choice with regards to which is best for them. It also demonstrates that providers and health systems are listening to the patient.

Vance Thompson, M.D., an ophthalmologist surgeon in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is a contributing Prairie Doc® columnist. He will guest host On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB this Thursday at 7 p.m. central. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook.



By Vance Thompson, M.D. ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

**Weber
Landscaping
Greenhouse
opening this
Spring!**



**We will have a full greenhouse of beautiful
annuals and vegetables.**

Opening First Week of May!

**Located behind 204 N State St, Groton
(Look for the flags)**

**LET US HELP YOU BRIGHTEN
UP YOUR YARD!**

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#427 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I have the usual Sunday weekly summary for you, and for the first time in several weeks, things are looking up. We're down to 11 from 15 states and territories in the red zone, up to 34 from 30 in orange, and have 9 in yellow. The one-week increase in total cases was 476,300 last week and is down to 379,158 this week. Two-week increase was up to 960,800 last week and is down to 855,458 this week. I have us at a one-week daily average new-case number of 54,165.4, which is down 17 percent. I feel as though we're turning a corner here. I hope so.

I track 54 states and US territories, including the District of Columbia; and we now have only two over 10 percent increase in two weeks, Michigan at 11.11 percent and Maine at 10.47 percent, both of these below last week. We're down to 8 states above five percent. Highest per capita rates of increase are in Michigan, New Jersey, Delaware, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania.

We are up to 32,070,058 total cases, 0.2% more than yesterday. Somehow last night I missed the fact that we passed 32 million. I didn't really want to do this again, but here's that background:

April 28 – 1 million – 98 days
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days
December 3 – 14 million – 6 days
December 7 – 15 million – 4 days
December 12 – 16 million – 5 days
December 17 – 17 million – 5 days
December 21 – 18 million – 4 days
December 26 – 19 million – 5 days
December 31 – 20 million – 5 days
January 5 – 21 million – 5 days
January 9 – 22 million – 4 days
January 13 – 23 million – 4 days
January 18 – 24 million – 5 days
January 23 – 25 million – 5 days
January 30 – 26 million – 7 days
February 7 – 27 million – 8 days
February 19 – 28 million – 12 days
March 7 – 29 million – 16 days
March 24 – 30 million – 17 days
April 8 – 31 million – 15 days
April 24 – 32 million – 16 days

There were 50,591 new cases reported today. We have a 14-day average of 45,453 people hospitalized, slightly less than yesterday. There have been 571,471 deaths in the US in this pandemic, 0.1% more than we had yesterday. There were 600 deaths reported today. Average daily deaths are down this week to

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666.7, another 89 below last week. States with the most per capita deaths this week were Michigan, New Jersey, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

On April 25, 2020, one year ago today, we were at 938,133 cases and 48,303 deaths in the US. We were holding near our peak from earlier in the month around 30,000 daily new cases as the case load shifted from one set of states to another. Still short of testing: Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, in a National Academy of Sciences webcast, said we needed to double the current capacity. Worldwide, we were over 2.8 million cases and 200,000 deaths.

I can say the same thing about today that I said about its counterpart a year ago—slightly off our peak from earlier in the month as cases shift. Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and the Northeast are all showing slow but steady improvement; I'm hoping no one else steps in to pick up the slack. All of these states still have high numbers hospitalized and are experiencing severe burdens on the health care system. Public health officials, including Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, are telling us we need to get our caseloads down before we get too comfortable.

Meanwhile, New Zealand had a concert with 50,000 people attending without distancing or masks. They've had just 2600 cases and 26 deaths since the pandemic began. Less than three percent of the population is vaccinated.

The FDA has announced they are ready to resume administration of the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine; a warning label has been added about the rare blood clotting disorder and information about it will also be made available at vaccination sites administering this vaccine. The doses are expected to resume within a few days in many locations.

Just over three million doses of vaccine were administered today in the US; that number has been declining somewhat for about a week. We have 95 million people, 28.5 percent of our population, fully vaccinated and 140 million people, 42.2 percent, with at least one dose. There are troubling reports that eight percent of people—that's five million—have missed their second dose; a little of that is due to unavailability of the correct vaccine at the time of the second appointment, and more of it seems to be due to people deciding a single dose is good enough, either because they're worried about side effects of that second dose or because they think they have enough protection. That is a concern because we are not at all sure that pretty-good protection we've seen from the first dose is durable if a second dose is skipped. I guess we'll find out about that. The next worry is that demand is already slackening; some states have rejected new shipments as a surplus builds up. In Iowa, for example, close to half of counties returned some of their allotment last week. This is a very bad sign.

The US has a new oldest living person: Thelma Sutcliffe, born October 1, 1905. She's 114 years old and comes from a family with pretty good longevity: Her sister died at 106, and she has a nephew, 91, still kicking. She supplants Hester Ford who died last weekend at the age of at least 115 years, six months. She wasn't exactly sure what year she was born—1905 or 1906—but either way, she was the oldest person in the country at 115 or 116. She lived through pandemics, wars, sharecropping and segregation and lynchings and the civil rights movement. She gave birth to 12 children, four of whom are still with us, 68 grandchildren, 125 great grand-children, and 120 great-great-grandchildren. She outlived her husband by more than his entire lifespan and died peacefully in the home they bought together some 60 years ago, staying there without assistance until she was 108. She remembered the days when she was not permitted to vote and never missed an opportunity, including last November when she dressed up the way she did for church on Sunday, tan dress trimmed in white with "some sequin on it. . . . And she voted."

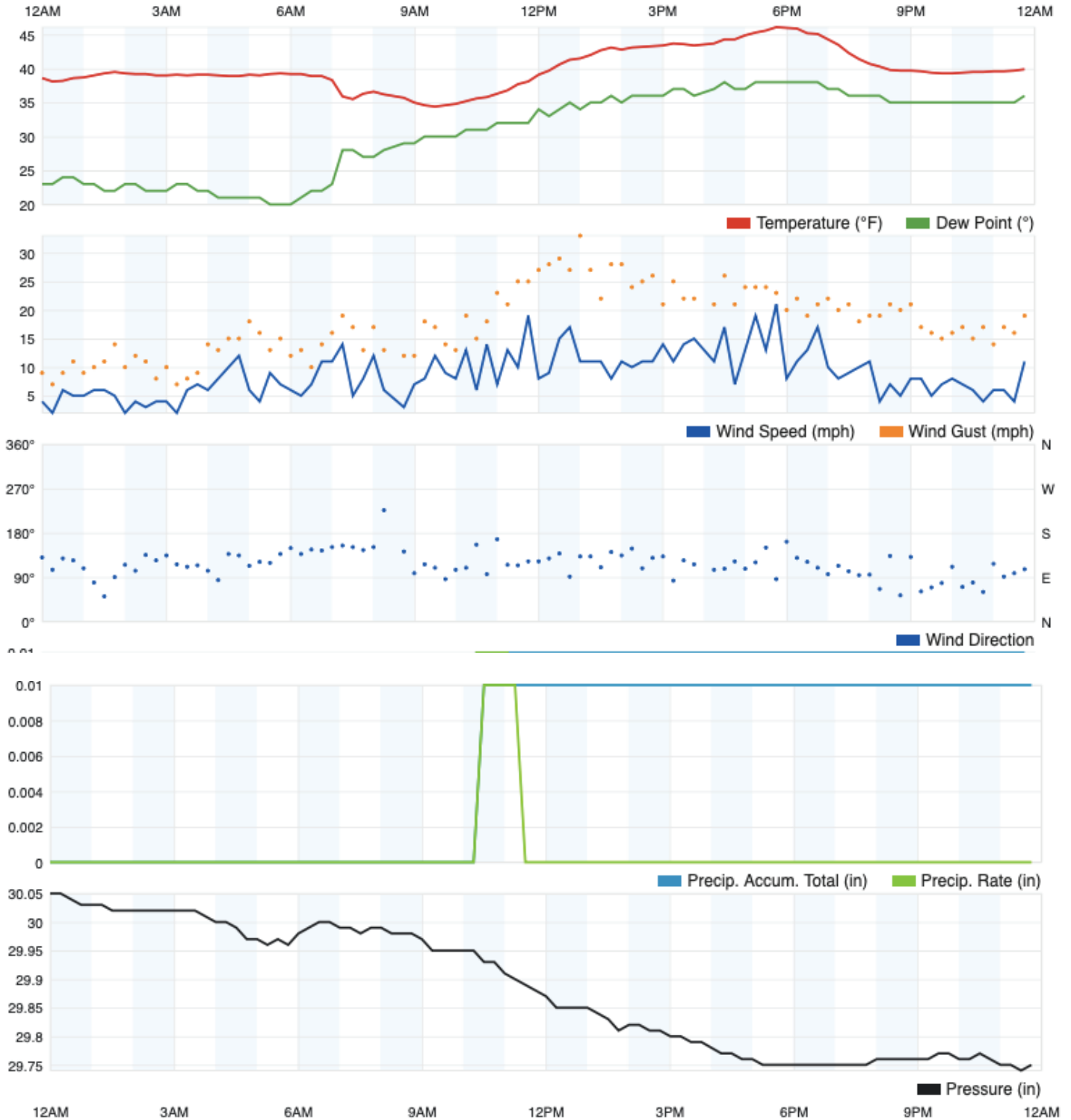
As sad as her family is to lose her, they can celebrate a life that was full and rich right up to its end. Her great-granddaughter credited that long, full life to Ford's resilience, saying, "She was a pillar and stalwart to our family and provided much needed love, support, and understanding to us all." We could do worse—probably will. Godspeed to Ms. Ford, and many more happy years to Ms. Sutcliffe.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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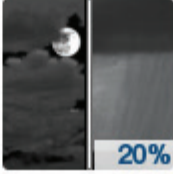
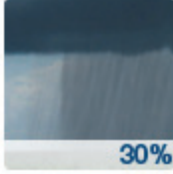


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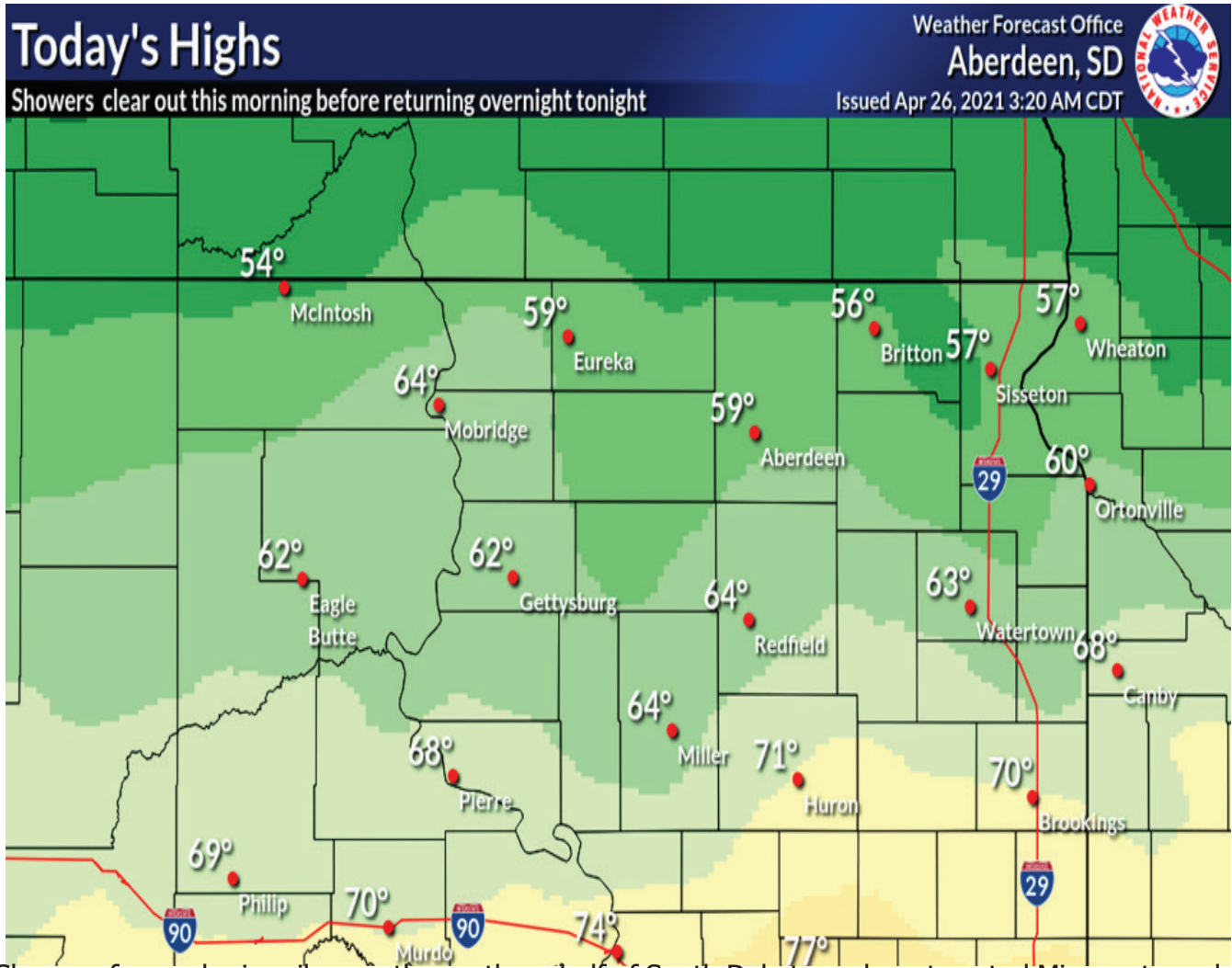
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Chance Showers then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Slight Chance Showers	Mostly Sunny
High: 59 °F	Low: 40 °F	High: 57 °F	Low: 36 °F	High: 66 °F



Showers focused primarily over the northern half of South Dakota and west central Minnesota early this morning will clear out before noon. Additional showers are expected to develop overnight tonight. High temperatures today will vary greatly with more northern areas remaining below 60° while more southern locations will reach the 70s.

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Today in Weather History

April 26, 1986: Intense thunderstorms swept across southeast South Dakota, southwest Minnesota, and northwest Iowa. Baseball size hail fell in a 15-mile wide swath from near Pickstown to Scotland, South Dakota. The large hail caused extensive damage to windows, roofs, siding, and vehicles in the path of the storm. Wind gusts of 70 to 80 mph and rain amounts of 2 or more inches in a short period (including 5 inches at Centerville) were reported in southeast South Dakota. Several tornadoes moved across northwest Iowa including one that ran across part of Lyon County destroying several farmsteads. Another tornado moved through Lyon County, Iowa into Nobles County, Minnesota damaging, at least, 16 separate farms. Another tornado touched down briefly on the south side of Okebena in Jackson County destroying or damaging several houses.

April 26, 1991: During a severe thunderstorm event, large hail fell over parts of Brown, Spink, Hand, and Buffalo Counties. Both Brown and Hand Counties received hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter.

April 26, 2008: An area of low-pressure brought widespread heavy snow of 6 to 20 inches to most of northeast South Dakota for much of the 25th and into the early morning hours of the 26th. The precipitation began as light freezing rain in the early morning across parts of the area before changing to all snow by mid-morning. As the low-pressure area intensified, snowfall rates and the north winds also increased. The heavy snow combined with the high winds created widespread visibility problems along with large snowdrifts. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Andover, Britton, Gann Valley, and 15 miles south of Miller, 8 inches at Roy Lake, 9 inches at Clark, Big Stone City, Hillside Colony, and Sisseton, 10 inches 7 miles south of Bristol, and 11 inches at Hayti. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches at Wilmot, Webster, and Waubay, 13 inches at Milbank, 15 inches at Castlewood, 16 inches near Victor, and near Summit, 17 inches at Clear Lake, 19 inches at Watertown, and 20 inches at Bryant.

Some automobiles went into the ditch along with many other vehicles damaged in accidents. Many stranded motorists had to abandon their cars in the hardest hit areas. Travel was not advised across the entire region. A school bus slid into a ditch east of Castlewood with no injuries occurring. Interstate-29 was closed from 3 pm the 25th until 3 pm on the 26th from Brookings north to the North Dakota border. Also, South Dakota State Highway 12 was closed from Webster to the Minnesota line from the afternoon of the 25th until the late morning of the 26th. Most counties affected by the storm opened emergency shelters when Interstate 29 was closed to house stranded motorists. Also, many schools were closed across the area.

The very heavy snow set several records across the area. The 19 inches at Watertown broke its all-time 24-hour snowfall record of 16 inches. Both Victor and Clear Lake had their second-highest snowfall ever recorded in a 24 hour period. Watertown, along with several other locations in northeast South Dakota, received near-record or record snowfall for April. In fact, Watertown's 29.5 inches of snow for April was almost their average seasonal snowfall.

1884: Tornadoes were hard to capture on old cameras with their hard to use glass plate negatives. The first recorded photograph of a tornado was taken on this date by A.A. Adams near Garnett, Kansas.

1978: An unusually strong occluded front swept out of the Gulf of Alaska and produced the first April thunderstorm of record at Fairbanks. Pea-size hail fell northeast of Fairbanks from thunderstorms whose tops were less than 8000 feet.

1986: The Chernobyl nuclear power station in Kiev Ukraine suffered a massive explosion. The radioactive cloud of particles and gas carried westward and northwestward, contaminating large areas of Europe in the following week.

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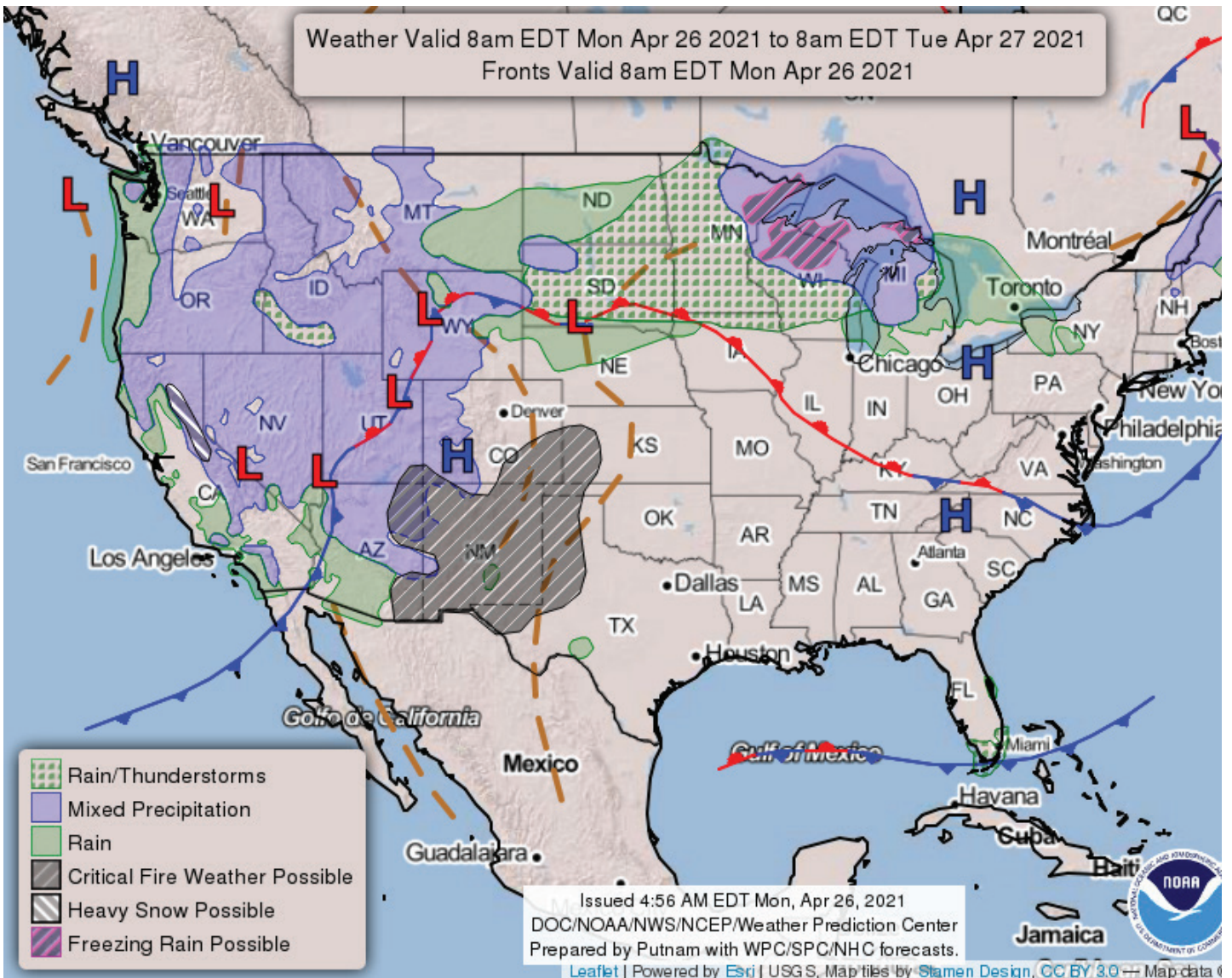
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 5:40 PM
Low Temp: 34 °F at 9:28 AM
Wind: 33 mph at 12:55 PM
Precip: .01

Today's Info

Record High: 86° in 1899, 1952
Record Low: 20° in 1931
Average High: 63°F
Average Low: 36°F
Average Precip in Apr.: 1.42
Precip to date in Apr.: 2.48
Average Precip to date: 3.60
Precip Year to Date: 2.66
Sunset Tonight: 8:34 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:28 a.m.



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STORMS AND STRUGGLES

As James was preparing to leave for the weekend, the vice-president called him into his office and asked him to sit down across the desk from him. In a somber voice, he said, "I'm sorry, James, but we are reducing the sales staff and this was your last day with this company. Here's a severance check that will help you make the transition."

Now he was not only out of work but facing a difficult job market. He was overwhelmed with the prospect of going home and telling his wife the news. She was a stay at home mom with a child that was paralyzed from an automobile accident. He could not help but ask, "Where's God in all of this? Is He for me or against me?" Those certainly are fair questions that any rational person would ask.

Life is often one storm after another. None of us can escape the fierce winds, raging waters, or crashing waves. Sometimes they come swiftly. Other times they seem to swell slowly and powerfully. Often a problem that started as a whispering breeze turns out to be a tornado.

The Psalmist said, "Deep calls to deep...all your waves and breakers have swept over me." It appears as though he is accusing God of a conspiracy. But that is not true. That is not how God works. He wants us to realize that our God is a God who is in the middle, the very center – if you will - of life's storms, and will never forsake us.

Think of it this way: In the depth of life's storms and the middle of life's sorrows, God wants us to call on Him for the promise of His sympathy and support. He is ever-present and all-powerful, and His grace is more than sufficient.

Never forget that whatever we experience in our lives Jesus experienced it before us. Wherever we are He has been and whatever we have to endure he endured. We know that He understands our greatest sorrows and deepest needs and will rescue us.

Prayer: We are comforted, Lord, to know that You have gone before us, know us and care for us. Assure us of Your presence and power to survive. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me. Psalm 42:7

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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

News from the Associated Press

Vet retiring after half a century of caring for animals

By TRENT ABREGO Aberdeen American News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — After it was suggested he not, Roger Cooper started to build his own business on the east side of Aberdeen in 1976.

Cooper Animal Clinic is still going strong.

He was discouraged from the venture by colleagues, business consultants and bankers, according to a Veterinary Economics article published in 1982.

But Cooper proved those doubters wrong. He, along with Frederick Hermann Associates, Inc., came up with the unique business design.

"I initially went to an architect with the idea that it'd be a Spanish-style architecture, but I also wanted to include the potential for solar, and so that's why he came up with the unique roof design," Cooper said. "That in itself has been good because almost everybody that would see this place, especially when it was early on, would recognize it. It was different."

While the building has potential for solar energy, that's not how it's powered. However, the clinic does have a front solar porch.

Cooper came to Aberdeen in 1970 as a recent veterinary school graduate from Iowa State University, and his first job was at Aberdeen Veterinary Hospital. Along with another co-worker, he eventually formed Animal Health Clinic, before eventually opening at his own business, the Aberdeen American News reported.

During Cooper's early years as a veterinarian, he worked on large animals, including production animals — those that provide meat, dairy, wool and other products used by humans — and animals in distress.

Eventually, he decided to step away from that type of work.

"As time went on, I chose to focus on the small animals because I knew I could do that the rest of my life as opposed to the back-breaking work that you get into (with) some large animals," Cooper said.

Years ago, before he made the change, one of those large animals was unusual for northeastern South Dakota. He received a call from a client by Bath who had camels that were on loan from a zoo in Minnesota.

"When this camel was born, it had a condition that required additional antibodies to be delivered. So they had three camels out there, a male and a couple females," Cooper said.

"We went to St. Luke's (Hospital) and we got blood bags that they would harvest our blood, and we drew blood from the male camel that was out there and then transferred that to St. Luke's to process the blood.

"Some place, I had a picture of me standing with an IV and a camel in front of the clinic," he said. "Kind of a neat deal. You run into all different kinds of animals that people care about."

Cooper has seen a recent trend concerning the importance of domesticated animals, be they dogs, cats, birds or others that can be found in pet stores.

"Companion animals have gotten much more important over the 50 years that I've been in practice," he said. "I'm not sure why, but I think pet owners appreciate our pets more than they did back in the '70s. ... Today, people would just as soon take their pet to their pediatrician. They're part of the family."

As a veterinarian, Cooper has earned many honors, including a merit award from Veterinary Economic Magazine and Reader's Choice Awards from American News readers.

Since starting his practice, Cooper has helped more than 22,000 customers. He knows this because when he went to print off mailing address labels for his retirement party, he had 749 pages with 30 contacts per sheet.

Once he's finished working, he plans to travel the U.S.

"Dr. Cooper is very blessed right now. He's healthy and wants to do a lot of traveling, and that's something (he's) not afforded to himself to this point, so it's going to be a new journey," said Adonica Kunnen, a friend of Cooper's.

But he won't be permanently leaving town.

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"We're still going to be around. We'll be maintaining some of this property, so we'll still be in the area and hopefully contributing," Cooper said.

As for the clinic, he will turn the reins over to Amber Sombke, who is also a graduate from the Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Sombke, who is originally from Groton, attended Ridgewater College in Willmar, Minnesota, and Northern State University for her undergraduate studies.

After graduation from Iowa State, she started at Cooper Animal Clinic.

"I'm hoping that we can keep Dr. Cooper's legacy going strong. He has built an amazing foundation here for us, and I hope we can make him proud," Sombke said.

"Maybe grow as a company and a clinic and be able to eventually serve more of the community of Aberdeen than we can right now."

Currently, Sombke specializes in dogs and cats. But from time to time she will help a hamster. The majority of staff from Cooper's tenure will stay with the clinic, Sombke said.

"I am very, very excited, very enthusiastic. I can't wait to see what we can do here," she said.

Sombke purchased the practice at the beginning of April.

"I'm pretty convinced that the clientele will be able to expect the same type of results that they did with us," Cooper said

Standing Rock disputes new figures by Dakota Access owners

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Attorneys for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota and South Dakota say the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers unlawfully authorized the Dakota Access pipeline without fully assessing the risks and are asking a judge to shut down the flow of oil while the Corps conducts a second environmental review.

Standing Rock and other tribes filed a response in federal court Friday to a document by owners of the pipeline who said shuttering the pipeline would be a crushing economic blow to several entities, including the state of North Dakota and the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. The figures by Dakota Access "rely on unsupported hearsay and exaggeration," Standing Rock lawyers said.

"The MHA Nation is a sovereign, and is free to change its position, although its assertions about economic impacts carry little weight if unsupported by admissible evidence," the document by Standing Rock and the other tribes said. "The Tribes have never denied that shutting down the pipeline would have impacts; however, they have emphasized that the profits of others should not come at the expense of the Tribes, especially when the law has not been followed."

Also Friday, a federal appeals court denied a request from the pipeline to reconsider a panel's ruling requiring a new environmental review while one of its permits remains revoked. The decision clears the way for U.S. District Judge James Boasberg to rule on whether the pipeline must shut down during the review process.

Biden's first 100 days: Where he stands on key promises

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, AAMER MADHANI AND KEVIN VINEYS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As he rounds out his first 100 days in office, President Joe Biden's focus on reigning in the coronavirus during the early months of his administration seems to have paid off: He can check off nearly all his campaign promises centered on the pandemic.

Biden has delivered on a number of his biggest campaign pledges focused on climate change and the economy as well. But some issues have proved to be tougher for the administration — including immigration, where Biden is grappling with how to enact promised reforms in the face of a steep increase in unaccompanied minors seeking to cross the border. On some of his promises, Biden is waiting for Congress to act.

Where Biden stands on some of his key promises:

IMMIGRATION

— Raise refugee cap to 125,000, up from the 15,000 set by President Donald Trump.

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Nowhere close. The White House first said it would stick to Trump's 15,000 cap due to "humanitarian concerns." After facing backlash from Democrats, it shifted gears and said Biden would increase the historically low cap on refugees set by Trump — but probably not all the way to the 62,500 that Biden previously had planned. And the numbers actually admitted this year are likely to be closer to 15,000.

— Surge humanitarian resources to the border and encourage public-private partnerships to deal with an increase in migration there.

Yes, but is it enough? The Department of Homeland Security has deployed the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help deal with the major increase of border arrivals, and Biden signed an executive order asking officials to prepare plans for using humanitarian resources there. He has yet to establish any new public-private partnerships. The largest number of unaccompanied children ever at the border created massive overcrowding at Customs and Border Protection facilities and set off a mad scramble for temporary space at convention centers, military bases and other large venues.

— Reform the U.S. asylum system.

Incomplete. Biden signed an executive order in February directing his officials to craft a strategy for migration, including refugees and asylum seekers. Biden has promised to unveil a new "humane" asylum system but he and his aides have been mum on timing and offered no specifics. He's eliminated some Trump-era policies, like a requirement that new asylum seekers wait in Mexico. But he has kept a Trump-era policy that allows Customs and Border Protection to expel migrants who enter the country without authorization to avoid the spread of COVID-19. And Biden has yet to articulate a plan to manage asylum flows beyond proposing that billions of dollars be spent to address root causes in Central America.

— Deliver a comprehensive immigration reform bill to Congress within his first 100 days.

Done.

— End travel restrictions on people from a number of Muslim-majority countries.

Done.

— Reverse Trump-era order expanding criteria for deporting immigrants and return to Obama-era principle of prioritizing deportations of immigrants posing a national security, border security or public health risk.

Done.

— Stop funding and building the border wall.

Done.

— Reverse Trump's public charge rule discouraging immigrants from using public benefits.

Done.

— Restore the Obama-era principle of deporting foreigners who are seen as posing a national security threat or who have committed crimes in addition to the crime of illegal entry.

Done.

— Freeze deportations for 100 days.

Attempted, but blocked in court.

— Streamline and improve the naturalization process for green card holders.

In progress. Biden signed an executive order in February ordering a plan to improve the naturalization process, and the Department of Homeland Security has since revoked some Trump-era rules, sought public input into naturalization barriers and reverted to a 2008 version of the U.S. civics test for applicants, considered more accessible than the Trump-era revamp.

— End family separation and create task force to reunite families separated at the border.

In progress. Biden signed executive orders ending the policy and establishing a task force focused on reuniting families. The task force is making slow progress as it pores over thousands of records.

— Order a review of Temporary Protected Status.

No review has been ordered, but Biden's Department of Homeland Security has granted TPS for Venezuelans and Burmese, extended it for Syrians and extended a related program for Liberians.

— Convene a regional meeting of leaders, including officials from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Canada, to address the factors driving migration and propose a regional resettlement solution.

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Not yet. Vice President Kamala Harris, tasked with dealing with the root causes of migration, has spoken to the leaders of Mexico and Guatemala, but no regional meeting is on the horizon.

— Protect those often described as “Dreamers” — young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents — and their families by reinstating DACA, the Obama-era policy defending them from deportation.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in March his agency was issuing a rule to “preserve and fortify DACA,” but the policy faces a Texas court challenge that could invalidate protections for those often described as “dreamers.”

— Ensure that personnel within Immigration and Customs Enforcement and within Customs and Border Protection abide by professional standards and are held accountable for inhumane treatment.

Biden included funding for training and investigating misconduct in his immigration bill and in the budget he proposed to Congress. His administration has faced questions about allegations of abuse in at least one Texas facility, which are being investigated.

— End prolonged migrant detention and invest in a case-management system to process people.

There’s been no announcement of added investments in case-management systems. The administration did roll out plans to release parents and children within 72 hours of their arrival in the United States in March. Officials subsequently acknowledged that hundreds of children have been held by Border Patrol for much longer, due to an increase in unaccompanied minors arriving at the border and a lack of facilities to house them.

DOMESTIC POLICY

— Reverse transgender military ban.

Done.

— Establish police oversight board.

Abandoned. The Biden administration said it was scrapping the idea, after consultations with civil rights groups and police unions that said it would be counterproductive.

— Direct attorney general to deliver a list of recommendations for restructuring the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and other Justice Department agencies to better enforce gun laws.

Not yet.

— Direct FBI to issue report on delays in background checks for gun purchases.

Not yet.

— Reauthorize Violence Against Women Act

Requires congressional action.

— Sign Equality Act

Requires congressional action.

— Create Cabinet-level working group focused on promoting union organizing tasked with delivering a plan to increase union density and address economic inequality.

Not yet.

COVID-19

— Rejoin World Health Organization.

Done.

— Ensure 100 million vaccines have been administered before the end of his first 100 days, later increased to 200 million.

Done.

— Increase access to testing and establish pandemic testing board.

Done.

— Issue mask mandate on federal property and ask Americans to wear masks for 100 days.

Done.

— Extend nationwide restrictions on home evictions and foreclosures.

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Done.

— Continue to pause student loan payments.

Done.

— Safely reopen a majority of K-8 schools.

According to data collected by Burbio, a school-tracking site, as of April 18 62% of schools offered in-person learning every day. It's unclear what percentage of those schools are elementary schools.

— Push for passage of \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief legislative package.

Done; the bill passed in March.

CLIMATE

— Rescind Keystone XL oil pipeline permit, protect the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, rejoin the Paris climate agreement and embrace the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol to reduce harmful hydrofluorocarbons, or HFC's.

Done.

— Convene climate world summit and persuade nations to set more ambitious emissions pledges.

Done.

— Ban new oil and gas leases on federal lands and offshore waters.

Sort of — he's imposed an indefinite moratorium on new oil and gas leases on federal lands and waters.

— Reverse Trump rollbacks on 100 public health and environmental rules.

In progress. Biden signed an executive order on Inauguration Day ordering a review of Trump-era rules on the environment, public health and science, and has begun the process of rolling back some.

ECONOMY

— Roll back Trump's 2017 cuts to corporate tax rates.

In progress. Biden has proposed raising the corporate tax rate to 28% from the 21% rate set by Trump's 2017 overhaul of the tax code.

— Provide \$2,000 in direct payments as part of COVID-19 relief.

Done. The aid package approved right before Biden became president offered \$600 in direct payments to eligible Americans. Biden said the payment should have been \$2,000. His \$1.9 trillion relief package included \$1,400 in additional direct payments, which with the prior round adds up to \$2,000.

— Pause federal student debt payments.

Done.

— Order a review of U.S. supply chains.

Done.

FOREIGN POLICY

— "End the forever wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East" and terminate U.S. involvement in the Yemen civil war.

In progress. Biden announced that the American troop withdrawal from Afghanistan would begin by May 1 and the redeployment would be done no later than Sept. 11. Biden announced he was ending American support for the five-year Saudi Arabia-led military offensive in Yemen.

— Put human rights at the center of foreign policy.

Mixed. Biden has directly raised concerns with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Hong Kong, human rights abuses against Uyghur and ethnic minorities in the western Xinjiang province, and its actions toward Taiwan. He's repeatedly raised concerns about the jailing and treatment of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. But Biden declined to hold Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, directly responsible for the killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi even after the publication of U.S. intelligence showing Salman approved of the hit.

— Improving relations with allies who had rocky relations with Trump.

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Mostly accomplished. Allies like Canada's Justin Trudeau and Germany's Angela Merkel, who had stormy relationships with Trump, have praised Biden for his efforts reclaim U.S. leadership on climate issues, and leaders in the Indo-Pacific have been pleased by early efforts at coordination on China policy.

— Reversing the embrace of "dictators and tyrants like Putin and Kim Jong Un."

Mostly accomplished. Biden has levied two rounds of sanctions against the Russians. His administration decided to be measured in its approach with Putin and has said that he's interested in finding areas where the U.S. and Russia can find common ground. Biden's team acknowledges they have sought to reengage with North Korea, but have been rebuffed.

— Quickly rejoin the nuclear deal with Iran so long as Tehran comes back into compliance.

Mixed. Indirect talks are under way among other signatories of the 2015 deal, including British, German, French, Chinese and Russian officials, with American officials down the hall. But the path forward is less than certain as Tehran has thus far refused to come into compliance with the old deal without sanctions relief and it recently began enriching uranium to its highest purity ever.

— Recognize World War I-era atrocities against Armenians as genocide.

Completed. As a candidate, Biden said, if elected, he'd make it U.S. policy to recognize the killings and mass deportations by Ottoman Empire forces of hundreds of thousands of Armenians more than a century ago — something past presidents have avoided doing out of concern of angering strategic ally Turkey. Biden followed through on the promise on the annual commemoration Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. Turkey swiftly condemned the move.

'Nomadland' wins best picture at a social distanced Oscars

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

Chloé Zhao's "Nomadland," a wistful portrait of itinerant lives on open roads across the American West, won best picture Sunday at the 93rd Academy Awards, where the China-born Zhao became the first woman of color to win best director and a historically diverse group of winners took home awards.

In the biggest surprise of a socially distanced Oscar ceremony held during the pandemic, best actor went to Anthony Hopkins for his performance in the dementia drama "The Father." The award had been widely expected to go to Chadwick Boseman for his final performance in "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." The night's last award, it ended the ceremony on a down note, particularly since Hopkins wasn't in attendance.

Hours later, Hopkins made a belated victory speech from his Welsh homeland and paid tribute to Boseman, who he said was "taken from us far too early."

The "Nomadland" victory, while widely expected, nevertheless capped the extraordinary rise of Zhao, a lyrical filmmaker whose winning film is just her third, and which — with a budget less than \$5 million and featuring a cast populated by non-professional actors — ranks as one of the most modest-sized movies to win Hollywood's top honor. (Zhao's next film, Marvel's "Eternals," has a budget approximately 40 times that of "Nomadland.")

A plain-spoken meditation on solitude, grief and grit, "Nomadland" stuck a chord in a pandemic-ravaged year. It made for an unlikely Oscar champ: A film about people who gravitate to the margins took center stage.

"I have always found goodness in the people I've met everywhere I went in the world," said Zhao when accepting best director, which Kathryn Bigelow ("The Hurt Locker") was the only previous woman to win. "This is for anyone who has the faith and the courage to hold on to the goodness in themselves and to hold on the goodness in other no matter how difficult it is to do that."

With a howl, "Nomadland" star Frances McDormand implored people to seek out her film and others on the big screen. Released by the Disney-owned Searchlight Pictures, "Nomadland" premiered at a drive in and debuted in theaters, but found its largest audience on Hulu.

"Please watch our movie on the largest screen possible," McDormand said. "And one day very, very soon, take everyone you know into a theater, shoulder to shoulder in that dark space, and watch every film that's represented here tonight."

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Soon after, McDormand won best actress, too — her third such win. Only Katharine Hepburn, a four-time winner, has won best actress more times.

The most ambitious award show held during the pandemic, the Oscars rolled out a red carpet and tried to restore some glamour to a grim year. For the first time ever, this year's nominees were overwhelmingly seen in the home during a pandemic year that forced theaters to close and prompted radical change in Hollywood.

More women and more actors of color were nominated than ever before, and Sunday brought a litany of records and firsts across many categories, spanning everything from hairstyling to composing to acting. It was, some observers said, a sea change for an awards harshly criticized as "OscarsSoWhite" in recent years, leading the film academy to greatly expand membership.

The ceremony — fashioned as a movie of its own and styled as a laid back party — kicked off with opening credits and a slinky Regina King entrance, as the camera followed the actress and "One Night in Miami" director in one take as she strode with an Oscar in hand into Los Angeles' Union Station and onto the stage. Inside the transit hub (trains kept running), nominees sat at cozy, lamp-lit tables around an intimate amphitheater. Some moments — like Glenn Close getting down to "Da Butt" — were more relaxed, but the ceremony couldn't just shake off the past 14 months.

"It has been quite a year and we are still smack dab in the middle of it," King said.

Daniel Kaluuya won best supporting actor for "Judas and the Black Messiah." The win for the 32-year-old British actor who was previously nominated for "Get Out," was widely expected. Kaluuya won for his fiery performance as the Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, whom Kaluuya thanked for showing him "how to love myself."

"You've got to celebrate life, man. We're breathing. We're walking. It's incredible. My mum met my dad, they had sex. It's amazing. I'm here. I'm so happy to be alive," Kaluuya said, while cameras caught his mother's confused reaction.

With the awards capping a year of national reckoning on race and coming days after Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted for killing George Floyd, police brutality was on the minds of many attendees. King said that if the verdict had been different, she might have traded her heels for marching boots.

Travon Free, co-director of the live-action short winner "Two Perfect Strangers," wore a suit jacket lined with the names of those killed by police. His film dramatizes police brutality as an inescapable time loop like a tragic "Groundhog's Day" for Black Americans.

Best supporting actress went to Youn Yuh-jung for the matriarch of Lee Isaac Chung's tender Korean-American family drama "Minari." The 73-year-old Youn, a well-known actress in her native South Korea, is the first Asian actress to win an Oscar since 1957 and the second in history. She accepted the award from Brad Pitt, an executive producer on "Minari." "Mr. Brad Pitt, finally," said Youn. "Nice to meet you."

Hairstylists Mia Neal and Jamika Wilson of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" became the first Black women to win in makeup and hairstyling. Ann Roth, at 89 one of the oldest Oscar winners ever, also won for the film's costume design.

The night's first award went to Emerald Fennell, the writer-director of the provocative revenge thriller "Promising Young Woman," for best screenplay. Fennell, winning for her feature debut, is the first woman win solo in the category since Diablo Cody ("Juno") in 2007.

The telecast, produced by a team led by filmmaker Steven Soderbergh, moved out of the awards' usual home, the Dolby Theatre, for Union Station. With Zoom ruled out for nominees, the telecast included satellite feeds from around the world. Performances of the song nominees were pre-taped and aired during the preshow.

Pixar notched its 11th best animated feature Oscar with "Soul," the studio's first feature with a Black protagonist. Peter Docter's film, about a about middle-school music teacher (Jamie Foxx), was one of the few big-budget movies in the running at the Academy Awards. (It also won best score, making Jon Batiste the second Black composer win the award, which he shared with Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross.) Another

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was Christopher Nolan's "Tenet," which last September attempted to resuscitate moviegoing during the pandemic. It took best visual effects.

David Fincher's "Mank," a lavishly crafted drama of 1940s Hollywood made for Netflix, came in the lead nominee with 10 nods and went home with awards for cinematography and for production design. Netflix led all studios with seven Oscars but again — after close calls with "The Irishman" and "Roma," again missed out on the top award.

"My Octopus Teacher," a film that found a passionate following on Netflix, won best documentary. Danish director Thomas Vinterberg's "Another Round" won best international film, an award he dedicated to his daughter, Ida, who in 2019 was killed in a car crash at age 19.

The red carpet was back Sunday, minus the throngs of onlookers and with socially distanced interviews. Casual wear, the academy warned nominees early on, was a no-no. Stars, limited to a plus-one, went without their usual battalions of publicists.

But even a good show may not be enough to save the Oscars from an expected ratings slide. Award show ratings have cratered during the pandemic, and this year's nominees — many of them smaller, lower-budget dramas — won't come close to the drawing power of past Oscar heavyweights like "Titanic" or "Black Panther."

Sunday's pandemic-delayed Oscars bring to a close the longest awards season ever — one that turned the season's industrial complex of cocktail parties and screenings virtual. Eligibility was extended into February of this year, and for the first time, a theatrical run wasn't a requirement of nominees. Some films — like "Sound of Metal" — premiered all the way back in September 2019. The biggest ticket-seller of the best picture nominees was "Promising Young Woman," with \$6.4 million in box office.

Biden expanding summer food program for 34M schoolchildren

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

The Biden administration is expanding a program to feed as many as 34 million schoolchildren during the summer months, using funds from the coronavirus relief package approved in March.

The Agriculture Department is announcing Monday that it will continue through the summer a payments program that replaced school meals because the pandemic left many children with virtual classes. Families of eligible children would receive \$6.82 per child for each weekday. That adds up to \$375 per child over the summer months.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack called the summer benefits a "first-of-its-kind, game-changing intervention to reduce child hunger in the United States."

The program reflects the Biden administration's attempts to nearly stamp out child poverty — an unprecedented push with money for parents, child care centers and schools that could revamp the social safety net. Conservative critics have warned that the spending, if made permanent, could undermine the willingness of poorer Americans to work.

Stacy Dean, deputy undersecretary for food, nutrition and consumer services at Agriculture, said that Congress previously approved limited funding for pilot programs to test the effectiveness of the payments. But the coronavirus relief package allowed it to be rolled out nationwide.

Besides the food aid, parents will receive roughly \$250 a month starting in July for each child between the ages of 6 and 17. Qualifying families with a child under 6 would receive \$300 monthly. The payments are part of an enhanced child tax credit that would expire at the end of this year, according to the terms of the most recent coronavirus relief package.

President Joe Biden plans to extend the monthly payments through 2025. The extension would be part of a multitrillion-dollar plan that he intends to announce Wednesday in a joint address to Congress.

Democratic lawmakers have called for making the enhanced tax credit permanent, with Sens. Michael Bennet of Colorado, Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Cory Booker of New Jersey and Reps. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, Suzan DelBene of Washington state and Ritchie Torres of New York issuing a statement last week.

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"Expansion of the child tax credit is the most significant policy to come out of Washington in generations, and Congress has an historic opportunity to provide a lifeline to the middle class and to cut child poverty in half on a permanent basis," the April 20 statement said.

When the school year ends, children have traditionally shifted to other forms of food aid such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP. Yet administration officials said that summer feeding programs tend to reach less than 20% of the number served during the school year.

Children could qualify for the new summer benefit if they are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals during the school year or if they are under age 6 and live in a SNAP household. Children already on SNAP would get the benefits as a supplement to what they already receive.

Analysis: A reckoning on racism? Not for many leaders of GOP

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — If the nation is in the midst of a historic reckoning on racism, most leaders of the Republican Party are not participating.

On the day last week that a jury convicted the police officer who killed George Floyd, Republicans in Washington focused much of their energy on condemning the longest-serving Black woman in Congress. In the days since, former President Donald Trump attacked what he called the "racist rants" of basketball icon LeBron James. And some of Trump's staunchest supporters on Capitol Hill are considering forming a new group that initially planned to champion "Anglo-Saxon political traditions."

Beyond simple rhetoric, Republican state lawmakers are pushing forward with new voting restrictions that disproportionately affect people of color and are resisting legislation designed to prevent police brutality.

The moves reflect a stark political reality: As America grows more diverse, the Republican Party continues to be led almost entirely by white people, particularly men, who cater to an overwhelmingly white base. And despite fierce criticism from civil rights leaders and growing concern from business leaders who are traditional allies, many Republicans see no problem.

"It's unfortunate that more in the Republican Party are not willing to stand up for what I would define as creating a more just and humane system," Martin Luther King III told The Associated Press. "It makes you wonder if they really even care."

Still, the reality of America's modern political coalitions is increasingly complex. While reliable demographic data on voting patterns in last year's election is still emerging, leaders in both parties believe that Trump attracted more support from Latinos — and perhaps Black men — than his more conventional Republican presidential predecessors.

"Republicans are making inroads," said Ari Fleischer, an aide in George W. Bush's White House.

Fleischer helped author the Republican National Committee 2013 internal report that determined the GOP's survival depended upon adopting more inclusive messaging and policies to attract the growing universe of nonwhite voters.

"Despite Trump's rhetoric and the knock on Trump that he was a racist, he grew the vote among black African Americans, he grew the vote among Hispanic Americans," Fleischer said. "He did what we called for."

The continued Republican resistance to African American priorities on voting and policing could threaten any modest progress the party has made with voters of color. But more than that, the GOP could further alienate the larger swath of suburban voters — many of them white — who have turned sharply away from Trump's party.

Leading Republicans insist that systemic racism doesn't exist in America. But in a tacit acknowledgment that something needs to change, Republicans picked South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, the GOP's only Black senator and one of just three Black Republicans in Congress, to deliver a national response to President Joe Biden's address to a joint session of Congress on Wednesday.

Overall, 261 Republicans serve in Congress, and fewer than two dozen are people of color. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy on Sunday celebrated the handful of nonwhite House freshmen elected

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last fall — there were nine — in response to former President George W. Bush's recent description of the modern-day GOP as "nativist."

"This party is expanding to reflect America," McCarthy said on "Fox News Sunday."

But in the same interview, he was again forced to denounce plans by Trump allies such as Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., and Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., to form an "America First" caucus that planned to promote "uniquely Anglo-Saxon political traditions," according to an internal planning document. After the plans were publicly reported, Greene distanced herself from the the "Anglo Saxon" language and blamed staff.

Look no further for evidence of the GOP's entrenched position than Minnesota, where a jury last week convicted former police officer Derek Chauvin of murder after he was caught on video kneeling on Floyd's neck for more than 9 minutes.

The state, which is an epicenter of the nation's racial reckoning, leans Democratic. Trump lost Minnesota by 7 percentage points in 2020 — having lost by only 2 percentage points four years earlier — even after spending much of the the fall warning suburban voters of violent Black Lives Matter protesters.

But there is little sign of urgency in Minnesota's Republican-controlled state Senate, which so far has resisted new Democrat-backed legislation to address racial justice and police accountability. Both parties supported a proposal last summer that, among other things, banned police chokeholds.

Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, the state's most powerful elected Republican, refused to commit to the new legislative overhaul in an interview.

"We are looking at it. We've been looking at it. But we're a thorough, deliberative body," he said in an interview.

Meanwhile, the number of people of color killed by police continues to grow.

Since the guilty verdict was read last Tuesday, at least six people were fatally shot by officers across the U.S. That figure doesn't include Daunte Wright, the 20-year-old African American killed by Minnesota police during a traffic stop and laid to rest two days after the Chauvin verdict.

Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, a Republican, described inaction as unacceptable when asked about the general lack of urgency from his party to address police reform or other African American priorities.

"It's obvious more work is needed to ensure opportunity is fully and fairly available to all Americans," Pawlenty told the AP. "Republicans have a responsibility to advance that goal and can do so in ways that are consistent with our principles."

That may be happening in Washington, where once-stalled police reform legislation on Capitol Hill may be slowly moving toward a bipartisan consensus. Republican leaders, including Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, have said little publicly of the Chauvin verdict, but McConnell has tapped Scott to continue leading the effort in talks with Democrats.

Passage remains uncertain, however.

The Democratic-led House has now twice approved what it's calling "the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act," which would be the most substantial federally ordered changes to policing in a generation. Senate Republicans have so far resisted the proposal.

Meanwhile, the RNC issued a new set of talking points for surrogates three days after the Chauvin verdict encouraging Republicans to focus on "dangerous anti-police rhetoric" from Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., and a handful of Black and Latina congresswomen who make up "the Squad."

The document specifically encourages Republicans to note that four members of the Squad, which includes Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., have called for defunding or dismantling the police, but spent thousands of dollars on their own "private security services." The talking points also highlight Waters' comments earlier in the week encouraging supporters "to get more confrontational."

"Maxine Waters is encouraging violence and encouraging confrontation, at a time when our law enforcement officials are working to keep communities safe," the RNC document says.

Waters made her comments to a Minnesota crowd ahead of the Chauvin verdict. When asked what should happen if Chauvin wasn't convicted on murder charges, she replied: "We got to stay on the street, we've got to get more active, we've got to get more confrontational."

Hours before the verdict, House Republicans tried but failed to censure Waters, who has been serving

in Congress for three decades.

On the defensive, Republicans are trying to score political points by noting that Democrats, not Republicans, embraced racist Jim Crow laws a half-century ago before a major political realignment.

"I'm, for one, sick and tired of Democrats. They need to apologize for their history," Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures."

Leaked recording of Iran's top diplomat offers blunt talk

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A recording of Iran's foreign minister offering a blunt appraisal of diplomacy and the limits of power within the Islamic Republic has been leaked, providing a rare look inside the country's theocracy.

The release of the comments by Mohammad Javad Zarif set off a firestorm within Iran, where officials carefully mind their words amid a cut-throat political environment that includes the powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, ultimately overseen by the country's supreme leader. Zarif has been suggested as a possible candidate for Iran's June 18 presidential election as well.

Outside of Iran, Zarif's comments could also affect talks in Vienna aimed at finding a way for Tehran and the U.S. to both come into compliance with Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Already, sabotage targeted Iran's nuclear facility at Natanz during the talks as Tehran has begun enriching a small amount of uranium up to 60% purity, which edges the country closer to weapons-grade levels.

After the leak became public, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh did not dispute the tape's authenticity. He told journalists on Monday that the recording represented just a portion of a seven-hour interview Zarif gave to a well-known economist that was to be held for posterity by a think tank associated with the Iranian presidency.

Khatibzadeh called the release of the recording "illegal" and described it as "selectively" edited, though he and others did not offer opinions on how it became public. Zarif, visiting Iraq on Monday after a trip to Qatar, took no questions from journalists after giving a brief statement in Baghdad.

Portions of the leaked interview first aired overnight on Iran International, a London-based, Farsi-language satellite news channel once majority owned by a Saudi national. Tehran has criticized Iran International in the past for its airing of a militant spokesman who praised a 2018 militant attack on a military parade in Ahvaz that killed at least 25 people, including a child. British regulators later rejected an Iranian complaint over the segment.

Iran International shared a file with a little over three hours of the interview with an Associated Press correspondent based in the United Arab Emirates on Monday.

In the interview, Zarif describes Russia as wanting to stop the nuclear deal, something apparently so sensitive that he warns the interviewer: "You definitely can never release this part." Russia had a frosty relationship with then-President Barack Obama, whose administration secured the deal with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Russia and Iran also at times have strained relations, despite being battlefield allies in Syria.

"If Iran hadn't become Mr. (Donald) Trump's priority, China and Russia would have become his priority," Zarif said. "If, because of hostility with the West, we always need Russia and China, they don't have to compete with anyone, and also they can always enjoy maximum benefits through us."

Both China and Russia have been vocal proponents of returning to the nuclear deal. Their missions in Vienna did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday.

The recordings also include Zarif offering criticism of Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani's separate relations with Russia as well. A U.S. drone strike in 2020 killed Soleimani in Baghdad, an attack that at the time brought the U.S. and Iran to the brink of war. Soleimani's funeral processions in Iran drew millions of people to the streets.

"I have sacrificed diplomacy for the battlefield more than the price that (those on) the battlefield (led by Soleimani) ... paid and sacrificed for diplomacy," Zarif said. He added that Iran gave up much of what

it "could have achieved from the nuclear deal" for the sake of advancement on the battlefield.

He added that Soleimani refused to stop using the national carrier Iran Air for Syrian operations despite Zarif's objections. Iran Air has been sanctioned by the U.S., exasperating a long-running crisis that forced it fly decades-old aircraft, often lacking parts for repairs.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who pushed the Trump administration's pressure campaign on Iran, later linked to a story about the leaked tapes on Twitter. He described it as an "exquisite strike" that "had a massive impact on Iran and the Middle East."

"You don't have to take my word for it," Pompeo wrote, noting Zarif's comments.

China mutes reaction to Zhao's Oscars as S. Korea lauds Youn

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Chloé Zhao's history-making Oscars sweep, winning best director and best picture, is being met with a muted response in her country of birth, and even censorship.

Zhao's "Nomadland" is the second film directed by a woman to win a best picture Oscar. She is the first woman of color and second woman ever to win the Oscars for best director.

Yet, in China, where Zhao was born, her history-making success has not been trumpeted or celebrated. State media in China remained silent as of Monday afternoon, with no mention of her win by either CCTV and Xinhua, the two main state-run outlets.

Instead, there was even censorship. A post announcing Zhao's directing win by film magazine Watch Movies, which has over 14 million followers on the ubiquitous Weibo microblog, was censored a few hours after it appeared Monday morning. A hashtag called "Chloe Zhao wins Best Director" was also censored on the platform with users coming across an error message saying, "according to relevant laws and regulations and policies, the page is not found."

Some users resorting to using "zt" to post about Zhao, using the initials of her full name in Chinese, Zhou Ting. Typing in Zhou's name in Chinese on Weibo brought up only unrelated posts from the beginning of April. A search for "Oscars" showed only official posts from the South Korean and U.S. embassies.

Douban, an app popular with film buffs, banned searches for "Nomadland" and "Zhao Ting" saying that "the search results could not be displayed in accordance to relevant laws and regulations." Multiple discussion threads about Zhao's win were deleted on the app as well. A news article on WeChat, the largest messaging app in the country, was also deleted.

Still, the news of her wins spread onto the Chinese internet, with individual web users and bloggers cheering Zhao. Many took note of her acceptance speech, in which Zhao quoted a line from a poem written in the 13th century that she, like many other Chinese children, had memorized as a child, which translates as, "People are good at birth."

In stark contrast, South Korea's Youn Yuh-jung, who won over audiences playing the grandmother in "Minari" could still be searched on the Chinese internet. Youn nabbed best supporting actress award, becoming the first Korean performer to win an Oscar.

And in Youn's home of South Korea, "Actor Youn Yuh-jung" topped Twitter's trending list while other South Korean celebrities quickly offered their congratulations. Lee Byung-hun, a South Korean actor known abroad for his role as "Storm Shadow" on the "G.I. Joe" series, posted a photo of Youn clutching an Oscar trophy. "Impossible is just an opinion," he wrote on the post. Bae Doona from the acclaimed Netflix series "Kingdom" and a well-known South Korean actor Kim Hye-soo also congratulated Youn on their social media accounts.

Zhao faced a nationalist backlash in March when she won a Golden Globe for best director, with internet users in China questioning whether she could be called Chinese and some saying she had insulted her home country in comments on the political system. China's press, television and social media are tightly controlled by the ruling Communist Party, either directly or through self-censorship, and online criticism can frequently result in calls for boycotts of entertainers or name brands.

Before the backlash in March, the film was slated for an April 23 release in China according to local me-

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dia, but it did not open last week and there was no official word on a release. Employees at two cinemas in Beijing said they did not know of any upcoming showings of the film.

Offline, however, some celebrated Zhao's win and offered congratulations.

"Wow that's incredible—winning a world's top award as a Chinese person," said Zhou Lu, 35, who worked at a publisher in Beijing. She said she had not heard of Zhao before, however, but would plan to watch the film.

Others pointed out that the nationalism should not have a place in the discussion about the film.

"Her win is deserved, and it has nothing to do with her country or her ethnicity," said Victory Dong, a 19-year-old college student who uses Douban.

But Dong did not feel any particular connection with Zhao just based on her country of birth. "She is a global citizen, I am not."

Oscars Latest: Anthony Hopkins wins best actor in a surprise

By The Associated Press undefined

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Latest on the Oscars (all times local):

8:20 p.m.

Anthony Hopkins has won his first Oscar since he was victorious for playing Hannibal Lecter.

Despite his pedigree, Hopkins was a surprise as the winner of the Academy Award for best actor for his work on "The Father."

The late Chadwick Boseman was expected to win the award, which, in a very rare move from the academy, was the last to be handed out this year instead of best picture.

It was also an anti-climax on a show where Hopkins wasn't present to accept the trophy. Joaquin Phoenix's reading of his name was the last dramatic moment of a most unusual ceremony.

The second Oscar for Hopkins comes nearly 30 years after his first in 1992, for playing Hannibal Lecter in "The Silence of the Lambs." He's been nominated four times since without a win.

The 83-year-old Hopkins won the Oscar for his role as a man who battles with dementia opposite Olivia Colman in the film directed by Florian Zeller.

A PANDEMIC ACADEMY AWARDS

— 'Nomadland' wins best picture at a social distanced Oscars

— The list of final winners at a different Academy Awards

— The Oscars bring back red carpet glam in whites and gold

— Chloé Zhao makes history with best director Oscar win

— Regina King reacts to Chauvin verdict in Oscars opening

— Pixar's 'Soul' wins best animated feature Academy Award

For complete coverage of this year's Oscars, visit: <https://apnews.com/hub/academy-awards>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

8:15 p.m.

Frances McDormand has won the Oscar for best actress, and "Nomadland" triumphed in three of the top categories, including best picture and best director.

It's the third Oscar for McDormand, who also won best actress in 2018 for "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri." That Oscar was stolen at the post-show Governors Ball, though it was recovered before the night was over. She also won for " Fargo."

McDormand plays a woman who leaves her small town to wander the American West in director Chloé Zhao's film "Nomadland."

She beat out fellow nominees Viola Davis, Carey Mulligan, Vanessa Kirby and Andra Day.

8:15 p.m.

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"Nomadland" has wandered straight into the Academy Award for best picture.

It's an unprecedented triumph in the awards show's most prestigious category for a film with a woman as both director and lead.

In a radical departure from previous decades, the best picture Oscar was not the last handed out. Best actress and best actor have yet to be awarded.

Directed by Chloé Zhao, who won best director earlier Sunday night, and starring Frances McDormand, who is up for best actress, "Nomadland" follows a woman who leaves her small town to join a group of wanderers in the American West.

It's just the second film directed by a woman to win a best picture Oscar. The first was the Kathryn Bigelow-directed "The Hurt Locker" in 2009.

It beat out fellow nominees "Judas and the Black Messiah," "Minari," "Sound of Metal," "The Father," "The Trial of the Chicago 7," "Mank" and "Promising Young Woman."

7:30 p.m.

"Fight for You" from "Judas and the Black Messiah" has won the Academy Award for best original song.

The Oscar goes to songwriters Dernst Emile II and Tiara Thomas and H.E.R., who also performed it.

From the stage at Union Station in Los Angeles on Sunday night, H.E.R. thanked her father for playing her funk and soul from the late 60s, when the film about Black Panthers leader Fred Hampton was set.

"All those days of listening to Sly and the Family Stone, and Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye really paid off," she said.

Daniel Kaluuya also won best supporting actor Sunday for playing Hampton.

Earlier, Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross and Jon Batiste won best score for the music they composed for "Soul," the Pixar film that also won best animated feature.

7 p.m.

Youn Yuh-jung has become the first Korean actor to win an Academy Award.

She claimed the Oscar for best supporting actress Sunday night for her performance in "Minari" as a grandmother who moves from South Korea to live with her daughter's farming family in Arkansas.

It was the first Oscar nomination in a career that spans five decades for the 73-year-old Youn, long a star in South Korea.

She seemed starstruck herself by Brad Pitt, who presented the award.

"Mr. Brad Pitt, finally, nice to meet you!" she said.

She said many throughout the world have badly botched the pronunciation of her name, but "tonight you are all forgiven."

Last year the South Korean film "Parasite" won best picture and best director, but none of its actors were nominated for Oscars.

Youn beat out fellow nominees Olivia Colman, Amanda Seyfried and Maria Bakalova and Glenn Close, who has now been nominated for eight Oscars without a win.

6:45 p.m.

"My Octopus Teacher," the tale of an eight-limbed creature and her human companion, has won the Oscar for best documentary.

Ten years in the making, "My Octopus Teacher" began as a personal video project by South African filmmaker Craig Foster to rekindle his connection with nature by observing an inquisitive female mollusk while free-diving near Cape Town.

Foster said his relationship with the octopus taught him about life's fragility and our connection with nature, and even helped him become a better father.

For the Oscar, "My Octopus Teacher" beat out "Collective," "Crip Camp," "The Mole Agent" and "Time."

6:30 p.m.

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"Soul" has won the heart of Oscar voters.

The Pixar film won the Academy Award for best animated feature Sunday night, continuing the Disney division's dominance in the category.

Directed by Pete Docter and featuring the voices of Jamie Foxx and Tina Fey, "Soul" follows a middle-school band teacher who dreams of being a jazz musician and tries to escape the afterlife to do it.

"This film started as a love letter to jazz, but we had no idea how much jazz would teach us about life," Docter said as he accepted the Oscar.

Pixar has now won the award 11 times in the 20 years since the category was established.

6 p.m.

Chloé Zhao has made history at the Academy Awards.

Zhao won the Oscar for best director for "Nomadland," becoming just the second woman and the first woman of color to win the award.

"My entire 'Nomadland' company, what a crazy, once-in-a-lifetime journey we've all been on together," Zhao said.

Kathryn Bigelow was the first woman to win, for "The Hurt Locker," in 2009.

This was the only year in Oscar history with two female nominees, Zhao and "Promising Young Woman" director Emerald Fennell. Only seven women have ever been nominated.

It was the first Oscar for the 39-year-old Zhao, who was born in Beijing and went to college and film school in the United States. "Nomadland" is her third feature.

The other nominees were Lee Isaac Chung for "Minari," Thomas Vinterberg for "Another Round," and David Fincher for "Mank."

It may not be long before Zhao gets her second Oscar. "Nomadland" is considered the favorite for best picture, and she's nominated as a producer.

5:30 p.m.

Daniel Kaluuya used a lead role to win a best supporting actor Oscar. He'll take it.

Kaluuya won his first Academy Award on Sunday night for playing one of the two title roles in "Judas and the Black Messiah."

"I'd like to thank my mom," Kaluuya said, as his mother teared up while watching. "You gave me everything. You gave me your factory settings. So I could stand at my fullest height."

Kaluuya played Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, who was killed in an FBI raid in 1969.

In an odd quirk of the nominating process, LaKeith Stanfield, who played the "Judas" of the title, an FBI informant who got close to Hampton, was also nominated for best supporting actor.

It was Kaluuya's second nomination. The first came for his breakout role in "Get Out" in 2018.

The other nominees were Paul Raci, Leslie Odom Jr. and Sacha Baron Cohen.

5:20 p.m.

Raise a glass for "Another Round."

The film from Denmark, directed by Thomas Vinterberg, has won the Oscar for best international feature film.

"This is beyond anything I could ever imagine," Vinterberg said from the stage at Union Station in Los Angeles on Sunday night. "Except this is something I've always imagined."

It is the fourth time a film from Denmark has won in the category. The last was "In a Better World" in 2010.

"Another Round" stars Mads Mikkelsen as one of a group of school teachers who try to stay slightly drunk all day to break out of their midlife malaise.

Vinterberg teared up when he told the audience his daughter died four days into shooting. "An accident on the highway took my daughter away," he said. "We ended up making this movie for her, as her monu-

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ment. So, Ida, this is a miracle that just happened.”

Vinterberg is also nominated for best director Sunday night.

5:15 p.m.

The first Oscar of the night has gone to Emerald Fennell, writer and director of “Promising Young Woman.”

Fennell won best original screenplay at the ceremony Sunday night at Union Station in downtown Los Angeles. The award isn’t normally handed out until mid-show, but this year has already broken with several traditions in the opening minutes.

It’s the first Oscar for Fennell, a 35-year-old British actor and screenwriter.

She worried from the stage that she was going to be in trouble.

Fennell fretted after taking the Oscar statue that she would be in trouble with the show’s producers, who are trying to make this year’s ceremony less like a TV show and more like a film.

“They said write a speech, and I didn’t because I didn’t think this was ever going to happen,” she said.

She is also nominated for best director for the #MeToo-themed revenge tale.

The night’s second Oscar, for best adapted screenplay, went to Christopher Hampton and Florian Zeller for “The Father.”

The two co-wrote the script based on Zeller’s 2012 play.

5:10 p.m.

The Academy Awards have begun in true cinematic fashion.

This year’s unusual ceremony opened with actor and director Regina King grabbing an Oscar statuette outside Union Station in downtown Los Angeles and walking it inside while credits rolled, giving the show’s presenters, including Angela Basset and Harrison Ford, and nominees including Viola Davis and Riz Ahmed, as the show’s stars.

Inside Union Station in front of a small crowd, King then opened the show with a monologue, telling the nominees in front of her to “think of this as a movie set.”

“People have been vaxxed, tested, re-tested and socially distanced,” she said, informing everyone to take their face masks off while the cameras rolled, and to put them on during breaks.

Producers and directors promised that this year’s ceremony would be closer to a movie than a television show.

4:20 p.m.

Performances of the Oscar nominees for best original song have begun from locations as varied as Los Angeles and Iceland, even if the ceremony hasn’t.

In one of many twists in this year’s ceremony, the five songs are being presented in a pre-show before the main event begins at Union Station in Los Angeles at 5 p.m. Sunday.

Laura Pausini performed a pre-taped “Io Si (Seen)” from “The Life Ahead” high above Los Angeles on the roof of the new Academy Museum of Motion Pictures that opens in September. She was joined by writer and 12-time nominee Diane Warren playing a red grand piano, and an orchestra decked out in red.

Swedish singer Molly Sandén performed “Húsavík” from “Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga” on a cold boat dock in Iceland, joined by a sweater-sporting children’s choir from the town the song is named for, which has adopted the song as a de facto anthem.

There are also will be performances of “Fight for You” from “Judas and the Black Messiah,” “Speak Now” from “One Night in Miami” and “Hear My Voice” from “The Trial of the Chicago 7.”

3:30 p.m.

Leslie Odom Jr. has arrived at the Academy Awards decked out in gold from head to toe. He has two chances Sunday night to get a matching Oscar.

Wearing the sparkling double-breasted suit with a matching gold shirt underneath, Odom walked the

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scaled-back red carpet outside Union Station in Los Angeles with his wife, actor Nicollette Robinson, who was in a simple black dress.

Odom told KABC-TV from the carpet that it feels great to be "walking in healthy, walking in at all."

Odom, nominated for best supporting actor and best original song for "One Night in Miami," can get one or two Oscar statuettes to go with the Tony and Grammy he won for playing Aaron Burr in the original Broadway cast of "Hamilton."

He praised this year's diverse nominees, including his own film, "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" and "Judas and the Black Messiah," calling it a "special moment" for films about black lives.

2:45 p.m.

The preparations are done and the arrivals have begun for a most unusual Oscars.

Paul Raci, up for best supporting actor Sunday, and Diane Warren, up for best original song, were among the early arriving nominees.

Raci, a 73-year-old first-time nominee for "Sound of Metal," and Warren, a 12-time nominee who has never won, walked a red carpet that was heavily scaled back for the pandemic outside Union Station in downtown Los Angeles, where the ceremony is being held for the first time.

Actor Colman Domingo of multiple nominee "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" made the day's first big fashion splash with a shockingly pink tuxedo.

"Mank" has the most nominations and "Nomadland" is the favorite in several top categories at the 93rd Academy Awards starting at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET.

11 a.m.

Show producers are hoping to return some of the traditional glamour to the Oscars, even in a pandemic year.

The red carpet is back, though not the throngs; only a handful of media outlets will be allowed on site. Casual wear is a no-no.

Pulling the musical interludes (though not the in memoriam segment) from the three-hour broadcast — and drastically cutting down the time it will take winners to reach the podium — will free up a lot of time in the ceremony. And producers, led by filmmaker Steven Soderbergh, are promising a reinvented telecast.

The Oscars will look more like a movie, Soderbergh has said. The show will appear more widescreen and the presenters — including Brad Pitt, Halle Berry, Reese Witherspoon, Harrison Ford, Rita Moreno and Zendaya — are considered "cast members." The telecast's first 90 seconds, Soderbergh has claimed, will "announce our intention immediately."

Oscar moments: History, glamour ... and what a weird ending

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

Wait. What?

If that's what you yelled at the TV during the final moments of Sunday's Oscars, you weren't alone. In what may have been the most abrupt ending since that closing shot of "The Sopranos," TV audiences expecting an emotional finale crowning the late Chadwick Boseman as best actor were left to ponder a huge upset, an absent winner, and a quick "see ya" from the Oscars.

It was one more unusual moment in the most unusual of all Oscar telecasts, one that defied convention in so many ways. Some of it was good: In a pandemic year when award shows faced unprecedented challenges, the Oscars brought back red-carpet glamour. And though many nominees weren't able to attend in person, it was truly heartening to see those who were.

The nominees represented a huge advance in diversity, with more women and more actors of color nominated than ever before — but one oft-predicted outcome was not meant to be: a sweep of the acting categories by actors of color. Though supporting prizes went to Daniel Kaluuya ("Judas and the Black Messiah") and Youn Yuh-jung ("Minari"), the best actor and actress categories went unexpectedly to

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Anthony Hopkins and to Frances McDormand, winning her third trophy in the category, for "Nomadland."

But history was made nonetheless, especially by Chloé Zhao, the China-born director of "Nomadland" who became just the second woman to win best director, and the first woman of color.

And in a year when there was so much pain for all, her words were a balm — perhaps just what a battered world needed. "This is for anyone who has the faith and the courage to hold on to the goodness in themselves," she said. "And to hold on to the goodness in each other."

Some key Oscar moments:

AMID THE GLAMOUR, REAL-WORLD REMINDERS

Oscars may be about Hollywood-style escapism, but in her opening moments, Regina King kept it real. The talented actor and director of "One Night in Miami" immediately reminded the world both of the scourge of the pandemic and the scourge of police violence. "We are mourning the loss of so many, and I have to be honest, if things had gone differently this past week in Minneapolis I may have traded in my heels for marching boots," she said, a reference to the guilty verdict against Derek Chauvin in the murder of George Floyd. She noted that some viewers prefer their Oscar ceremonies not to dwell on such things: "I know that a lot of you people at home want to reach for your remote when you feel like Hollywood is preaching to you." But, she added, "as a mother of a Black son I know the fear that so many live with, and no amount of fame or fortune changes that, OK?"

A 'PROMISING' SHOWING FOR WOMEN

There was a wealth of history to be made this Oscar night, and much of it came for women. First off was Emerald Fennell, who won the night's first award — best original screenplay — for the fierce and provocative revenge thriller, "Promising Young Woman," her directorial debut. The busy Fennell, who also found time for an acting role in "The Crown," became the first woman in 13 years to win a screenwriting Oscar. Fennell, who is pregnant, joked that she was also pregnant when she shot "Promising Young Woman," and thanked her son for waiting until the shoot was over to arrive: "I was crossing my legs."

A SAD TRIBUTE

One of the benefits of the telecast leaving more time for speeches this year — with no play-off music — was that some were deeper and more heartfelt. This was especially true of director Thomas Vinterberg, who, in a heartbreaking moment, dedicated his win for "Another Round" (international feature) to his late daughter Ida, who was supposed to be in the film but was killed at age 19 in a car crash by a driver looking at a cell phone, four days into shooting. "Ida, this is a miracle that just happened, and you're part of this miracle," the director said, in tears. "Maybe you've been pulling some strings somewhere."

HISTORY, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

History had already made in the directing category before the envelope was opened. For the first time, two women were nominated, Zhao and Fennell. It was quite simply a monumental night for Zhao, the China-born director who became only the second woman in Oscar history to win the directing prize, after Kathryn Bigelow, and the first woman of color. Her lyrical "Nomadland" went on to win best picture — an emphatic triumph for the elegant filmmaker. Next up for Zhao is something very different from this film made for less than \$5 million: a Marvel film with a budget around \$200 million.

THANKS, MOM — FOR HAVING SEX WITH DAD!

It's always a good idea to pay tribute to one's Mom when winning an Oscar. Maybe not to talk about her sex life, though — especially when she's sitting in the audience. Daniel Kaluuya gave a stirring speech when he won best supporting actor for his charismatic performance in "Judas and the Black Messiah" as Black Panther leader Fred Hampton. Waxing rhapsodic, he then said: "My mum met my dad, they had sex. It's amazing. I'm here. I'm so happy to be alive." His mother, in her seat, could clearly be seen asking what the heck he was talking about. Backstage, Kaluuya explained: "She's got a sense of humor."

MAN AND CEPHALOPOD

Many a buddy film has triumphed at the Oscars over the years. This was presumably the first about a human and ... an octopus. "My Octopus Teacher" from Netflix rode a wave of fan enthusiasm to the best documentary feature prize. With stunning visuals, the film tells the tale of filmmaker Craig Foster, who became attached to a female octopus. Noted James Reed, co-director with Pippa Ehrlich: "If a man can

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form a friendship with an octopus, it does sort of make you wonder what else is possible.”

OH HEY, BRAD

Youn Yuh-jung has charmed Western audiences since she broke through in “Minari,” and the prominent South Korean actress did not disappoint Sunday as she won the best supporting actress award — only the second Asian actress to do so. In her speech, she joked about how often her name is mangled, and marveled at how she could possibly defeat fellow nominee Glenn Close. Youn, 73, also dared to tease her presenter, Brad Pitt, whose company was involved in the production of “Minari,” for not visiting the set in Oklahoma. “Mr. Brad Pitt, finally!” she said. “Nice to meet you.”

BYPASSED AGAIN, CLOSE MAKES HER MARK

It probably wasn’t the kind of Oscar history she wanted to make: Close is now 0-8 at the Oscars, tying Peter O’Toole for most nominations without winning. Surely she will win one day, but for Sunday’s telecast at least, she had to make her mark another way. She did it with humor, in a rare comedy bit. Playing a game where Questlove would play a song and a celebrity would guess if it was ever nominated for or won an Oscar, Close was given E.U.’s “Da Butt.” In what appeared a scripted moment, she exclaimed: “Wait a second. Wait a second. That’s Da Butt.” She then jumped out of her seat and, well, gyrated her butt, providing a needed moment of levity.

CAN WE GO BACK TO THE OLD WAY?

Yet another awkward Oscar moment for Joaquin Phoenix, who seems to specialize in them. Presenting the final award for best actor, Phoenix undoubtedly expected — as did most of the rest of the world — to give the award to Boseman, rewarding the beloved actor posthumously for his superb performance in “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom.” Indeed, it seemed as if the award order was changed, with best picture presented before best actress and actor, to capitalize on the expected emotional impact. Instead, Hopkins (also deserving, of course) won the award, and since he wasn’t there, it lent a bizarrely abrupt ending to the proceedings ... a la the cut-to-black in “The Sopranos”. So ...next time, can we go back to the old order, please?

Packed parks, lurking virus? Worries mount as Italy reopens

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Italy’s gradual reopening on Monday after six months of rotating virus lockdowns is satisfying no one: Too cautious for some, too hasty for others.

Allowing outdoor dining comes too little, too late for Italy’s restaurant owners, whose survival is threatened by more than a year of on-again, off-again closures. The country’s continued 10 p.m. curfew puts a damper on theater reopenings, and is seen as bad public relations for Italy’s key tourism industry, which hopes the second summer of the pandemic can finally see the return of overseas visitors. The government has also been facing strong pressure to reopen from Italy’s right-wing parties.

Yet the nation’s weary virologists and medical workers worry that even the tentative reopening planned by Premier Mario Draghi’s government will invite a free-for-all that risks a new virus surge before the current one is truly tamped down.

“Unfortunately, as I have had to repeat often: The virus does not negotiate. The virus, moreover, has succeeded in adapting itself, becoming more aggressive and more widespread,” said Professor Massimo Galli of Milan’s Sacco Hospital.

In a preview of what many fear, Italians on Sunday — a day before the virus restrictions loosened — crowded the streets, squares and parks of cities from Rome to Turin, Milan to Naples, as warmer weather pushed aside an unusually cold spring.

Recognizing the risks, Italy’s interior ministry instructed law enforcement officers on Sunday to make sure that social distancing and mask-wearing were enforced so that the loosening of restrictions doesn’t translate into a new virus spike.

Italy has the second-deadliest pandemic toll in Europe after Britain, with over 119,000 confirmed deaths. And experts say that number is low because more Italians suspected of having COVID-19 died in spring

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2020 before they could be tested.

By Monday, 15 of Italy's 21 regions and autonomous provinces will be under the lowest levels of coronavirus restrictions, with inter-regional travel allowed for the first time since the fall. The number of people who can visit friends and family at any one time will double from two to four. Restaurants and bars will be able to seat people for open-air dining. Contact sports can resume outdoors.

However, plans to fully reopen Italian high schools for the last six weeks of the school year ran up against inadequate public transport and had to be scaled back to a minimum of 70% in-person schooling for the upper grades.

Four southern regions — Basilicata, Calabria, Puglia and Sicily — along with tiny Aosta on the French border in the north remain under stronger, second-tier virus restrictions.

The Italian island of Sardinia — the only region entirely free of restrictions this winter — was plunged into the red zone in mid-April after the all-clear signal resulted in a surge of new infections. Sardinia has become a cautionary tale cited by Italian virologists.

The reopenings come even as Italy's intensive care wards remain above the 30% threshold for alarm. Italy's vaccine campaign is also still well shy of its 500,000-shots-a-day goal, and is only now moving to protect people in the 70-79 age bracket. The World Health Organization says people over 65 have accounted for the vast majority of COVID-19 deaths in Europe.

"There are two words that should guide us in the next days," Health Minister Roberto Speranza said Sunday. "Trust, because the measures have worked, and prudence. We need to take one step at a time, be gradual and evaluate the evolution day by day."

Virus surge in crowded Gaza threatens to overwhelm hospitals

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — More than a year into the coronavirus pandemic, some of the worst fears are coming true in the crowded Gaza Strip: A sudden surge in infections and deaths is threatening to overwhelm hospitals weakened by years of conflict and border closures.

Gaza's main treatment center for COVID-19 patients warns that oxygen supplies are dwindling fast. In another hospital, coronavirus patients are packed three to a room.

For months, Gaza's Hamas rulers seemed to have a handle on containing the pandemic. But their decision to lift most movement restrictions in February — coupled with the spread of a more aggressive virus variant and lack of vaccines — has led to a fierce second surge.

At the same time, many of Gaza's more than 2 million people ignore safety precautions, especially during the current fasting month of Ramadan. In the daytime, markets teem with shoppers buying goods for iftar, the meal breaking the fast after sundown. Few wear masks properly, if at all.

"Corona is not a game," said Yasmin Ali, 32, whose 64-year-old mother died of the virus last week. "It will take the lives of many people if they don't protect themselves in the first place."

From the start, the course of the pandemic in Gaza, one of the world's most crowded territories, was largely shaped by politics. A border closure — enforced by Israel and Egypt to varying degrees since the Islamic militant Hamas group seized control of Gaza in 2007 — helped slow the spread initially. In the early months, Hamas quarantined small groups of travelers coming from Egypt, and the first cases of community spread were only reported in August.

A first outbreak came in the fall. Hamas tried to contain it by closing schools, mosques and markets, and by imposing a nighttime curfew. By February, infections had dropped sharply.

At that point, Hamas lifted curfews. Students were back in schools, wedding halls reopened and street markets were back. Travelers from Egypt were no longer placed in quarantine or even tested. Instead they were waved through after a temperature check, on the assumption that they had already been tested in Egypt.

The decision to reopen was in part driven by economic concerns. The closures had further battered Gaza's long-suffering economy, where unemployment stands at roughly 50% and among young people at 70%.

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Hamas may also have been concerned about prolonging unpopular measures ahead of Palestinian parliament elections. In the May 22 vote, Hamas is competing against the Fatah movement of West Bank-based Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. There's no reliable polling, but Hamas appears vulnerable to a Fatah challenge in Gaza, even as it is expected to do well in the West Bank.

The start of Ramadan in mid-April, with its crowded markets and late-night mosque prayers, further fueled infections, as did the emergence of more aggressive virus variants.

Last week, the daily death toll rose above 20 on most days, compared to a one-time daily high of 15 in the first surge. Daily infections of 1,000 to 1,500 are the new norm. The total number of infections is close to 100,000, with 848 deaths.

The European Hospital in the town of Khan Younis, the main treatment center for COVID-19 patients, is quickly running out of resources.

Its director, Yousef al-Aqqad, said 118 of 150 beds are occupied by patients in critical or serious condition. He said he would need hundreds more oxygen cylinders if the number of patients exceeds 150.

Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, has 100 beds for COVID-19 patients, including 12 in the ICU. The hospital has postponed elective surgeries and closed outpatient clinics, while continuing life-saving services, such as heart operations and dialysis.

The Health Ministry said almost all of Gaza has been designated a "red zone" because of widespread community transmission.

Dr. Majdi Dhair, a senior health official, said Gaza's limited medical infrastructure made the situation worse. The severe shortage of vaccines poses another challenge.

Israel, whose own vaccination campaign has been a success, has been broadly criticized for refusing to accept responsibility for vaccinating the Palestinians. Rights groups say that under international law, Israel remains responsible for Palestinians in areas it occupied in the 1967 Mideast war, including Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Israel says interim peace accords absolve it of that responsibility and that this is particularly true in Gaza, from which it withdrew in 2005, while keeping tight control over borders.

So far, Gaza has received enough doses to fully vaccinate just over 55,000 people, with shipments arriving from the United Arab Emirates and the U.N.-backed COVAX program.

At the same time, skepticism is widespread in Gaza, especially when it comes to the AstraZeneca vaccine, which has been linked to rare blood clots, said Dhair.

Health authorities have been urging those older than 40 to get the jab, but thousands of doses of AstraZeneca are sitting on the shelves.

In crowded Gaza, it's near impossible to keep a distance from others. Dhair said he also encounters widespread indifference. "There is no conviction by the people and even if we put checkpoints, they will remove the mask once they get past the policeman," he said.

After the sharp rise in cases last week, Hamas tightened restrictions again at the urging of health officials. It reimposed night curfews and closed mosques for Ramadan evening prayers.

The after-dark lockdown dealt a new economic blow. Restaurants usually flourish in Ramadan after the faithful break their daily fast. In previous years, cafes and eateries would be full until dawn.

Ramadan provides temporary employment to 30,000 to 50,000 people, mainly restaurant workers and vendors. Most of that has gone with the new restrictions, said economist Omar Shaban.

Mamdouh Abu Hassira, whose seaside café with its view of Mediterranean sunsets is a popular Ramadan spot, had to lay off 15 of his 19 workers. Abu Hassira said it made no sense to him to ban families from enjoying iftar at his restaurant while allowing shoppers to crowd markets during the day. "We are destroyed," he said of his business.

Salama Marouf, a Hamas government spokesman, said managing the pandemic was a balancing act. "The confrontation with the virus is a long-term one," he said. "We try to take measures that could improve the health situation without hurting other sectors."

Review: Not quite a movie, but the Oscars were a love letter

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By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The 93rd Academy Awards wasn't exactly a movie, but it was a show made for people who love learning about movies. And it stubbornly, defiantly wasn't trying to be anything else. It wasn't an advertisement for the nominated films that audiences at home may or may not have seen, a well-heeled stand-up routine or a star-studded concert. Although it did, curiously, turn into a brief musical trivia game 2 hours and 40 minutes into the evening. Best actress winner Frances McDormand said later upon collecting her trophy that, "They didn't ask me but if they had, I would have said karaoke."

There probably would have been fewer bleeps.

It was a show unlike any others this year and if you didn't have a working knowledge of the films going into the night, the ceremony may have been a little mystifying. The spectacular musical numbers, atop the new Academy Museum and in Iceland, were pre-recorded and broadcast during the pre-show. There were no montages, barely any clips and only one major trailer debut during the commercial breaks (for Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story"). Aside from Regina King's brisk strut through Los Angeles' historic Union Station that kicked off the show with candy colored credits, it was a subtle, subdued and sincere affair (mostly).

Few would deny that the Oscars had gotten, if not stale, too safe. Certainly there were moments of excitement, whether in an unexpected winner, an true upset or something as colossal as announcing the wrong best picture winner. And this year had some historic possibilities up its sleeves, some of which it made good on (like Chloé Zhao winning for directing and Youn Yuh-jung for supporting actress) and some of which it didn't (a Black woman still has yet to win two Oscars).

But it also had an impossible checklist: Revitalize the format, celebrate the movies, bring back awards show glamour, avoid a ratings disaster, get audiences excited about going back to the movies and put on a pandemic-safe show in person and without Zoom. It's a big haul, not to mention the non-pandemic fact that the only thing that had gotten more predictable than the Oscars was people criticizing the Oscars: Too long, too boring, too preachy, not preachy enough, too irrelevant, too many montages (or not enough montages). It's the show that many love to hate and no format or venue tweaks was ever going to change that.

Union Station, a legendary movie location already, provided a grand and fresh setting for the proceedings. They were shooting it all in 24 frames-per-second. The presenters were called cast members. Once it all got underway, however, it became clear that the transit hub was being used neither as supporting character nor symbol: It was just background — a place to construct the elegant Art Deco banquets where the nominees were seamlessly cycled in and out throughout the ceremony. And the cast of Harrison Ford, Brad Pitt, Rita Moreno and Reese Witherspoon? They were just presenters too. No one even seemed to interact with one another.

The ceremony was imbued with interesting personal anecdotes and a flurry of factoids about everyone's love of the movies that will surely necessitate some Wikipedia updates. There were beautiful and funny moments too and some that wouldn't be possible if an orchestra was there playing people off. Would we have heard best supporting actor winner Daniel Kaluuya thank his parents for, well, doing what they needed to do to have him? Or best international film director Thomas Vinterberg reveal, through tears, that his daughter was killed in a car crash four days into filming "Another Round?"

With more time and a more intimate setting that felt like a throwback to the earliest days of the Oscars, when they were just an untelevised banquet for 270 people, it seemed the winners were ready to get personal with their speeches. They were talking to a small room of friends and peers: Not the anonymous faces of sponsors and friends of the studios/networks/financiers that usually help populate the 3,400 seats at the Dolby Theater (not to mention the global audience). Plus, the walk to the stage was mercifully short. And it was inspired to have Marlee Matlin present in American Sign Language and Bong Joon Ho in Korean.

Yet as the night wore on, some of the choices started to get more questionable. The biggest change was the decision to not present the best picture award last. Although likely conceived to ensure a finale with a star and not a stage of producers, it backfired. After "Nomadland" won the top prize, McDormand seemed even less interested in collecting hers. And it certainly didn't help that the show ended on a down

note when best actor went not to the late Chadwick Boseman as expected, but to Anthony Hopkins who simply wasn't in attendance. It's not a judgment of either performance, just the fact that it was an abrupt and unsatisfying conclusion. And just like that, the 93rd Oscars were over.

Usually the host bears the brunt of the blame or praise for the failure or success of an awards show. This year, however unfair, judgment is going to land on the most famous of the three producers: Steven Soderbergh. Like some Soderbergh productions, the 93rd Oscars were so different, with a voice and a pacing all its own, that its magic might not be immediately evident. But there was also, to use a film school cliché, a lot of telling and not a lot of showing. Never was that so clear as when the broadcast sped through the In Memoriam as though on fast forward.

There's a danger in promising too much and the more-like-a-movie-less-like-a-television show concept was, in retrospect, a little lofty for what we got. No one's asking for their money back: The 93rd Oscars were by far the best movie awards show of the past year. Hopefully it's also the last pandemic show we'll ever have to endure.

Michigan became hotspot as variants rose and vigilance fell

By COREY WILLIAMS, DAVID EGGERT AND LINDSEY TANNER Associated Press

ROYAL OAK, Mich. (AP) — Eric Gala passed up an opportunity to get a coronavirus vaccine when shots became available in Michigan, and he admits not taking the virus seriously enough.

Then he got sick with what he thought was the flu. He thought he would sweat it out and then feel back to normal.

Before long, the 63-year-old Detroit-area retiree was in a hospital hooked up to a machine to help him breathe. He had COVID-19.

"I was having more trouble breathing and they turned the oxygen up higher — that's when I got scared and thought I wasn't going to make it," a visibly weary Gala told The Associated Press on Wednesday from his hospital bed at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, north of Detroit. "I had so many people tell me this was a fake disease."

Gala's situation illustrates how Michigan has become the current national hotspot for COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations at a time when more than half the U.S. adult population has been vaccinated and other states have seen the virus diminish substantially.

Doctors, medical professionals and public health officials point to a number of factors that explain how the situation has gotten so bad in Michigan. More contagious variants, especially the mutation first discovered in Britain, have taken root here with greater prevalence than other states. Residents have emerged from harsh, lengthy state restrictions on dining and crowd sizes and abandoned mask wearing and social distancing, especially in rural, northern parts of the state that had largely avoided severe outbreaks. The state has also had average vaccine compliance.

Michigan has recorded a highest-in-the-nation 91,000 new COVID-19 cases over the last two weeks, despite improvements in the numbers in recent days. By comparison, that is more cases than California and Texas had combined in the same period.

Beaumont Health, a major hospital system in Michigan, recently warned that its hospitals and staff had hit critical capacity levels. COVID-19 patient numbers across the eight-hospital health system jumped from 128 on Feb. 28 to more than 800 patients.

"A year ago, the phrase was tsunami," said Dr. Paul Bozyk, assistant chief of critical care and pulmonary medicine at Beaumont Royal Oak. "It was chaotic. People were overwhelmed with what they were seeing: Death and dying. This year, it's more of a slow, rising flood. No big surge of patients, but we keep getting more each day. We're full."

Detroit was an early epicenter a year ago when the virus first arrived in the U.S., prompting aggressive measures by Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer to stop the spread. That made her a target of then-President Donald Trump and right-wing protesters who vilified her as the epitome of government overreach in a year when Michigan played a pivotal role in the presidential election.

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Toni Schmittling, a nurse anesthetist who works at Sinai-Grace Hospital in Detroit, says that when Detroit was hard-hit and her hospital had to double-up ventilator patients in one room, the rest of Michigan was wondering why restrictions were needed.

"We'd say, 'Are you kidding me, people are dying right and left here,'" Schmittling said.

Now, cases are more spread out and rural areas are getting hit hard. At Sinai-Grace, Beaumont Royal Oak and other hospitals across the U.S., patients are younger than before, in their 30s to 50s, but don't seem to get quite as sick.

Dr. Mark Hamed, medical director in the emergency department at McKenzie Hospital in Sandusky, Michigan, and for several counties in the state's northern region, says the area was spared from rampant COVID-19 last year and that may have created a false sense of security, especially among the region's farmers and blue-collar workers who suffered economically from the pandemic and already were feeling COVID fatigue.

"Businesses weren't really enforcing mask-wearing," and many people in the region shunned them anyway, he said.

Now, with variants spreading and many people still unvaccinated, his area "is being hit pretty hard," Hamed said. "Our ER is absolutely swamped beyond belief."

The current surge has left medical staff beleaguered. Unlike their colleagues in other states where the virus is relatively under control, Michigan doctors and nurses are enduring another crisis — more than a full year after hospitals in Detroit were besieged.

"We start to gain some hope when the plateau hits and then here we are with another surge," said Lizzie Smagala, a registered nurse in Beaumont Royal Oak's medical ICU, where masked-up hospital personnel quietly and methodically tend to the sick. "I think the people on the outside of our situation don't understand the depths of what we're going through, how long we've been going through it here in the hospital and that COVID's not really ever left."

COVID's toll in Michigan has been much more than emergency rooms and ICU departments packed with the ill and thousands of people self-quarantining due to fear of contracting the virus. Tens of thousands of jobs were lost, and Detroit, which is 80% Black and has a high level of poverty, has been especially hard hit by the virus and economic woes.

Schools were closed for months, then reopened and shuttered again this month in Detroit after the virus came back with a vengeance. In-person classes may have to be scratched for the remainder of the school year in Detroit.

"Frankly, we have a lot of folks in the community that are just done with the pandemic," said Bozyk. "It's hard to be in social isolation for 13 months. Nobody wants that. That's not good for the psychological health. But as a medical practitioner treating COVID I wanted to make COVID go away. I would tell everyone to stay home until we get herd immunity."

At the same time, vaccine hesitancy has been an issue in Michigan. About 40% of the state has received at least one vaccine dose — about the same as the national average. About 28% of city residents 16 and older in Detroit have received at least one dose of vaccine. The city is planning to go door-to-door to urge people to get vaccine doses — many of which are manufactured in Michigan at Pfizer's plant near Kalamazoo.

When vaccinations began it felt like "there's light at the end of the tunnel," Schmittling said. "Then, what happens to Michigan — we're like highest in the nation. What are we doing? What's happening in Michigan? I wish I had the answers for that."

Officials hope that the latest COVID surge has started to recede. There were more than 400 COVID-19 patients Thursday morning at six Henry Ford Health System hospitals in the Detroit area, down 10% from earlier in the week.

Still, the health system is seeing a softer vaccine demand: roughly 10,000 doses this week compared to nearly 20,000 in recent weeks, said Dr. Adnan Munkarah, chief clinical officer at Henry Ford.

Gala was expected to be sent home this week from Beaumont Royal Oak. His brother-in-law, who caught the virus around the same time, died a few days ago at another hospital.

Gala still wonders when and how he caught the virus.

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"I was wearing masks and sometimes I wasn't," he said. "I was never out in public without a mask. My biggest regret is I didn't get vaccinated. This is a life-changer for me."

Pain, loss linger a decade after tornadoes hammer 6 states

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — For Tom Sanders, it's the void left by the death of a cousin and the man's wife, killed when a tornado mowed through a placid Alabama valley. To Markedia Wells, it's the stolen innocence of her sons, who still get nervous anytime it starts raining. Darryl Colburn laments a lost way of life in his hometown, which was all but leveled in seconds.

Waves of tornadoes pummeled the Eastern U.S. over four days in the spring of 2011, killing more than 320 people in six states, including about 250 who died in Alabama on April 27 of that year. A decade has passed, but time has been unable to erase the pain or replace the losses inflicted by the terrifying storms.

Homes and businesses were rebuilt and new trees have grown; empty seats around dinner tables were filled as babies were born and a new generation came of age. Yet there's still a sense of absence, a lingering feeling of sorrow, in communities where so much was lost so quickly.

"I don't know if it's a day to remember, but it's a day you can't forget," said Colburn, the mayor of tiny Hackleburg, where 18 died in an EF-5 twister with winds estimated at 210 mph (338 kph). The same twister hit nearby Phil Campbell, where a granite monument at the center of town honors 27 who were killed.

Storms that began in eastern Texas mushroomed by the time the line reached Mississippi, where one twister was so intense it scoured 2 feet (0.61 meters) of dirt from the ground. More than 60 tornadoes then struck Alabama, including one that was captured on video as it decimated the city of Tuscaloosa, and storms continued as far north as New York state.

Another major tornado outbreak had killed more than three dozen people across the South about two weeks earlier, and a spring of pain got even worse two weeks later, when an EF-5 ripped through Joplin, Missouri. About 160 people died there.

The government funded construction of hundreds of residential safe rooms and community storm shelters following the outbreak, still one of the deadliest in U.S. history, and meteorologists improved forecasting systems. One study suggested better ways of communicating weather threats through live TV, including the constant presence of maps on screen so viewers can understand where dangerous storms are located.

But better preparation for future disasters has done little to ease the pain of those who still relive the horror of past storms and the loss of loved ones.

In east Alabama's Shoal Creek Valley, where 12 died, families are still coping with unforgettable images and stories like that of Albert Sanders, 44, who died in the arms of his father, Buford Sanders, after being flung by a twister in a field.

"He basically held him in his arms, and then finally Albert told him that he felt like he was fixing to die and (said), 'I just want you to know I love you, daddy,'" said Albert's cousin Tom Sanders. "And then he died right after that."

Tom Sanders' home was badly damaged. Another relative, Jim Wilson, dug the graves for Albert and his wife, Angie Sanders, a few days later. A shiny black tombstone marks the spot in the cemetery of a country church. The couple's three daughters, teens at the time, were injured but survived, Wilson said.

Markedia Wells, 39, and her two young sons survived a monster tornado that left a path of destruction through the heart of Tuscaloosa, but their house was twisted off its foundation. She recalls shielding the boys' eyes from the sight of a dead neighbor being carried out of the rubble of a home by volunteers who used a door like a stretcher.

Recently married, Wells lives with her husband and sons, now 14 and 16, in one of dozens of homes built by Habitat for Humanity volunteers in the same neighborhood. But dozens of empty lots and barren concrete slabs mark the spots where homes once were, and the boys are still skittish about the weather, she said.

"I'll be the first to admit the emotional loss in it all," she said. "We're still very much nervous when it rains. When the weatherman is talking about bad weather or they speak about a tornado that may be

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coming, it all comes flooding back.”

Located about 95 miles (153 kilometers) northwest of Birmingham, the town of Hackleburg lost nearly all of its 30 or so businesses, two schools, 180 homes, several churches, a doctor’s office, pharmacy and most municipal buildings to the twister, said Colburn, the mayor. He can still point out the underground shelter where he survived the storm with 11 others.

“We came out and wondered if we were the only ones who survived,” said Colburn, whose wife lost an uncle in the tornado.

Fewer than 60% of the town’s homes have been rebuilt, and bare foundations are all that remain of the old brick storefronts that used to make up Hackleburg’s downtown. The city’s 1,500 or so residents still struggle with a lack of housing and retail options, he said.

The schools were rebuilt along with a new City Hall and a textile warehouse that was leveled, and churches that were wiped out have new buildings. But long gone are the old school buildings that graduates used to visit during homecoming. So are the sanctuaries where generations were baptized, married and eulogized, along with nearly every familiar sight that made the place home.

“The landscape of the town was forever changed,” Colburn said.

The story is much the same about 70 miles (113 kilometers) away in Cordova, where four died. The entire downtown was badly damaged by twisters, and what little remained caught fire a few weeks later. Today, 20-year-old Austin Thomas skateboards across the bare concrete foundations of a place he barely remembers from childhood.

“One tornado just ruined everything,” he said.

Help Wanted: In pandemic, worry about finding summer workers

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The owner of seafood restaurants on Cape Cod has eliminated lunch service and delayed the opening of some locations because his summertime influx of foreign workers hasn’t arrived yet.

More than a thousand miles away, a Jamaican couple is fretting about whether the rest of their extended family can join them for the seasonal migration to the popular beach destination south of Boston that’s been a crucial lifeline for them for decades.

As vaccinated Americans start to get comfortable traveling again, popular summer destinations are anticipating a busy season. But hotel, restaurant and retail store owners warn that staffing shortages exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic could force them to limit occupancy, curtail hours and services or shut down facilities entirely just as they’re starting to bounce back from a grim year.

The problem, they say, is twofold: The annual influx of seasonal foreign workers has stalled in places because of the pandemic. Businesses have also struggled to attract U.S. workers, even as many have redoubled their efforts to hire locally amid high unemployment.

“It’s the ‘Hunger Games’ for these employers, fighting for getting these guest workers into the country while also trying everything they can to recruit domestically,” said Brian Crawford, an executive vice president for the American Hotel and Lodging Association, a Washington, D.C.-based industry group. “It’s really frustrating. They’re trying to regain their footing after this disastrous pandemic but they just can’t catch a break.”

Earlier this month, President Joe Biden let expire a controversial ban on temporary worker visas such as the J-1 program for students and the H-2B program for nonagricultural laborers imposed by former President Donald Trump.

But American embassies and consulates remain closed or severely short-staffed in many countries. The U.S. has also imposed restrictions on travelers from countries including the United Kingdom, Ireland, Brazil and South Africa because of the emergence of new virus variants or rising COVID-19 cases.

Advocates for the J-1 program, which brings in about 300,000 foreign students annually, urged the State Department in a letter Thursday to exempt the applicants from the travel bans and provide other relief so they can start their summer jobs. Ilir Zherka, head of the Alliance for International Exchange, which sent

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the letter along with more than 500 supporting groups and companies, argued the J-1 program doesn't just benefit local economies, but also helps strengthen national security by promoting understanding and appreciation of U.S. culture.

Supporters of the H-2B program, meanwhile, have renewed their call to overhaul the program, which is capped at 66,000 visas per fiscal year. The Biden administration, citing the summer demand from employers, said Tuesday it will approve an additional 22,000 H-2B visas, but lawmakers from New England and other regions that rely on the visas for tourism, landscaping, forestry, fish processing and other seasonal trades say that's still inadequate.

"That's infinitesimal. It isn't anywhere close to the need," said Congressman Bill Keating, a Democrat representing Cape Cod.

Cem Küçükgenç (Gem Koo-CHOOK-gench), a 22-year-old engineering student at Middle East Technical University in Turkey, is among thousands of foreign students worldwide awaiting approval for a J-1 visa.

He's slated to work at a waterfront restaurant in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, this summer, but the U.S. Embassy in Ankara recently announced that it won't be able to process temporary work visas in time for the summer season.

Turkey has imposed a partial lockdown as the coronavirus surges there, but Küçükgenç is still holding out hope the embassy might relent if virus cases subside.

"I graduate next year," he said. "I'm not sure when I'll have another chance."

In Jamaica, Freda Powell says she and her husband have secured their H-2B visas and will arrive on Cape Cod, where they've worked in retail stores and restaurants for roughly 20 summers now, in early May.

But the 55-year-old worries her siblings and other relatives might not be so lucky. The U.S. Embassy in Kingston has temporarily halted visa processing because of rising COVID-19 cases in her country, she says.

"In Jamaica, you can work, but it's hand to mouth," Powell said. "With the money you make in the U.S., you can buy a car, fix the house, send your kids to school and build savings."

The uncertainty around international hires has forced American businesses to redouble their efforts to hire domestically, or make tough compromises until reinforcements can arrive.

In New Hampshire's White Mountains, the Christmas-themed amusement park Santa's Village is promising college students free housing and utilities.

In California's Sonoma Valley, business leaders in the famous winemaking region are exploring the idea of pooling employees, among other workforce initiatives.

Mark Bodenhamer, head of the Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce, said a restaurant that serves breakfast and lunch could possibly share employees with one that does the majority of its business during evening hours.

"Those solutions are complicated and costly," he said. "But at this point, it's all hands on deck."

In North Carolina's Outer Banks, the tourist season is already in full swing, but staff shortages abound, according to Karen Brown, head of the beach region's chamber of commerce.

Some restaurants have been forced to shut down once a week or halt curbside service, while in some hotels, managers are helping maids turn over rooms, she said.

"Everyone is pitching in where they can just to keep the wheels on the bus," Brown said.

Mac Hay, who owns seafood restaurants and markets on Cape Cod, is among the business owners who have their doubts that extra efforts to hire American workers will pay off.

On a given year, he estimates about a third of his 350-person summer workforce ultimately has to come from seasonal visa workers from Mexico, Jamaica and elsewhere when the jobs aren't filled locally.

Hay argues the foreign workers are the "backbone kitchen staff" — the line cooks, food prep workers and dishwashers — who make it possible for him to hire Americans for jobs they're seeking, such as waiting tables, bartending and management.

"We simply won't be able to meet demand without an increased workforce," he said.

Business owners and experts say there are myriad reasons why U.S. citizens aren't rushing to respond to the job boom, from COVID-19-related worries to child care issues or simply a decision to collect unem-

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ployment benefits, which have been increased and extended through the summer season in most places.

But the need for international workers on Cape Cod — where soaring housing costs have been a major barrier to generating a substantial homegrown workforce — boils down to a simple math problem, Hay said.

Provincetown, a popular gay resort community at the very tip of the cape, has just 2,200 year-round residents, yet restaurants like Hay's employ about 2,000 workers in high season alone.

"We're on a dead-end street up here, basically," he said. "There's no one else coming."

The Oscars bring back red carpet glam in whites, reds, gold

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Red carpet glam was back Sunday at the Oscars with Andra Day and Carey Mulligan shimmering in award-worthy gold and Maria Bakalova among several stars in bright white princess gowns during the pandemic era's first big parade of fashion.

There was a strong showing of reds as well, along with belly-baring midriffs, the latter including Zendaya in standout yellow by Valentino and more than 183 carats of Bulgari diamonds from ears and neck to her fingers at the Los Angeles ceremony.

"Andra Day and Zendaya have set the tone for spring and we are showing midriff all season," said Nandi Howard, associate fashion editor for Essence. "Both ladies arrived in beautiful gowns on the carpet with cutouts and slits that were a breath of fresh air for red-carpet attire."

Day dressed all the way up in a sexy look cut to the thigh on one side with a cutout at the waist. It was custom Vera Wang made of actual metal, paired with a dainty pair of drop earrings tipped with yellow diamonds from Tiffany & Co. Mulligan stunned in gold Valentino couture, a midriff look with a tiny metallic top and a huge ball skirt.

With nominees scattered around the world, the red carpet was far less hectic.

"Calm. If people were here they would know how absolutely groundbreaking calm is," said Viola Davis, dressed in a stunning white custom look with intricate cutouts in a snug bodice that fell to a princess skirt.

The designer? "Alexander McQueen, baby," Davis told E!

Bakalova, the breakout star of "Borat: Subsequent Movie Film," also brought princess, also in white, with a bit of subdued sparkle and a plunging neckline that fell to a tulle skirt, thanks to Louis Vuitton. She snagged a pair of stunning chandelier diamond earrings for the evening.

Regina King, who opened the show, went for light blue Louis Vuitton with winged shoulders and silver stripe embellishments.

"Regina King delivered the red carpet fantasy that award season viewers have been missing when she showed up in a sculptural, custom-made masterpiece from Louis Vuitton. While the baby blue color and the wing-like shoulders gave off an ethereal vibe, the modern neckline screamed high fashion," said Irina Grechko, senior fashion editor for the millennial-focused lifestyle site Refinery29.com.

Riz Ahmed, Leslie Odom Jr. and Daniel Kaluuya, in a Bottega Veneta tux, were among many of the guys who went without ties. Ahmed was in Prada and Odom in Brioni.

Travon Free, who co-directed the short live-action winner "Two Distant Strangers," mixed Hollywood fantasy with real life. He wore a black-and-yellow Dolce & Gabbana tux lined with names of Black victims killed by police in the United States.

Reese Witherspoon got the red memo, in Dior, along with Angela Bassett in a red look with statement poofy shoulders and Chopard rubies and diamonds. Bassett's train gown was by Alberta Ferretti.

Presenter Laura Dern wore a look with a white feathered skirt and a black, long-sleeve mock turtleneck top, while Margo Robbie went full Hollywood in body hugging silvery Chanel.

Chloe Zhao made history as the second woman and first woman of color to win best director wearing Hermes and a pair of bright white sneakers, her hair in two long braids. Her ankle-length dress was a neutral tone ruched and adorned with small beads and a latticework design.

Oscar performer H.E.R. made a red carpet appearance in cobalt blue custom Dundas. It included a hooded cape and a flared jumpsuit. Her round signature shades were by Bonnie Clyde.

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Diane Warren and Odom kicked off the carpet in two trend colors: white and gold, Warren in a Valentino tuxedo white with a sequin turtleneck and Odom in a glistening gold double-breasted tux — gold shirt included.

"I've never been dressed by a designer before," Warren told E!. "How cool is that?" A small Swarovski frog adorned her collar.

Odom walked the carpet with spouse Nicolette Robinson. They recently welcomed a second child.

"I am a lucky, lucky man," he said, while Robinson was grateful for no baby spit up.

Amanda Seyfried chose vibrant red from Armani Prive, her hair in an Old Hollywood side-swept updo. It was among a slew of classic princess cuts, hers a strapless look with a plunging neckline. Halle Berry was a loner in mauve, unfurling her light-as-air train on the carpet with her hair in a short crop.

New mom Emerald Fennell, best director nominee for "Promising Young Woman," smiled bright in a flowing spring green and lilac gown. Lately, she's been making up personas to match her outfits. She topped off the look with sparkly lilac eye shadow. Her look included all-over sequin embroidery and ruffle details.

"So tonight I am Susan your pottery teacher who has a business opportunity for you which is absolutely not a pyramid scheme," she said.

This pottery teacher wore Gucci.

The 9-year-old star of "Minari," Alan Kim, vamped on the carpet in his black shorts suit with high black socks, including one with horizontal white stripes. He just had a birthday and got the bike he was hoping for. Another "Minari" star, Yuh-Jung Youn, smiled on the carpet in a Marmar Halim midnight blue brocade gown with a velvet belt, a wide diamond Chopard bracelet on her wrist.

Glenn Close, nominated for "Hillbilly Elegy," paired a jewel-tone blue embellished caftan from Armani Prive with dark slacks and gloves. And she, like so many others on hand, was back in heels.

"I'm feeling great. My shoes are comfortable. It's not two miles long so that's lovely," she said.

Other stars chose elegant black for the pandemic-era Oscars. Some were in bright oranges and pinks.

Nominee LaKeith Stanfield chose a custom black jumpsuit with a belt and wide-labeled button-down underneath by Saint Laurent. Another statement maker among the men: Colman Domingo of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" in a hot pink suit by Versace.

All told, Grechko said, Hollywood was due for the final and splashiest carpet of the Zoom-heavy, leisure-wear-accented pandemic awards season.

"After a year of virtual red carpet shows, it's clear that celebrities were ready to bring their A-game to the red carpet, with high-on-glamour looks dominating the night. From Maria Bakalova's Grace Kelly-esque look, made with 100 meters of tulle, to Carey Mulligan's oversized, liquid gold-like skirt train, celebrities understood the assignment and brought back fashion in a big way," she said.

There were some big beauty moments, too.

Of Zendaya's look, Refinery29 Beauty Director Sara Tan said: "Zendaya looked like she emerged from the pages of a magazine. It was elegant, yet effortless, a balance that Zendaya always achieves with ease. I loved that she kept her beauty look glam, but simple — waist-grazing hair, dewy skin, full brows, a simple wash of color on her lid, and a barely-there lip — so as not to compete with the collection of Bulgari jewels around her neck!"

Seyfried's smoky red eye "gave her old school Hollywood glam a modern twist," Tan said.

Bold lips ruled the carpet, from Seyfried's deep plum pout to H.E.R.'s pinky-purple lip, she added.

Tan called Berry's hair a "very edgy, Amelie-esque microbob," noting Robbie's new bangs and darker "bronde" hair color.

Harris to tell UN body it's time to prep for next pandemic

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris will make the case before United Nations members on Monday that now is the time for global leaders to begin putting the serious work into how they will respond to the next global pandemic.

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The virtual address, Harris' second to a U.N. body since her inauguration, will come as the United States makes progress on vaccinating the public and much of the world struggles to acquire vaccines.

"At the same time that the world works to get through this pandemic, we also know that we must prepare for the next," Harris will say, according to excerpts of the speech obtained by The Associated Press. The speech will be co-hosted by U.N. permanent representatives of Argentina, Japan, Norway and South Africa.

The Biden administration will mark its first 100 days in office this week. President Joe Biden is scheduled to address Congress on Wednesday and is certain to highlight the headway his administration has made in responding to the worst public health crisis in the U.S. in more than a century.

Harris, according to the excerpts, will broadly outline how the administration thinks the U.S. and other nations should consider focusing their attention. The steps include improving accessibility to health systems, investing in science, health workers and the well-being of women, and surging capacity for personal protective equipment and vaccine and test manufacturing.

Harris says much has been learned over the last year about pandemic preparedness and response but that it would be unwise to rest easy

"We have been reminded that the status quo is not nearly good enough, and that innovation is indeed the path forward," Harris says.

Biden's ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfield, is also scheduled to deliver remarks at Monday's virtual event and intends to call on nations to "build the pandemic preparedness architecture for the future."

"The takeaway from this past year is clear: The world barely withstood this pandemic," Thomas-Greenfield says in excerpts of her prepared remarks. "We must be ready for the next."

Virus 'swallowing' people in India; crematoriums overwhelmed

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and AIJAZ HUSSAIN Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — With life-saving oxygen in short supply, families are left on their own to ferry people sick with COVID-19 from hospital to hospital in search of treatment as India is engulfed in a devastating surge of infections. Too often, their efforts end in mourning.

On social media and in television footage, desperate relatives plead for oxygen outside hospitals or weep in the street for loved ones who died waiting for treatment.

One woman mourned the death of her younger brother, aged 50. He was turned away by two hospitals and died waiting to be seen at a third, gasping after his oxygen tank ran out and no replacements were to be had.

She blamed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government for the crisis.

"He has lit funeral pyres in every house," she cried in a video shot by The Caravan magazine.

For the fourth straight day, India on Sunday set a global daily record of new coronavirus infections, spurred by an insidious new variant that emerged here. The surge has undermined the government's premature claims of victory over the pandemic.

The 349,691 new infections brought India's total to more than 16.9 million, behind only the United States. The Health Ministry reported another 2,767 deaths in the past 24 hours, pushing India's fatalities to 192,311.

The death toll could be a huge undercount, as suspected cases are not included, and many COVID-19 deaths are being attributed to underlying conditions.

The unfolding crisis is most visceral in India's overwhelmed graveyards and crematoriums, and in heart-breaking images of gasping patients dying on their way to hospitals due to lack of oxygen.

Burial grounds in the capital New Delhi are running out of space. Bright, glowing funeral pyres light up the night sky in other badly hit cities.

In the central city of Bhopal, some crematoriums have increased their capacity from dozens of pyres to more than 50. Yet there are still hours-long waits.

At the city's Bhabhada Vishram Ghat crematorium, workers said they cremated more than 110 people on Saturday, even as government figures in the entire city of 1.8 million put the total number of virus

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deaths at just 10.

"The virus is swallowing our city's people like a monster," said Mamtesh Sharma, an official at the site.

The unprecedented rush of bodies has forced the crematorium to skip individual ceremonies and exhaustive rituals that Hindus believe release the soul from the cycle of rebirth.

"We are just burning bodies as they arrive," said Sharma. "It is as if we are in the middle of a war."

The head gravedigger at New Delhi's largest Muslim cemetery, where 1,000 people have been buried during the pandemic, said more bodies are arriving now than last year. "I fear we will run out of space very soon," said Mohammad Shameem.

The situation is equally grim at unbearably full hospitals, where desperate people are dying in line, sometimes on the roads outside, waiting to see doctors.

Health officials are scrambling to expand critical care units and stock up on dwindling supplies of oxygen. Hospitals and patients alike are struggling to procure scarce medical equipment that's being sold on the black market at an exponential markup.

The drama is in direct contrast with government claims that "nobody in the country was left without oxygen," in a statement made Saturday by India's Solicitor General Tushar Mehta before Delhi High Court.

The breakdown is a stark failure for a country whose prime minister only in January had declared victory over COVID-19, and which boasted of being the "world's pharmacy," a global producer of vaccines and a model for other developing nations.

Caught off-guard by the latest deadly spike, the federal government has asked industrialists to increase the production of oxygen and other life-saving drugs in short supply. But health experts say India had an entire year to prepare for the inevitable — and it didn't.

Dr. Krutika Kuppalli, assistant professor of medicine in the division of infectious diseases at the Medical University of South Carolina, said the government should have used the last year, when the virus was more under control, to stockpile medicines and develop systems to confront the likelihood of a new surge.

"Most importantly, they should have looked at what was going on in other parts of the world and understood that it was a matter of time before they would be in a similar situation," Kuppalli said.

Instead, the government's premature declarations of victory encouraged people to relax when they should have continued strict adherence to physical distancing, wearing masks and avoiding large crowds.

Modi is facing mounting criticism for allowing Hindu festivals and attending mammoth election rallies that experts suspect accelerated the spread of infections. At one such rally on April 17, Modi expressed his delight at the huge crowd, even as experts warned that a deadly surge was inevitable with India already counting 250,000 new daily cases.

Now, with the death toll mounting, his Hindu nationalist government is trying to quell critical voices.

On Saturday, Twitter complied with the government's request and prevented people in India from viewing more than 50 tweets that appeared to criticize the administration's handling of the pandemic. The targeted posts include tweets from opposition ministers critical of Modi, journalists and ordinary Indians.

A Twitter spokesperson said it had powers to "withhold access to the content in India only" if the company determined the content to be "illegal in a particular jurisdiction." The company said it had responded to an order by the government and notified people whose tweets were withheld.

India's Information Technology Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Even with the targeted blocks, horrific scenes of overwhelmed hospitals and cremation grounds spread on Twitter and drew appeals for help.

President Joe Biden said the U.S. was determined to help. "Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need," Biden said in a tweet.

The White House said the U.S. was "working around the clock" to deploy testing kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment, and it would seek to provide oxygen supplies as well. It said it would also make available sources of raw material urgently needed to manufacture Covishield, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine made by the Serum Institute of India.

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Help and support were also offered from archrival Pakistan, with politicians and citizens in the neighboring country expressing solidarity. Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry said it offered to provide relief including ventilators, oxygen supply kits, digital X-ray machines, PPE and related items.

"Humanitarian issues require responses beyond political consideration," Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said.

The Indian government did not immediately respond to Qureshi's statement.

Police seek attacker who kicked Chinese American man in head

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A 61-year-old Chinese American man was attacked by a man who kicked him repeatedly in the head in East Harlem, police said.

The man was collecting cans when he was attacked from behind, knocked to the ground and kicked in the head shortly after 8 p.m. Friday. He was taken to Harlem Hospital in critical but stable condition, police said.

Surveillance video released by the police appears to show the attacker stomping on the victim's head. Police have not specified a motive. The department's hate crimes task force is investigating the attack, the latest in a troubling rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in New York and around the country.

Mayor Bill de Blasio called the attack "outrageous" on Twitter. "Make no mistake, we will find the perpetrator and they will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," de Blasio said Saturday.

The attack recalled last month's assault near Times Square in which a woman who immigrated from the Philippines was knocked to the ground and stomped on by an attacker who shouted anti-Asian slurs. A parolee convicted of killing his mother nearly two decades ago was arrested in that attack.

The U.S. Senate passed legislation last week aimed at fighting the rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The measure would expedite the review of hate crimes at the Justice Department and provide support for local law enforcement in response to thousands of reported violent incidents in the past year.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Sunday he would direct the state hate crimes task force to offer assistance in investigating Friday's attack in East Harlem.

"I'm sickened to learn of yet another bigoted act of violence against an Asian American man," the governor said in a statement. "This is not who we are as New Yorkers, and we will not let these cowardly acts of hate against members of our New York family intimidate us."

Police did not release the victim's name, but multiple news outlets identified him as Yao Pan Ma, a former restaurant worker who lost his job because of the pandemic and was collecting cans to make ends meet.

The victim's wife, Baozhen Chen, 57, pleaded for police to find her husband's attacker in an interview with the New York Post.

"Please capture him as soon as possible and make him pay," Chen said in Mandarin through a translator.

EXPLAINER: New players add volatility in Jerusalem tensions

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The holy city of Jerusalem, a tinderbox of competing religious and political claims, has repeatedly triggered bouts of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

This time around, there have been some additional sparks, including Jewish extremists who, emboldened by their political patrons' recent election to parliament, staged a provocative march to Jerusalem's walled Old City chanting "death to the Arabs."

Over the course of a few days, nightly Jerusalem street brawls between Israeli police and disaffected Palestinian residents of the city escalated to cross-border fighting between Israel and Gaza's Islamic militant Hamas. Gaza militants fired an intense barrage of rockets into southern Israel and Israel launched several airstrikes at Gaza.

Political posturing by Israeli and Palestinian leaders has added to the tense atmosphere.

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Here is a closer look at what's been driving the violence:

HEART OF THE CONFLICT:

Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians claim all three areas for a future independent state, with east Jerusalem as their capital.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem, home to the city's most sensitive Jewish, Muslim and Christian holy sites, after the war and views the entire city as its unified capital.

The fate of Jerusalem and its holy sites is one of the most explosive issues in the conflict, and the city has seen many waves of violence over the years.

WHY NOW?

The immediate spark for the current round of unrest was Israel's decision to barricade a plaza outside of Jerusalem's Old City during the holy month of Ramadan.

That decision appeared to have been reversed late Sunday, when the barricades were suddenly removed, setting off joyous celebrations outside Damascus Gate.

Palestinians traditionally gather at the spot each evening after prayers and a daylong fast.

Angry that their popular gathering spot was taken away, hundreds of young Palestinian men have taken to the streets each evening. Crowds have hurled stones, firebombs and other objects at police, while officers have used stun grenades and water cannons to disperse them. Dozens of people have been hurt.

Israel's apparent reversal late Sunday could help calm tensions. Crowds clapped and chanted "God is great" as people sat on the steps once again.

The crackdown in recent weeks had touched on Palestinian fears that Israel is trying to deepen its control over east Jerusalem.

"All we wanted to do is to be able to sit on the stairs of Damascus Gate at night to drink coffee or tea," said Rami, a 24-year-old resident who asked that his last name be withheld because he feared arrest.

"It's a tradition for Old City residents to go outside for refreshments. My father used to sit on the stairs of Damascus Gate before me," he said before the spot was opened. "What police are trying to do is simply erase our identity."

On Thursday night, a far-right Israeli group called Lehava staged a massive demonstration just a few hundred meters (yards) from the Palestinian crowds.

It said the march was a response to TikTok videos showing Palestinians slapping religious Jews at random. But the group's leader is a disciple of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, who promoted the forced expulsion of Palestinians from the Holy Land. Although police kept the sides apart, Lehava protesters chanted "Death to Arabs" and "Arabs Get Out."

Early Saturday, Gaza militants responded by firing 36 rockets into Israel, the most intense barrage in over a year. Israel retaliated with a series of airstrikes on Hamas targets.

POLITICS AT PLAY?

With the Palestinians scheduled to hold elections next month, both President Mahmoud Abbas and his Hamas rivals have tried to portray themselves as defenders of Jerusalem.

Abbas is threatening to postpone the election unless Israel allows Palestinians in east and Jerusalem to vote. It has not announced its position but appears unlikely to cave in. That could give Abbas, whose Fatah party is expected to do poorly, a pretext to cancel the vote. But it could also heighten tensions in Jerusalem.

While Hamas is not believed to be directly involved in the latest rocket fire, it has done little to stop it — and may be tacitly encouraging it — as a message of solidarity with Jerusalem Palestinians.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, is desperately trying to hold on to power after Israeli elections last month ended in deadlock for a fourth consecutive time.

Netanyahu has courted the support of "Religious Zionism," a far-right party with loose ties to Lehava. This outreach appears to have emboldened Lehava. With just over a week to form a new coalition, Netanyahu seems unlikely to rein in the group or its supporters.

"The question lurking in the background is to what extent has Netanyahu's failure to form a coalition shaped the clashes and the government's reaction," commentator Nadav Eyal wrote in the Yediot Ahrontot

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daily. "There are simply too many matches that might get lit."

COOLER HEADS?

Israel's decision to allow the Palestinians to remove the barriers late Sunday appeared to be aimed at easing tensions.

Earlier, both Israel and Hamas have signaled they want to cool things down.

Late Saturday, rocket fire out of Gaza resumed, but at a much lower rate, with only four projectiles launched. Israel decided not to retaliate, and the rocket fire subsided.

At the same time, Netanyahu appealed for quiet in Jerusalem. "Right now we demand that the law be followed; I call on all sides to display calm," he said.

Jordan, which acts as the custodian over Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites, and Egypt issued a joint call on Sunday for Israel to "stop all attacks and provocative measures" in Jerusalem.

The Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers discussed the tensions in a phone call and jointly condemned "violence and incitement carried out by extremist groups against the Palestinians," the Jordanian foreign ministry said.

While it was impossible to predict whether the clashes will end, the initial reaction to the removal of the barriers outside the Old City appeared to be a positive sign.

But late Sunday, minor scuffles broke out in Jerusalem, while the Israeli military reported two rocket launches out of Gaza, signaling the latest round of troubles was not over.

Drone operators challenge surveyors' turf in mapping dispute

By BRYAN ANDERSON Associated Press/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — When Michael Jones started a side hustle shooting drone photos and videos for realtors, his clients wanted more: Images with property lines on them, to better understand where their fences should be.

It seemed like a good use of emerging technology that met an obvious consumer demand, and Jones was careful to add a disclaimer: His maps weren't meant to replace the proper surveys that are often needed for such things as mortgages, title insurance and land use applications.

But after two years of steady business, Jones was slapped by the state of North Carolina in 2018 with an order that grounded his drone. The Board of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors said he faced criminal prosecution for surveying without a license.

Eager to deploy a technology that's disrupting the staid practice of surveying nationwide, Jones sued last month, accusing the board of violating his First Amendment rights.

"I would just like to have the right back to fly," Jones said. "I myself don't feel like I'm offering any surveying, and more or less, I'm telling people this is not accurate mapping, this is only for visual, and all of my clients understood that."

Jones is one of many drone pilots coming into conflict with regulations designed to protect surveying professionals, whose exclusive roles are being disrupted now that it's possible to nearly precisely combine line drawings with images to better resolve property disputes.

Jones' lawsuit represents the cutting edge of this coming disruption, according to David Benowitz, head of research at Drone Analyst and a former employee at DJI, the world's largest commercial drone manufacturer. "This has been rumored about and talked about for years now. Drones have really changed the game in surveying."

The challenge goes both ways: Surveyors would need Federal Aviation Administration approval to professionally fly drones, and drone operators would need to pass state licensing exams to produce legal surveys. Neither side wants to take on the training and expenses.

But Kurt Carraway, executive director of the Applied Aviation Research Center at Kansas State University, said licensing boards should do more to embrace partnerships by researching the accuracy of drone mapping and encouraging the use of drones, particularly in places where a surveyor can't safely do the work.

"I would think that with the continued development of technologies and positional accuracy that it's likely

that drone data can be captured in a way that is compliant with those surveying standards," Carraway said.

A final notice Jones got from the board in 2019 ordered him to stop engaging in "mapping, surveying and photogrammetry, stating accuracy, providing location and dimension data and producing orthomosaic maps, quantities and topographic information."

The board declined to comment to The Associated Press, but said it will file a formal response to the lawsuit.

Jones, 44, of Goldsboro, said he couldn't afford a lawyer, so he abandoned drone mapping, resulting in over \$10,000 in lost business. This January, a libertarian law firm offered to represent him.

Sam Gedge, an attorney at the Institute for Justice, plans to argue that Jones has the right to freedom of speech by taking photos and videos and producing artwork for clients. He's seen similar disputes in Mississippi, Oregon and California.

In the Mississippi case, the Virginia-based law firm reached a settlement in December that allows Viza-line, a real estate analytics firm accused of performing unlicensed surveying, to use public data to draw property lines on satellite photos.

"Many states have enforced their laws in a way that is under the radar," Gedge said. "They just send warning letters to people ... and for most people who receive that letter, as Michael did, you're gonna knock it off because nobody wants to be the target of a government enforcement proceeding."

Walter Lappert, a 35-year-old Tampa, Florida, resident, founded two drone-manufacturing companies that now partner with engineers to provide mapping services, Triad Drones and Charlotte UAV. He said he lost out on a good chunk of a \$300,000 Charlotte-area government contract because surveyors objected to his drones.

Lappert said he understands the board's desire to protect an industry that has consistently been undercut in recent years by unlicensed drone operators who can do a less-than-accurate job for substantially less money. "Inexperienced people are going out and taking jobs and sub-par delivering on what the actual technology can do," he said.

He's compromised by partnering as a sub-contractor with engineering firms or surveying companies, but he'd like to do the work on his own.

"Service work is the best bang for the buck," Lappert said. "I can go out in one day and make \$25,000 doing service work versus it might take me three months to sell a \$100,000 drone."

Airline bans Alaska state senator for violating mask rules

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Alaska Airlines has banned an Alaska state senator for refusing to follow mask requirements.

"We have notified Senator Lora Reinbold that she is not permitted to fly with us for her continued refusal to comply with employee instruction regarding the current mask policy," spokesman Tim Thompson told the Anchorage Daily News on Saturday, adding that the suspension was effective immediately.

Reinbold, a Republican of Eagle River, said she had not been notified of a ban and that she hoped to be on an Alaska Airlines flight in the near future.

Last week, Reinbold was recorded in Juneau International Airport arguing with Alaska Airlines staff about mask policies. A video posted to social media appears to show airline staff telling Reinbold her mask must cover her nose and mouth.

Reinbold told the newspaper that had been inquiring about a "mask exemption with uptight employees at the counter."

"I was reasonable with all Alaska Airlines employees," she said, adding that she was able to board the flight to Anchorage.

Reinbold has been a vocal opponent to COVID-19 mitigation measures and has repeatedly objected to Alaska Airlines' mask policy, which was enacted before the federal government's mandate this year.

Last year, she referred to Alaska Airlines staff as "mask bullies" after being asked by flight attendants to wear a mask aboard a flight, the newspaper reported. After the incident, she reportedly sent a cake to

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some flight attendants bearing the inscription: "I'm sorry if I offended you."

Alaska Airlines has banned over 500 people.

Thompson said the length of Reinbold's ban will be determined by a review.

It wasn't immediately known how Reinbold, who was in southcentral Alaska this weekend, would be able to get to Juneau where the legislative session resumes Monday. No other airline has scheduled flights between Anchorage and Juneau, and a ferry trip could take several days.

Lawmakers can participate in committee meetings by teleconference but cannot vote on the House or Senate floor remotely under current procedures.

Election conspiracies live on with audit by Arizona GOP

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and BOB CHRISTIE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Months after former President Donald Trump's election defeat, legislative Republicans in Arizona are challenging the outcome as they embark on an unprecedented effort to audit the results in the state's most populous county.

The state Senate used its subpoena power to take possession of all 2.1 million ballots in Maricopa County and the machines that counted them, along with computer hard drives full of data. They've handed the materials over to Cyber Ninjas, a Florida-based consultancy with no election experience run by a man who has shared unfounded conspiracy theories claiming the official 2020 presidential election results are illegitimate.

The process is alarming election professionals who fear the auditors are not up to the complex task and will severely undermine faith in democracy.

"I think the activities that are taking place here are reckless and they in no way, shape or form resemble an audit," said Jennifer Morrell, a partner at Elections Group, a consulting firm advising state and local election officials, which has not worked in Arizona.

Conspiracy theories about the election have proliferated across the country even before President Joe Biden's victory but have had particular staying power in Arizona, which flipped to the Democratic column for just the second time in 72 years.

Trump on Friday predicted the audit would reveal fraud and would prompt similar reviews in other states he lost.

"Thank you State Senators and others in Arizona for commencing this full forensic audit," the former president said in a statement. "I predict the results will be startling!"

Cyber Ninjas began a manual recount of ballots Friday, a day after Democrats asked a judge to put an end to the audit. The judge ordered the company to follow ballot and voter secrecy laws and demanded they turn over written procedures and training manuals before a hearing Monday on the Democrats' request. He offered to pause the count over the weekend if Democrats posted a \$1 million bond to cover added expenses, but the party declined.

On a since-deleted Twitter account, Cyber Ninjas owner Doug Logan used hashtags and shared memes popular with people promoting unsupported allegations casting doubt on Biden's victory.

Logan insists that his personal views are irrelevant because he's running a transparent audit with video streamed online.

"There's a lot of Americans here, myself included, that are really bothered by the way our country is being ripped apart right now," Logan told reporters Thursday night. "We want a transparent audit to be in place so that people can trust the results and can get everyone on the same page."

But Logan refuses to disclose who's paying him or who's counting the ballots, and he won't commit to using bipartisan teams for the process. The GOP-dominated Senate refuses to let media members observe the count. Reporters can accept a six-hour shift as an official observer, but photography and notetaking are prohibited. It would be a violation of journalistic ethics for reporters to participate in an event they're covering.

The Senate has put up \$150,000 for the audit, but Logan acknowledged that's not enough to cover his

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expenses. The right-wing cable channel One America News Network has raised money from unknown contributors for the project, and the money goes directly to Cyber Ninjas. Logan would not commit to disclosing the donors and would not provide an estimate for the total cost of his audit.

Cyber Ninjas plans to have teams of three people manually count each ballot, looking only at the presidential and U.S. Senate contests, which were won by Democrats.

Logan said the counters are members of law enforcement and the military as well as retirees. He would not say how many are Democrats or Republicans and would not commit to ensuring the counting teams are bipartisan.

The process is overseen by volunteer observers. As of a week ago, 70% of observers were Republicans, according to Ken Bennett, a Republican former secretary of state who is serving as a liaison between the Senate and the auditors.

Cyber Ninjas also plans to review ballot counting machines and their data, and to scan the composition of fibers in the paper ballots in search of fakes. It plans to go door-to-door in select precincts to ask people whether they voted. Logan was vague about how the precincts were chosen but said a statistical analysis was done "based on voter histories."

The audit has been beset by amateur mistakes that critics view as evidence the auditors are not up to the task. Hand counters began the day using blue pens, which are banned in ballot counting rooms because they can be read by ballot machines. For days leading up to the audit, a crew from a group of Phoenix television stations, azfamily, had unfettered access to the supposedly secure facility as auditors were setting up equipment and receiving ballots and counting machines.

Election experts said hand counts are prone to errors and questioned a lack of transparent procedures for adjudicating voter intent when it's not obvious.

Maricopa County conducted a host of pre- and post-election reviews to check the accuracy of voting machines, including a hand count of a representative sample of ballots as required by state law. The county also hired two auditing firms that reported no malicious software or incorrect counting equipment and concluded that none of the computers or equipment were connected to the internet.

"We're going to set up a new norm where we don't accept the outcome of elections in a free and fair and just democracy, and that is the core of what is at stake here," said Tammy Patrick, senior adviser at the Democracy Fund and a former Maricopa County elections official. "I think that is incredibly, incredibly problematic."

Louisville looks to rebound with Kentucky Derby back in May

By GARY B. GRAVES AP Sports Writer

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The Kentucky Derby is back on the first Saturday in May, slowly bringing with it the sights, sounds and rituals familiar to Louisville.

And local officials and business owners are hopeful that translates into a better cash flow after the coronavirus pandemic upended the Derby's schedule last year.

The Thunder Over Louisville air show and fireworks display that kicks off Derby activities resumed with resounding booms last weekend. Marathons and cycling races, conducted virtually last fall, went off live this weekend, along with thousands of yellow rubber ducks bobbing in the Ohio River in the "Ken-ducky" Derby.

Tourists are steadily trickling back into downtown hotels, restaurants and museums. The most anticipated scenes loom in Saturday's 147th Run for the Roses at Churchill Downs with women in big colorful hats and men in seersucker suits, occasionally pulling their required face masks aside to sip bourbon and mint juleps and puff on cigars.

"It definitely smells like Derby," said Louisville native Kenzie Kapp, who owns a business that makes headpieces and is relishing a boost in demand for masks to match her hats and fascinators.

"In the fall, it was different. It's so good to be back on the first Saturday of May. That feels good. It feels right. It feels at home."

Social distancing guidelines will spread out the crowd beneath the Twin Spires and infield, a stark contrast

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to last fall's spectator-free Derby that was pushed back to Labor Day. By any measure, it's an encouraging sign of a return to normalcy for horse racing's biggest event and its hometown.

This year's economic impact on the region is estimated at \$34.6 million, less than a tenth of the typical \$400 million the event generates. Capacity for both the Kentucky Oaks and the Derby at Churchill Downs is limited to 40% to 50% for reserved seats and up to 60% in certain private areas. About 15,000 fans will be allowed in the infield, with total attendance around 45,000.

While those projections are 100,000 below normal, that's still enough to revive hopes for businesses hurt last spring by the Derby's first postponement since 1945.

"There is still excitement and brand awareness associated because it's such a big tradition," Louisville Tourism spokeswoman Rosanne Mastin said of the Derby. "It may not be the 100% capacity that we are used to, but we are fortunate. We will still realize some of the economic impact from what is usually Louisville's largest tourism generator.

"We are happy to have some (impact), since we really didn't have any previously for last year. Some is better than none."

Occupancy has topped 60% among the region's 21,000 hotel rooms, with several venues sold out. Luxury hotels such as the Omni Louisville are enjoying the Derby's return, no small matter considering rooms run about \$1,999 per night with a three-night minimum.

To that end, Omni general manager Eamon O'Brien has several Derby-themed events planned at the 3-year-old venue, the city's third-tallest building. It has partnered with high-end distiller Woodford Reserve for a lounge and will host concerts with musicians and a DJ.

"We're just excited and thankful that we're going to have an event here this year and actually have fans here that we can serve and take care of," O'Brien said.

Things are steadily coming back to life at other downtown venues, a trend businesses hope extends beyond the Derby.

While COVID-19 guidelines have limited tour group numbers to six at the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience on Whiskey Row, Heaven Hill Distillery visitors experiences director Jeff Crowe said tours are booked through the end of May. Its bar and retail space has increased, boosting business at its On3 bar.

"Our phones are ringing off the hook," said Crowe, who also touts the company's staff retention to other assignments such as hand sanitizer production and online tastings.

At Churchill Downs, Jonathan Blue can't wait to fire up cigar sales as the track's partner after missing out when fans weren't allowed. The co-owner of the Liquor Barn said the statewide chain realized a surprising boost through liquor packages for home parties, but he's curious to see how mask mandates will affect sales and enjoyment.

One certainty, Blue notes, "If someone wants a cigar, they'll be able to get access."

Attendance at the Frazier History Museum began to increase in March as more people were vaccinated. Event bookings are also up at the site that highlights Kentucky tradition and legacy, particularly its signature whiskey.

Museum president and CEO Andy Treinen noted that there's a way to go before the Derby buzz matches pre-pandemic levels. But the energy is building, with Louisville and Kentucky standing to benefit in the long run.

"It's like, that is the month every year where you get to see the people that you see once a year and can celebrate with," Treinen said. "You may see them more times a year, but that is the time of celebration. We're inching back toward that, and that's what makes the state of Kentucky feel special at Derby time."

More action, less talk, distinguish Biden's 100-day sprint

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The card tucked in President Joe Biden's right jacket pocket must weigh a ton. You can see the weight of it on his face when he digs it out, squints and ever-so-slowly reads aloud the latest tally of COVID-19 dead.

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Sometimes he'll stumble on a digit — after all, flubs come with the man. But the message is always clear: The toll of the virus weighs on him constantly, a millstone that helps explain why the typically garrulous politician with the megawatt smile has often seemed downright dour.

For any new leader, a lingering pandemic that has killed more than a half-million citizens would be plenty for a first 100 days. But it has been far from the sole preoccupation for the now 78-year-old Biden.

The oldest person ever elected president is tugging the United States in many new directions at once, right down to its literal foundations — the concrete of its neglected bridges — as well as the racial inequities and partisan poisons tearing at the civil society. Add to that list: a call for dramatic action to combat climate change.

He's doing it without the abrasive noise of the last president or the charisma of the last two. Biden's spontaneity, once a hallmark and sometimes a headache, is rarely seen. Some say he is a leader for this time: more action, less talk and something for the history books.

"This has been a really terrible year," said Matt Delmont, who teaches civil rights history at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. "There's so much. We want a new president to be a light forward. From that perspective, it makes sense that you want to get out of the box fast."

Biden "sees the virtue of going bigger and bolder," Delmont said. "It so strongly echoes FDR."

Few would have bet Joe Biden would ever be uttered in the same breath as Franklin D. Roosevelt. It's too soon to know whether he deserves to be.

But the scope of what Biden wants to do would — if he succeeds — put him in the company of that New Deal president, whose burst of consequential actions set the 100-day marker by which all successors have been informally measured since.

A reported 4,380 people in the U.S. died from the virus on the day Biden became president on Jan. 20. COVID-19 is killing about 700 people a day now. For Biden, much of the struggle is about "getting people some peace of mind so they can go to bed at night and not stare at the ceiling."

It's not all been smooth. Biden has struggled to change course on immigration practices he railed against in the campaign. He's earned rare rebukes from some Democrats and shown that a president's famously empathetic nature does not necessarily mean empathetic treatment of the world's dispossessed.

THE ZIGZAG NATION

Already, Biden has achieved a pandemic relief package of historic breadth and taken executive actions to wrestle the country away from the legacy and agitations of President Donald Trump.

The U.S. has pivoted on the environment. The government has created payments that independent analysts say should halve child poverty in a year. It has embraced international alliances Trump shunned. It has elevated the health insurance program Trump and fellow Republicans tried to kill, making the Affordable Care Act more affordable than it ever was under President Barack Obama.

When Trump won the 2016 election, Obama said the day after that he saw something very American in the outcome, as unhappy as he was about the result. "The path that this country has taken has never been a straight line," Obama said. "We zig and we zag."

It's Biden's zigzag now. The temperature is lower. The drama is less. And the persona is fundamentally different.

"He ran as the antithesis of Trump — empathetic, decent and experienced, and he is delivering on that promise," said former Obama adviser David Axelrod.

Biden's first months in office were, in many ways, a rejection of what came before.

He evoked his bipartisan deal-making track record of 36 years in the Senate as the example he sought to bring back, though there's been little bipartisanship in what he's achieved as president.

Gone are the out-of-control news conferences. Gone are the sudden firings and impulsive policy declarations — both often in the form of a tweet — of the Trump years. Twitter is irrelevant for Biden's presidential musings; he has yet to tweet by his own hand and what appears under his name is White House boilerplate.

THE CARD

Americans are getting something more organized and methodical. Like the index card in his suit jacket

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pocket. Printed in black and white, it shows his schedule, the daily numbers of vaccine doses administered, the previous day's virus deaths, daily hospitalizations and the cumulative death toll.

It lists daily numbers of troops killed and wounded in war, a tally he started keeping in his pocket years ago, through the wars that spanned his two-term vice presidency. He says he will bring the last U.S. troops home from Afghanistan on Sept. 11, the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks that sparked America's longest war.

Biden has appeared in public far less than his predecessors and given the public fewer set pieces. That's in part due to COVID-19 safety concerns, but also because of a sense among his advisers that people were simply worn out from four years of the Trump show.

Biden wanted to occupy less of the American consciousness than did Trump, who dominated the discourse like no one else had done, while achieving almost nothing legislatively in his 100-day debut. The new president turned virus briefings over to the scientists and administration officials and didn't gag them.

NO FIREBRANDS HERE

He filled his staff with policy experts and old administration hands, not provocateurs. He achieved more diversity in the administration's top levels than any president before him.

If there is a consistent through line to Biden's term so far, it is his attempt to respond to age-old racial inequalities, in corners of public policy where most Americans might not expect to see it.

Biden's massive infrastructure plan, for example, contains measures to address harms inflicted generations ago when governments built urban highways through Black neighborhoods, fracturing communities.

"That's something most Americans don't think about if they don't have a direct experience of it," Delmont said. "People hear infrastructure and think it's a race-neutral set of policies."

But without knowing about the destruction of Black neighborhoods from the bulldozer or reckoning with the heavy pandemic toll on minority communities, he said, "It's hard to know what systemic racism looks like. These are civil rights issues. That's where people want to see actions and resources."

Biden's agenda has been more activist than expected, unabashedly liberal and defined by anti-poverty measures and a far-reaching expansion of government.

WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

For the most part, he's actually doing more than he promised in his campaign. The election dealt him a hand that makes bigger things possible, thanks to majorities so thin in Congress that he needs Vice President Kamala Harris to cast tiebreaking votes in a 50-50 Senate.

If the pace seems breakneck, there may be a good reason: Time with real power may be perilously short. First-term presidents historically see their party lose big in the midterms and Republicans have shown no inclination to support his policies.

Even within his party, cohesion is not a given, with constant tension between centrists and those on the activist left. So far, Biden has managed to avoid a revolt from either faction.

But liberals were far from pleased when Biden, citing a "crisis" at the U.S.-Mexico border from a wave of migrants seeking asylum, balked at keeping his campaign promise to restore Obama-era refugee admissions worldwide and go even higher, after Trump's drastic cuts. Thousands of refugees who had been cleared to come to the U.S. have been stranded abroad as a result.

"This cruel policy is no more acceptable now than it was during the Trump administration," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., adding that Biden was "caving to the politics of fear."

THE UNEXPECTED

Though the West Wing attempted to script the first 100 days, Biden faced vivid reminders that presidents are often measured more by how they respond to events they cannot control.

A surge of mass shootings confronted him, as did a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans. The record number of unaccompanied children who tried to cross the border from Mexico — 18,890 in March alone — strained the administration's capacity to hold them humanely. China, Russia, Iran and North Korea are testing him.

Yet to Axelrod, Biden has moved swiftly and efficiently on the two issues that dominate public concerns — the virus and the economy.

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"His team has been competent and focused, a marked contrast to the chaos of the Trump years," he said. "But, as important, he's restored a sense of calm and equilibrium to a capital that lived on the jagged edge for four years of Trump.

"Biden is measured. He does not personally vilify his opponents or divide the country. He does not insist on constantly making himself the center of attention."

Biden was deprived of an orderly transition by Trump's false claims of election fraud, explosive charges that animated the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol and brought a second Trump impeachment trial.

THE VACCINE

This meant delays up and down the federal bureaucracy. In the case of vaccines, it meant the Trump administration had done little to facilitate their distribution before Biden took office, prompting his complaint in late February about "the mess we inherited."

A distribution mess, perhaps, but the Trump administration and Congress had made a huge investment in the development of vaccines. Not only that, but the administration took action to lock in early supplies for the U.S. while many other developed countries still face crucial shortages of doses.

As the number of vaccines manufactured swelled, so did the number that reached Americans' arms, with more than 4 million shots administered one day in mid-April. The president became fond of the political trope of underpromising but overdelivering, repeatedly blowing past benchmarks and timelines.

The improved vaccine deployment was a significant early achievement, in part made possible by Biden's first legislative success: passing a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill into law within two months.

Not a single Republican lawmaker voted for the measure, though the White House was quick to claim that it was a bipartisan bill because it polled well with GOP voters.

Republican opposition to Biden's next cornerstone legislation, a \$2.3 trillion infrastructure and jobs program, also initially seemed firm. Yet some Republicans worry they will be left defending politically unpopular decisions — like opposing a corporate tax rate increase — while the Democrats may be able to simply pass the mega-package along party lines.

UP IN POLLS

To this point, Republican criticism of Biden has failed to land, as he enjoys healthy poll numbers. A Pew Research approval rating of 59% this month put him in league with Obama (61%) and President George W. Bush (55%). Trump trailed all modern presidents at 39% at this point.

In large measure Republicans have tried to score points by focusing on wedge issues of the kind that mostly interest Twitter users who argue over racial stereotypes in Dr. Seuss books, gender issues raised by Mr. Potato Head and excesses of cancel culture.

Meanwhile a longtime Republican argument — we're spending way too much on government programs — has lost much of its potency, at least for now, thanks to cheap borrowing costs and low inflation.

Biden press secretary Jen Psaki looked back at the Obama stimulus package that helped lift the U.S. from the Great Recession and said it wasn't so big that "people would be talking about it at their dinner tables." This one got everyone's attention.

Biden's package featured \$1,400 payments to most people, on top of \$1,800 from Trump's two waves of pandemic relief, which steered nearly \$3 trillion to the economy.

But Biden's package was much more geared to lower-income Americans and broader in its sweep. It focused on barriers to returning to work and sustaining people as they look for jobs, instead of subsidizing employers. It offers the prospect of slashing poverty by one-third with the stroke of his pen. The aid is to expire; Democrats will try to extend it.

THE MAN

Few people have tried longer to be president than Biden, who also had formed a clear vision of the job. "He really knew how he saw the presidency before he got here," said White House senior adviser Steve Ricchetti.

Biden talks more quietly now, moves a little slower and has lost weight. Mindful of his age, and his own life touched by immense tragedy, Biden has told confidants that he knows tomorrow is never a given.

He speaks of all he wants to do, "God willing."

"I'm just going to move forward and take these things as they come," he said at his only formal news conference. "I'm a great respecter of fate."

The schedule on his card is full. The virus death tally inches up, more slowly now. So far, he's played golf once.

Death toll in fire at Iraqi COVID-19 hospital surpasses 80

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — The death toll from a massive fire at a Baghdad hospital for coronavirus patients rose to at least 82 Sunday as anxious families searched for missing relatives and the government suspended key health officials for alleged negligence.

The flames, described by one witness as "volcanoes of fire," swept through the intensive care unit of the Ibn al-Khatib Hospital, which tends exclusively to COVID-19 patients with severe symptoms. Officials said the blaze, which also injured 110 people, was set off by an exploding oxygen cylinder.

Nurse Maher Ahmed was called to the scene late Saturday to help evacuate patients.

"I could not have imagined it would be a massive blaze like that," he said. The flames overwhelmed the hospital's second floor isolation hall within three to four minutes of the oxygen cylinder exploding, he said. "Volcanoes of fire."

Most of those killed suffered severe burns, he said. Others were overcome by smoke, unwilling to leave behind relatives hooked up to ventilators. Ahmed said the patients could not be moved. "They would have minutes to live without oxygen."

He said he and others watched helplessly as one patient struggled to breathe amid the smoke.

Widespread negligence on the part of health officials is to blame for the fire, Iraq's prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, said Sunday. Following a special cabinet meeting to discuss the blaze, the government suspended key officials, including the health minister and the governor of Baghdad province. Other officials, including the hospital director, were dismissed from their posts.

It took firefighters and civil defense teams until early Sunday to put out the flames.

Among the dead were at least 28 patients on ventilators, tweeted Ali al-Bayati, a spokesman of the country's independent Human Rights Commission, a semi-official body.

Paramedics carried the bodies, many burned beyond recognition, to al-Zafaraniya Hospital, where Ahmed said forensics teams will attempt to identify them by matching DNA samples to relatives.

By midday Sunday, relatives were still searching anxiously for loved ones.

"Please, two of my relatives are missing. ... I am going to die (without news about them)," posted a young woman on social media after a fruitless search for her family members. "I hope someone can help us find Sadi Abdul Kareem and Samir Abdul Kareem, they were in the ICU."

Rokya Kareem, 30, was looking frantically for her friend Riyam Rahman, a pharmacist, who was visiting her mother at the hospital. Rahman's mother, Basima, was admitted to the hospital 45 days ago with complications from COVID-19.

"All we know is they were in the room next to where the fire started," she said. "Her phone is switched off, and her family has gone to every hospital trying to find them."

The fire happened as Iraq grapples with a severe second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. Daily virus cases now average around 8,000, the highest level since Iraq began recording infection rates early last year. At least 15,200 people have died of coronavirus in Iraq among at least 100,000 confirmed cases.

Years of sanctions and war have crippled the country's health sector, and the latest infection wave has tested the limits of health facilities. Security concerns also plague the country as frequent rocket attacks continue to target army bases hosting foreign troops and the seat of Iraq's government.

The deadly fire was only the latest chapter in Iraq's poor record for public safety.

In March 2019, over 100 people died when a ferry capsized on the Tigris River near the northern city of Mosul. The boat overturned due to overcrowding and high water. A few months later, in September 2019,

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a fire ripped through Baghdad's Shorja market, a major commercial area in the city, burning many shops to the ground.

Part of the problem is that laws and regulations governing public safety and health are old, said Yesar al-Maliki, an adviser to the Iraq Energy Institute.

"It has to do with the overall system. There are no detailed regulations and (standard operating procedures) on how to do basic things step by step, especially when handling risky equipment," said Al-Maliki, who also worked in Iraq's oil and gas industry.

"There needs to be specialists handling policy, regulation and implementation," he said. "If there was a standard operating procedure on how to handle oxygen bottles, especially noticing wear and tear ... This wouldn't have happened."

The prime minister convened the special cabinet session hours after the flames broke out. In addition to suspending the health minister, Hasan al-Tamimi, and Baghdad's governor, the cabinet ordered an investigation of the health minister and key hospital officials responsible for overseeing safety measures.

The cabinet also fired the director-general of the Baghdad health department in the al-Rusafa area, where the hospital is located, and the hospital's director of engineering and maintenance, according to a statement from the Health Ministry and the prime minister's office.

"Negligence in such matters is not a mistake, but a crime for which all negligent parties must bear responsibility," al-Kadhimi said Sunday after a meeting.

The United Nations envoy to Iraq, Jeannine Hennis-Plasschaert, expressed "shock and pain" over the fire in a statement and called for stronger protection measures in hospitals.

At the Vatican, Pope Francis, who concluded a historic trip to Iraq last month, remembered those who perished in the blaze. Addressing people gathered in St. Peter's Square for his customary Sunday appearance, Francis mentioned the news of the dead. "Let's pray for them," he said.

French protesters demand trial for Jewish woman's killer

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Protesters in Paris and other French cities on Sunday denounced a ruling by France's highest court that the killer of Jewish woman Sarah Halimi was not criminally responsible and therefore could not go on trial.

Thousands of people filled Trocadero Plaza in Paris, in front of the Eiffel Tower, answering a call by Jewish associations and groups fighting antisemitism who say that justice has not been done. Other protests took place in Marseille, Lyon, Strasbourg, Bordeaux and elsewhere.

The announcement that the killer would not be sent to trial sparked outrage among the French and international Jewish community.

Halimi, a 65-year-old Jewish woman, died in 2017 after being pushed out of the window of her Paris apartment by her neighbor, Kobili Traoré, who allegedly shouted "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great" in Arabic). Traoré admitted pushing her.

The ruling from the Court of Cassation, issued this month, said there was enough evidence to show the act had antisemitic motives. But the court said a person who committed a crime while in a "delirious state" cannot be sent to trial — even if that state was caused by the habitual use of illegal drugs. Traoré used to smoke heavy quantities of cannabis.

"According to unanimous opinions of different psychiatry experts, that man was presenting at the time of the facts a severe delirious state," the court said.

Under French law, people cannot be held criminally responsible for actions committed while fully losing their judgment or self-control due to a psychiatric disorder. Traoré has been in a psychiatric hospital since Halimi's death.

Robert Ejnes, the executive director of CRIF, French Jewish umbrella group, said he came to Trocadero Plaza to support Halimi's relatives.

"I think they are like the French people — they're angry and don't understand at all," he said.

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"Here are people who trust France's government, France's justice system, and who are confronted with this totally unfair decision. The killer is recognized as a killer, is recognized as being antisemitic but he won't be tried. It's simply unacceptable and it's very hard for these people to even grieve," he said.

Ilai Laymond, a 19-year-old law student protesting in Paris, said "as a Jew but also as a French citizen, this court ruling affects me profoundly because it's inexplicable."

"With this decision ... we feel abandoned," he said.

French President Emmanuel Macron, meanwhile, called for a change in French law.

"Deciding to take narcotics and then 'going mad' should, not in my view, remove your criminal responsibility," Macron told the Le Figaro newspaper. He also expressed his support for the victim's family.

Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti tweeted Sunday that he will present a bill in May to plug a legal vacuum in French law regarding the consequences of the voluntary use of drugs.

Indonesia says 53 crew of lost sub are dead, wreckage found

By EDNA TARIGAN and FADLAN SYAM Associated Press

BANYUWANGI, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia's military on Sunday officially said all 53 crew members from a submarine that sank and broke apart last week are dead, and that search teams had located the vessel's wreckage on the ocean floor.

The grim announcement comes a day after Indonesia said the submarine was considered sunk, not merely missing, but did not explicitly say whether the crew was dead. Officials previously said the KRI Nanggala 402's oxygen supply would have run out early Saturday, three days after the vessel went missing off the resort island of Bali.

"We received underwater pictures that are confirmed as parts of the submarine, including its rear vertical rudder, anchors, outer pressure body, embossed dive rudder and other ship parts," military chief Hadi Tjahjanto told reporters in Bali on Sunday.

"With this authentic evidence, we can declare that KRI Nanggala 402 has sunk and all the crew members are dead," Tjahjanto said.

An underwater robot equipped with cameras documented the lost submarine lying in at least three pieces on the ocean floor at a depth of 838 meters (2,750 feet), said Adm. Yudo Margono, the navy's chief of staff.

That's much deeper than the submarine's collapse depth of 200 meters (655 feet), at which point water pressure would be greater than the hull could withstand, according to earlier navy statements.

The cause of the submarine's sinking remains uncertain. The navy previously said an electrical failure could have left the submarine unable to execute emergency procedures to resurface.

Margono said emergency survival suits that are normally kept in boxes were found floating underwater, apparently indicating the crew may have tried to put them on during the emergency.

The navy plans to eventually lift the wreckage and recover the dead, although the depth of the water poses a significant challenge, he said.

The wreckage is located 1,500 meters (yards) to the south of the site where the submarine last dove off Bali's northern coast, Margono said. Photos of the debris were presented at the press conference.

The underwater robot deployed by Singaporean vessel MV Swift Rescue provided the images, while the Indonesian vessel KRI Rigel had scanned the area where the submarine was believed to have sunk using multibeam sonar and a magnetometer, Tjahjanto said.

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo delivered his condolences in a televised address Sunday.

"All Indonesians convey deep sorrow for this tragedy, especially to all of the families of the submarine's crew. They are the best sons of the nation, patriots guarding the sovereignty of the country," Widodo said.

An American reconnaissance plane, a P-8 Poseidon, landed Saturday and had been set to join the search, along with 20 Indonesian ships, a sonar-equipped Australian warship and four Indonesian aircraft.

The German-built diesel-powered KRI Nanggala 402 had been in service in Indonesia since 1981 and was carrying 49 crew members and three gunners as well as its commander, the Indonesian Defense Ministry said.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago nation with more than 17,000 islands, has faced growing challenges to its maritime claims in recent years, including numerous incidents involving Chinese vessels near the Natuna islands.

FDA to scrutinize unproven cancer drugs after 10-year gap

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Each year the U.S. approves dozens of new uses for cancer drugs based on early signs that they can shrink or slow the spread of tumors.

But how often do those initial results translate into longer, healthier lives for patients?

That seemingly simple question is one of the thorniest debates in medicine. It spills into public view Tuesday as the Food and Drug Administration convenes the first meeting in a decade to consider clawing back approvals from several cancer drugs that have failed to show they extend or improve life.

The agency says it has used innovative research shortcuts to speed up the availability of medicines for desperately ill patients. But many researchers say it has failed to crack down on medications that don't deliver on their early promise, leaving a glut of expensive, unproven cancer drugs on the market.

"Doctors are using these drugs and patients are receiving them with all their toxicities and without knowing whether they actually doing anything," said Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, a cancer specialist and bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania. "We should not be in a situation where we're endlessly uncertain."

The three-day meeting on drugs from Merck, Roche and Bristol-Myers Squibb is part of an industrywide review triggered by an "unprecedented level of drug development" in recent years, according to FDA officials. The agency has only held similar meetings three times in its history, the last one in 2011.

The U.S. spends more per person on prescription drugs than any other nation, and spending on cancer drugs has more than doubled since 2013 to over \$60 billion annually, according to the data firm IQVIA. New medications typically cost \$90,000 to \$300,000 a year. And those prices have risen much faster than patient survival.

The FDA is prohibited from considering cost, but it is supposed to keep ineffective drugs off the market.

"This is finally a referendum, a small court, where we can ask whether we are we better off for spending all this money," said Dr. Vinay Prasad, a cancer specialist at University of California, San Francisco and longtime critic of FDA's approach. "And for many of these drugs, the answer looks like 'no.'"

The FDA will hear presentations from the drugmakers and seek advice from a panel of cancer experts. Agency leaders stated in a recent op-ed that the discussion is important because a failed study "does not necessarily mean that the drug is ineffective."

FDA makes the final decision on whether to pull approvals, but there are signs the agency may be ready for a tougher approach.

Since late last year, four drugmakers have "voluntarily" pulled approvals for several types of lung and bladder cancers after "consulting" with FDA. Each drug had failed to extend survival after initially winning FDA approval based on measures like tumor shrinkage.

The removal of four cancer approvals in quick succession is unprecedented. Several former FDA directors said at a recent conference that it showed the agency's so-called accelerated approval program is "healthy."

But the sheer rarity of such withdrawals undercuts that view.

In 1992, Congress gave the FDA the ability to accelerate drug approvals based on preliminary study data, responding to protests from HIV patients and activists over the slow pace of drug development. The program was embraced by the industry for giving many drugs a faster, cheaper path to market.

As originally conceived, these quicker approvals functioned like a contract: If the drugs weren't shown to help patients live longer or better lives in follow-up studies, the approvals would be revoked.

That's rarely happened. Of 155 expedited cancer approvals, 10 have been withdrawn, almost always voluntarily by the manufacturer. The FDA has used its authority to revoke an accelerated cancer approval only once. That long, ugly experience still looms large over the agency's oversight of cancer drugs.

It took the FDA more than a year to finally pull the breast cancer approval from Roche's blockbuster drug Avastin. The agency was besieged by calls from cancer patients and libertarian groups to keep the

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approval, despite clear evidence that it didn't extend life and caused dangerous side effects.

The drugs under review this week — Merck's Keytruda, Roche's Tecentriq and Bristol Myers Squibb's Opdivo — are part of a recent wave of "immunotherapies" that help the body's defense system recognize and attack cancer. The blockbuster drugs have shown life-extending gains against deadly forms of skin and lung cancer, among other conditions. But they've also racked up several dozen approvals in other indications, including forms of bladder, throat and liver cancer that are the focus of the meeting.

Studies by all three companies have shown negative or inconclusive results.

Even if all six uses under review are withdrawn, the drugs will stay on the market because they are approved for so many other indications. And that may not change care much for patients. Dr. Shilpa Gupta of the Cleveland Clinic notes FDA approved five immunotherapy drugs for bladder cancer between 2016 and 2017 — including two under review.

"Did we really need all five of those drugs?" she asked.

Accelerated approval is technically reserved for drugs that fill an "unmet need." But today roughly a third of all cancer drugs reach the market through the pathway, including many drugs approved for overlapping uses.

After years of studies criticizing the FDA's oversight of the program — including by government inspectors — agency scientists have begun pushing back.

In a 2018 study, FDA staffers deemed the program a success, noting only 5% of accelerated cancer approvals had ever been withdrawn and 55% had been "verified" by follow-up studies.

But when Harvard researchers dug into that claim, they found that only about 20% of cancer drugs had actually been shown to extend lives. In most cases, the FDA had allowed drugmakers to confirm their drugs' worth by conducting a second study of a preliminary measure, such as tumor shrinkage or delayed tumor growth.

In some cancers, shrinking or slowing tumor growth is proven to benefit patients. But in many cases that link hasn't been established.

"Having a smaller cancer that kills you, rather than a bigger cancer, is no consolation because you're still dead," said Emanuel.

Despite racial reckoning, state efforts stall on reparations

PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN Associated Press/Report For America

LOUISVILLE, Ky (AP) — During last summer's reckoning over racial injustice, decades-long debates about whether to offer reparations to the descendants of slaves in the U.S. finally seemed to be gaining momentum.

State lawmakers in California, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Oregon — where Democrats control the legislatures — introduced or hoped to revive proposals to study the possibility. It turns out the wait for reparations will continue.

The state efforts have mostly stalled, raising questions about whether they can win enough support to succeed on a wide scale. California is the only state to approve a commission to study reparations statewide and how they might work.

"We need a federal reparations bill, but I don't know when we'll get there," said Maryland state Del. Wanika Fisher, a Democrat who introduced legislation there to create a reparations task force. "Hopefully we will ... but I think states should be accountable."

Her bill received a committee hearing but never made it any further during this year's legislative session, which ended earlier this month. It's similar in the other states. Bills that would study the possibility of statewide reparations in New Jersey, New York and Oregon have been parked in legislative committees.

That mirrors the outlook in Congress. A committee in the U.S. House, which is controlled by Democrats, advanced a decades-old bill that would establish a reparations commission, but its prospects appear dim in the evenly divided Senate where it's unlikely to generate enough support to overcome a filibuster.

"A lot of our legislation and the things we work on are all Band-Aids on the issue of institutional racism,

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class inequality and the host of other issues that stem from that," said Fisher, who plans to reintroduce her bill next year. "But we've never fully tackled what's at the heart, what's the cancer, what's the disease?"

The lack of progress reflects the nation's conflicting views on whether reparations to atone for slavery are necessary. A 2019 Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll found that the vast majority of Black Americans — 74% — favored reparations, but less than a fifth of white Americans did.

Maryland resident Lynda Davis believes a lack of education on the subject keeps many white Americans from supporting the effort. Davis, who is white, belongs to Coming to the Table, a national organization made up of descendants of those who were enslaved and slaveholders.

"I think getting people to make that leap is sometimes a challenge," said Davis, who submitted written testimony in support of the state reparations effort. "It's trying to help people see the ongoing harms, like this summer. I think more white people are getting it now, which is hard because it seems like people should have gotten it before now."

Davis points to local efforts as an example of what grassroots activism around the issue can achieve.

In March, Evanston, Illinois, became one of the first U.S. cities to offer Black residents reparations. The city council in Asheville, North Carolina, voted unanimously last July in favor of reparations for Black residents that would take the form of helping businesses and providing housing and health care. Other local governments, including in Amherst, Massachusetts, Providence, Rhode Island, and Iowa City, Iowa, are considering whether or how to grant some form of reparations.

Oregon state Sen. Lew Frederick said local and state efforts, if they gain more traction, can help build support — eventually — for reparations on the federal level.

Frederick introduced a measure that would create a task force and issue cash payments to Black Oregonians who can document they are descendants of slaves. He plans on reintroducing it if it doesn't succeed this year.

"It's going to take a lot of states saying that this is something we have to do before we actually get something done at the national level," he said.

Though Oregon wasn't a slave state, its constitution explicitly barred Black settlers, a provision that wasn't repealed until 1927. Many of the state's Black residents had to contend with discriminatory housing and employment practices well into the 20th century.

The nation's racial reckoning amid the COVID-19 pandemic and police killings of Black Americans have only intensified the need for reparations, Frederick said. Earlier this month, he sponsored a successful resolution urging Congress to create a reparations commission.

"It was so obvious," he said of his legislation. "The reparations bill is basically to say, 'OK, now we've talked about it, now we see it, now it's no longer seen as something that's fantasy.'"

California state Sen. Steven Bradford, who will serve on the state's reparations task force, said the effort succeeded because of the commitment from the bill's author, now-Secretary of State Shirley Weber, support from the Legislative Black Caucus and the state's governor, Democrat Gavin Newsom.

He said other states, whether led by Democrats or Republicans, have yet to come to terms with the extent of systemic racism in the country.

"I think it's a sad state of affairs, but it's a reality of who we are as a nation," Bradford said.

While valuable, the ongoing debates at the state and local level should not take away from the need for a federal reparations program, said Duke University economist William Darity, who partnered with his wife, A. Kirsten Mullen, on a study that outlines how cash payments could fix the racial wealth gap.

They said the consequences of slavery are national in scope, not merely localized.

"The federal government is the one that created these policies, and in some instances ignored its own policies, and that is who should pay this debt," Mullen said.

Black lawmakers and other supporters say federal action also is needed because so few of the state and local discussions about reparations are happening in the South, where the majority of descendants of slavery live.

Without a federal program, Black Americans such as Lisa Hicks-Gilbert, are unlikely to benefit.

Hicks-Gilbert, of Elaine, Arkansas, is a descendant of survivors of the 1919 Elaine massacre, one of many

episodes of racial violence against African Americans in the early 20th century. When Black sharecroppers in the town joined together to negotiate for fairer terms and wages, they were attacked by white mobs. More than 200 Black men, women and children were killed.

She doesn't believe that federal reparations will happen in her lifetime. But through her work as an advocate for descendants of the massacre, Hicks-Gilbert is pushing for legislation that would have the state officially recognize the killings and set up educational opportunities.

While she acknowledges it will take time to get there, the promise is enough to keep her going, even in moments of doubt.

"That's what's in my heart to do — to continue and finish what they started," she said.

Pope: Migrants begged for help at sea, shamefully ignored

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis on Sunday decried as shameful the deaths of 130 migrants in the Mediterranean, saying they pleaded for two days for help for their overcrowded, foundering rubber dinghy in the sea off Libya but potential rescuers choose "to look the other way."

Francis called the sea tragedy last week "a moment of shame."

The migrants had made a call for help on Wednesday. On Thursday, when a humanitarian rescue boat and a merchant ship sailing in very rough waters arrived at the scene, the deflating dinghy had partially sunk, several bodies were seen in the water and no survivors were found. Rescue centers in Libya, Malta and Italy had been alerted, according to the European Union border protection agency Frontex, whose plane had located the dinghy.

"I confess to you I am very pained by the tragedy that once again played out in the last days in the Mediterranean," the pope told people in St. Peter's Square who gathered to hear his traditional Sunday noon remarks.

"One hundred and thirty migrants died in the sea. They are persons, human lives, who for two entire days implored in vain for help, help that didn't arrive," Francis said.

"Let us pray for these brothers and sisters, let us interrogate all of ourselves about this latest tragedy," the pope said. "It is a moment of shame."

"Let us pray also for those who can help but who prefer to look the other way," the pope added.

SOS Mediterranee, a humanitarian group whose rescue ship Ocean Viking sailed toward the distressed dinghy amid strong winds and high waves, said a Libyan coast guard vessel was supposed to arrive at the scene but never did.

Libyan coast guard officials have said bad weather and the need to help other migrants in distress off the coast of the North African country meant it couldn't reach the dinghy in time.

Human traffickers based in Libya continuously launch unseaworthy dinghies and small fishing boats filled with migrants hoping to reach European shores for a better life.

A few hours after the pope's denunciation, the Italian coast guard said with a help of a container ship it aided an ailing motorized fishing boat filled with migrants that was struggling in towering waves and stiff winds.

The vessel, which had at least 100 people aboard including children, was spotted Saturday, it said. After the boat's motor quit working it was at risk of overturning in the waves. Coast guard motorboats towed it and it arrived Sunday at a port in Calabria, southern Italy.

Americans update their closets as they emerge from pandemic

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After a year of being stuck in sweatpants, pajamas and fuzzy slippers, Americans are starting to dress up and go out again.

Levi Strauss is seeing a resurgence in denim while demand for dresses at Macy's, Anthropologie and Nordstrom is going up as proms and weddings resume. And teen retailer American Eagle Outfitters said

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sales are rising due to "pent-up" demand for its fashions.

During the three months ended February, market research firm NPD Group said jeans and casual pants began to cut their previous declines by more than half, indicating consumers are gearing up to spend more time out of the home. And more than half of U.S. consumers plan to buy clothing in the coming months, catapulting it back to the top category of anticipated spending, followed by footwear and beauty products, according to NPD's consumer survey.

"My plan is to dress up and enjoy the things in my wardrobe," said Beth Embrescia, 51, an executive fundraiser who for the last year paired dressy tops with sweatpants and Birkenstocks for work Zoom calls but recently bought collared shirts and loafers with a wedge heel while on a recent vacation in Florida. "I will not be going out to dinner in joggers."

Such signs of renewed interest offer a much-needed boost for clothing sales, which have been in the dumps for a year. They also serve as hopeful indications of a strong economic recovery as Americans show more willingness to travel and dine out as President Joe Biden's vaccination plan proceeds ahead of schedule.

Major transactions at full service restaurants rose more than twofold this March compared to year ago, though down 25% compared to two years ago, according to NPD. Hotels are making a comeback too, with demand during the week ended April 11 surging more than fourfold compared with a year ago and up 10.9% compared with the same week in 2019, according to Koddi, an advertising technology company.

Through the first 20 days in April, the Transportation Security Administration screened an average of 1.4 million people per day, a significant climb from a year ago when the number was just under 99,000 a day. But travel is still off from 2019, which averaged more than 2.3 million people a day over a comparable period.

The data on clothing sales is preliminary, and retailers and designers are still trying to figure out how a year of being homebound will change the way people think about dressing up. Casual wear was already strong before COVID-19, and many experts believe the pandemic only accelerated the trend.

A year ago, Los Angeles-based fashion designer Kevan Hall quickly moved away from his trademark gowns and cocktail dresses to caftans, tunics and pull-on pants. Now Hall is adding back some dressier looks, but he's eliminating the full skirts and scaling back the beading in favor of simple gowns and dresses in knit and tulle fabrics.

"I don't know whether women will ever want to go back to being with so much structure," said Hall, who has been getting calls from clients and stores in recent weeks asking for dressed-up looks. "I think people are going to lean into comfort even more — even when they are getting dressed for evening or galas."

Retail executives are also looking at how business attire will change. While some corporations are starting to re-open their offices, many are extending work-from-home indefinitely or moving to a hybrid model, eliminating the need for office wear five days a week.

At the onset of the pandemic, sales of clothing and accessories cratered when non-essential stores were forced to temporarily close. But now business is starting to rebound above pre-pandemic levels. In March, spending at clothing and accessory stores rose 18.3% to \$22.86 billion from the month before, according to the Commerce Department's most recent monthly retail report. That was almost double compared with the same month in March 2020 and up 2.3% compared with March 2019.

Retailers, burned by the sudden switch away from formal looks last year, are being cautious about how much to add back.

Janice Elliott, a buyer for designer clothing boutique Gus Mayer's Nashville, Tennessee location, says she's optimistic about people's return to going-out-clothes this spring and fall, but she's staying away from ordering items like structured sheaths and leaning toward flowy cotton dresses.

Before the pandemic, more than 50% of the business at Gus Mayer was in formal clothes; during the height of COVID-19, that fell to less than 10%.

"I think there is going to be a pent-up demand, but I still think there will be a more relaxed way of dressing going forward," Elliott said.

Deirdre Quinn, CEO and co-founder of upscale clothing brand Lafayette 148 New York, says her team is

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designing multi-purpose items like blouses that can be worn from day into evening.

She noted that business was down 30% last year from a year earlier and this year has started out weak. Quinn hasn't seen any pickup in dresses yet and believes sales won't rebound to pre-pandemic levels until 2023.

"I don't want to rush back to where we were," she said. "I am going to control how quickly I grow. It is a reset time."

Sen. Johnson may offer insight into GOP's 2022 positioning

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Ron Johnson is in an uncomfortable class of his own.

The Wisconsin Republican is the only senator in his party facing reelection next year in a state that backed Democrat Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential race. But rather than moderate his politics to accommodate potentially shifting voter attitudes, Johnson is focusing even more intently on cultural issues that appeal to his party's overwhelmingly white base.

He has said the trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in the murder of George Floyd distracted journalists from covering immigration. He has lent credence to the white supremacist "great replacement" theory. And he said he was less concerned about the predominantly white mob that staged a deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in January than he would have been if they were Black Lives Matter protesters.

Johnson has not committed to seeking a third term in 2022. But his seat probably will be among the most fiercely contested in a campaign year that will decide control of Congress and the future of Biden's agenda. Johnson's tactics offer a window into how Republicans may approach the midterm elections, with a focus on turning out the base and steadfastly dismissing any criticism, especially when it comes to issues of race.

"I know how just about anything any Republican or conservative will say will get taken out of context and exploited," Johnson told The Associated Press recently, responding to a question about his comment on the Capitol riot. "And I understand exactly how the left plays the race card all the time. I understand that. But there was nothing, nothing racial in my comments at all."

Johnson is hardly the only Republican taking this approach.

Donald Trump centered his presidential reelection campaign last year on a "law and order" message that was intended as a counter to racial justice protests, some of which turned violent, that swept the nation. While Trump lost to Biden, he won more than 10 million additional votes than he did in 2016, which may have helped the GOP narrow its gap in the House.

More recently, House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California introduced a measure to censure Rep. Maxine Waters, a Black Democratic congresswoman from California, for urging people to "stay on the street" to pursue justice for Floyd. And a memo linked to Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., proposed an America First Caucus hailing "Anglo-Saxon political traditions" and warning of immigration's threat to the country's "unique culture."

For Johnson, much of the controversy began when he said he wasn't concerned for his safety during the Jan. 6 Capitol riot because "I knew those were people who love this country." The crowd was overwhelmingly white.

"Had the tables been turned, and President Trump won the election, and tens of thousands of Black Lives Matter and antifa" stormed the Capitol, "I might have been a little concerned," Johnson said during the interview on nationally syndicated conservative radio show. Antifa are far-left, anti-fascist protesters who have joined Black Lives Matter advocates at demonstrations.

GOP pollster Whit Ayres said that "inartful doesn't begin to describe" Johnson's comment, which represents the broader challenge of defining the party's core principles.

"The challenge for the center-right political party is figuring out a constructive way to respond to these changes, rather than simply fomenting outrage and anger," said Ayres, who has done extensive work in

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racially diverse Southern states.

But Johnson hasn't backed down.

Days after his comments about the Capitol, he suggested the news media was distracted from an influx of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border by the Chauvin trial in Minneapolis. And last week, Johnson nodded to the "great replacement," a conspiracy theory promoted by white supremacists that holds that people of color are replacing white people in the West, enabled by Jews and progressive politicians.

Fox News host Tucker Carlson complained that he, a white man, had "less political power because (Democrats) are importing a brand new electorate."

Johnson appeared to spur such beliefs during a Fox interview with Larry Kudlow, a former economic adviser to Trump, by asking, "Is it really that they want to remake the demographics of America so they stay in power forever? Is that what's happening here?"

This is not the obvious path for someone who was first elected to the Senate in 2010 as a policy wonk more concerned with cutting spending than fanning culture wars. Some Wisconsin Republicans note a project he spearheaded to place unemployed inner-city Milwaukee workers in jobs, a program that helped some Black residents.

But others point to doubt that he cast about Biden's victory as then-chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee as yet another example of undermining minority voices. Johnson, one of Trump's staunchest supporters, had signed on to objecting to Arizona's Electoral College vote, but reversed course after the Capitol riot.

"Johnson may not be spitting on Black people," said Brown University professor Juliet Hooker, who is writing a book on the politics of white voter resentment. "But he certainly seems committed to pushing the idea there was widespread fraud in the 2020 election, allegations centered on majority Black or multiracial cities. The implication of that is votes by people of color are suspect."

Democrats have seized on the scrutiny. Prospective Democratic Senate challenger Tom Nelson, county executive in Johnson's Outagamie County home, has paid for a billboard in Oshkosh featuring Johnson's picture, with the word "resign" over his mouth, and the text: "Racism has no place in Wisconsin."

Johnson, however, is an astute businessman, playing to a politically active audience by bemoaning mainly during conservative media interviews his treatment by other news outlets, said Charlie Sykes, a former conservative radio host in Milwaukee.

"He picks up on what is playing in that world, and Ron Johnson is right there, right now," said Sykes, a devout Trump critic.

The senator also is stoking a theme that has soaked disproportionately into Republicans: that white Americans face widespread discrimination. It stems from the economic decline in rural, white, working-class communities who don't feel the effects of white privilege racial justice advocates describe, Ayres and others say.

A Pew Research Poll conducted last month showed that 14% of all Americans say there's a lot of anti-white discrimination. The figure among Republicans was 26 percent.

Conservative media stoke the outrage by offering Johnson and others the opportunity to paint themselves as victims, Sykes said.

"Any accusation of racism must be in bad faith, they say, and is an attempt to cancel you, silence you and make you a victim, which then becomes a great way of getting attention from your base," he said.

The issue could shadow Johnson's campaign, should he seek a third term next year.

Turnout in Milwaukee, where more than one-third of residents are Black, was flat last year compared with 2016, though Biden carried Wisconsin as narrowly as Trump did four years earlier.

Johnson's racially fraught statements could spark higher Black turnout, said Wisconsin Rep. Gwen Moore, a Milwaukee Democrat. Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, who is Black, is weighing a Democratic campaign for Senate.

"If Johnson dares to run, he'll be kindling for the fire that his candidacy will bring in terms of inspiring Democrats, especially voters of color," Moore said. "He's made it quite clear he's totally Trumpian."

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Trump has heartily endorsed Johnson even though he hasn't yet announced his reelection plans. "He is brave, he is bold, he loves our Country, our Military and our Vets," Trump said in a statement before a Republican fundraising gathering this month in West Palm Beach, Florida. "He has no idea how popular he is. Run, Ron, Run!"

Pope ordains 9 priests, saying: Stay humble, compassionate

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis on Sunday gave the Catholic church nine new priests, encouraging them in an ordination ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica to be humble and compassionate and to stay close to the rank-and-file faithful, whose trust in clergy has been sorely tested by decades of sex abuse scandals.

Professing obedience to the pontiff during the Mass on Sunday were six men from Italy and one each from Romania, Colombia and Brazil. The men removed their masks, part of COVID-19 safety protocols, when they knelt before Francis and he lay his hands on their head as part of the ordination ritual. At another point of the ceremony, the nine lay prostrated on a carpet in front of the basilica's central altar in a sign of obedience, humility and giving of oneself.

Shortages of locally ordained seminarians have in recent decades seen priests be transferred to predominantly Catholic countries like Italy from Asia and Africa, where seminaries are still attracting many recruits.

Sexual abuse scandals in the priesthood have eroded many Catholics' confidence in their church.

In an improvised homily, Francis instructed the nine to stay close to God, to their bishop and among themselves, but "most of all to the holy faithful people of God" from whose ranks they come. He told them to please stay away from vanity, pride and money, lest they become "businessmen priests."

"If you do that, don't be afraid, all will go well," in their new roles as priests, Francis said.

Financial scandals and instances of clergy living in posh quarters, including at the Vatican, have tainted the church's teaching that humility and poverty are virtues.

One of the newly ordained is a 40-year-old Italian who had worked as an artistic director before deciding he wanted to become a priest. Another Italian said in his biography that he loves soccer and had even tried out for Roma, one of the Italian capital's major league soccer clubs, but turned down an offer to study for the priesthood instead.

Last year, with Italy in the first wave of the pandemic, the basilica ordination by the pope was skipped. This year, at the ceremony's end, Francis, looking relaxed, after taking a group photo with the new priests still wearing their masks, asked the nine to remove their masks for another photo opportunity, and smiling, the nine eagerly complied.

Young adults' relocations are reshaping political geography

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Garima Vyas always wanted to live in a big city. She thought about New York, long the destination for 20-something strivers, but was wary of the cost and complicated subway lines.

So Vyas picked another metropolis that's increasingly become young people's next-best option — Houston.

Now 34, Vyas, a tech worker, has lived in Houston since 2013. "I knew I didn't like New York, so this was the next best thing," Vyas said. "There are a lot of things you want to try when you are younger -- you want to try new things. Houston gives you that, whether it's food, people or dating. And it's cheap to live in."

The choices by Vyas and other members of the millennial generation of where to live have reshaped the country's political geography over the past decade. They've left New York and California and settled in places less likely to be settings for TV sitcoms about 20-something urbanites, including Denver, Houston and Orlando, Florida. Drawn by jobs and overlooked cultural amenities, they've helped add new craft breweries, condominiums and liberal voters to these once more-conservative places.

The U.S. Census Bureau this coming week is expected to formally tally this change by releasing its count of population shifts in the once-a-decade reallocation of congressional seats. It's expected to lead to

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the Sun Belt gaining seats at the expense of states in the north.

Most projections have Texas gaining three seats, Florida two and Arizona, Colorado, Montana, North Carolina and Oregon one each. Expected to lose seats are Alabama, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, West Virginia — and California.

The relocations have reshuffled politics. Once solidly conservative places such as Texas have seen increasingly large islands of liberalism sprout in their cities, driven by the migration of younger adults, who lean Democratic. Since 2010, the 20-34-year-old population has increased by 24% in San Antonio, 22% in Austin and 19% in Houston, according to an Associated Press analysis of American Community Survey data. In November's election, two states that also saw sharp growth in young people in their largest cities — Arizona and Georgia — flipped Democratic in the presidential contest.

These demographic winners are almost all in the Sun Belt, but climate is not the only thing they have in common.

"These places are growing not just because they're warmer, it's because that's where the jobs are and young people are moving there," said Ryan Wiechelt, a geography professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

There are other drivers of population growth, such as immigration from overseas and childbirths. But as foreign immigration tapered off during the decade, then plummeted during the pandemic, internal relocations have become an increasingly big factor in how the country is re-sorting itself, demographers say.

Places with jobs have long attracted transplants, but this shift has been different because housing prices have risen so much in previous job clusters — Boston, New York and Silicon Valley, for example — that cost of living has become more of a factor in relocations, said Daryl Fairweather, chief economist for Redfin.

"Since the last housing crisis, young millennials have had to move to places with really strong job markets," Fairweather said. "Now, during the pandemic I think that is changing — you don't have to move to San Francisco if you want a job in tech."

Plenty of young people still move to traditional destinations such as New York and California to start careers, experts say. They just leave them relatively quickly now, with a wider variety of alternative job centers to choose from. "Every year these places attract a lot of young people, but they lose more," William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institute, said of traditional, coastal job magnets, joking that his own hometown of Washington, D.C. "rents" young people.

Instead, places with both cheaper housing, growing economies and recreational amenities have become popular. Colorado was the third most popular place for young adults to relocate to since 2015, gaining more than 20,000 new young adults from elsewhere each year, according to Frey's analysis of early census data. The state has boomed over the past decade as its libertarian lifestyle, outdoor attractions and growing knowledge-based economy have drawn young people from across the country.

As a result, Denver's skyline is regularly pockmarked with construction cranes. Apartment complexes are springing up from parking lots. For when those renters want to have children and buy homes, waves of new suburban subdivisions are emerging in the shadow of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains.

As mostly college-educated transplants have relocated to Denver and its satellite communities, Colorado has gone from being a solidly Republican state to a competitive swing state to a solidly Democratic one. It's a pattern that some political experts expect could be replicated in other states importing loads of young people, even traditionally conservative Texas.

Sydney Kramer is typical of many new Colorado arrivals. The 23-year-old moved to the university town of Boulder in January to begin graduate studies in atmospheric and oceanic sciences. She could have stayed in Miami, a natural location for someone of her interests and where she finished her undergraduate studies. But Kramer was depressed by Florida's anti-science turn under Republican state control.

"The government and policy hasn't necessarily caught up there yet," Kramer said of Florida, noting that state regulations barred the use of the term "climate change" in some official documents under the previous governor. "Everybody here has a high level of education, is really educated about climate change."

"This," she said of Boulder, with its wealth of environmental and forecasting organizations, "is just a

really great place to be for my industry.”

A New Jersey native who did not want to deal with New York City’s high rents, Kramer has been impressed by how her new neighbors talk excitedly about hiking, camping and skiing and at the combination of outdoor activities and urban amenities the area offers. “It’s a really wonderful place to be for everything you get for the cost of living,” she said.

Turkey summons US ambassador over genocide announcement

By ZEYNEP BILGINSOY Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Turkey’s foreign ministry has summoned the U.S. ambassador in Ankara to protest the U.S. decision to mark the deportation and killing of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire as “genocide.”

Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal met with David Satterfield late Saturday to express Ankara’s strong condemnation. “The statement does not have legal ground in terms of international law and has hurt the Turkish people, opening a wound that’s hard to fix in our relations,” the ministry said.

On Saturday, U.S. President Joe Biden followed through on a campaign promise to recognize the events that began in 1915 and killed an estimated 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians as genocide. The statement was carefully crafted to say the deportations, massacres and death marches took place in the Ottoman Empire. “We see that pain. We affirm the history. We do this not to cast blame but to ensure that what happened is never repeated,” it said.

The White House proclamation immediately prompted statements of condemnation from Turkish officials, although Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is yet to address the issue.

Turkey rejects the use of the word, saying both Turks and Armenians were killed in the World War I-era fighting, and has called for a joint history commission to investigate. For years, American presidents have avoided using “genocide” to describe what Armenians call Meds Yeghern, or the Great Crime.

The announcement comes as Turkish-American relations suffer from a host of issues. The U.S. has sanctioned Turkish defense officials and kicked Turkey out of a fighter jet program after the NATO member bought the Russian-made S400 defense system. Ankara is frustrated by Washington’s support of Syrian Kurdish fighters linked to an insurgency that Turkey has fought for decades. Turkey has also demanded the extradition of Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish cleric accused of orchestrating a bloody coup attempt against Erdogan’s government in 2016. Gulen lives in the U.S. and denies involvement.

Erdogan and Biden spoke on the phone Friday for the first time since the U.S. elections.

Ibrahim Kalin, the spokesman to the president, tweeted Sunday: “President Erdogan opened Turkey’s national archives & called for a joint historical committee to investigate the events of 1915, to which Armenia never responded. It is a pity @POTUS has ignored, among others, this simple fact and taken an irresponsible and unprincipled position.”

ASEAN leaders tell Myanmar coup general to end killings

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Southeast Asian leaders demanded an immediate end to killings and the release of political detainees in Myanmar in an emergency summit Saturday with its top general and coup leader who, according to Malaysia’s prime minister, did not reject them outright.

The leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also told Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing during the two-hour talks in Jakarta that a dialogue between contending parties in Myanmar should immediately start, with the help of ASEAN envoys.

“The situation in Myanmar is unacceptable and should not continue. Violence must be stopped, democracy, stability and peace in Myanmar must be returned immediately,” Indonesian President Joko Widodo said during the meeting. “The interests of the people of Myanmar must always be the priority.”

Daily shootings by police and soldiers since the Feb. 1 coup have killed more than 700 mostly peaceful protesters and bystanders, according to several independent tallies.

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The messages conveyed to Min Aung Hlaing were unusually blunt and could be seen as a breach of the conservative 10-nation bloc's bedrock principle forbidding member states from interfering in each other's affairs. But Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said that policy should not lead to inaction if a domestic situation "jeopardizes the peace, security, and stability of ASEAN and the wider region" and there is international clamor for resolute action.

"There is a tremendous expectation on the part of the international community on how ASEAN is addressing the Myanmar issue. The pressure is increasing," Muhyiddin said. The current ASEAN chair, Brunei Prime Minister Hassanal Bolkiah, and the bloc's secretary general should be allowed access to Myanmar to meet contending parties, encourage dialogue and come up with "an honest and unbiased observation," he said.

Such a political dialogue "can only take place with the prompt and unconditional release of political detainees," the Malaysian premier said.

A formal statement issued by ASEAN through Brunei after the summit outlined the demands made by the six heads of state and three foreign ministers in more subtle terms. It asked for the "immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar" and urged all parties to "exercise utmost restraint," but omitted the demand voiced by Widodo and other leaders for the immediate release of political detainees. It said ASEAN would provide humanitarian aid to Myanmar.

In a news conference late Saturday, Muhyiddin said that Min Aung Hlaing told ASEAN leaders that he will find a way to solve the problem and agreed that violence must stop.

"Our proposals would be accepted, the general in his response did not reject (them)," Muhyiddin said, "This is very encouraging progress."

When asked about Min Aung Hlaing's response to the demand to cease the violence, Muhyiddin said that ASEAN leaders tried not to accuse his side too much because "we don't care who's causing it, we just stressed that the violence must stop."

"For him, it's the other side that's causing the problems," said Muhyiddin. "If that's the case, we hope that he will find a way to stop it even before the ASEAN representatives go to Myanmar."

Muhyiddin also denied allegations that ASEAN has not done enough to address the crisis.

"We are concerned about what's happening and we've taken steps and made decisions," he said. "The best thing is that there is a representative from Myanmar who says they are ready to accept our representative there."

It was the first time Min Aung Hlaing traveled out of Myanmar since the coup, which was followed by the arrests of Aung San Suu Kyi and many other political leaders.

Critics have said ASEAN's decision to meet the coup leader was unacceptable and amounted to legitimizing the overthrow and the deadly crackdown that followed. ASEAN states agreed to meet Min Aung Hlaing but did not treat or address him as Myanmar's head of state in the summit, a Southeast Asian diplomat told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity for lack of authority to discuss the issue publicly.

The divergent ties of many of ASEAN members to either China or the United States, along with a bedrock policy of non-interference in each other's affairs and deciding by consensus, has hobbled the bloc's ability to rapidly deal with crises.

Amid Western pressure, however, the group has struggled to take a more forceful position on issues but has kept to its non-confrontational approach.

The London-based rights watchdog Amnesty International urged Indonesia and other ASEAN states ahead of the summit to investigate Min Aung Hlaing over "credible allegations of responsibility for crimes against humanity in Myanmar." As a state party to a U.N. convention against torture, Indonesia has a legal obligation to prosecute or extradite a suspected perpetrator on its territory, it said.

Indonesian police dispersed dozens of protesters opposing the coup and the junta leader's visit.

The leaders of Thailand and the Philippines skipped the summit to deal with coronavirus outbreaks back home. Laos also canceled at the last minute. The face-to-face summit is the first by ASEAN leaders in more than a year.

Aside from Myanmar, the regional bloc is made up of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the

Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Democrat Troy Carter wins New Orleans-based US House seat

By MELINDA DESLATTE Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Democrat Troy Carter won Saturday's special election for Louisiana's vacant U.S. House seat, defeating his state Senate colleague and ending an acrimonious, intraparty clash that divided politicians across New Orleans.

Carter easily defeated Karen Carter Peterson in the race for Louisiana's only Democrat-held seat in Congress, in a race seen as handing a victory to the more moderate side of the party after Peterson planted herself firmly in the progressive camp. Carter dismissed those comparisons, noting he also had progressive support.

The pair of state senators from New Orleans, who both made previous failed bids for the congressional seat, had only modest policy differences to distinguish them, and the race centered mainly on personality. Carter had the backing, however, of the seat's predecessor, Cedric Richmond.

The 2nd District seat — representing a majority-Black district centered in New Orleans and extending up the Mississippi River into Baton Rouge — was open because Richmond left the position shortly after he won last year's election to work as a special adviser to President Joe Biden.

"I will wake up every day with you on my mind, on my heart, and I will work for you tirelessly," Carter, a former New Orleans City Council member, pledged to his supporters.

He said he would focus on economic recovery from COVID-19, overhauling criminal sentencing laws, protecting LGBTQ rights and fighting for clean air in parts of the 10-parish district with higher levels of pollution.

"The work begins tomorrow," Carter said.

Peterson, the former chair of Louisiana's Democratic Party, conceded fewer than two hours after the polls closed, acknowledging she lost her latest attempt to be the state's first Black woman elected to Congress. She pledged to "keep swinging hard for the people" from the state Senate.

"I can still do a lot in the role I have," Peterson said.

Carter and Peterson reached Saturday's runoff after they emerged as the top vote-getters among 15 candidates in the March primary. Carter raised more campaign cash in the competition, but he faced attack ads from out-of-state groups supporting Peterson.

The two state senators differed more in style than substance, though Peterson positioned herself as the more liberal candidate. In one runoff debate, Peterson described herself as "bold and progressive" and willing to "shake things up to get things done."

Carter is known more for his ability and willingness to work across party lines, while Peterson is more overtly partisan in her approach. She suggested Carter cozied up to Republicans to boost his campaign, while he said Peterson's dogmatic approach damaged her ability to pass legislation.

"In order to get things done, they need to send someone to Washington who can build bridges, not walls, that can establish relationships that mean something, not kick rocks because you don't get your way, not spew lies because you're losing," Carter said in a debate.

The two candidates backed an increase in the minimum wage, the legalization of recreational marijuana and abortion rights. They supported changes in how police agencies and public safety are funded and approached, though Peterson went further saying she backed a "complete restructuring."

Both Carter and Peterson said they support the idea of "Medicare for All." But while Peterson fully embraced shifting to a government-run, single-payer plan, Carter said he'd like people to have the option of retaining employer-financed coverage.

Across the campaign, they traded accusations.

Carter hit Peterson on her many missed votes in the Louisiana Senate.

Peterson slammed campaign donations Carter received from people and entities tied to the oil and gas industry. She made support of "environmental justice" for poor communities facing greater health risks

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from pollution one of the cornerstones of her campaign.

Carter hammered Peterson for suggesting she helped establish Louisiana's Medicaid expansion program, which was started by Gov. John Bel Edwards and required no legislation. He noted that when she was head of the Democratic Party, she discouraged Edwards from running for governor.

They each touted high-profile endorsements.

Peterson had backing from voting rights advocate Stacey Abrams, progressive U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell, among others.

In addition to Richmond's endorsement, Carter had backing from No. 3 House Democratic leader James Clyburn of South Carolina, New Orleans District Attorney Jason Williams and every Black member of the state Senate besides Peterson.

DMX immortalized by family and close friends at memorial

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — DMX's legacy was immortalized as a man beloved by his family, honored for his strong faith and respected as one of hip-hop's greatest icons at his memorial service Saturday, with several heartfelt speeches from those who knew the rapper best.

The speakers included friends Swizz Beatz and Nas, as well as his daughter, who rapped in honor of her father.

Kanye West and Busta Rhymes were among the big names who attended the two-hour ceremony at the Barclays Center in New York. The service at the Brooklyn arena was closed to the public and restricted to close friends and family because of the coronavirus pandemic.

In a touching moment, DMX's 15 children gathered on stage to talk — and sometimes rap — about the star as a father who taught them such lessons as "always say thank you," "be kind to everyone" and that being afraid can sometimes show a person how to be brave.

"Our father is a king. Our father is an icon," eldest son Xavier Simmons said, adding that he was honored to be his son: "This man deepened my ability to love."

Tashera Simmons, DMX's ex-wife, told the audience: "Everything he did, he did for you all. He always wanted to please you. He always wanted to give you his best show."

"What he wants you to do," she said, "is love Jesus the same way he did. Love his babies. Love his family."

West's Sunday Service Choir kicked off the ceremony with a gospel performance. The hoodie sweatshirt-wearing ensemble performed a few songs, including their arrangement of "Excellent" and Soul II Soul's "Keep On Movin'." The choir took the stage during other moments of the ceremony, performing "Ultralight Beam" and Whitney Houston's assisted vocals on the hymn "Jesus Loves Me."

Nas reminisced about having a conversation with a teary-eyed DMX while filming a scene for "Belly," a crime drama. He said DMX became emotional knowing the rapper was about to embark on a journey to become a "hip-hop icon."

"It's a sad day as well as a glorious day," said Nas, who starred with DMX in the 1998 film. "That was my brother. We did a great movie together. On that movie, he was just rising up as a star. His first album didn't even come out yet, but he knew his journey was starting."

Eve said she was still having a hard time with DMX's death, remembering him as a "man, a father, a friend." She stood on stage with the Ruff Ryders collective, which helped launch the careers of Grammy winners Eve and Swizz Beatz and relaunch The Lox, formerly signed to Bad Boy Records.

After Eve spoke, Styles P talked about a time when he and DMX were both in the same jail. He said DMX fetched him from his cell and then took him to a part of the jail where he had a band set up along with a string of MCs.

"DMX was the ghetto-est person that ever existed," Styles P said. "What he means to us is indescribable. ... He celebrated us and pushed us. He was one of the most incredible individuals, because from the beginning of his career to the end, he accomplished something no one has ever accomplished. He was in pain the whole way. Whenever you (saw) him, that man was in pain, but he was built out of love. He

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was a beast with the rhymes.”

Jadakiss said DMX was the “happiest he ever been in life” during the last couple years.

Before the service, a massive black big-wheel truck with the words “LONG LIVE DMX” on a side of the vehicle carried DMX’s shiny red casket for more than 15 miles from Yonkers, New York — where the rapper grew up — to the Barclays Center. A plethora of motorcycles trailed the truck during the procession before arriving at the arena, where thousands of people crowded the streets.

Thousands of motorcycle riders surrounded the monster truck, revving up their engines. Others gathered at the arena while some of DMX’s biggest songs from “Where The Hood At” and “Ruff Ryders’ Anthem” blared from the crowd’s speakers.

Cynthia Roberts, a 57-year-old Brooklyn resident, said she has been a fan of DMX since his Ruff Ryders days. She showed up at the arena to pay homage to the rapper, saying she was struck by his rhymes, voice and musicianship.

“He was a true guy. He spoke his truth. He touched my soul,” said Roberts, who was sporting a DMX T-shirt. She called the rapper’s music timeless.

“I tell myself he was put here for that,” she continued. “We all have a job to do, and he did his job.”

DMX, whose birth name is Earl Simmons, died April 9 after suffering a “catastrophic cardiac arrest.” He spent several days on life support after being rushed to a New York hospital from his home April 2.

Programs with images of DMX were handed out to the service’s attendees ahead of the ceremony, which was livestreamed on the rapper’s YouTube channel. The four-page booklet had different images of the rapper, including one with his arms folded with wings and another photo of him standing on stage during a performance.

The 50-year-old Grammy-nominated rapper delivered iconic hip-hop songs such as “Ruff Ryders’ Anthem” and “Party Up (Up in Here).”

DMX arrived on the rap scene around the same time as Jay-Z, Ja Rule and others who dominated the charts and emerged as platinum-selling acts. They were all part of rap crews, too: DMX fronted the Ruff Ryders collective, which had success on the charts and on radio with its “Ryde or Die” compilation albums.

Along with his musical career, DMX paved his way as an actor. He starred in “Belly” and appeared in 2000’s “Romeo Must Die” with Jet Li and Aaliyah. DMX and Aaliyah teamed up for “Come Back in One Piece” on the film’s soundtrack.

DMX’s funeral service will be held at 2:30 p.m. EDT Sunday. It will be broadcast live on BET and the network’s YouTube channel.

Recordings show chaos surrounding Ma’Khia Bryant shooting

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS Report for America/Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A chaotic 911 call. A convulsive 11 seconds of violence ending in the death of an Ohio teen. A historic verdict being broadcast in the police cruiser.

A routine day in a quiet Columbus neighborhood was shattered instantly Tuesday when a police officer fired four shots at 16-year-old Ma’Khia Bryant as she swung a knife at a young woman.

“She was just a kid!” a man shouts within a second of Bryant falling to the ground.

Less than 30 minutes before the man charged with killing George Floyd was pronounced guilty, yet another Black person was dead at the hands of police in the U.S., and a city facing immense pressure to change its law enforcement patterns was once again on the defensive.

While the events leading up to the fateful 911 call that set the shooting in motion remain unclear, hours of official police footage and bystander videos detail how one of the country’s latest deadly police shootings unfolded.

At 4:32 p.m., a male dispatcher receives a call from a female caller. It remains unclear who called 911, but Bryant’s family members told The Associated Press that she herself summoned law enforcement.

“We got these grown girls over here trying to fight us. Trying to stab us. Trying to put their hands on our grandma,” the caller says as the background filled with female voices screaming and arguing. “Get

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here now!"

Officer Nicholas Reardon, who has been on the force since December 2019, was dispatched three minutes later. Two other officers, Eric Channel and Serge Akpalo, followed shortly behind.

"Hey, what's going on?" Reardon asks upon exiting his vehicle at 4:44 p.m. In those next 11 seconds, Bryant was seen charging at 20-year-old Shai-Onta Lana Craig-Watkins with a kitchen knife and then moving on to 22-year-old Tionna Bonner before Reardon yelled, "Get down!" and fired four consecutive shots into Bryant's chest.

The teenager collapsed to the ground.

While officers took turns rendering CPR, several neighbors filled the residential street. Others stood in their driveways and doorways, shaking their heads. Some had heard the gunfire from their backyards while others were in the middle of unloading groceries from their car.

But almost every single witness that day stopped to film the aftermath of an incident they are now all too familiar with: the killing of another Black person in America at the hands of law enforcement.

"No! You ain't shoot my (expletive) baby!" an unidentified Black man screams at the officer. "You shot my (expletive) baby!"

Reardon, who is white, responds, "She had a knife. She just went at her."

"You have no respect for life," another Black man, who lives across the street, can be heard yelling. "No, actually, you have no respect for Black life."

Another neighbor was heard on body camera footage saying, "You ever hear of de-escalating? No, you guys just shoot."

While Reardon faced recrimination at the scene, his split-second decision to shoot was commended by the national Fraternal Order of Police, which called it "an act of heroism, but one with tragic results."

Meanwhile, Akpalo, the only Black officer who responded, began to gather and separate the various witnesses and placed them in police vehicles.

Craig-Watkins, the first woman to be attacked by Bryant, was put in the backseat where dashcam footage showed her weeping for several minutes as dozens of officers from a neighboring department arrived on the scene.

An ambulance arrived at 4:52 p.m. — 20 minutes after the initial 911 call — and left seven minutes later.

Around 5:05 p.m., as Craig-Watkins remained in the backseat, waiting to be interviewed by state investigators, audio of a judge speaking interrupts the flow of dispatches from the police radio.

The exact source of the audio wasn't clear, but a live reading of the guilty verdict in the murder trial of Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis police officer who killed Floyd, is heard streaming through the cruiser.

"Members of the jury, I am now going to ask you individually if these are your true and correct verdicts," Judge Peter Cahill is heard saying on the audio. One by one the jurors begin to say yes. "Juror number 19, are these your true and correct verdicts?"

The audio is suddenly interrupted by Akpalo, who comes in to check on the witness.

"You still doing OK?" he asks.

"Yeah," Craig-Watkins replies wearily as the officer shuts off the audio at 5:07 p.m. — with one police killing aftermath's end colliding with the beginning of another.

Hundreds show up in Nebraska for fight over name Josh

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A fight over the name of Josh drew a crowd from around the country to a Nebraska park Saturday for a heated pool-noodle brawl.

It all started a year ago when pandemic boredom set in and Josh Swain, a 22-year-old college student from Tucson, Arizona, messaged others who shared his name on social media and challenged them to a duel.

Hundreds showed up at Air Park in Lincoln — a location chosen at random — to participate in the silliness.

The festivities started with a "grueling and righteous battle of Rock, Paper, Scissors" between the Josh Swain from Arizona and another Josh Swain from Omaha. KLKN-TV reports that the Arizona student won

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that competition, allowing him to claim the title of the true Josh Swain.

The pool-noodle competition that followed was open to anyone with the first name of Josh. The victor of that competition was a 5-year-old, who was coronated with a Burger King crown.

Swain, the organizer, said he is a little surprised about how the whole thing blew up: "I did not expect people to be as adamant about this as they are right now."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 26, the 116th day of 2021. There are 249 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 26, 1986, an explosion and fire at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine caused radioactive fallout to begin spewing into the atmosphere. (Dozens of people were killed in the immediate aftermath of the disaster while the long-term death toll from radiation poisoning is believed to number in the thousands.)

On this date:

In 1607, English colonists went ashore at present-day Cape Henry, Virginia, on an expedition to establish the first permanent English settlement in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1865, John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln, was surrounded by federal troops near Port Royal, Virginia, and killed.

In 1913, Mary Phagan, a 13-year-old worker at a Georgia pencil factory, was strangled; Leo Frank, the factory superintendent, was convicted of her murder and sentenced to death. (Frank's death sentence was commuted, but he was lynched by an anti-Semitic mob in 1915.)

In 1933, Nazi Germany's infamous secret police, the Gestapo, was created.

In 1945, Marshal Henri Philippe Petain (ahn-REE' fee-LEEP' pay-TAN'), the head of France's Vichy government during World War II, was arrested.

In 1968, the United States exploded beneath the Nevada desert a 1.3 megaton nuclear device called "Boxcar."

In 1977, the legendary nightclub Studio 54 had its opening night in New York.

In 1989, actor-comedian Lucille Ball died at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles at age 77.

In 1994, voting began in South Africa's first all-race elections, resulting in victory for the African National Congress and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president.

In 2000, Vermont Gov. Howard Dean signed the nation's first bill allowing same-sex couples to form civil unions.

In 2009, the United States declared a public health emergency as more possible cases of swine flu surfaced from Canada to New Zealand; officials in Mexico City closed everything from concerts to sports matches to churches in an effort to stem the spread of the virus.

In 2018, Bill Cosby was convicted of drugging and molesting Temple University employee Andrea Constand at his suburban Philadelphia mansion in 2004; it was the first big celebrity trial of the #MeToo era and completed the spectacular downfall of a comedian who broke racial barriers on his way to TV superstardom. (Cosby was later sentenced to three to 10 years in prison.)

Ten years ago: Phoebe Snow, a singer, guitarist and songwriter whose song "Poetry Man" was a defining hit of the 1970s, died in Edison, New Jersey.

Five years ago: Republican Donald Trump roared to victory in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Delaware and Rhode Island while Democrat Hillary Clinton prevailed in four of those states, ceding Rhode Island to Bernie Sanders.

One year ago: Children in Spain were allowed to go outside and play for the first time in six weeks as European countries moved to ease their coronavirus lockdowns and reopen their economies. Italy recorded its lowest 24-hour death toll from the virus since mid-March. China's state-run media said hospitals in

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Wuhan, the original epicenter of the virus, no longer had any COVID-19 patients.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Carol Burnett is 88. R&B singer Maurice Williams is 83. Songwriter-musician Duane Eddy is 83. Singer Bobby Rydell is 79. Rock musician Gary Wright is 78. Actor Nancy Lenehan is 68. Actor Giancarlo Esposito is 63. Rock musician Roger Taylor (Duran Duran) is 61. Actor Joan Chen is 60. Rock musician Chris Mars is 60. Actor-singer Michael Damian is 59. Actor Jet Li (lee) is 58. Actor-comedian Kevin James is 56. Author and former U.S. Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey (TREHTH'-eh-way) is 55. Actor Marianne Jean-Baptiste is 54. Rapper T-Boz (TLC) is 51. Former first lady Melania Trump is 51. Actor Shondrella Avery is 50. Actor Simbi Kali is 50. Country musician Jay DeMarcus (Rascal Flatts) is 50. Rock musician Jose Pasillas (Incubus) is 45. Actor Jason Earles is 44. Actor Leonard Earl Howze is 44. Actor Amin Joseph is 44. Actor Tom Welling is 44. Actor Pablo Schreiber is 43. Actor Nyambi Nyambi is 42. Actor Jordana Brewster is 41. Actor Stana Katic is 41. Actor Marnette Patterson is 41. Actor Channing Tatum is 41. Americana/roots singer-songwriter Lilly Hiatt is 37. Actor Emily Wickersham is 37. Actor Aaron Weeks is 35. Electro pop musician James Sunderland (Frenship) is 34. New York Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge is 29.