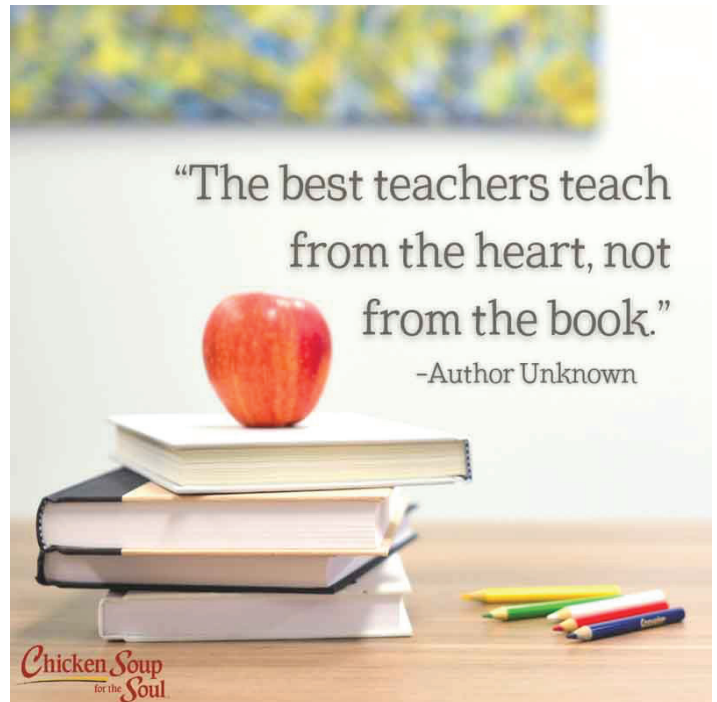


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NOW HIRING

MJ's Sinclair of Groton is looking for someone to work weekends and nights. Stop out and see Jeff for an application.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

**Weber
Landscaping
Greenhouse
IS NOW
OPEN!**



**We have a full greenhouse of
beautiful annuals and vegetables!!**

Open

M-F: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sunday: Noon to 4 p.m.

602 West Third Ave., Groton

LET US HELP YOU BRIGHTEN UP YOUR YARD!



Captain StarEagle to speak at D.A.R.E. Graduation

Capt Haida StarEagle was a former student within the Groton School District from 1992-2003. She graduated from Aberdeen Central High School in 2004. She enlisted in the United States Air Force in 2004 and was selected to receive her commission in 2015 under the Senior Leaders Enlisted Commissioning Program (SLECP). SLECP-O is a commissioning program which enables the top 15 senior Air Force military leaders to handpick 15 enlisted members who have already acquired their degree to directly commission through Officer Training School (OTS). Those selected must be highly talented and exhibit exceptional performance and leadership abilities. She earned her commission from OTS in 2016.

Capt StarEagle is an intelligence operator with more than five years of intelligence experience supporting combat operations. She has participated in the U.S. Global War on Terrorism; IRAQI FREEDOM, FREEDOM's SENTINEL, INHERENT RESOLVE, USSOUTHCOM Joint Task Force – Bravo, and Special Operations Command Central. Capt StarEagle has her Bachelors of Science in Aerospace Studies and is currently attending Penn State to obtain her Masters in Geospatial Intelligence. She is currently the Flight Commander of Directorate Operations Training for the 36th Intelligence Squadron, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA. Her duties include overseeing and providing training guidance, policy, and reporting for 155 personnel with targeting architecture valued at \$1.5M.

Recently, on 12 March 2021, Capt StarEagle was inducted into the United States Space Force as the first Native American female Intelligence Officer. She is set to move to Washington D.C this October to work at the Pentagon for the Space Force S2 Staff.

Pictured is Captain Haida StarEagle, U.S. Space Force, who will be speaking at Groton's DARE graduation on Thursday, May 6th, 10AM at the GHS Arena led by Groton Police Chief Stacy Mayou.

Captain StarEagle was Mike Nehls' DARE student for the 5th grade and JH program when he was the Groton Police Chief. Nehls said, "I am so proud of this young lady! Please come and listen to her inspirational message to our 5th grade DARE students."

D.A.R.E.

GRADUATION

On [GDILIVE.COM](https://gdilive.com)

Thursday, May 6, 2021, 10 a.m..
Groton Area High School Arena

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Marzahn is double winner at Webster, Traphagen wins 800m run

Groton Area picked up three first-place finishes at the Webster Area Track meet held last week. Andrew Marzahn won both the 100m and 200m dash events and Faith Traphagen won the 800m run. Jackson Cogley placed second in the high jump and Kenzie McInerney played second in the triple jump.

Girls 100m Hurdles: 13, Jayla Jones, 21.02.
Boys 300m Hurdles: 6, Jackson Cogley, 49.61.
Girls 300m Hurdles: 14, Jayla Jones, 58.70
Boys 100m Dash: 1, Andrew Marzahn, 11.79.
Girls 100m Dash: 21, Karsyn Jangula, 15.10; 26, Camryn Kurtz, 15.49.
Boys 200m Dash: 1, Andrew Marzahn, 24.46; 19, Tate Larson, 26.90.
Girls 200m Dash: 19, Jayla Jones, 32.14; 26, Camryn Kurtz, 32.94.
Boys 400m Dash: 5, Cole Simon, 57.85; 23, Douglas Heminger, 1:07.77.
Girls 400m Dash: 4, Faith Traphagen, 1:09.64; 14, Anna Fjeldheim, 1:16.00; 16, Camryn Kurtz, 1:18.64.
Boys 800m Run: 17, Douglas Heminger, 2:52.99.
Girls 800m Run: 1, Faith Traphagen, 2:38.30.
Boys 1600m Run: 8, Isaac Smith, 5:13.70; 9, Jacob Lewandowski, 5:16.44.
Boys 500m Relay: 6, Groton (Andrew Marzahn, Tate Larson, Ethan Gengerke, Taylor Diegel), 48.97.
Girls 400m Relay: 4, Groton (Jerica Locke, Aspen Johnson, Karysn Jangula, Laila Roberts), 56.93.
Boys 800m Relay: 4, Groton (Andrew Marzahn, Tate Larson, Ethan Gengerke, Teylor Diegel), 1:41.64.
Girls 800m Relay: 4, Groton (Jerica Locke, Aspen Johnson, Jayla Jones, Laila Roberts), 1:59.29.
Girls 1600m Relay: 3, Groton (Jerica Locke, Rylee Dunker, Laila Roberts, Faith Traphagen), 4:42.03.
Boys 1600m Relay: 5, Groton (Ethan Gengerke, Jacob Lewandowski, Cole Simon, Teylor Diegel), 3:59.74.
Girls 1600 Medley Relay: 4, Groton (Emilie Thurston, Camryn Kurtz, Karsyn Jangula, Mia Crank), 5:21.01.
Boys 1600m Medley Relay: 6, Groton (Ethan Gengerke, Teylor Diegel, Cole Simon, Jacob Lewandowski), 4:12.19.
Girls 3200m Relay: 6, Groton (Rylee Dunker, Mia Crank, Anna Fjeldheim, Faith Traphagen), 12:10.21.
Boys High Jump: 2, Jackson Cogley, 5-3.
Girls High Jump: 8, Kenzie McInerney, 4-5.
Boys Long Jump: 16, Jackson Cogley, 16-4.5; 22, Tate Larson, 15-1.75; Paxton Bonn, 12-11.
Girls Long Jump: 3, Kenzie McInerney, 15-6; 9, Aspen Johnson, 14-03; 19, Emilie Thurston, 12-8.50.
Boys Triple Jump: 12, Jackson Cogley, 34-2.5.
Girls Triple Jump: 2, Kenzie McInerney, 32-9; 11, Aspen Johnson, 28-1.
Boys Discus: 7, Caleb Furney, 104-9; 26, Caleb Hanten, 83-2; 28, Holden Sippel, 81-1.
Girls Discus: 5, Chloe Daly, 86-0; 6, Maddie Bjerke, 84-4; 20, Faith Fliehs, 70-10.
Boys Shot Put: 18, Caleb Furney, 34-7.5; 22, Kaleb Antonsen, 32-0.75; 23, Seth Johnson, 31-5.75.
Girls Shot Put: 5, Maddie Bjerke, 30-5.5; 7, Chloe Daly, 29-0; 11, Faith Fliehs, 26-10.

Guthmiller places ninth at Redfield Golf Meet

Two Groton Area golfers competed in the Redfield Tournament held last week. Carly Guthmiller placed ninth with a score of 116, shooting a 55 in the front nine and an 61 in the back nine. Emma Schinkel scored a 128 with scores of 66 and 62.

In the junior varsity division, Shaylee Peterson shot a 118 with scores of 53 and 65. Trinity Smith shot a 127 with scores of 63 and 64. Hailey Monson shot a 145 with scores of 75 and 70.

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Upcoming Events

Tuesday, May 4

1 p.m.: Track: Varsity at Milbank

7 p.m.: Elementary Spring Concert, GHS Gym

Wednesday, May 5

Noon: Groton Chamber Meeting at Groton Community Center

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting at New City Hall (120 N Main)

Thursday, May 6

Elementary Track and Field Day

10 a.m.: 5th Grade DARE Graduation, GHS Arena

10:30 a.m.: Funeral Service for Dolores Baily at SEAS Church

7 p.m.: High School Spring Concert & Awards Night

Friday, May 7

Last Day of School

3 p.m.: Track: Varsity at Sisseton

Monday, May 10

4 p.m.: Track: 7th/8th at Aberdeen Roncalli (Swisher Field)

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Thursday, May 13

11 a.m.: Track: Northeast Conference Meet in Groton

12:30 p.m.: Scholarship Meet and Greet, GHS Library

Friday, May 14

3:30 p.m.: Track: 7th/8th @ Groton

Sunday, May 16

2 p.m.: GHS Graduation, GHS Arena

Monday, May 17

10 a.m.: Track: 7th/8th Northeast Conference Track Meet at Swisher Field

Thursday, May 20

Noon: Region 1A Track Meet at Sisseton

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SPRING CONCERT**

On GDILIVE.COM

Tuesday, May 4, 2021, 7:00 p.m.
Groton Area High School Gym

**HIGH SCHOOL
SPRING CONCERT**

On GDILIVE.COM

Thursday, May 6, 2021, 7:00 p.m.
Groton Area High School Gym

SD FFA Members Earn National Scholarships

There is a need to fill the pipeline of leaders in the agriculture industry, and industry is stepping up to help students meet that need. In 2020, the National FFA awarded \$55,250 in scholarships, to 21 SD FFA members, through the National FFA Scholarship program. Scholarships are sponsored by businesses and individuals through the National FFA Foundation and are given for a wide variety of experiences, career goals and higher education plans. These students devoted much time and effort to FFA involvement, work experience, supervised agricultural experience (SAE), community service, leadership skills and academics, making them likely future leaders in agriculture. Groton Recipients are:

Tessa Erdmann, Groton FFA, America's Farmers Grow Ag Leaders Scholarship Program, \$1,500.00
Tessa Erdmann, Groton FFA, BNSF Railway Foundation Scholarship, \$1,250.00

Columbia's Americanism Poetry Winners



Neely Althoff - Columbia's 1st place winner of this year's Americanism poetry contest with the theme: Always Serving Veterans Not Self

Neely also received 1st place in the District 4 Class II contest!

Both Neely and Halee were awarded \$10 for their 1st place finish (for Columbia.) (Courtesy Photo)



Halee Harder - Columbia's 1st place winner of this year's Americanism poetry contest with the theme: Always Serving Veterans Not Self

Halee also received 2nd place in the District 4 Class IV contest! (Courtesy Photo)

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#435 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're going to try something new this week—backing off from the daily Updates. There is less and less news and not so much day-to-day change in the trajectory of this thing, so I figure this is a good time to step back a little and reclaim some of my time for other things. I think I'll drop this post today and then check back in on Thursday to pick up anything new. If it turns out I'm wrong and there are all kinds of big happenings, I'll do something sooner—maybe a very brief bit on just that development, but I'm thinking that's not too likely.

Here's part of why I'm choosing now to slow down (besides exhaustion): Today our average daily new cases and average daily deaths are at one-fifth their peaks in January. Our seven-day deaths average has been below 1000 every day for over three weeks—lowest since last July. And although we've been on a downturn before and then faced an even bigger wave next, I don't think that's going to happen again here. Even with new variants and the occasional flare-up here and there around the country, I'm thinking we're on our way out of this. The situation worldwide, especially in South Asia and in South America remains worrisome, in fact tragic, but it appears vaccination and mitigation are bringing us through the worst of this here if we keep an eye on new developments in the virus itself and don't go all stupid. Another big reason for stepping back is that it's been a very long time since I went 24 hours without thinking or typing the word, death. It's time; I trust you'll understand.

Today, there were 49,950 new cases reported. That's considerably above yesterday, but we were suspicious last night that this might just be an artifact of weekend reporting—looks like that was probably it. We are now up to 32,498,673 cases, which is 0.2% more than yesterday's total. Average hospitalizations are down to 41,526. And total deaths have grown to 577,378, which is 0.1% more than yesterday. There were 740 deaths reported today.

On May 3, 2020, one year ago today, we had 1,164,300 cases and 67,772 deaths. Worldwide, we were up to 3.4 million cases and over 246,000 deaths. More meat packing plants were having outbreaks, but overall, things were looking much better in the US. We were entering a lull that hit its low point a little over a month later. Of course, the summer of ugly followed and that prior peak was lower than our current rate of transmissions; how we see these things really depends on what our experience has been: One year ago's 21,000 daily new cases would look pretty good to us today—it'll look good again, soon, I hope.

The big news today is that an FDA decision is expected this week or early next week on Pfizer's request for an extension of its emergency use authorization (EUA) for its vaccine to ages 12 to 15. Given the excellent safety profile in this age group, the fact that the vaccine is well-tolerated by children, and its 100 percent (!) efficacy rate in this group, no one expects a negative decision. After the FDA's finished with it, there will be a meeting of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, likely some labeling stuff and administration guidelines, before the kids can line up; but it's coming very soon—likely within days of the FDA decision. What's more, there is some expectation the EUA will also be extended to even younger children by fall; this date has moved up considerably from what was anticipated to be more like early next year. We are on track to have a goodly supply of this vaccine by the end of July, so we should have enough to go around for the willing, especially if we set aside doses of this particular vaccine for children as long as it's the only one they may receive. If we get good uptake, that could transform the upcoming school year. With teachers and school staff protected and transmission reduced, depending on vaccine uptake, the quarantines and closures and remote classes could become a thing of the past. Wouldn't that be great?

The European Union is currently entertaining a proposal to admit travelers from outside the Union as long as they are fully vaccinated. It's been about a year since they enacted a ban on all nonessential travel from most countries (including this one, which was a disaster at the time); travelers are subject to testing and quarantine requirements, depending on their point of origin. Individual countries would be permitted to admit the unvaccinated, but they could require testing or quarantine as they see fit.

The EU's also put together another huge package of equipment and supplies to send to India—oxygen,

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oxygen concentrators and generators, ventilators, and medications. Oxygen supplies are in the most critical shortage, and it appears there are a lot of those things on their way. They'd sent a large amount last week too. It is expected that India will continue to see high mortality throughout this month; we can hope new case numbers start tapering off soon; if so, declines in deaths will follow. India passed Mexico on the world's deaths leader board, now in third place behind the US and Brazil. Much as I hate us being a world leader in death, I most sincerely hope they don't catch us. Enough is enough.

Well, those dances we talked about in Liverpool happened Friday and Saturday nights. I looked at the photos, and it was almost shocking to see that many—around 3000—people jammed in together, dancing and singing and waving their hands—no masks. The tagline in the New York Times called it "clubbing for science" because researchers hope to gather information about infection rates in order to assess just what guidelines need to look like when things really open up. Since the UK is planning to open these sorts of things within a month or a bit more, this information is highly relevant to the situation. I'll watch for data and analysis on the aftermath.

The primary rule for this experiment is that a test was required of everyone; one of the questions needing resolution is whether people will stand for that. Looks like many are willing if it means they can party. The test results were uploaded and linked to each ticket so that they could be checked at the door. The movement of people inside was monitored, and sensors were used to check carbon dioxide levels, which are a good indication of the sufficiency of ventilation. Since carbon dioxide exhaled by people tends to build up in a poorly ventilated space, carbon dioxide measurements can be used as proxy for quality of ventilation. Since the UK intends to open bars and nightclubs in June, researchers hope the information gathered this weekend will help public health authorities to reach better decisions.

We've now administered 246,780,203 doses of vaccine in the US out of 312,509,575 delivered. We have over 105.5 million fully vaccinated, more than 40 percent of adults and almost 70 percent of senior citizens. We know from Israel's experience that when you get 50 to 55 percent of the population vaccinated, case numbers just bottom out—not herd immunity, something I am thinking we'll likely never see here—a sad subject for a future conversation—but something that enables many of us to return to a more normal sort of life. We olds and some smaller number of the youngs will continue to die from this virus, but the larger share of the population will probably be fine. And that's probably going to have to be good enough.

Here's how I closed my Update a year ago today. I've been thinking about this sort of thing again just lately, so it feels apropos: "In the meantime, I'll mention that I've been thinking globally lately. One of the things I've been thinking about is the fact that there are only so many oxygen atoms on this planet. They keep getting recycled: Creatures inhale them, use them in their metabolism and excrete them as part of some other compound, which eventually breaks down so that other creatures can inhale them. The oxygen you just drew into your lungs this minute may have once graced the lungs of Muhammad, or Charlemagne, or Abraham Lincoln. Or Atilla the Hun. Hitler. Or Christ. I'll remind you that, in ways chemical and spiritual, we are all interconnected and that the loss of any one of us is an irreplaceable loss. The woman who died in New York today and the man who died in Mississippi yesterday are all part of us, of our society, of our humanity. They may have shared oxygen atoms with us at some point. While we each will face our time to die, seeing a life unnecessarily cut short is always tragic because each of us, however lowly in the scheme of things, has something of value to offer the rest of us and is a part of the rest of us; and once that person is gone, we all suffer an irremediable loss. Please look for opportunities to notice people who need you and to find a way to meet some part of that need. A word, attention, just acknowledging someone's presence in the world can be life-changing for them—and for you. Go forth and do good while there is still good to be done."

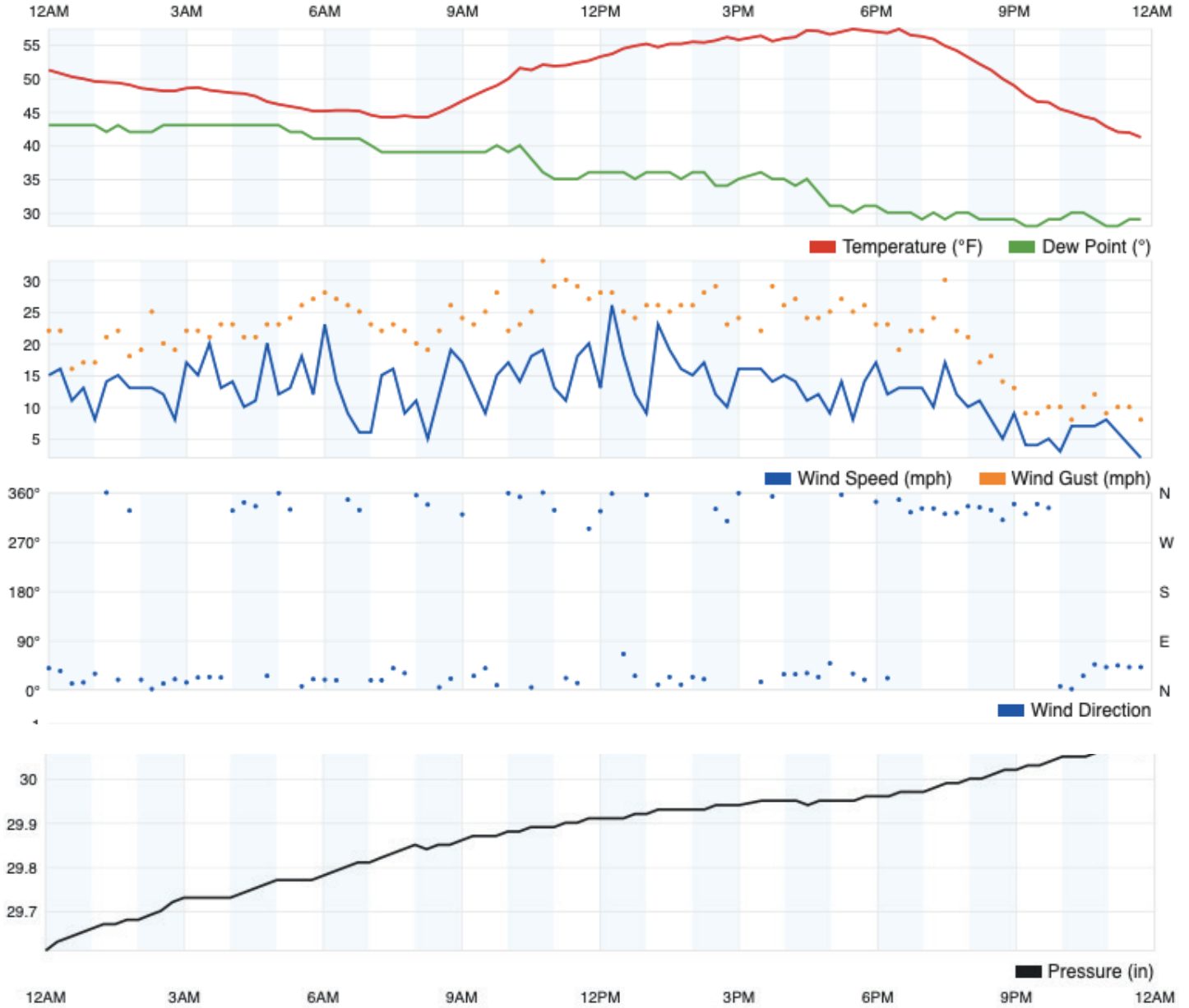
And with this, the streak ends at 421 days: March 9, 2020, to May 3, 2021.

Be well. We'll talk on Thursday.

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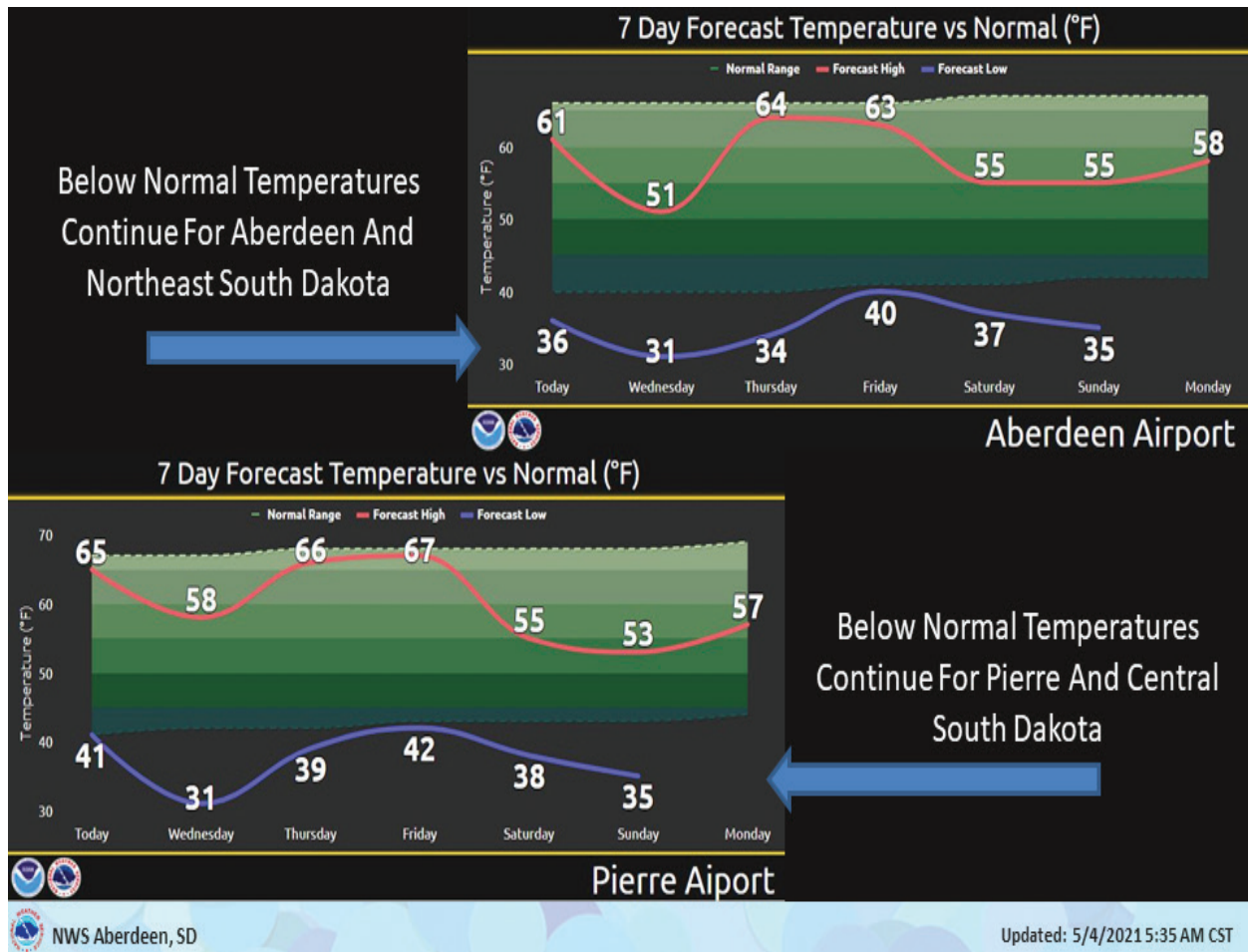
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Sunny	Partly Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Showers Likely	Chance Showers then Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 60 °F	Low: 36 °F	High: 50 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 64 °F



The seven day forecast will consist of temperatures cooler than normal, with some chances for precipitation. One chance for rain comes in the middle of the week on Wednesday, while another chance is forecast as we head into the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

May 4, 1964: A tornado touched down southwest of Kadoka causing \$25,000 in damage.

1774: Snow was reported in the Williamsburg Gazette to have fallen in Dumfries, Virginia. George Washington's weather diary logged at Mount Vernon that it was a cold day with spits of snow and a hard wind from the northwest. Thomas Jefferson near Charlottesville recorded that the Blue Ridge Mountains was covered with snow. The late snow and frost killed most of the fruit crop in the northern part of the state. It also snowed north across Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York.

1922: The first of two tornadoes that formed over Austin, Texas was called the "western cloud." It was more visible, but caused much less damage than the "eastern cloud."

2003: The week of May 4th through the 10th was one of the busiest weeks for tornadoes in U.S. history. On this date through the 5th, the deadliest outbreak of severe weather since May 1999 produced 84 tornadoes, large hail and damaging winds across eight states. Several thunderstorms became tornadic with a total of five distinct tornado touchdowns in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Two of the tornadoes received a rating of F4, two a rating of F2, and the last was rated an F1. Total damage exceeded 144 million dollars. Several of the tornadoes tracked long distances ranging from 15 to 80 miles. More than 3000 homes and businesses were destroyed. At least 38 people were killed in Kansas, Missouri, and Tennessee.

2007: A devastating EF5 twister demolishes nearly every structure in Greensburg around 9:30 pm (CDT) and kills ten. The mammoth wedge tornado cuts a swath 1.7 miles (2.7 km) wide and 22 miles (35 km) long across the Kansas landscape. It is the worst single tornado to touch down in the US in eight years.

1812 - A storm produced snow from Philadelphia to Maine. A foot of snow fell near Keene NH, and in Massachusetts, nine inches fell at Waltham, located near Boston. (David Ludlum)

1917 - A late season snowstorm in northwest Texas produced up to eight inches of snow in Potter County and Armstrong County. (David Ludlum)

1977 - A tornado 500 yards in width struck Pleasant Hill, MO, severely damaging the high school and grade school. Only minor injuries were reported among the more than 1000 teachers and students due to excellent warnings and prior tornado drills. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the southeastern U.S., with South Carolina hardest hit. Thunderstorm winds toppled trees seventy feet high in Spartanburg County SC, and knocked homes off their foundations near Bishopville SC. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail in North Carolina, but brought welcome rains to much of the rest of the eastern U.S. Residents of New England finally saw sunshine after about a week of clouds and rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the Southern Plains Region and the Lower Mississippi Valley. Thunderstorms spawned fifteen tornadoes, and there were 340 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Hail three inches in diameter, and 9.39 inches of rain, resulted in more than 130 million dollars damage at Monroe LA. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 100 mph at Epps LA and Fort Worth TX. A thunderstorm north of Mineral Wells TX produced high winds which unroofed a nightclub, turning it into a "topless club." (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Lower Ohio Valley to Virginia and the Carolinas. A tornado at Augusta Springs VA killed two people and injured ten others, and another tornado caused 1.7 million dollars damage at Colonial Heights VA. Temperatures soared into the 90s in northern California. The high of 98 degrees in downtown Sacramento was their hottest reading of record for so early in the season. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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THEREFORE...

Few of us ever stop to think about the fact that the continents on planet Earth are afloat. Geologists have discovered that the continents continue to change their shape and form by moving "plates." Volcanoes are the earth's "heating and air-conditioning vents" that are arranged around the plates that allow them to "exhale" when the heat and pressure build. We live on a dynamic planet that constantly expands and contracts, moves and reshapes itself.

God, our Creator, did not "begin" something and then turn it "loose" to go its own way. The universe, in all its many intricacies, reflects purpose and planning, design and direction. If, as the geologists have proven, the earth is moving and changing and not in a fixed position, where can we find security and establish a place where we will be safe from all the turbulence and "earthquakes" we face in life?

The Word of God. Scripture always has the answer to life's essential questions and concerns. Psalm 46 begins with the statement that "God is our refuge, our strength, and our help." That verse is followed by another statement that gives us the assurance that "we need not fear, though the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea!" In these two verses, we are given God's answer for life's never-ending uncertainties. When we face times of insecurity and instability "we do not need to fear" because our God Who created it all is in all and working out His plan for our lives.

The essential fact, however, is that we must have faith and faithfulness of God. We must have unquestioning faith in our God Who created and now sustains the universe and everything and everyone in it and on it and hope in Him who does all things well.

Prayer: Grant us Your peace and the assurances that come from Your faithfulness. May we recognize our fears that are unfounded and trust in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: We need not fear, though the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Psalm 46:2

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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

US appeals court considers Idaho transgender athletes ban

By KEITH RIDLER Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A U.S. appeals court on Monday gave little indication of how it might rule on the constitutionality of the first law in the nation banning transgender women and girls from playing on women's sports teams.

The three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard virtual arguments in the case that could have far-ranging consequences as more states follow conservative Idaho's lead.

Idaho passed its law last year, and more than 20 states have considered such proposals this year. Bans have been enacted in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and West Virginia. Florida lawmakers passed a bill, and South Dakota's governor issued an executive order.

On Monday, conservative Republican lawmakers in Kansas failed to override Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's veto of a proposed ban on transgender athletes in girls' and women's school sports.

The judges on Monday focused at one point on whether the case was still relevant because one of the plaintiffs, Lindsay Hecox, had dropped out of Boise State University after failing to qualify for the women's cross country team. Her attorney said Hecox planned to return in the fall and try out for the team again.

Judges also questioned whether the other plaintiff, who feared invasive tests to prove her gender that are outlined in the law, had standing to sue because she is not transgender and her gender identity had not been challenged.

It's possible the court could rule the case is no longer relevant and dismiss it without ruling on its merits.

Roger Brooks, an attorney with a Christian conservative group defending the Idaho law, said he hoped that would not happen because the case needed a definitive ruling.

"This is a situation that is live and is going to be ongoing," he said at a news conference after the arguments.

Supporters say such laws are needed because transgender female athletes have physical advantages. Opponents say the laws are discriminatory and, in Idaho, an invasion of privacy because of tests required should an athlete's gender be challenged.

Lawmakers in Idaho also have argued that allowing transgender athletes on girls' and women's teams would negate nearly 50 years of progress women have made since the 1972 federal legislation credited with opening up sports to female athletes.

But those opposed to the ban have cited the same Title IX federal civil rights law that prohibits sex-based discrimination.

"Ultimately, this is (an Idaho) law that harms all women and girls," said Chase Strangio, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, which is seeking to stop the law from taking effect.

The law prohibits transgender students who identify as female from playing on female teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities.

It does not apply to men's teams, which prompted one judge to ask whether discrimination existed.

"They're not barred," Judge Andrew Kleinfeld said. "Anybody can play on the boys' team whether they're transgender or not."

The ACLU and Legal Voice women's rights group sued last year on behalf of Hecox and an unnamed Boise-area high school student who is cisgender, meaning her gender identity matches the one she was assigned at birth.

The lawsuit contends the law violates the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause because it is discriminatory and the Fourth Amendment's protections against invasion of privacy because of tests required should an athlete's gender be challenged.

A federal judge in Idaho temporarily blocked the law from taking effect last year. Idaho and the conservative Christian group that intervened, Alliance Defending Freedom, appealed.

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The group is representing Madison Kenyon of Johnston, Colorado, and Mary Marshall of Twin Falls, Idaho, who run track and cross country on scholarships at Idaho State University and are concerned they could have to unfairly compete against transgender athletes.

The appeals court didn't indicate when it might issue a ruling.

South Dakota governor expecting many tourists this summer

MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MONUMENT, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem on Monday told South Dakota's tourism industry to gear up for a busy summer, as she expects an influx of visitors itching to travel after more than a year of dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

During an event at Mount Rushmore National Memorial, where she is suing to hold another fireworks display this summer, the Republican said there are many signs that tourism — the state's second-largest industry — will make a big rebound.

"The tourism industry is so important to our entire state," Noem said, pointing to the tax revenue it brings in and the jobs it sustains.

Tourism spending dropped by 18% in 2020, but Noem said the state still welcomed ample visitors. She drew widespread attention — and criticism — for forgoing virus restrictions and hosting a fireworks display at Mount Rushmore that featured former President Donald Trump. She also welcomed people to the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, where hundreds contracted COVID-19 and brought it back to more than two dozen states.

At an event later Monday in Sioux Falls, Noem downplayed the impact of the motorcycle rally, saying "less than a couple handfuls of cases were traced" to it. But a study from the Infectious Diseases Society of America published last week found that health officials reported 463 people who tested positive for COVID-19 after attending the rally. Another 186 people who were close contacts of rally-goers were also infected. The researchers, who surveyed public health departments in all 50 states and several large metro areas, found that 17 people were hospitalized with COVID-19 after attending the rally, and one died.

Meanwhile, the governor has initiated a legal battle with President Joe Biden's administration over holding fireworks at the monument to celebrate Independence Day once again this year. She successfully pushed last year for a revival of the pyrotechnic display after a decade-long hiatus, but the National Park Service denied the state's application to hold the event again this summer due to safety concerns and objections from local Native American tribes.

Noem said she filed the lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Interior because the permit denial appeared to be "punitive or political." Noem's tourism secretary, Jim Hagen, called the 2020 event "an economic lifeline" to the tourism industry in a court filing last week and argued that the proposed fireworks show this year would "provide critical income during a crucial" period for the state economy.

But the pyrotechnic display last year drew concerns over the wildfire danger it posed, and much of the state is already facing a drought this year. The National Park Service closed Mount Rushmore for several days in March as firefighters battled blazes within the park.

However, with or without fireworks, there are signs that people will be lining up at tourist attractions such as Mount Rushmore, Wall Drug and Badlands National Park. Web traffic to the state's tourism site, rental car bookings, and applications for hunting and fishing licenses are all up, according to Noem and Hagen.

Noem said her biggest concern about the upcoming tourism season is finding enough people to work in the industry, which offers mostly temporary, low-paying jobs. She promoted an initiative to match job-seekers with tourism businesses through the state's job-listing website.

"Telling our story worked," Noem said.

Corps: Dakota Access oil pipeline to stay open during review

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — The Biden administration on Monday reiterated that the Dakota Access oil pipeline should continue to operate while the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducts an extensive environmental

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review, although the Corps said again that it could change its mind.

The Standing Rock Sioux and other tribes have filed for an injunction asking U.S. District Judge James Boasberg to shut down the pipeline while the Corps conducts a second review, expected to be completed by March 2022. The tribes and environmental groups, encouraged by some of Biden's moves on climate change and fossil fuels, were hoping he would step in and shut down the pipeline north of the reservation that straddles the Dakotas border.

Instead, the Corps in an update ordered by the judge repeated its stance from last month's hearing that the shutdown issue remains in Boasberg's lap.

"It is possible that in the EIS process the Corps would find new information," the document stated, referring to the environmental impact statement, "but to date the Corps is not aware of information that would cause it to evaluate the injunction factors differently than in its previous filing."

Earthjustice attorney Jan Hasselman, who represents Standing Rock, reacted by citing Biden's discussion with world leaders on addressing climate change and the president's promise to be more sensitive to concerns by Indigenous leaders and tribal governments.

"Given all this, it's baffling that when it comes to the Dakota Access pipeline, Biden's Army Corps is standing in the way of justice for Standing Rock by opposing a court order to shut down this infrastructure while environmental and safety consequences are fully evaluated," Hasselman said.

Attorneys for the pipeline's Texas-based owner, Energy Transfer, have argued that shuttering the pipeline would be devastating financially to several entities, including North Dakota, and the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation tribe. Standing Rock said preventing those economic losses should not come at the expense of other tribes, especially when Boasberg's decision to strip the project of a key federal permit has been supported by the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Standing Rock, which draws its water from the Missouri River, says it fears pollution. The company says the pipeline is safe.

Boasberg ordered further environmental study after determining the Corps had not adequately considered how an oil spill under the Missouri River might affect Standing Rock's fishing and hunting rights, among other things. A federal panel later upheld the judge's ruling, but did not go as far as shutting down the pipeline.

Midwest Economy: April state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for April:

Arkansas: The overall index for Arkansas decreased to 73.9 from 75.0 in March. Components from the survey were: new orders at 80.6, production or sales at 77.1, delivery lead time at 84.8, inventories at 70.2, and employment at 56.9. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Arkansas manufacturing employment is higher by 900 jobs, or 0.6%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 2.6% higher," Goss said.

Iowa: The state's overall index rose to 67.9 from March's 66.5. Components were: new orders at 79.7, production, or sales, at 76.1, delivery lead time at 80.9, employment at 54.6, and inventories at 59.9. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Iowa manufacturing employment is down 4,300 jobs, or 1.9%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 2.1% lower," Goss said.

Kansas: The overall index climbed to 75.0 from March's 67.3. Components were: new orders at 80.9, production or sales at 77.5, delivery lead time at 85.6, employment at 57.6, and inventories at 73.2. "Compared

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to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Kansas manufacturing employment is down 12,400 jobs, or 7.3%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 1.1% higher," Goss said.

Minnesota: The April index rocketed to 79.7 from 59.8 in March. Components were: new orders at 82.0, production or sales at 78.8, delivery lead time at 90.8, inventories at 86.1, and employment at 60.6. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Minnesota manufacturing employment is down 13,600 jobs, or 4.2%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 1.7% higher," Goss said.

Missouri: The April index rose to 73.2 from 70.5 in March. Components were: new orders at 80.4, production or sales at 76.9, delivery lead time at 84.0, inventories at 68.2, and employment at 56.5. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Missouri manufacturing employment is down 6,800 jobs, or 2.5%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 0.7% higher," Goss said.

Nebraska: The April climbed to 76.8 from 72.0 in March. Components of the index were: new orders at 81.3, production or sales at 78.0, delivery lead time at 87.7, inventories at 78.1, and employment at 58.7. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nebraska manufacturing employment is lower by 100 jobs, or 0.1%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 1.0% higher," Goss said.

North Dakota: The overall index jumped to 74.3 from 69.3 in March. Components were: new orders at 83.3, production or sales at 80.3, delivery lead time at 82.1, employment at 63.8, and inventories at 62.3. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, North Dakota manufacturing employment is down 1,200 jobs, or 4.5%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 3.7% higher," Goss said.

Oklahoma: The Oklahoma index expanded to 70.9 from 63.0 in March. Components were: new orders at 79.8, production or sales at 76.3, delivery lead time at 81.6, inventories at 61.9, and employment at 55.0. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oklahoma manufacturing employment is down 9,200 jobs, or 6.6%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 4.3% higher," Goss said.

South Dakota: The state's overall index climbed to 74.9 from 69.4 in March. Components were: new orders at 80.8, production or sales at 77.4, delivery lead time at 72.9, inventories at 72.9, and employment at 57.5. "Compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, South Dakota manufacturing employment is down 1,100 jobs, or 2.5%, while average hourly manufacturing wages are 2.9% higher," Goss said.

Monthly Midwest economy survey index soars to all-time high

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The economy in nine Midwest and Plains states is roaring back to life in the wake of a devastating global pandemic, according to a new monthly survey of business leaders and managers, with the survey's overall index soaring to its highest reading since it began almost three decades ago.

The Creighton University Mid-America Business Conditions for April released Monday came in at 73.9 from March's 68.9.

Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests recession.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey, said the region has regained more than half the 106,000 manufacturing jobs lost to the pandemic in April 2020. Even so, the regional employment index dropped to 57.2 in April from 60.0 in March.

"More than one of five, or 22%, of supply managers named finding and hiring qualified workers as the greatest 2021 challenge to their firm," Goss said.

Goss also warned of supply chain disruptions and signs of growing inflation, with the survey's wholesale inflation gauge in April surging to a record high 96.2, up from March's 94.0. More than nine out of 10 supply managers reported supply bottlenecks, with 40% indicating that the delays were significant.

Despite concerns over supply disruptions and inflation, the survey's confidence index, which looks ahead six months, rose to 64.8 from March's 58.0.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Neurosurgeon, 2 companies settle kickback allegations

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A former Sanford Health neurosurgeon and two medical device distributorships that he owns will pay \$4.4 million to settle allegations that they defrauded the federal government through illegal kickback schemes, the U.S. Department of Justice said Monday.

The settlement resolves allegations that over the course of nearly a decade, Wilson Asfora and his distributorships, Medical Designs and Sicage, knowingly and willfully engaged in three kickback schemes to allow Asfora to profit from his use of over a dozen devices in his medical procedures.

Medical Designs and Sicage also agreed to pay a \$100,000 penalty for failing to report Asfora's ownership interests in the two companies, as required by federal law.

Asfora, Medical Designs and Sicage will be barred from participating in federal health care programs, including Medicare, for a period of six years.

"Physicians who accept kickbacks and perform unnecessary surgeries put their patients at risk and increase healthcare costs for everyone," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Brian M. Boynton said. "We will continue to hold physicians and medical device companies accountable for unlawful financial arrangements that undermine the integrity of federal healthcare programs."

The agreement is the latest settlement involving Asfora. Sanford Health had already agreed to pay \$20 million to settle its role in the kickback scheme. And, last year medical device giant Medtronic agreed to pay \$9.2 million for its role in paying kickbacks to Asfora through the restaurant Carnaval Brazilian Grill, which Asfora and his wife owned.

Munitions being detonated as evidence in pipeline lawsuit

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Munitions were expected to be detonated Monday as attorneys attempt to gather evidence in a federal lawsuit by a Dakota Access pipeline protester who was injured in a skirmish with law enforcement officers during the height of demonstrations against the pipeline.

Sophia Wilansky claims police targeted her with a concussion grenade as law enforcement tried to prevent protesters from breaching a blocked highway bridge near their main encampment in November 2016 in south central North Dakota. Demonstrators were turned back by officers who used tear gas among other things.

Wilansky suffered a left arm injury in an explosion and had multiple surgeries to save her limb. Protesters said her injury was caused by a flash-bang device thrown by officers. Law enforcement maintains it was caused by a propane canister that protesters had rigged to explode.

Wilansky, who was 21 at the time, is suing Morton County and the officers who were at the scene.

Morton County has obtained up to five munitions that will be deployed in the presence of an expert. Wilansky's attorneys sought "fully functional examples of every type of munition, armament, less-lethal weapon, and crowd-control device" that law enforcement agents carried or used during the Backwater Bridge confrontation, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

That encounter was part of the prolonged protest against the pipeline in 2016 and 2017, during which 750 people were arrested. Opponents fear an oil leak could pollute the Missouri River, but the developer, Energy Transfer, maintains the pipeline is safe.

Wilansky is seeking millions of dollars in damages in her lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Bismarck in November 2018 alleging excessive force, assault, negligence, emotional distress and defamation. Federal Judge Daniel Traynor last October dismissed several claims including defamation but allowed numerous others to proceed.

The plaintiffs said criminal activity was to blame for Wilansky's injury, and that officers did not violate her rights.

American Indian tribes led by the Standing Rock Sioux are still fighting in court to try to get the pipeline shut down four years after it became operational.

Deaths at sea highlight failings in Europe migration policy

By RENATA BRITO and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — As the waves pounded the gray rubber boat carrying more than 100 Africans hoping to reach Europe from Libya, those aboard dialed the number for migrants in distress frantically. In the series of calls to the Alarm Phone hotline, passengers explained that the dinghy had run out of fuel while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea and was quickly filling up with water and panic.

On the other end of the line, activists tried to keep the migrants calm as they relayed the boat's GPS coordinates repeatedly to Italian, Maltese and Libyan authorities and later to Frontex, the European Union's border and coast guard agency, hoping authorities would launch a rescue operation as required under international maritime law.

An analysis of logs and emails from Alarm Phone and the NGO SOS Méditerranée as well as reports by the Libyan coast guard show that the national authorities contacted responded slowly, insufficiently or not at all to the pleas for help. In all, approximately 130 people are believed to have died between April 21 and April 22 as they waited in vain for someone to save them, roughly 45 kilometers (30 miles) from the Libyan coast.

It was the deadliest wreck so far this year in the Mediterranean Sea, where more than 20,000 migrants or asylum seekers have perished since 2014, and has renewed accusations that European countries are failing to help migrant boats in trouble.

Instead, human rights groups, the U.N.'s migration and refugee agencies and international law experts say European countries too often ignore their international obligations to rescue migrants at sea and outsource operations to the Libyan coast guard despite its limited capacity, reports of its ties to human traffickers, and the fact that those intercepted, including children, are placed in squalid, overcrowded detention centers where they face abuse, torture, rape and even death.

European nations, of course, routinely rescue migrants in distress. Since the April 21 wreck alone, the Italian coast guard and navy have rescued at least 149 people near its coasts. Spanish authorities, meanwhile, deployed military planes and helicopters as well as rescue ships to airlift three people and recover the bodies of 24 who had died in a wreck April 26 nearly 500 kilometers (310 miles) from the country's Canary Islands.

Still, 2021 is shaping up to be particularly deadly. According to the International Organization for Migration's Missing Migrants project, at least 612 people are known to have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean so far this year. That's significantly higher than during the same time period last year, when 278 died or disappeared.

No rescue came April 21. A day later, merchant vessels sailing in the area and a humanitarian rescue ship, the Ocean Viking, found the boat's wreckage and reported seeing at least 10 bodies. One of the deceased was hunched over a ring buoy, face in the water.

"I was supposed to be one of the drowned," 27-year-old Mutawakel Ali said recently from Libya. He and five other Sudanese missed the boat's departure on April 20 from al-Khums by a few minutes because they had stopped on their way to the coast to break their daily Ramadan fast.

But his 23-year-old cousin Mubarak Jaber did not escape. Jaber, the oldest of seven brothers, had quit his economics studies at university and headed for Libya to look for a job a year and a half earlier. He worked in construction, sending money back to his relatives struggling in Sudan's deteriorating economic crisis.

But it still wasn't enough, so he contacted smugglers and boarded the migrant boat.

The rescue and coordination centers of Libya, Italy, Malta were first alerted by Alarm Phone that the boat needed help at 9:52 a.m. Central European Summer Time the next day, according to emails seen by The Associated Press.

Alarm Phone and SOS Méditerranée say they never received any response from Maltese authorities. The

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Armed Forces of Malta, responsible for maritime search-and-rescue operations, did not respond to several requests for comment from the AP.

It was only at 2:11 p.m., more than four hours later, that Alarm Phone received a response from Italian authorities, asking the activists to inform the "competent authorities" without specifying who those were.

Alarm Phone was only able to reach a Libyan officer five hours after the first alert, at 2:44 p.m. They were told that the Libyan coast guard was indeed searching for three boats in the area — but with only one vessel, the Ubari.

A day after the wreck, Libyan coast guard spokesperson Masoud Ibrahim Masoud told the AP that his agency had found 106 migrants and two bodies from two other boats. Due to worsening weather and the poor health of those already found, they returned to port before locating the third boat, he said, adding that the support received from the EU was insufficient.

Frontex, which only patrols the Mediterranean by air, said it deployed two planes after being requested to do so by the Italians, one on April 21 that spotted the boat in distress and another one on April 22.

"Frontex did exactly what it had to do and above and beyond," the agency's spokesman, Chris Borowski, told the AP on April 24. "We alerted national rescue centers, we issued a mayday call to any vessel in the area to come to the rescue, and we stayed there as long as we could."

But that mayday message was only sent at 7:15 p.m. according to SOS Méditerranée, more than nine hours after Italian, Maltese and Libyan authorities were first alerted. It is unclear why those three rescue and coordination centers did not issue an alert to vessels in the region sooner.

Frontex blamed the deaths on smugglers and deteriorating weather. On the night of April 21, waves reached 2 to 3 meters (6 1/2 to 10 feet) high.

Questioned by the AP about its role, the Italian coast guard referred back to a statement issued following the initial wreck. "The event took place in the Libyan search-and-rescue responsibility area. The Libyan authorities took over the coordination of the event," read the statement from April 23.

Legal experts consulted by the AP, however, said that even though a boat in distress may be in one country's search-and-rescue zone of international waters, it does not relieve other authorities of responsibility.

"The manner in which each of the European actors contacted ... attempted to deflect or ignore responsibility can be constitutive of a violation by omission of the relevant obligations under international law," Violeta Lax Moreno, founder of the immigration law program at Queen Mary University of London, explained in an email.

Earlier this year the independent Human Rights Committee, working with the United Nations, ruled that Italy failed to protect the "right to life" of over 200 migrants and refugees who died when the boat they were on sank in the Mediterranean in 2013. In that case, the boat was inside the Maltese search-and-rescue area — but the experts determined that Italian rescuers might have been able to prevent the tragedy if they had acted quickly. They have urged Italy to investigate and prosecute anyone responsible.

Still, Europeans rely heavily on the Libyans, who, with European encouragement, registered a massive search-and-rescue area in the Mediterranean with the International Maritime Organization in 2018, including an area where Italy previously conducted rescues.

Frontex also works closely with the Libyan coast guard to help them intercept migrants. According to a recently published investigation by media organizations Der Spiegel, Lighthouse Reports, ARD and Libération, European planes guided the Libyan coast guard to migrant boats in distress at least 20 times since January 2020. During those interceptions some 91 migrants and refugees died or are went missing, the investigation found.

When the Ocean Viking asked Frontex for aerial support on April 22 to find the boat in distress, it says it got no answer.

Frontex told the AP that the recent investigation "misrepresents" the agency's role in the central Mediterranean and that its priority in any potential search and rescue is to save lives.

"In the central Mediterranean region this means that any time a Frontex plane spots a boat in distress, it immediately alerts the national rescue centers in the region: Italy, Malta, Libya and Tunisia," the agency

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said. "Frontex does not coordinate search and rescue operations."

Questioned about the EU's role in responding to the April 21 wreck, European Commission spokesperson for home affairs, Adalbert Jahnz, lamented the deaths but said the commission could not comment because "we have no competence or influence" on the matter and that search-and-rescue operations were conducted and coordinated by national authorities.

Compounding the April 21 tragedy, none of the European or Libyan authorities involved ever picked up the bodies found floating in the water. The crew of the Ocean Viking ultimately made the difficult decision not to pick up any of the bodies to allow the ship to continue to conduct rescues and because it was told the Libyans were on their way. It went on to save 236 people.

The families will never be able to bury their loved ones, and without bodies, it will be more difficult to investigate the deaths.

Setena Abdalla sobbed as she spoke from her home in Omdurman, Sudan, about the death of her only son: 24-year-old Mohammed Abdel-Khaliq.

"He was my whole life," said the 54-year-old single mother.

Abdel-Khaliq had already attempted the crossing once before but was intercepted and placed in a detention center for two months. On another two occasions, smugglers took his money and did not show up. Still, he was determined to try again. On April 19, he phoned his mother for the last time.

"I appealed to him not to travel," she said.

But Abdel-Khaliq went anyway and now remains forever in the Mediterranean Sea.

Mexico City metro overpass collapses onto road; 23 dead

By E. EDUARDO CASTILLO Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — An elevated section of the Mexico City metro collapsed and sent a subway car plunging toward a busy boulevard late Monday, killing at least 23 people and injuring about 70, city officials said. Rescuers searched a car left dangling from the overpass for hours for anyone who might be trapped.

Those efforts were suspended early Tuesday, however, because of safety concerns for those working near the precariously dangling car. A crane was brought in to help shore it up.

"We don't know if they are alive," Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said of the people possibly trapped inside the car following one of the deadliest accidents in the city's subway system, which is among the busiest in the world.

Earlier Sheinbaum said someone had been pulled alive from a car that was trapped on the road below. She said 49 of the injured were hospitalized, and that seven were in serious condition and undergoing surgery.

"There are unfortunately children among the dead," Sheinbaum said, without specifying how many.

The overpass was about 5 meters (16 feet) above the road in the borough of Tlahuac, but the train ran above a concrete median strip, which apparently lessened the casualties among motorists on the road below.

"A support beam gave way" just as the train passed over it, Sheinbaum said.

The Mexico City Metro has had at least two serious accidents since its inauguration half a century ago. In March of last year, a collision between two trains at the Tacubaya station left one passenger dead and injured 41 people. In 2015, a train that did not stop on time crashed into another at the Oceania station, injuring 12.

Hundreds of police officers and firefighters cordoned off the scene Tuesday as desperate friends and relatives of people believed to be on the train gathered outside the security perimeter. Despite the fact that the coronavirus situation remains serious in Mexico City, they crowded together as they waited for news.

Adrián Loa Martínez, 46, said that his mother called him to tell him that his half-brother and sister-in-law were driving when the overpass collapsed and that beam fell onto their car.

He said that his sister-in-law was rescued and sent to a hospital, but that his half-brother José Juan Galindo was crushed and he feared he was dead. "He is down there now," he told journalists pointing toward the site.

Gisela Rioja Castro, 43, was looking for her husband, 42-year-old Miguel Ángel Espinoza. She said that

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her husband always take that train after finishing work at a store, but he never got home and had stopped answering his phone. When she heard what has happened, she immediately feared the worst but has gotten no information from the authorities.

"Nobody knows anything," she said.

The collapse occurred on the newest of the Mexico City subway's lines, Line 12, which stretches far into the city's south side. Like many of the city's dozen subway lines, it runs underground through more central areas of the city of 9 million, but then runs on elevated concrete structures on the city's outskirts.

The collapse could represent a major blow for Mexican Foreign Relations Secretary Marcelo Ebrard, who was Mexico City's mayor from 2006 to 2012, when Line 12 was built. Allegations about poor design and construction on the subway line emerged soon after Ebrard left office as mayor. The line had to be partly closed in 2013 so tracks could be repaired.

Ebrard wrote on Twitter: "What happened today on the Metro is a terrible tragedy."

"Of course, the causes should be investigated and those responsible should be identified," he wrote. "I repeat that I am entirely at the disposition of authorities to contribute in whatever way is necessary."

It was not clear whether a 7.1-magnitude earthquake in 2017 could have affected the subway line.

Storms spawn twisters in Mississippi, kill 2 in Georgia

By ROGELIO V. SOLIS Associated Press

YAZOO CITY, Miss. (AP) — Much of the South is facing the risk of more severe weather Tuesday, forecasters say, after tornadoes struck parts of the region Sunday night and Monday, causing heavy damage in some parts of Mississippi.

Parts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee, as well as corners of Arkansas and Georgia are at enhanced risk for the worst weather, according to the national Storm Prediction Center. That zone is home to more than 11 million people and includes the cities of Nashville, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Jackson, Mississippi, forecasters said.

"We'll see all three threats as far as hail, wind and tornadoes on Tuesday," said Mike Edmonston, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Mississippi.

Hail and high winds were buffeting north Texas Monday night. Just before midnight, three tractor-trailers flipped over on Interstate 35 south of Dallas in the driving rain.

The weather could include wind gusts of up to 70 mph (113 kph) and hail to the size of golf balls, forecasters said, noting that "tornadoes are likely Tuesday into Tuesday evening" in parts of Mississippi.

The risk follows heavy weather that moved across the South on Sunday and Monday, damaging homes and uprooting trees from Mississippi to West Virginia.

A tornado spotted in Atlanta forced thousands to seek shelter, and one man was killed when a falling tree brought power lines onto his vehicle in Douglasville, Georgia, west of Atlanta, Douglas County spokesman Rick Martin said. And in middle Georgia, 55-year-old Carla Harris was killed after a tree fell onto her Bonaire home, Houston County emergency officials said.

The weather first turned rough in Mississippi on Sunday, where just south of Yazoo City, Vickie Savell was left with only scraps of the brand-new mobile home where she and her husband had moved in just eight days ago. It had been lifted off its foundation and moved about 25 feet (8 meters). It was completely destroyed.

"Oh my God, my first new house in 40 years and it's gone," she said Monday, amid tree tops strewn about the neighborhood and the roar of chainsaws as people worked to clear roads.

Savell had been away from home, attending church, but her husband Nathan had been driving home and hunkered down in the front of his truck as the home nearby was destroyed. From there, he watched his new home blow past him, he said.

Nearby, Garry McGinty recalled being at home listening to birds chirping — then dead silence. He looked outside and saw a dark, ominous cloud and took shelter in a hallway, he said. He survived, but trees

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slammed into his carport, two vehicles and the side of his house.

The storms hit the northeast Mississippi city of Tupelo late Sunday, damaging homes and businesses.

There were multiple reports of damage to homes on Elvis Presley Drive, just down the street from the home where the famed singer was born. Presley was born in a two-room house in the Tupelo neighborhood but there was no indication that the historic home sustained damage. It's now a museum.

Just down the street, a tornado tore the roof off the home of Terrille and Chaquilla Pulliam, they told the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal. About 10 family members took shelter inside the house, and "we got everybody inside in time," Terrille Pulliam said.

Calhoun County Sheriff Greg Pollan said Calhoun City also "was hit hard."

"Light poles have been snapped off. Trees in a few homes. Trees on vehicles. Damage to several businesses. Fortunately we have had no reports at this time of injuries," Pollan posted on Facebook.

"I don't even recognize my neighborhood anymore," Calhoun City resident Martha Edmond told the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal after a tree poked a hole in her roof, causing heavy water damage. Two locations of a metal fabrication company were heavily damaged.

In Mississippi, forecasters confirmed 12 tornadoes Sunday evening and night, including the Yazoo City twister, which stretched for 30 miles (48 kilometers), and another tornado that moved through suburbs of Byram and Terry south of Jackson that produced a damage track 1,000 yards (910 meters) wide.

In South Carolina, at least one tornado was reported Monday afternoon in Abbeville County. The tornado appeared to be on the ground for several miles, according to warnings from the National Weather Service. No injuries were immediately reported. In Greenwood, downed trees and power lines were reported, while a vehicle was blown over and a storage unit building was heavily damaged. Multiple locations reported golf ball-sized hail.

In the southern Kentucky town of Tompkinsville, a Monday morning storm later confirmed as a tornado damaged several homes and knocked down trees and power lines, Fire Chief Kevin Jones said. No injuries were reported, he said.

In West Virginia, Jefferson County communications supervisor James Hayden said one person was injured when a possible tornado touched down at a lumber company Monday evening. The injury was minor, and the person was treated at the scene, he said. An exterior lumber shed collapsed, Hayden said.

National Weather Service surveyors confirmed one tornado west of Atlanta near where the motorist died. The twister was determined to have peak winds of 90 mph (145 kph) with a path that ran 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers). At least 10 homes had trees on them.

The same thunderstorm sent thousands of people to shelter in more central parts of Atlanta and may have produced at least one more tornado southwest of downtown. Possible tornado damage was also reported in the region around Athens.

Refugee doctor chronicles Tigray's pain as he treats it

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

HAMDAYET, Sudan (AP) — He is a surgeon and a father. Every morning, he wakes up under a plastic tarp and is reminded he's now a refugee, too.

Tewodros Tefera is one of more than 60,000 people who have fled ethnic violence in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, crossing the border into a remote corner of Sudan. Horrified by what he saw when the fighting between Ethiopian and Tigray forces began six months ago, and by the tales of new arrivals, the 44-year-old chronicles the pain even as he treats it.

"It's getting worse," he says of life back home.

Ethiopia says it is "deeply dismayed" by the deaths of civilians, blames the now-fugitive Tigray leaders and claims normality is returning. But Tewodros' patients tell him that killings, gang rapes and mass expulsions of ethnic Tigrayans continue as some 6 million civilians are targeted for their leaders' political past.

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For Tewodros, it has not been a comfortable transformation from cool, detached doctor at one of Tigray's largest hospitals to driven spokesman for his people. He used to write down reflections so emotional on the war and his new life that he later burned them.

"Ethiopia is dead to me," he says, then corrects himself: "Ethiopia is dying."

His wife and small children remain there, and he doesn't know when he'll see them again. They don't know how raw his experience has been, and he hesitates to tell them. Once well-off, he arrived in Sudan with only the clothes he wore — jogging pants and a polo shirt — and his wedding ring.

He slept in the market his first few days in Sudan before introducing himself as a doctor and being welcomed.

The stresses have shaped him. He has lost weight, 12 kilograms (26 pounds), in the past five months, enough to worry his mother still inside Tigray. At times he closes his eyes and knocks a fist against his forehead, trying to drive back anxiety.

Tewodros now fills a growing number of notebooks as he compiles a "dossier" on the Tigray conflict. Sometimes he dreams of taking it to the International Criminal Court in a quest for justice.

He works from dawn to well beyond dusk at a clinic run by the Sudanese Red Crescent Society in the border community of Hamdayet. With no running water or electricity, he and a handful of colleagues see well over 100 patients a day. Tewodros has delivered babies and treated gunshot wounds, despite a shortage of anesthesia.

"He feels it as if he has the same pain," one patient, Rahwa Haylay, says, her jaw still bandaged from an operation.

On a recent day, Tewodros examined the fresh welts on the back of a young man who had just walked in from Tigray. The man said he and his friends had been forced to lie in the hot sand and be beaten by soldiers from nearby Eritrea collaborating with Ethiopian forces. He heard one soldier call a superior and ask, "Should we kill them or let them go?"

Between patients, Tewodros is pulled aside by fellow refugees who seek his help with community matters, hushed confidences, legal questions. Meanwhile, he is picking up Arabic phrases to improve his treatment of local Sudanese. His exhaustion is kept at bay with cigarettes and coffee.

"This man, I think, is a special man," said Yagoub Mohamed, the director of the local Sudanese reception center for refugees. He and Tewodros meet daily to discuss their work but stray into the personal.

"When he talks about his wife and children, he's crying," Mohamed said.

At night, as Tewodros sits in the darkness outside the clinic and listens to the hum of thousands of refugees fade, he agonizes over the war. It troubles his sleep.

"It is definitely genocide," he says. "If someone is being attacked for their identity, if they're threatened to be vanished because of their identity, there is no other explanation for this."

He believes that the killings are just the first step against the Tigrayans, with starvation the next. Already he has seen a number of severely malnourished people arrive.

Tigray remains largely cut off from the outside world by the Ethiopian government, with no internet access in most of the region.

"They are foolish to think the truth could be hidden forever," Tewodros says.

Despite his criticism, he treated wounded soldiers for the Ethiopian government in the early hours of the conflict.

"A doctor is a doctor," he says.

He would see 93 bodies in all, both combatants and civilians, before he fled, taking some wounded patients with him.

He plans to continue his work in Sudan. The high-rise buildings of his city in Tigray, Humera, can be seen on the horizon.

He could walk home, but he's not sure he will ever go there again.

Flurry of diplomatic contacts fuel Iran deal speculation

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A flurry of diplomatic contacts and reports of major progress suggest that indirect talks between the U.S. and Iran may be nearing an agreement. That's despite efforts by U.S. officials to play down chances of an imminent deal that would bring Washington and Tehran back into compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal.

With the negotiations in Vienna on hiatus, the U.S. and Britain denied Iranian reports that any agreement was at hand with Iran for a swap of American and British prisoners. Such an exchange could be a confidence-building measure to revive the nuclear deal.

A U.S. return to the deal would be the biggest and most controversial foreign policy initiative in the early months of Joe Biden's presidency. It would revive a deal that top Biden aides put together during their years in the Obama administration, only to see President Donald Trump pull out and try to prevent the U.S. from ever returning. Rejoining it — and making the concessions required to do so — would enrage Republicans and likely unsettle Israel and Gulf Arab allies.

Even as Secretary of State Antony Blinken and British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab rejected the prisoner swap reports at a news conference Monday in London, senior American diplomats were in the Middle East meeting Gulf Arab leaders. And two of the nuclear deal's biggest proponents in Congress — Democratic Sens. Chris Coons and Chris Murphy — were touring the region.

Those discussions follow a week of top-level meetings in Washington between Biden; his national security adviser, Jake Sullivan; Blinken; his deputy, Wendy Sherman; special Iran envoy Rob Malley; and others with the head of Israel's spy agency and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's top national security aide.

The Israelis are adamantly opposed to any U.S. rapprochement with Iran, which they regard as an existential threat to the Jewish state. At least three separate meetings were held with the Israelis last week, including one Friday with Mossad chief Yossi Cohen at which Biden made an appearance. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Cohen was briefed on the Vienna discussions "and the progress being made there."

Later Friday, and on Saturday, reports emerged from Iran and Iran-linked media outlets that an agreement had been struck on what the U.S. would provide in return for Iran returning to compliance with the 2015 deal, which had given billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. On Sunday reports of the prisoner swap deal emerged.

U.S. officials were quick to bat those reports down as premature and inaccurate, although the broad contours of potential sanctions relief are well-known and Washington has made no secret of its eagerness to free Americans held in Iran.

Administration officials have allowed that limited progress has been made at the talks in Vienna, where Malley is heading the U.S. delegation. Malley was a key figure in the Obama administration's negotiation of the original nuclear deal in 2015, as were Sherman and Sullivan, who respectively led those talks and took part in secret meetings that paved the way for the agreement.

The Biden administration reacted sharply to the Iranian reports. The State Department said "we are not at the cusp of any breakthrough" and dismissed the prisoner swap claim as false. "Unfortunately, that report is untrue," White House chief of staff Ron Klain said Sunday.

Sullivan himself has been cautious in public comments about the talks, stressing that things stand at a "unclear place in Vienna." At a virtual meeting of the Aspen Security Forum on Friday, he underscored that the talks were a "real negotiation" while acknowledging the indirect nature of the discussions have made the undertaking somewhat "inefficient."

"I guess good faith is always in the eye of the beholder and we believe the Iranians have come in a serious way to have serious discussions about details and the teams are working through those details now," he said.

Thus, the surge in diplomatic activity as negotiators prepare for a fourth round of talks in Vienna has given supporters of the deal that Trump withdrew from in 2018 reason for hope. And it has caused deal

opponents great angst.

Complicating any potential resolution either in the short- or medium-term is the significant array of opponents lined up to try to frustrate a deal. In addition to the Gulf Arabs and Israel, there is strong opposition from Republican members of Congress who are already trying to pass legislation to block it. In Iran, elements of the hard-line Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps appear to be using the Vienna talks to thwart a candidacy of Foreign Minister Mohamed Javad Zarif in presidential elections this year.

Deal critics have taken issue with the negotiating tactics of Malley and his colleagues, alleging that they are giving away the leverage on Iran that Trump created when he pulled out of the deal and imposed sweeping new sanctions. In fact, any U.S. return to the deal would require the easing of many of those sanctions, including possibly ones that were imposed for non-nuclear reasons, such as terrorism, ballistic missile activity and human rights abuses.

Deal supporters, on the other hand, have lashed out at that criticism, accusing the other side of rejecting diplomacy and cheerleading for war. They argue that sanctions relief is the only way to bring Iran back into compliance with the agreement and shut down its pathways to a nuclear weapon.

As Lebanese cry for justice, politics paralyzes the system

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Even after she was taken off an investigation into alleged financial crimes by a money transfer company, the defiant Lebanese prosecutor charged ahead. She showed up at the company's offices outside of Beirut with a group of supporters and a metal worker, who broke open the locked gate.

Ghada Aoun obtained data from Mecattaf Holding Company that she contends will reveal the identities of people who sneaked billions of dollars out of Lebanon amid the financial meltdown that has hit the country.

The move was part of a public feud between Aoun and Lebanon's state prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat, who had dismissed her from the case, saying she'd overstepped with two earlier raids. Their feud has turned into scuffles between their supporters in the street.

Aoun, an investigating judge for the Mount Lebanon district, presents herself as a crusader against corruption and accuses higher-ups of trying to stop her. But to her critics, she's a tool of her backer, Lebanon's president, who they say uses her to punish his political opponents and protect his allies.

That is the problem in Lebanon: The judiciary is so deeply politicized it paralyzes the wheels of justice, mirroring how factional rivalries have paralyzed politics.

Political interference in the judiciary has for years thwarted investigations into corruption, violence and assassinations. But mistrust of the judiciary is thrown into even starker relief now, when Lebanese are crying out for politicians to be held accountable for the disastrous crises in their country — not only the financial collapse but also last August's massive explosion in Beirut's port that killed scores and wrecked much of the capital. The explosion has been blamed on incompetence and neglect.

Lebanon's political posts are split up in a power-sharing system among sectarian-based factions. Judicial appointments are subject to the same sectarian allotment and horse-trading.

Ghada Aoun is a Maronite Christian, like the country's president, Michel Aoun, and her supporters are mainly members of the president's Free Patriotic Movement. The two are not related. The state prosecutor, Oueidat, is a Sunni Muslim, like the prime minister-designate, Saad Hariri. The country's top financial prosecutor is a Shiite Muslim, chosen by the country's top Shiite factions, Amal and Hezbollah. Positions all through the judicial hierarchy are similarly divvied up.

"Those who hold on to power have set up a judiciary that is loyal to them in order to fight their opponents and protect their interests," retired state prosecutor Hatem Madi told The Associated Press.

President Aoun and Prime Minister-designate Hariri have been locked in a power struggle that has prevented the formation of a Cabinet for more than six months. As a result, there is no leadership to carry out reforms to rescue the country even as the currency collapses in value.

Lebanese watched in fury as their own savings and salaries plummet in value and prices skyrocket. The central bank is struggling to gather enough hard currency to ensure fuel for electricity or other key

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imports, much less maintain its longtime peg of the currency to the dollar.

Even more galling for the public, the wealthy and politically connected transferred billions of dollars to safety outside Lebanon even after banks imposed informal capital controls at the beginning of the crisis. Most people have been unable to access their dollars in bank accounts since late 2019.

Ghada Aoun, the judge, was probing Mecattaf Holding on suspicion it helped in that flight of capital. Mecattaf, one of Lebanon's largest money and gold-trading companies, denied any links to suspicious transfers, saying all business it does is legal.

Skeptics note that Mecattaf's owner, Michel Mecattaf, is the publisher of Nidaa al-Watan, a daily newspaper that is harshly critical of President Aoun and his main ally, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Ghada Aoun has also pursued cases against Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh and former Prime Minister Najib Mikati, both of them opponents of the president.

In tweets, Aoun said she was being sidelined "because I dared to open a major file and tried to establish the truth with evidence." She accuses her opponents of using "false accusations" against her to "politicize a case of justice, a case where an oppressed people wants accountability."

After her previous raids, Ouiedat ordered her taken off financial cases. Then on April 20, both he and Aoun appeared at a session of Lebanon's top judicial body, where they upheld the order. Outside, supporters of the president and the prime minister got into scuffles and nearly into fist-fights before the army separated them. The next day, she carried out her third raid on the company.

Sami Kara, a Hariri supporter, said Aoun ruined her long reputation by breaking into the company. "She was used for political purposes and now they threw her away," said the 61-year-old shop owner.

Lebanese are also closely watching the investigation into the Aug. 4 explosion of nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrates poorly stored at Beirut's port. The explosion killed 211, wounded more than 6,000 and devastated nearby neighborhoods.

The first investigating judge accused two former Cabinet ministers of negligence, but was then removed from the case after the former ministers raised legal challenges against him. Many worry his replacement, Judge Tarek Bitar, will be prevented by politicians from holding anyone accountable for the blast.

Judges know that if they want senior posts, they must be loyal to a political leader, said Bushra al-Khalil, a prominent Lebanese lawyer.

Knowing this, some people go straight to politicians and ask for their help in cases, rather than go through judicial authorities, she said. Others hire a lawyer with strong political connections to intimidate judges.

Madi said the long-term solution is for the judiciary to be given independence under the constitution. Currently, it comes under the authority of the government.

Lebanon "is proving incapable of fighting corruption," said outgoing Justice Minister Marie-Claude Najm, pointing to the divisions demonstrated in the feud between Aoun and Ouiedat.

"After all that has happened," she said, "how can people feel they respect and trust the judiciary?"

Israel's Netanyahu faces midnight deadline to form coalition

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced a midnight deadline on Tuesday to put together a new coalition government — or be looking at the possibility of leading his Likud party into the opposition for the first time in 12 years.

Netanyahu has struggled to secure a parliamentary majority since March 23 — when elections ended in deadlock for the fourth consecutive time in the past two years. Despite repeated meetings with many of his rivals and unprecedented outreach to the leader of a small Islamist Arab party, Netanyahu has not been able to close a deal during a four-week window.

That window was to expire at midnight, at which point the matter returns to President Reuven Rivlin in the absence of an agreement.

A failure to reach a deal would not immediately push Netanyahu out of office.

Rivlin could give him an additional two weeks to form a coalition. He could give one of Netanyahu's op-

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ponents an opportunity to form a government, or in a final move of desperation, send the matter straight to parliament.

That would give lawmakers a chance to choose one of their own as a prime minister. If all options fail, the country would face another election this fall, meaning months of continued political paralysis.

In the March 23 election, Netanyahu's Likud emerged as the largest single party, with 30 seats in the 120-member parliament. But to form a government, he needs to have the support of a 61-seat majority.

That task has been complicated in large part by members of his own religious and nationalist base.

The New Hope party, led by a former Netanyahu aide, refuses to serve under the prime minister because of deep personal differences. Religious Zionism, a far-right party that espouses an openly racist platform, supports Netanyahu but has ruled out serving in a government with the Arab partners he has courted. Yamina, another right-wing party led by a former Netanyahu aide, has refused to commit to either him or his opponents.

On Monday, Netanyahu said he had offered the head of Yamina, Naftali Bennett, the chance to share the job of prime minister in a rotation, with Bennett holding the post for the first year.

Bennett responded: "I never asked Netanyahu to be prime minister. I asked to form a government. Unfortunately, he does not have that."

Looming over Netanyahu has been his ongoing corruption trial. Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and bribery in a series of scandals. The trial has moved into the witness phase, with embarrassing testimony accusing him of trading favors with a powerful media mogul. Netanyahu denies the charges.

In recent days, he has appeared increasingly frustrated, coddling potential partners one day and then lashing out at them with vitriol the next. Last week's deadly stampede at a religious festival, in which 45 ultra-Orthodox Jews were killed, has only complicated his task by creating an unwelcome diversion and calls for an official investigation into possible negligence on his watch.

Netanyahu's opponents, meanwhile, have been holding meetings of their own in an effort to cobble together a possible alternative government.

Netanyahu has also suffered a series of embarrassing — and uncharacteristic — defeats in parliament.

Earlier this month his opponents gained control of the powerful Arrangements Committee, which controls the legislative agenda until a new government is formed. Last week, he was forced to abandon his appointment of a crony as the interim justice minister, just before the Supreme Court appeared set to strike down the move.

Despite all of Netanyahu's vulnerabilities, it remains unclear whether his opponents can form an alternative government. The opposition includes a vast spectrum of parties that have little in common except for their animosity toward Netanyahu.

If Netanyahu fails to put together a coalition by midnight, he will do his utmost to prevent his opponents from reaching an agreement in the coming weeks.

That would keep him in office until the next election, allowing him to battle his corruption charges from the perch of the prime minister's office and giving him yet another chance to win a new term, along with possible immunity from prosecution.

'Horrible' weeks ahead as India's virus catastrophe worsens

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL AP Science Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — COVID-19 infections and deaths are mounting with alarming speed in India with no end in sight to the crisis and a top expert warning that the coming weeks in the country of nearly 1.4 billion people will be "horrible."

India's official count of coronavirus cases surpassed 20 million Tuesday, nearly doubling in the past three months, while deaths officially have passed 220,000. Staggering as those numbers are, the true figures are believed to be far higher, the undercount an apparent reflection of the troubles in the health care system.

The country has witnessed scenes of people dying outside overwhelmed hospitals and funeral pyres

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lighting up the night sky.

Infections have surged in India since February in a disastrous turn blamed on more contagious variants of the virus as well as government decisions to allow massive crowds to gather for Hindu religious festivals and political rallies before state elections.

India's top health official, Rajesh Bhushan, refused to speculate last month as to why authorities weren't better prepared. But the cost is clear: People are dying because of shortages of bottled oxygen and hospital beds or because they couldn't get a COVID-19 test.

India's official average of newly confirmed cases per day has soared from over 65,000 on April 1 to about 370,000, and deaths per day have officially gone from over 300 to more than 3,000.

On Tuesday, the health ministry reported 357,229 new cases in the past 24 hours and 3,449 deaths from COVID-19.

Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's School of Public Health in the U.S., said he is concerned that Indian policymakers he has been in contact with believe things will improve in the next few days.

"I've been ... trying to say to them, 'If everything goes very well, things will be horrible for the next several weeks. And it may be much longer,'" he said.

Jha said the focus needs to be on "classic" public health measures: targeted shutdowns, more testing, universal mask-wearing and avoiding large gatherings.

"That is what's going to break the back of this surge," he said.

The death and infection figures are considered unreliable because testing is patchy and reporting incomplete. For example, government guidelines ask Indian states to include suspected COVID-19 cases when recording deaths from the outbreak, but many do not do so.

The U.S., with one-fourth the population of India, has recorded more than 2 1/2 times as many deaths, at around 580,000.

Municipal records for this past Sunday show 1,680 dead in the Indian capital were treated according to the procedures for handling the bodies of those infected with COVID-19. But in the same 24-hour period, only 407 deaths were added to the official toll from New Delhi.

The New Delhi High Court announced it will start punishing government officials if supplies of oxygen allocated to hospitals are not delivered. "Enough is enough," it said.

The deaths reflect the fragility of India's health system. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party has countered criticism by pointing out that the underfunding of health care has been chronic.

But this was all the more reason for authorities to use the several months when cases in India declined to shore up the system, said Dr. Vineeta Bal of the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research.

"Only a patchwork improvement would've been possible," she said. But the country "didn't even do that."

Now authorities are scrambling to make up for lost time. Beds are being added in hospitals, more tests are being done, oxygen is being sent from one corner of the country to another, and manufacturing of the few drugs effective against COVID-19 is being scaled up.

The challenges are steep in states where elections were held and unmasked crowds probably worsened the spread of the virus. The average number of daily infections in West Bengal state has increased by a multiple of 32 to over 17,000 since the balloting began.

"It's a terrifying crisis," said Dr. Punyabrata Goon, convener of the West Bengal Doctors' Forum.

Goon added that the state also needs to hasten immunizations. But the world's largest maker of vaccines is short of shots — the result of lagging manufacturing and raw material shortages.

Experts are also worried the prices being charged for shots will make it harder for the poor to get vaccinated. On Monday, opposition parties urged the government make vaccinations free to all Indians.

India is vaccinating about 2.1 million people daily, or around 0.15% of its population.

"This is not going to end very soon," said Dr. Ravi Gupta, a virus expert at the University of Cambridge in England. "And really ... the soul of the country is at risk in a way."

How companies rip off poor employees — and get away with it

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By ALEXIA FERNÁNDEZ CAMPBELL and JOE YERARDI The Center for Public Integrity

Already battered by long shifts and high infection rates, essential workers struggling through the pandemic face another hazard of hard times: employers who steal their wages.

When a recession hits, U.S. companies are more likely to stiff their lowest-wage workers. These businesses often pay less than the minimum wage, make employees work off the clock, or refuse to pay overtime rates. In the most egregious cases, bosses don't pay their employees at all.

Companies that hire child care workers, gas station clerks, restaurant servers and security guards are among the businesses most likely to get caught cheating their employees, according to a Center for Public Integrity analysis of minimum wage and overtime violations from the U.S. Department of Labor. In 2019 alone, the agency cited about 8,500 employers for taking about \$287 million from workers.

Major U.S. corporations are some of the worst offenders. They include Halliburton, G4S Wackenhut and Circle-K stores, which agency records show have collectively taken more than \$22 million from their employees since 2005.

Their victims toil on the lower rungs of the workforce. People like Danielle Wynne, a \$10-an-hour convenience store clerk in Florida who said her boss ordered her to work off the clock, and Ruth Palacios, a janitor from Mexico who earned less than the minimum wage to disinfect a New York City hospital at the height of the pandemic.

Companies have little incentive to follow the law. The Labor Department's Wage and Hour Division, which investigates federal wage-theft complaints, rarely penalizes repeat offenders, according to a review of data from the division. Public Integrity obtained the records through a Freedom of Information Act request covering October 2005 to September 2020.

The agency fined only about 1 in 4 repeat offenders during that period. And it ordered those companies to pay workers cash damages — penalty money in addition to back wages — in just 14% of those cases.

On top of that, the division often lets businesses avoid repaying their employees all the money they're owed. In all, the agency has let more than 16,000 employers get away with not paying \$20.3 million in back wages since 2005, according to Public Integrity's analysis.

"Some companies are doing a cost-benefit analysis and realize it's cheaper to violate the law, even if you get caught," said Jenn Round, a labor standards enforcement fellow at the Center for Innovation in Worker Organization at Rutgers University.

The federal data provides a revealing — though incomplete — look at a practice that pushes America's lowest-paid workers further into poverty. The data doesn't include violations of state wage-theft laws or cases where employees sued. And it misses all the workers who don't file complaints, either because they're afraid to or are unaware of their rights.

But some economists say wage theft is so pervasive that it's costing workers at least \$15 billion a year — far more than the amount stolen in robberies.

Companies are more prone to cheating employees of color and immigrant workers, according to Daniel Galvin, a political science professor and policy researcher at Northwestern University. His research, based on data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, shows that immigrants and Latino workers were twice as likely to earn less than the minimum wage from 2009 to 2019 compared with white Americans. Black workers were nearly 50% more likely to get ripped off in comparison.

Through much of the Jim Crow era, the federal government ignored racial disparities in pay. It wasn't until the Great Depression that Congress first tried to establish a national minimum wage and overtime pay for workers. To get Southern Democrats to vote for the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, Northern Democrats agreed to exclude agricultural laborers, nannies and housekeepers from the law's protections. In the South, most of those workers were Black. Out west, a large number were Mexican American.

Congress amended the act during the 1960s and 1970s to cover most of these excluded workers, but their employers often flout the law anyway. Galvin reports in his forthcoming book, "Alt-Labor and the New Politics of Workers' Rights," that the lowest-paid workers lost roughly \$1.67 per hour — about 21% of their income — to wage theft from 2009 to 2019.

Yuri Callejas, a 40-year-old single mother, cleaned hotel rooms at a Fairfield Inn & Suites franchise in

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Pelham, Alabama. Callejas complained to her boss that he was paying her only \$9 an hour when she was hired at \$10 an hour, according to a lawsuit filed in January 2020 in federal court. Though she said she was working more than 40 hours a week, she wasn't getting paid overtime, either, according to the complaint.

Her boss refused to change her pay rate, the complaint said, so she quit. Her accounting of how much she was owed: \$1,272.

With help from an attorney at Adelante Alabama Worker Center, Callejas sued the owner of the hotel, AUM Pelham LLC. The company denied that Callejas was hired at \$10 an hour or that she worked overtime, but it agreed to a settlement. Company owner Rakesh Patel did not respond to requests for comment.

Callejas walked away with \$2,500 in back wages and damages. But that didn't wipe away the memories of her struggle.

"Every time I paid my bills," she recalled, "I never had enough money."

Isaac Guazo, an economic justice organizer for Adelante Alabama, said fewer workers have reported wage theft during the pandemic, but that doesn't mean it's happening less.

"It's the opposite, actually," he said. "Workers will tolerate a lot more abuse right now because it's so hard to find another job and they need to pay rent."

Ruth Palacios and Arturo Xelo, a married couple from Mexico, disinfected COVID-19 patient rooms at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. They worked seven days a week for months, Palacios said, but weren't paid overtime. At the start of the pandemic, they earned the local minimum wage of \$15 an hour, she said, but after a few months, their boss lowered their pay to \$12.25, she said.

"The little guys have to speak up because people — the bosses — are taking advantage of their workers," Palacios said in a video call from her home in Queens.

Palacios, Xelo and two of their former co-workers filed a federal lawsuit against the contractor that hired them, BMS Cat, in January. The company did not respond to requests for comment. In court records, it denied that it paid the cleaners less than the minimum wage or that it owed them overtime pay. The hospital did not respond to requests for comment, either.

Danielle Wynne rang up customers at a Circle-K gas station in Brevard County, Florida, during shifts that started at 4:30 a.m. and ended in the early afternoon. Before and after clocking in, Wynne said, her manager made her work for free, according to a lawsuit she filed in federal court in February 2020. She counted cash in the register, brewed coffee, cleaned the store, set out condiments and refilled the lottery machine — all while off the clock.

The unpaid work added up to about \$1,250 in one year, according to the court filing. For someone earning \$10 an hour, that's about three weeks of pay.

Wynne said in court records that she didn't complain at the time because she was scared of her "vindictive" boss.

Circle-K Stores denied the underpayment allegations in court filings, though it ended up settling the case for \$2,500 in October. But data from the Labor Department shows that the company repeatedly takes wages from its employees, with few repercussions.

Federal investigators caught Circle-K stores underpaying employees 22 times since 2005, most recently in February 2020. The total: \$54,069 taken from 120 employees. But the Labor Department only fined the company four times and ordered it to pay damages to employees in two cases. In six cases, the company didn't pay all the money it owed employees, known as back wages. The agency closed those cases anyway without further action.

Circle-K Stores did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Public Integrity found that Labor Department investigators are just as lenient with other repeat offenders.

The oilfield services company Halliburton illegally withheld \$18.7 million from 1,050 employees, Labor Department records show, but staff investigators never ordered the company to pay cash damages on top of the back wages. The department fined Halliburton in only three of eight cases it brought against the company.

Halliburton declined to comment on the cases. But in a 2015 statement to Inside Energy, a spokesperson

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for the company said it had misclassified employees as exempt from overtime pay.

"The company re-classified the identified positions, and throughout this process, Halliburton has worked earnestly and cooperatively with the U.S. Department of Labor to equitably resolve this situation," wrote Susie McMichael, a public relations representative for Halliburton.

G4S Wackenhut and its subsidiaries, which provide security services to companies and courthouses, illegally denied nearly \$3.3 million to 1,605 employees. Federal investigators never ordered the company to pay damages to employees and only issued a fine in nine of 47 cases, totaling less than \$41,000. Though G4S Wackenhut later repaid employees in nearly all the cases, it didn't pay full back wages on two occasions, and the Labor Department closed those cases anyway.

Sabrina Rios, a spokeswoman for the company, said most of the money owed involved G4S subsidiaries that were under independent management. She added that the claims do not reflect the company's business practices and that some of the cases date back more than 22 years.

"The company worked with the DOL in order to investigate each case and made appropriate payments to the individuals totaling about \$3.3 (million)," she wrote.

A Labor Department official said the agency orders companies to pay damages when appropriate, determined on a case-by-case basis. Fines are usually assessed when a company repeatedly, or willfully, breaks the law. The department tries to resolve cases administratively to avoid taking employers to court.

"The department exercises its prosecutorial discretion in determining whether to litigate specific cases, based upon careful consideration of our priorities, resources, and mission," Jessica Looman, principal deputy administrator for the agency's Wage and Hour Division, wrote in a statement.

Nancy Leppink, former head of the Wage and Hour Division during the Obama administration, said the agency doesn't have enough lawyers to take every employer to court when they don't pay up. Although the division hired 300 new investigators during her tenure, it had only about 787 to enforce wage theft laws as of February.

That's about one investigator per 182,000 employees covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act, far below the one investigator per 10,000 workers recommended by the United Nations' International Labour Organization.

Leppink, now commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, said she pushed investigators to demand cash damages for workers in every possible federal case. For example, if an employer took \$1,000 from an employee, the agency could demand that amount in back wages and an extra \$1,000 in damages.

"If all you do is collect wages, why would a company bother complying until (an investigator) walks through the door?" she said.

While the percentage of cases with damages jumped during Leppink's tenure, it has never surpassed 15%, the data shows. The agency's decision about whether to pursue damages sometimes is dictated by the strength of the evidence, the urgency in getting workers their back wages, and the level of noncompliance by the employer, Leppink said — and sometimes simply by a lack of staff resources.

Last year, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Trump administration ordered federal investigators to stop seeking damages in most cases for workers. In April, the Biden administration reversed that decision, Looman said.

Lawyers who represent workers in wage theft cases say they often discourage clients from filing a complaint with the Labor Department because they rarely get paid damages or see quick results. The typical case took 108 days to investigate, according to the agency's data.

At a 2015 hearing in Philadelphia, a law professor from Temple University told the City Council that employers stole wages from tens of thousands of Philadelphia workers every week. The professor, Jennifer Lee, was pointing to findings from a study by the university's Sheller Center for Social Justice.

"This tells us that wage theft is no accident," Lee told city lawmakers. "It's not a few bad apple employers or a few new businesses that don't understand the law, but rather a calculated approach by employers to

maximize their profits on the backs of their workers.”

The hearing helped launch a local wage-theft law that allows workers to get their money back more quickly than they would by filing a complaint with the state or federal government.

The ordinance, which went into effect in 2016, sets a 110-day limit for city staff to investigate and close a wage theft case. It also gives workers three years to file a complaint with the city, compared with the two-year statute of limitations under federal law. And the penalties are steep. The city can revoke or deny local permits and licenses to companies that steal wages.

Legal experts and community groups point to strong local wage theft laws as an effective way to get around lax enforcement at the federal level and in some states. Chicago passed such a law in 2013. Minneapolis followed in 2019.

But other workers’ rights advocates want to see federal reforms, considering that the Labor Department protects the largest number of workers. They want Congress to boost funding to the Wage and Hour Division so it can double the number of investigators, hire more attorneys and take on additional wage theft cases. They also want lawmakers to extend the federal statute of limitations beyond two years.

Leppink, the Minnesota labor commissioner, said the federal government could revoke franchise licenses and federal contracts from companies with a history of wage theft.

At the very least, the Wage and Hour Division can order employers to pay damages in every possible case, said Jennifer Marion, a former policy adviser with the division.

“If you know you are likely to pay double than what you owed,” she said, “that changes everything.”

Biden quadruples Trump refugee cap after delay backlash

By MATTHEW LEE, ZEKE MILLER and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden formally raised the nation’s cap on refugee admissions to 62,500 this year, weeks after facing bipartisan blowback for his delay in replacing the record-low ceiling set by former President Donald Trump.

Refugee resettlement agencies have waited for Biden to quadruple the number of refugees allowed into the United States this year since Feb. 12, when a presidential proposal was submitted to Congress saying he planned to do so.

But the presidential determination went unsigned until Monday. Biden said he first needed to expand the narrow eligibility criteria put in place by Trump that had kept out most refugees. He did that last month in an emergency determination. But it also stated that Trump’s cap of up to 15,000 refugees this year “remains justified by humanitarian concerns and is otherwise in the national interest,” indicating Biden intended to keep it.

That brought sharp pushback for not at least taking the symbolic step of authorizing more refugees to enter the U.S. this year. The second-ranking Senate Democrat, Dick Durbin of Illinois, called that initial limit “unacceptable” and within hours the White House made a quick course correction. The administration vowed to increase the historically low cap by May 15 — but the White House said it probably would not hit the 62,500 Biden had previously outlined.

In the end, Biden returned to that figure.

Biden said he received additional information that led him to sign the emergency presidential determination setting the cap at 62,500.

“It is important to take this action today to remove any lingering doubt in the minds of refugees around the world who have suffered so much, and who are anxiously waiting for their new lives to begin,” Biden stated before signing it.

Biden said Trump’s cap “did not reflect America’s values as a nation that welcomes and supports refugees.”

But he acknowledged the “sad truth” that the U.S. would not meet the 62,500 cap by the end of the fiscal year in September, given the pandemic and limitations on the country’s resettlement capabilities — some of which his administration has attributed to the Trump administration’s policies to restrict immigration.

The White House insisted it was unable to act until now because the administration was being taxed by

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a sharp increase in unaccompanied young migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras arriving at the southern U.S. border, though any link between the border and the government's decision on refugees was not immediately clear. Refugee advocates, including Durbin, accused Biden of playing politics.

Biden said Monday it was important to lift the number to show "America's commitment to protect the most vulnerable, and to stand as a beacon of liberty and refuge to the world."

It also paves the way for Biden to boost the cap to 125,000 for the 2022 fiscal year that starts in October.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said work is being done to improve U.S. capabilities to process refugees in order to accept as many of them as possible under the new cap. Since the fiscal year began last Oct. 1, just over 2,000 refugees have been resettled in the U.S.

Travel preparations are being made for more than 2,000 refugees who were excluded by Trump's presidential determination on Oct. 27, 2020.

Refugee resettlement agencies applauded Biden's action.

"We are absolutely thrilled and relieved for so many refugee families all across the world who look to the U.S. for protection," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, head of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, one of nine resettlement agencies in the nation. "It has a felt like a rollercoaster ride, but this is one critical step toward rebuilding the program and returning the U.S. to our global humanitarian leadership role."

Biden has also added more slots for refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Central America and ended Trump's restrictions on resettlements from Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

Some 35,000 refugees have been cleared to go to the United States, and 100,000 remain in the pipeline. Resettlement agencies that closed more than 100 offices during the Trump administration said the cap needed to be raised to unleash resources.

"The way you rebuild capacity is by setting ambitious commitments that signal to domestic and international stakeholders that U.S. leadership is back," said Nazanin Ash of the International Rescue Committee.

Whose 'Big Lie'? Trump's proclamation a new GOP litmus test

By JILL COLVIN and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump and his supporters are intensifying efforts to shame — and potentially remove — members of their party who are seen as disloyal to the former president and his false claims that last year's election was stolen from him.

On Capitol Hill, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the No. 3 Republican in the House, risks losing her leadership post amid her increasingly public dispute with Trump. In Utah, Sen. Mitt Romney, a rare Trump foe in the GOP, faced the indignity over the weekend of reminding a booing crowd that he was once their presidential standard-bearer. And in Texas, the only openly anti-Trump Republican in a crowded special election for a congressional seat finished a lowly 9th.

Trump left office nearly four months ago with his reputation badly damaged after a mob of his supporters waged a deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol to prevent the certification of election results. But the recent developments suggest a revival of his political fortunes in which those who refuse to go along with his falsehoods find themselves on the defensive.

"It's scary," said Michael Wood, the Texas Republican congressional candidate who based his campaign on a vow to push the GOP past the "cult of personality" that is Trump. In the end, he garnered just 3% of the vote in Saturday's special election, while two Trump supporters, including one he endorsed, will advance to a runoff.

Trump's grip on the party may only tighten in coming days.

Adding to his flurries of press releases, his powerful Facebook account could be reinstated this week if a quasi-independent oversight board rules in his favor. Meanwhile, Republicans in Virginia will decide whether to nominate a vocal Trump supporter for governor in one of the few marquee elections on the calendar this year.

An important signal of the party's direction may come on Capitol Hill, where Cheney's future is in question.

The Wyoming congresswoman, the most senior Republican to call for Trump's impeachment, has insisted

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that the party must reject the former president's lie that the election was somehow stolen. There is no evidence to support Trump's allegations of mass voter fraud, and numerous audits, Republican state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said the election was fair.

But Trump has stuck to his story and issued a "proclamation" Monday attempting to co-opt the language his foes use to brand his falsehoods.

"The Fraudulent Presidential Election of 2020 will be, from this day forth, known as THE BIG LIE!" he wrote.

Cheney, who has not ruled out a 2024 run herself, fired back.

"The 2020 presidential election was not stolen. Anyone who claims it was is spreading THE BIG LIE, turning their back on the rule of law, and poisoning our democratic system," she tweeted.

Clearly she has no intention of scaling back her criticism, even as she faces the possibility of losing her leadership post.

Cheney survived an earlier attempt to oust her from leadership, but it could be different this time. GOP leader Kevin McCarthy stood by her earlier this year, but he has declined to defend her from the latest round of attacks as he faces conservatives restive for her removal. That's a sign of McCarthy's own calculations as he works to stay close to Trump while also trying to extend a wider tent to help his party win general elections.

While the pro-Trump Republican voices on Capitol Hill far outweigh his party critics, the detractors should not be dismissed.

In all, 10 House Republicans voted to impeach Trump for inspiring the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, and seven Senate Republicans voted to convict. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell voted to acquit Trump, but publicly chastised the former president and has privately encouraged the party to move on.

It's a different calculation for rank-and-file members of Congress, particularly those representing heavily Republican areas, where roughly 8 in 10 party supporters typically approve of Trump. Among party activists and base voters, that number is thought to be much higher.

It's still too early to draw any definite conclusions about Trump's success so far this year. Some Republican strategists privately suggest there are real signs that the former president's strength with rank-and-file voters and elected officials has begun to wane.

"He becomes less relevant with every passing day, but among those who still listen to him he's more relevant than ever," said veteran Republican pollster Frank Luntz. "He still matters. He's going to matter for months and even years, but as time goes on he'll matter less and less."

For now, the former reality TV celebrity seems to be enjoying the ride.

"So nice to see RINO Mitt Romney booed off the stage at the Utah Republican State Convention," Trump crowed in a series of celebratory statements Monday lauding the Texas results and criticism of Cheney and Romney. "RINO" means "Republican in Name Only."

In Utah over the weekend, a roomful of Republicans had rained boos down on Romney before trying unsuccessfully to censure him for backing Trump's impeachment.

"Show respect," the crowd was reprimanded by the state party chair. Romney reminded them that he was a lifetime conservative and their presidential nominee in 2012 — and told them Republicans would only hurt themselves by attacking each other.

"If we divide our party, we're going to be a losing party," he said.

In Texas, losing congressional candidate Wood, a 34-year-old former Marine and two-time Purple Heart recipient, has commiserated with a handful of prominent anti-Trump Republicans, including Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., former Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake, former Ohio Gov. John Kasich and Cheney, who had donated to Wood's campaign and offered moral support.

He said Monday there's real urgency for anti-Trump Republicans to unify against him.

"This can't be just individuals pushing back. We've got to organize and show the public you can be a good Republican and not buy into all that BS," Wood said. "This fight won't be won with podcasts and op-eds."

Mike DuHaime, a top Republican strategist, said the party is still grappling with its identity post-Trump, but argued that it will be better positioned going forward if it includes conservatives like Cheney and Romney.

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"There are people who are playing to the base of the electorate, which is very passionate and believes the big lie about the election. And it's enough to win a primary for Congress or Senate or governor, or even president, it seems." But, he warned, "If we stay focused on only that, it's not going to be successful enough in the general election to win back the majority."

"We have to at some point put this behind us if we want to be successful in a general election."

Restrictions easing in US and Europe amid disaster in India

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Air travel in the U.S. hit its highest mark since COVID-19 took hold more than 13 months ago, while European Union officials are proposing to ease restrictions on visitors to the continent as the vaccine sends new cases and deaths tumbling in more affluent countries.

The improving picture in many places contrasts with the worsening disaster in India.

In the U.S., the average number of new cases per day fell below 50,000 for the first time since October. And nearly 1.67 million people were screened at U.S. airport checkpoints on Sunday, according to the Transportation Security Administration, the highest number since mid-March of last year.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation giving him sweeping powers to invalidate local emergency measures put in place during the outbreak. While the law doesn't go into effect until July, the Republican governor said he will issue an executive order to more quickly get rid of local mask mandates.

"I think this creates a structure that's going to be a little bit more respectful, I think, of people's businesses, jobs, schools and personal freedom," he said.

Las Vegas is bustling again after casino capacity limits were raised Saturday to 80% and person-to-person distancing was dropped to 3 feet (0.9 meters). New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that New York City's subways will begin running all night again and capacity restrictions on most businesses will end statewide in mid-May. And Los Angeles County reported no coronavirus deaths on Sunday and Monday, some of which may be attributable to a lag in reporting but was nevertheless a hopeful sign that could move the county to allow an increase in capacity at events and venues, and indoor-service at bars.

EU officials also announced a proposal Monday to relax restrictions on travel to the 27-nation bloc this summer, though the final decision is up to its member countries.

"Time to revive EU tourism industry and for cross-border friendships to rekindle — safely," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. "We propose to welcome again vaccinated visitors and those from countries with a good health situation."

In Greece, restaurants and cafes reopened their terraces on Monday after six months of shutdown, with customers flocking to soak up the sunshine. In France, high schools reopened and a ban on domestic travel was lifted.

The once hard-hit Czech Republic, where cases are now declining, announced it will allow people to remove face coverings at all outdoor spaces starting next Monday if they keep their distance from others.

But with more-contagious variants taking hold, efforts are underway to boost vaccination efforts, which have begun to lag. The average number of doses given per day fell 27% from a high of 3.26 million on April 11 to 2.37 million last Tuesday, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In Detroit, teams from the city's health department have knocked on nearly 5,000 doors since the weekend to persuade people to get immunized. And Massachusetts' governor announced plans to close four of seven mass vaccination sites by the end of June in favor of a more targeted approach.

"My plea to everyone: Get vaccinated now, please," President Joe Biden said in Norfolk, Virginia. He stressed that he has worked hard to make sure there are more than 600 million doses of vaccine — enough for all Americans to get both doses.

"We're going to increase that number across the board as well so we can also be helping other nations once we take care of all Americans," the president said.

Brazil, once the epicenter of the pandemic, has been overtaken by a surge in India that has overrun crematoriums and made it clear the pandemic is far from over.

As the U.S. and other countries rushed in aid, India reported nearly 370,000 new cases and more than 3,400 deaths Monday — numbers that experts believe are vast undercounts because of a widespread lack of testing and incomplete reporting.

In Germany, Bavarian officials canceled Oktoberfest for a second year in a row because of the safety risks. The beer-drinking festivities typically attract about 6 million visitors from around the world.

And in Italy, medical experts and politicians expressed concern about a possible spike in infections after tens of thousands of jubilant soccer fans converged on Milan's main square Sunday to celebrate Inter Milan's league title.

Biden quadruples Trump refugee cap after delay backlash

By MATTHEW LEE, ZEKE MILLER and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

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Refugee resettlement agencies have waited for Biden to quadruple the number of refugees allowed into the United States this year since Feb. 12, when a presidential proposal was submitted to Congress saying he planned to do so.

But the presidential determination went unsigned until Monday. Biden said he first needed to expand the narrow eligibility criteria put in place by Trump that had kept out most refugees. He did that last month in an emergency determination. But it also stated that Trump's cap of up to 15,000 refugees this year "remains justified by humanitarian concerns and is otherwise in the national interest," indicating Biden intended to keep it.

That brought sharp pushback for not at least taking the symbolic step of authorizing more refugees to enter the U.S. this year. The second-ranking Senate Democrat, Dick Durbin of Illinois, called that initial limit "unacceptable" and within hours the White House made a quick course correction. The administration vowed to increase the historically low cap by May 15 — but the White House said it probably would not hit the 62,500 Biden had previously outlined.

In the end, Biden returned to that figure.

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But he acknowledged the "sad truth" that the U.S. would not meet the 62,500 cap by the end of the fiscal year in September, given the pandemic and limitations on the country's resettlement capabilities — some of which his administration has attributed to the Trump administration's policies to restrict immigration.

The White House insisted it was unable to act until now because the administration was being taxed by a sharp increase in unaccompanied young migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras arriving at the southern U.S. border, though any link between the border and the government's decision on refugees was not immediately clear. Refugee advocates, including Durbin, accused Biden of playing politics.

Biden said Monday it was important to lift the number to show "America's commitment to protect the most vulnerable, and to stand as a beacon of liberty and refuge to the world."

It also paves the way for Biden to boost the cap to 125,000 for the 2022 fiscal year that starts in October.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said work is being done to improve U.S. capabilities to process refugees in order to accept as many of them as possible under the new cap. Since the fiscal year began last Oct. 1, just over 2,000 refugees have been resettled in the U.S.

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"We are absolutely thrilled and relieved for so many refugee families all across the world who look to the U.S. for protection," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, head of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, one of nine resettlement agencies in the nation. "It has a felt like a rollercoaster ride, but this is one critical step toward rebuilding the program and returning the U.S. to our global humanitarian leadership role."

Biden has also added more slots for refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Central America and ended Trump's restrictions on resettlements from Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

Some 35,000 refugees have been cleared to go to the United States, and 100,000 remain in the pipeline. Resettlement agencies that closed more than 100 offices during the Trump administration said the cap needed to be raised to unleash resources.

"The way you rebuild capacity is by setting ambitious commitments that signal to domestic and international stakeholders that U.S. leadership is back," said Nazanin Ash of the International Rescue Committee.

FDA expected to OK Pfizer vaccine for teens within week

By ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is expected to authorize Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for youngsters ages 12 to 15 by next week, according to a federal official and a person familiar with the process, setting up shots for many before the beginning of the next school year.

The announcement is set to come a month after the company found that its shot, which is already authorized for those age 16 and older, also provided protection for the younger group.

The federal official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to preview the FDA's action, said the agency was expected to expand its emergency use authorization for Pfizer's two-dose vaccine by early next week, and perhaps even sooner. The person familiar with the process, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal matters, confirmed the timeline and added that it is expected that the FDA will approve Pfizer's use by even younger children sometime this fall.

The FDA action will be followed by a meeting of a federal vaccine advisory committee to discuss whether to recommend the shot for 12- to 15-year-olds. Shots could begin after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention adopts the committee's recommendation. Those steps could be completed in a matter of days.

The New York Times first reported on the expected timing for the authorization.

Pfizer in late March released preliminary results from a vaccine study of 2,260 U.S. volunteers ages 12 to 15, showing there were no cases of COVID-19 among fully vaccinated adolescents compared with 18 among those given dummy shots.

Kids had side effects similar to young adults, the company said. The main side effects are pain, fever, chills and fatigue, particularly after the second dose. The study will continue to track participants for two years for more information about long-term protection and safety.

Pfizer isn't the only company seeking to lower the age limit for its vaccine. Results also are expected by the middle of this year from a U.S. study of Moderna's vaccine in 12- to 17-year-olds.

But in a sign that the findings were promising, the FDA already allowed both companies to begin U.S. studies in children 11 and younger, working their way to as young as 6 months old.

More than 131 million doses of Pfizer's vaccine have already been administered in the U.S., where demand for vaccines among adults has dramatically slowed in recent weeks.

While younger people are at dramatically lower risk of serious side effects from COVID-19, they have made up a larger share of new virus cases as a majority of U.S. adults have been at least partially vaccinated and as higher-risk activities like indoor dining and contact sports have resumed in most of the country. Officials hope that extending vaccinations to teens will further accelerate the nation's reduced virus caseload and allow schools to reopen with minimal disruptions this fall.

The U.S. has ordered at least 300 million doses of the Pfizer shot by the end of July, enough to protect 150 million people.

Bill and Melinda Gates announce they are getting divorced

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By SALLY HO Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Bill and Melinda Gates said Monday that they are divorcing but would keep working together at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, one of the largest charitable foundations in the world.

In identical tweets, the Microsoft co-founder and his wife said they had made the decision to end their marriage of 27 years.

"We have raised three incredible children and built a foundation that works all over the world to enable all people to lead healthy, productive lives," they said in a statement. "We ask for space and privacy for our family as we begin to navigate this new life."

Bill Gates was formerly the world's richest person and his fortune is estimated at well over \$100 billion. How the couple end up settling their estate and any impact on the foundation will be closely watched, especially after another high-profile Seattle-area billionaire couple recently ended their marriage.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and MacKenzie Bezos finalized their divorce in 2019. MacKenzie Scott has since remarried and now focuses on her own philanthropy after receiving a 4% stake in Amazon, worth more than \$36 billion.

The Gateses were married in 1994 in Hawaii. They met after she began working at Microsoft as a product manager in 1987.

In her 2019 memoir, "The Moment of Lift," Melinda Gates wrote about her childhood, life and private struggles as the wife of a public icon and stay-at-home mom with three kids. She won Bill Gates' heart after meeting at a work dinner, sharing a mutual love of puzzles and beating him at a math game.

She also detailed the ways they navigated imbalances in their marriage and parenting journey and noted how working together at the foundation made their relationship better.

"Bill and I are equal partners," Melinda Gates said in a 2019 interview with The Associated Press. "Men and women should be equal at work."

The Seattle-based Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is the most influential private foundation in the world, with an endowment worth nearly \$50 billion. It has focused on global health and development and U.S. education issues since incorporating in 2000.

While both are global figures, Melinda Gates has increasingly built her profile as a champion of women and girls. The former tech business executive launched her private Pivotal Ventures investment and incubation company in 2015 and recently partnered with Scott for a newly announced equity challenge.

David Callahan, founder of the Insider Philanthropy website and author of "The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age" says it's too early to know how the divorce will affect the Gates foundation and the wider philanthropic community.

Although the couple say they will continue to work together at their foundation, Callahan suggests Melinda Gates could still pursue her own philanthropic work.

"You can imagine two separate tracks where they're both working together at the foundation, and each is pursuing their own independent philanthropy outside the foundation," Callahan said.

He said the possibility of Melinda Gates opening another philanthropic foundation would have a dramatic impact.

"Nobody knows what the terms are of their divorce agreement. But if Melinda Gates ends up with just some portion of that wealth and turns to creating her own foundation, it would be among one of the biggest foundations probably in America," Callahan said.

As the public face of the foundation's COVID-19 grants and advocacy work, Bill Gates has come under fire for being a staunch supporter of intellectual property rights for vaccine makers. While the tech icon says protecting the shots' recipes will ensure incentives for research and development, critics claim that mentality hampers supply in favor of drug company profits.

Last year, Bill Gates said he was stepping down from Microsoft's board to focus on philanthropy.

He was Microsoft's CEO until 2000 and since then has gradually scaled back his involvement in the company he started with Paul Allen in 1975. He transitioned out of a day-to-day role in Microsoft in 2008 and served as chairman of the board until 2014.

Whose 'Big Lie'? Trump's proclamation a new GOP litmus test

By JILL COLVIN and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump and his supporters are intensifying efforts to shame — and potentially remove — members of their party who are seen as disloyal to the former president and his false claims that last year's election was stolen from him.

On Capitol Hill, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the No. 3 Republican in the House, risks losing her leadership post amid her increasingly public dispute with Trump. In Utah, Sen. Mitt Romney, a rare Trump foe in the GOP, faced the indignity over the weekend of reminding a booing crowd that he was once their presidential standard-bearer. And in Texas, the only openly anti-Trump Republican in a crowded special election for a congressional seat finished a lowly 9th.

Trump left office nearly four months ago with his reputation badly damaged after a mob of his supporters waged a deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol to prevent the certification of election results. But the recent developments suggest a revival of his political fortunes in which those who refuse to go along with his falsehoods find themselves on the defensive.

"It's scary," said Michael Wood, the Texas Republican congressional candidate who based his campaign on a vow to push the GOP past the "cult of personality" that is Trump. In the end, he garnered just 3% of the vote in Saturday's special election, while two Trump supporters, including one he endorsed, will advance to a runoff.

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Adding to his flurries of press releases, his powerful Facebook account could be reinstated this week if a quasi-independent oversight board rules in his favor. Meanwhile, Republicans in Virginia will decide whether to nominate a vocal Trump supporter for governor in one of the few marquee elections on the calendar this year.

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"The 2020 presidential election was not stolen. Anyone who claims it was is spreading THE BIG LIE, turning their back on the rule of law, and poisoning our democratic system," she tweeted.

Clearly she has no intention of scaling back her criticism, even as she faces the possibility of losing her leadership post.

Cheney survived an earlier attempt to oust her from leadership, but it could be different this time. GOP leader Kevin McCarthy stood by her earlier this year, but he has declined to defend her from the latest round of attacks as he faces conservatives restive for her removal. That's a sign of McCarthy's own calculations as he works to stay close to Trump while also trying to extend a wider tent to help his party win general elections.

While the pro-Trump Republican voices on Capitol Hill far outweigh his party critics, the detractors should not be dismissed.

In all, 10 House Republicans voted to impeach Trump for inspiring the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, and seven Senate Republicans voted to convict. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell voted to acquit Trump, but publicly chastised the former president and has privately encouraged the party to move on.

It's a different calculation for rank-and-file members of Congress, particularly those representing heavily

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Republican areas, where roughly 8 in 10 party supporters typically approve of Trump. Among party activists and base voters, that number is thought to be much higher.

It's still too early to draw any definite conclusions about Trump's success so far this year. Some Republican strategists privately suggest there are real signs that the former president's strength with rank-and-file voters and elected officials has begun to wane.

"He becomes less relevant with every passing day, but among those who still listen to him he's more relevant than ever," said veteran Republican pollster Frank Luntz. "He still matters. He's going to matter for months and even years, but as time goes on he'll matter less and less."

For now, the former reality TV celebrity seems to be enjoying the ride.

"So nice to see RINO Mitt Romney booed off the stage at the Utah Republican State Convention," Trump crowed in a series of celebratory statements Monday lauding the Texas results and criticism of Cheney and Romney. "RINO" means "Republican in Name Only."

In Utah over the weekend, a roomful of Republicans had rained boos down on Romney before trying unsuccessfully to censure him for backing Trump's impeachment.

"Show respect," the crowd was reprimanded by the state party chair. Romney reminded them that he was a lifetime conservative and their presidential nominee in 2012 — and told them Republicans would only hurt themselves by attacking each other.

"If we divide our party, we're going to be a losing party," he said.

In Texas, losing congressional candidate Wood, a 34-year-old former Marine and two-time Purple Heart recipient, has commiserated with a handful of prominent anti-Trump Republicans, including Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., former Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake, former Ohio Gov. John Kasich and Cheney, who had donated to Wood's campaign and offered moral support.

He said Monday there's real urgency for anti-Trump Republicans to unify against him.

"This can't be just individuals pushing back. We've got to organize and show the public you can be a good Republican and not buy into all that BS," Wood said. "This fight won't be won with podcasts and op-eds."

Mike DuHaime, a top Republican strategist, said the party is still grappling with its identity post-Trump, but argued that it will be better positioned going forward if it includes conservatives like Cheney and Romney.

"There are people who are playing to the base of the electorate, which is very passionate and believes the big lie about the election. And it's enough to win a primary for Congress or Senate or governor, or even president, it seems." But, he warned, "If we stay focused on only that, it's not going to be successful enough in the general election to win back the majority."

"We have to at some point put this behind us if we want to be successful in a general election."

Apple's 'walled garden' faces Epic attack in app store trial

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — Apple's lucrative app store was alternately portrayed as a price-gouging monopoly and a hub of world-changing innovation during the preamble to a trial that may reshape the technological landscape.

The contrasting portraits were drawn on Monday as lawyers for Apple and its foe, Epic Games, outlined their cases in an Oakland, California, federal court before U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, who will decide the case.

While Apple depicted its app store as an invaluable service beloved by consumers and developers alike, Epic Games attacked it as a breakthrough idea that has morphed into an instrument of financial exploitation that illegally locks out competition.

The trial, expected to last most of this month, revolves around the 15% to 30% commission that Apple charges for subscriptions and purchases made from apps downloaded from its store -- the only one accessible on the iPhone, iPad and iPod.

Epic, the maker of the popular Fortnite video game, laid out evidence drawn mostly from Apple's internal documents in an attempt to prove the company has built a digital "walled garden" during the past 13 years

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as part of a strategy crafted by its late co-founder, Steve Jobs. The formula, Epic contends, is designed to make it as difficult as possible for consumers to stop buying its products and services.

"The most prevalent flower in the walled garden is the Venus fly trap," said Epic lawyer Katherine Forrest. Later, Forrest highlighted expert testimony that will be submitted during the trial that estimated Apple reaped profit margins of 75% to 78% during 2018 and 2019, even though Jobs publicly said the company didn't expect to make large sums of money from the app store when it opened in 2008.

The app store is now an integral piece of a services division that generated nearly \$17 billion in revenue during the first three months of this year alone.

Apple brushed off Epic's arguments as a case brimming with unfounded allegations made by a company that wants to get rid of the app store commission to increase its own profits while freeloading off an iPhone ecosystem that has cost more than \$100 billion to build.

Karen Dunn, Apple's attorney, pointed to Epic's internal documents outlining a strategy called "Project Liberty" that paved a way for Fortnite to purposefully breach its app store contract last summer and set up a showdown over the fees.

"Rather than investing in innovation, Epic invested in lawyers, PR and policy consultants in an effort to get all of the benefits Apple provides without paying," Dunn said.

In sworn testimony, Epic CEO Tim Sweeney acknowledged that the company is trying to increase its current annual revenue of about \$5.1 billion through its own app store. The Epic store, which is currently banned from the iPhone and other Apple products, charges a 12% commission on in-app transactions. That model isn't profitable yet, Sweeney said, but he predicted the Epic store will start making money during the next three or four years.

"Epic is solely seeking changes to Apple's future behavior," Sweeney testified so the company won't have to pay higher commissions and still be able to offer Fortnite and other games on the iPhone. Apple ousted Fortnite from its app store last August after Epic tried to use its own payment system.

Sweeney also acknowledged that Epic decided to brazenly violate its contract with Apple to make a point. "I wanted to show the world through action exactly what the ramifications of Apple's policies were," he testified.

In his cross-examination, Apple lawyer Richard Doren repeatedly pressed why Epic seemed to have no problem paying a mandatory 30% commission on payments made on Fortnite through Sony's PlayStation Microsoft's Xbox and Nintendo's Switch consoles as well as other devices. During the same questioning, Doren also highlighted evidence showing those three video game consoles have accounted for about \$10.5 billion of the \$13.1 billion in revenue that Fortnite has brought into Epic the game's release in 2017.

Apple CEO Tim Cook -- Jobs' hand-picked successor -- will testify during the trial, too, but his appearance isn't expected until near the end of a courtroom drama that will unfold before only a handful of mask-wearing people being allowed inside each day because of pandemic restrictions.

While the trial will involve moments of high intrigue that could divulge closely guarded secrets, the nuts and bolts of the case will likely hinge on more mundane matters such as market definitions.

Epic contends the iPhone has become so ingrained in society that the device and its peripheral services such as the app store has become a market by itself. As part of that argument, Epic contends the Apple should be forced to open up its walled garden to alternative options, such as allowing other app stores and payment options besides its own.

"The garden could have a door," Epic lawyer Forrest insisted. "It was artificially closed."

Apple Inc. is seeking a far more broader market definition that would encompass the consoles, computers and other devices that people use to play video games. To prove that point, the Cupertino, California, company cited an internal Epic analysis done last year that concluded 38% of Fortnite users who play the game on mobile devices also rely on consoles and other devices, as well.

As part of its case, Apple is also highlighting the roughly 2 billion other smartphones that run on Google's Android software, which allows alternative ways to download apps.

The different way that Google manages apps on Android is one example that Apple believes proves that

consumers have other choices, but many of them prefer keeping their digital experiences within a carefully controlled walled garden.

Epic is "asking us to remove our competitive advantage," Apple lawyer Dunn said. "Epic wants us to be Android, but we don't want to be."

Epic also is suing Google in a separate case accusing that company of illegally gouging apps through its Play store for Android devices.

EPA rule to phase out gases used in refrigerators, coolants

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the first Biden administration rule aimed at combating climate change, the Environmental Protection Agency is proposing to phase down production and use of hydrofluorocarbons, highly potent greenhouse gases commonly used in refrigerators and air conditioners.

The proposed rule follows through on a law Congress passed in December authorizing a 15-year phase-out of HFCs. The new rule is intended to decrease U.S. production and use of the gases by 85% over the next 15 years, part of a global phaseout intended to slow climate change.

HFCs are considered a major driver of global warming and are being targeted worldwide. President Joe Biden has pledged to embrace a 2016 global agreement to reduce them.

"With this proposal, EPA is taking another significant step under President Biden's ambitious agenda to address the climate crisis," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement Monday. "By phasing down HFCs, which can be hundreds to thousands of times more powerful than carbon dioxide at warming the planet, EPA is taking a major action to help keep global temperature rise in check."

The phasedown of HFCs is widely supported by the business community, Regan said, and "will help promote American leadership in innovation and manufacturing of new climate-safe products. Put simply, this action is good for our planet and our economy."

A huge pandemic relief and spending bill passed by Congress in December, and signed by former President Donald Trump, directs EPA to sharply reduce production and use of HFCs. The measure won wide support in both parties and was hailed as the most significant climate change law in at least a decade.

Besides targeting HFCs, the so-called American Innovation and Manufacturing, or AIM Act also promotes technologies to capture and store carbon dioxide produced by power and manufacturing plants and calls for reductions in diesel emissions by buses and other vehicles.

Delaware Sen. Tom Carper, a Democrat who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, praised the EPA rule and said the United States was joining the rest of the world in reducing use of HFCs, helping to avoid the worst effects of global warming.

"Passing the AIM Act was a momentous climate achievement that will help save our planet, and today we are one step closer to its benefits being a reality," Carper said in a statement.

Carper and Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., pushed for the HFC proposal, which they said would give U.S. companies the regulatory certainty needed to produce "next-generation" coolants as an alternative to HFCs. Both men represent states that are home to chemical companies that produce the alternative refrigerants.

The HFC provision was supported by an unusual coalition that included major environmental and business groups, including the National Association of Manufacturers, American Chemistry Council and the Air-Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Institute, which represents companies that make residential and commercial air conditioners, water heaters and commercial refrigeration equipment.

The industry has long been moving to use of alternative refrigerants and was pushing for a federal standard to avoid a patchwork of state laws and regulations.

EPA's proposal "will sharply reduce a sizable source of greenhouse gas emissions while creating new manufacturing jobs and growing our nation's share of the global market for air-conditioning and refrigeration products," American Chemistry Council president Chris Jahn said in a statement. The council represents major companies including Honeywell, Chemours and Arkema.

Those companies and others have developed effective alternatives to HFCs for air conditioning and

refrigeration, the group said.

David Doniger, a senior climate and clean-energy official with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the EPA rule will deliver "enormous public health and climate benefits to all Americans."

Replacing HFCs with safer, commercially available alternatives "is a critical and totally doable first step to head off the worst of the climate crisis ... that will save industry money in the bargain," Doniger said.

EPA estimates the proposed rule would save nearly \$284 billion over the next three decades and prevent the equivalent of 187 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions, roughly equal to annual greenhouse gas emissions from one out of every seven vehicles registered in the United States.

Biden issued an executive order in January that embraces the 2016 Kigali Amendment to the 1987 Montreal Protocol on ozone pollution. The amendment calls for the U.S. and other large industrialized countries to reduce HFCs by 85% by 2036. Biden's order directs the State Department to prepare documents for submission of the amendment to the Senate for formal ratification.

Judges hear arguments over contentious Census privacy tool

By KIM CHANDLER and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — The fight over whether the U.S. Census Bureau can use a controversial statistical technique to keep people's information private in the numbers used for drawing political districts on Monday went before a judicial panel that must decide if the method provides enough data accuracy.

A panel of three federal judges heard arguments on whether the method known as "differential privacy" meets the federal legal requirement for keeping private the personal information of people who participated in the 2020 census while still allowing the numbers to be sufficiently accurate for the highly partisan process of redrawing congressional and legislative districts. Differential privacy adds mathematical "noise," or intentional errors, to the data to obscure any given individual's identity while still providing statistically valid information.

Because a panel of three federal judges will decide the matter, any appeal of the lawsuit brought by the state of Alabama could go straight to the Supreme Court.

Separately, another lawsuit brought by Alabama over the 2020 census was dismissed Monday at the request of the state. The lawsuit had tried to force the Census Bureau to exclude residents who are in the country illegally from the numbers used for divvying up congressional seats among the states. Alabama claimed it would lose a congressional seat if those residents were included, but the Cotton State defied expectations by keeping its seventh seat when the apportionment numbers were released last week. Former President Donald Trump issued a directive attempting to do the same thing, but President Joe Biden rescinded it when he took office in January.

In the lawsuit over the statistical method, Alabama and three Alabama politicians sued the Census Bureau earlier this year after the agency decided to delay the release of data used for drawing the political districts. Normally, the redistricting data is released at the end of March, but the Census Bureau pushed the deadline to sometime in August, at the earliest, because of delays caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Alabama claims the delay was caused by the bureau's attempt to implement differential privacy, which the state's attorneys say will result in inaccurate redistricting numbers. At least 16 other states back Alabama's challenge, which is asking the judges for a preliminary injunction to stop the Census Bureau from implementing the statistical technique. Alabama also wants the agency to release the redistricting data by July 31.

Alabama Solicitor General Edmund LaCour told the judges that the Census Bureau should return to a previous method for protecting privacy where easily identifiable characteristics in a household are swapped with data from another household.

"Small changes matter when you are dividing up power," LaCour said.

Jason Torchinsky, a lawyer also representing Alabama, said the "little bit of noise" the bureau claims to insert could affect the accuracy of the data and consequently, the number of the state's majority-minority districts, in which racial or ethnic groups make up a majority of a community.

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Civil rights advocates, state lawmakers and redistricting experts have raised concerns that differential privacy will produce inaccurate data that will skew the distribution of political power and federal funds.

But Department of Justice attorney Elliott Davis, representing the Census Bureau, told the judges that previous methods of privacy protection, such as swapping information around, are not robust enough to guard against someone being able to "reverse engineer" the data to get people's information.

Davis said computer power has risen exponentially since the early methods were developed for protecting privacy. The new method used by the Census Bureau protects privacy while providing statistically accurate data, he said.

"The error evens out," Davis said.

Bureau officials say the change is needed to prevent data miners from matching individuals to confidential details that have been rendered anonymous in the massive data release. In a test using 2010 census data, which was released without the obscuring technique, bureau statisticians said they were able to re-identify 17% of the U.S. population using information in commercial databases.

The delay in the release of the redistricting data has sent states scrambling for alternative plans such as using other data, utilizing previous maps, rewriting laws dealing with the deadlines or asking courts to extend deadlines. The state of Ohio filed a similar lawsuit over the changed deadlines. A federal judge dismissed the case, but Ohio has appealed.

The three-judge panel did not indicate when it would rule.

Top general drops opposition to change in sex assault policy

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a potentially significant shift in the debate over combating sexual assault in the military, the nation's top general says he is dropping his opposition to a proposal to take decisions on sexual assault prosecution out of the hands of commanders.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stopped short of endorsing the changes recommended by an independent review panel. But in an interview with The Associated Press and CNN, Milley said he is now open to considering them because the problem of sexual assault in the military has persisted despite other efforts to solve it.

"We've been at it for years, and we haven't effectively moved the needle," he said. "We have to. We must."

The comments by Milley, as arguably the most influential officer and as the senior military adviser to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and to President Joe Biden, are likely to carry considerable weight among the service chiefs and add to momentum for the change.

Austin, himself a former senior commander and former vice chief of the Army, has not publicly commented on the review commission's proposal, but it is his creation and thus its recommendations are seen as especially weighty. Lawmakers are also stepping up pressure for the change.

Milley said he would reserve judgment on the proposal to take prosecution authority on sexual assault cases away from commanders until the review commission has finished its work and its recommendations are fully debated within the military leadership.

The review commission submitted its initial recommendations to Austin late last month. Officials have said they expect him to give service leaders about a month to review and respond.

The review panel said that for certain special victims crimes, designated independent judge advocates reporting to a civilian-led office of the Chief Special Victim Prosecutor should decide two key legal questions: whether to charge someone and, ultimately, if that charge should go to a court martial. The crimes would include sexual assault, sexual harassment and, potentially, certain hate crimes.

This goes against longstanding and vehement Pentagon opposition to such moves.

"I was adamantly opposed to that for years," Milley said, speaking during a military flight Sunday. "But I haven't seen the needle move" — referring to a failure to reduce the number of reported sexual assaults.

Indeed, in response to policy questions for his July 2019 Senate confirmation hearing, Milley wrote: "Commanders must retain the ability to hold all service members in their formation accountable for their

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actions. The authority to discipline service members, to include convening courts-martial, is an important tool that enables commanders to fulfill their responsibility to their people and to establish an appropriate culture where victims are treated with dignity and respect."

Since then, Milley has gained a new boss with the election of Biden, and the president's defense secretary moved quickly to make combating sexual assault in the military a top priority.

In his comments Sunday, Milley said he has shifted his thinking in part because he is concerned by indications of a lack of confidence by junior enlisted service members in the fairness of sexual assault case outcomes. He said this amounts to an erosion of confidence in the military chain of command.

"That's really bad for our military if that's true, and survey and the evidence indicate it is true," he said. "That's a really bad situation if the enlisted force — the junior enlisted force — lacks confidence in their chain of command to be able to effectively deal with the issue of sexual assault."

Sexual assault has long plagued the military, triggered widespread congressional condemnation and frustrated military leaders struggling to find prevention, treatment and prosecution efforts that work. The most recent of the Defense Department's biennial anonymous surveys, done in 2018, found that more than 20,000 service members said they experienced some type of sexual assault, but only a third of those filed a formal report.

Formal reports of sexual assaults have steadily gone up since 2006, including a 13% jump in 2018 and a 3% increase in 2019, according to Pentagon data. The 2020 data is not yet available.

There have been a number of changes in the Uniform Code of Military Justice over the last decade to add more civilian oversight to the military's prosecution of sexual assault cases and to beef up assistance for victims. But, lawmakers, including Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, have long demanded a more concrete shift, arguing that commanding officers should be stripped of the authority to decide whether serious crimes go to trial.

Those commanders, Gillibrand and others argue, are often reluctant to pursue charges against their troops, and overrule recommendations for courts martial or reduce the charges. And they say that victims consistently say they are reluctant to file complaints because they don't believe they'll get support from their superiors since often their attacker is in the chain of command.

Taking that prosecution authority away from commanders, however, is seen in the military as eroding a basic principle — that a commander obligated to maintain order and discipline among his troops must have the authority to decide when to prosecute cases. Thus Gillibrand was met with widespread resistance among senior officers.

Milley said he now welcomes "a fresh set of eyes" from the review commission, whose members he has spoken with directly.

"We want that," he said, adding that he is "very open" to any and all ideas the commission puts forth.

"I'm confident that the recommendations of the independent review commission — I'm confident they'll develop evidence-based solutions, and that would be important as we go forward," he said.

Milley said it would be unrealistic to think that sexual assault in the military can be fully eliminated.

"Realistically, crime will occur. So zero might be an unrealistic objective, although it certainly is a desirable objective because one sexual assault is too many. But having said that, realistically, getting it to zero is probably not achievable."

Bobby Unser, 87, Indy 500 champ in great racing family, dies

By JENNA FRYER AP Auto Racing Writer

There wasn't much Bobby Unser wouldn't do to promote the Indianapolis 500, which is how he found himself at a show-and-tell at an Indiana elementary school a few years ago.

He had the famed Indy 500 winners' Borg-Warner Trophy with him and proudly showed the students the Unser legacy. He pointed to the nine places where their faces are sculpted into the sterling silver — four spots for his little brother, Al; three for himself; two for nephew Al Jr.

One girl had a question: If his brother was there four times and he was there only three, was his brother

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the better racer?

It was one of few times anyone had seen Unser speechless.

Unser, who began racing jalopies in New Mexico and went on to become a beloved figure across racing and part of the only pair of brothers to win "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing," died Sunday at 87. He died at his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, of natural causes, Indianapolis Motor Speedway said.

"There simply was no one quite like Bobby Unser," said Roger Penske, now the speedway owner. "Beyond his many wins and accomplishments, Bobby was a true racer that raised the performance of everyone around him. He was also one of the most colorful characters in motorsports."

Unser was a member of one America's most famed racing families and one of the greatest drivers in the history of the speedway, capturing the race in 1968, 1975 and 1981.

"He is part of the Mount Rushmore of Indy," said Dario Franchitti, another three-time Indy 500 winner.

Unser's final Indy 500 victory in a Penske entry was one of the most contentious outcomes and is still disputed to this day.

Unser won from the pole and beat Mario Andretti by 5.18 seconds, but officials ruled Unser passed cars illegally while exiting the pit lane under caution — drawing a penalty that docked him one position and moved Andretti to winner.

Penske and Unser appealed and after a lengthy process the penalty was rescinded in October of that year.

"Bobby was never exonerated of the infraction and USAC, which was the sanctioning body of only Indianapolis at the time, was a very weak organization," Andretti said Monday. "Roger Penske's lawyers were a lot smarter than the USAC lawyers. And this is a fact: Bobby did commit the infraction. But under the circumstances, the penalty was too severe."

Unser in the end was fined \$40,000 and declared the winner for the 35th and final victory of his career.

Andretti, who infamously won only once at Indy, told The Associated Press on Monday that to this day he wears the 1981 winner's ring he was presented at the banquet the day after the race instead of the one from his 1969 victory.

"Every time I saw Bobby I would flash my '81 ring, it's the one I wear, I never gave it back. I would just rub it on his ear," said Andretti, who added he last spoke to Unser about three weeks ago.

Unser was one of six members of the Unser family to race in the Indianapolis 500; an older brother, Jerry, died in a crash preparing for the 1959 Indy 500.

Al Unser is one of only three drivers to win the Indy 500 four times — 1970, 1971, 1978 and 1987. The Unser family tradition stretched to Al Unser's son, Al Unser Jr., who won Indy in 1992 and 1994.

Bobby Unser was born Feb. 20, 1934, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and moved with his family as a child to New Mexico. His father owned a garage along Route 66 and he and his three brothers grew up tooling around in old jalopies before he quit high school at 15 and began his racing career at Roswell New Mexico Speedway.

After two years in the U.S. Air Force from 1953 to 1955 — a stint in which he took pride — Unser turned to racing full time in what became a mighty career. His family was legendary at Pikes Peak International in Colorado — nicknamed "Unser's Peak" because of their prowess at the annual hill climb — but it was "Uncle Bobby" who was the best. He dominated with 13 championships, including six straight from 1958 to 1963.

At Indy, one of the most difficult and challenging race tracks in the world, Unser was magical.

He was one of just 10 drivers to win the 500 at least three times, and Unser and Rick Mears are the only drivers to win the 500 in three different decades. Unser produced 10 top-10 finishes in 19 career starts. He led in 10 races for a total of 440 laps, which to this day ranks 10th on the all-time list. He won two poles, in 1972 and 1981, and had nine front-row starts.

Franchitti spent time each year at the speedway or at dinner with other past winners and said Unser was "always the largest personality in pretty much any room."

"He showed up at the speedway and regardless of when he last raced, he still understood the race and what it took to win the race and he was still so very insightful," Franchitti said. "He loved the Indy 500 so much. He loved coming back."

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The exclusive club of former winners gathers in Indy annually — the pandemic put a pause on the tradition last year — to reminisce about their speedway days. Unser always held court among the giants of motorsport, none ever taking for granted the deadly dangers of Indianapolis.

“He was a fun guy and he liked to talk and to make light of a lot things and always made great conversation, especially at dinner in Indy where everybody convenes. We’d get together for a steak downtown,” Andretti said. “The fact that we survived at all. We lost so many. We dodged a bullet.”

After his driving career, Unser moved to a 20-year broadcasting career and won an Emmy Award as part of the ABC Sports broadcast team for “Outstanding Live Sports Special” for its coverage of the 1989 Indianapolis 500.

He was in the booth in 1987 when he called brother Al’s record-tying fourth 500 victory, and again in 1992 when nephew Al Unser Jr. won Indy for the first time in the closest 500 finish. When his TV career ended, Unser continued to visit the speedway every May. He was a driver coach who assisted on race strategy in 1998 and 1999 when son Robby Unser finished fifth and eighth.

Unser is survived by his wife, Lisa; sons Bobby Jr. and Robby; and daughters Cindy and Jeri.

Calls for justice at N.C. funeral of Andrew Brown Jr.

By BEN FINLEY and JONATHAN DREW Associated Press

ELIZABETH CITY, N.C. (AP) — The Rev. Al Sharpton issued a powerful call for transparency and the release of body camera footage at the funeral Monday for Andrew Brown Jr., a Black man shot and killed by deputies in North Carolina, with the civil rights leader likening withholding the video to a “con” job done on the public.

“I know a con game when I see it. Release the whole tape and let the folks see what happened to Andrew Brown,” Sharpton told mourners in a scorching eulogy at the invitation-only service at a church in Elizabeth City.

“You don’t need time to get a tape out. Put it out! Let the world see what there is to see. If you’ve got nothing to hide, then what are you hiding?” he said, to loud applause.

A judge ruled last week that the video would not be made public for at least a month to avoid interference with a pending state investigation into the April 21 shooting of Brown, 42, by deputies attempting to serve drug-related search and arrest warrants.

An independent autopsy commissioned by his family said Brown was shot five times, including once in the back of the head. Family members who were privately shown a portion of the body camera video say Brown was trying to drive away when he was shot. The shooting sparked days of protests in the city in rural northeastern North Carolina.

Other speakers included Brown’s sons as well as civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who is representing Brown’s family. Calling Brown’s death an “unjustifiable, reckless shooting,” Crump told mourners the legal team would continue fighting for justice and transparency.

“We are here to make this plea for justice because Andrew was killed unjustifiably, as many Black men in America have been killed: shot in the back. Shot, going away from the police. And because Andrew cannot make the plea for justice, it is up to us to make the plea for justice,” Crump said.

Relatives of other Black men killed by law enforcement officers, including siblings of George Floyd, Eric Garner’s mother and Daunte Wright’s sister also spoke at the service. Bridgett Floyd described the “sleepless nights, long days, heartache and pain” that she knows Brown’s family is facing, having experienced the killing of her brother by a police officer in Minnesota who was later convicted of murder.

After Brown’s funeral, she told reporters it was important for her to come to North Carolina to show support for his family.

“I’m showing them strength right now. If I can do it, they can do it,” she said.

A long line of mourners filed into the church, many wearing white T-shirts with Brown’s image and the words, “Say his name.” In the lobby, a wreath of red and white flowers with a ribbon bearing the message, “Rest in Peace Drew,” referring to Brown’s nickname, stood next to a tapestry with images of him.

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As the service started, an ensemble sang songs of praise including, "You're the Lifter," while mourners stood and clapped.

Family members have said that Brown was a proud father of seven, who was known for entertaining relatives with his stories and jokes.

The FBI has launched a civil rights probe of the shooting, while state agents are conducting a separate investigation. Three deputies who were involved remain on leave. The state's Democratic governor, Roy Cooper, has called for swift release of the body camera footage, which must be approved by a judge under state law.

The search and arrest warrants accused Brown of possessing small amounts of cocaine and methamphetamine that he intended to sell. Brown had a criminal history dating back to the 1990s, including past drug convictions.

A prosecutor has said that Brown's car ran into the deputies before they opened fire, while a family attorney who watched a 20-second clip of the footage disagreed, saying that Brown posed no threat and was driving away from deputies. The sheriff has said his deputies weren't injured.

During his eulogy, Sharpton slammed the notion that Brown's past record or actions on the day of the shooting justified violence against him.

"Whatever record Andrew had, Andrew didn't hurt nobody," he said, adding: "How do you try and justify shooting a man that was not a threat to you, because he was running away from you?"

Among those attending the service was 40-year-old Davy Armstrong, who said he went to high school with Brown and lived near him while the two were growing up. He said Brown seemed to be doing well when he ran into him recently before the shooting.

"He was very humble, very generous. He said he was doing good," said Armstrong, who works in construction. "We hear about this on TV all the time. But when it's someone so well known and so respected, it's pretty painful."

After the funeral, 67-year-old Michael Harrell, who lives around the corner from Brown's house, recalled that he would see Brown playing with his kids in the yard.

"Everything is in God's hands," Harrell said of the message he took away from the funeral. "And through God's hands, truth and justice will be served. People will be held accountable."

Mexico marks end of last Indigenous revolt with apology

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico on Monday marked the anniversary of a 1901 battle that ended one of the last Indigenous rebellions in North America, by issuing an apology for centuries of brutal exploitation and discrimination.

Monday's ceremony was held in the hamlet of Tihosuco in the Mayan township of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, the headquarters of the rebellion. It comes amid broader commemorations of the 500th anniversary of the 1519-1521 Spanish Conquest of Mexico, and 200 years of Mexico's 1821 independence from Spain.

"For centuries, these people have suffered exploitation and abuse," said Interior Secretary Olga Sánchez Cordero. "Today we recognize something which we have denied for a long time, the wrongs and injustices committed against the Mayan people."

"Today, we ask forgiveness in the name of the Mexican government for the injustices committed against you throughout our history and for the discrimination which even now you are victims of," she said.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador was accompanied by President Alejandro Giammattei of Guatemala, the neighboring country that has a majority Mayan population.

The Mayas of Quintana Roo — who fought an 1847-1901 rebellion against Mexican settlers and the government known as "the War of the Castes" — still live on the Caribbean coast. The rebellion was finally ended when Mexican troops captured Felipe Carrillo Puerto between May 4-5, 1901.

While Mexico's Mayas have survived, they have been largely locked out of the rich tourism industry that has sprung up at coastal resorts like Cancún and Playa del Carmen since 1974. Most eke out livings as small-scale farmers or fruit growers, or as construction or cleaning workers at resorts.

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"We realize that we have a great history, that we are held up as an example, and people make a lot of money off our name, but that money never shows up in our communities," said Mayan activist Alvaro Yam Canul.

While the coast south of Cancún is known as the "Riviera Maya," and aquatic parks often have "Mayan" attractions, the vast majority of Mayas live in poverty in the southern, undeveloped part of the state of Quintana Roo, south of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, close to the border with Belize.

Yam Canul asked López Obrador to give the Mayas the right to promote tourism a long stretch of mangrove-studded coast that has been designated a nature reserve.

Yam Canul said the Sian Ka'an nature reserve — which occupies 75 miles (120 kilometers) of coast and 1.3 million acres (530,000 hectares) of mangrove, wetlands and shallow bays and lagoons — had been "taken, stolen from us in a bad way, without our knowledge or consulting us."

The reserve currently offers small day trips to visitors, but there are no hotels. Experts say the lagoon and mangrove ecosystem are extremely delicate, and that any significant fishing or tourism activities would threaten them.

Yam Canul asked the president to revise the nature reserve's rules "so that we Maya, followers of the cross, can enter and develop community ecological tourism, in which we do not want really big buildings." He said "all the tourism infrastructure and hotels should be in the Maya capital" of Felipe Carrillo Puerto.

Felipe Carrillo Puerto, once known as Chan Santa Cruz, is considered the Maya capital because it was the center of the rebellion. It held the temple of the "Speaking Cross," an apparent ventriloquist's trick that counselled the Mayas to rise up against their oppressors.

During the 1800s, Mayas were forced to work in serf-like conditions on sisal plantations. Sisal and henequen were fibers used in making rope. Some were even tricked into virtually slavery in sugar cane fields in Cuba.

Death draws attention to police putting suspects face down

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — It's common practice for police around the U.S. to place combative suspects face down and press down on their backs with hands, elbows or knees to gain control.

They aren't supposed to do it for an "extended period" because that can lead to injuries or death. But what length of time is appropriate?

That question and the face-down method are in the spotlight after police video released last week showed officers in Northern California struggling with a man for more than five minutes as he lay face down.

He died. Two days after the video became public, a jury in Southern California awarded more than \$2 million to the family of a homeless man who died in 2018 after officers in Anaheim used a similar technique to restrain him.

Now, a Los Angeles-area lawmaker who is a former police officer is trying to outlaw techniques that create a substantial risk of what's known as "positional asphyxia" — legislation police oppose as either vague or unnecessary given that most departments already restrict the practice.

"This does not mean that a police officer can no longer restrain anyone when they need to for public safety, but it would mean that they cannot keep anyone from breathing/losing oxygen when restraining them," Democratic Assemblyman Mike Gipson said in a statement.

He cited George Floyd's death in Minneapolis last year, who was face down as an officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, and another California death before Christmas involving police in the San Francisco Bay Area community of Antioch.

The legislation is getting more attention after 26-year-old Mario Gonzalez died on April 19. Body camera video released last week showed he was pinned down by four Alameda Police Department employees. Officers confronted him after receiving 911 calls that he seemed disoriented or drunk and appeared to be breaking the security tags off bottles of alcohol he had in shopping baskets.

The department's policy manual says a suspect "shall not be placed on his/her stomach for an extended period, as this could reduce the person's ability to breathe."

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"Every department has policies on this," said Ed Obayashi, a use-of-force consultant to law enforcement agencies and a deputy sheriff and legal adviser for the Plumas County, California, sheriff's office. "Every law enforcement agency trains their officers, advises them, cautions them on this very restraint issue — positional asphyxia."

Timothy T. Williams Jr., a police tactics expert who spent nearly 30 years with the Los Angeles Police Department, said the policy should be clearer.

"The policy needs to be more specific and directed: Once he or she is handcuffed, they are to be immediately removed from the prone position, put on their side and if possible set up," Williams said. Otherwise, "you leave everything to subjective interpretation: What may be short to you may be long to me."

That's not new: A 1995 bulletin from the U.S. Department of Justice advised agencies that "as soon as the suspect is handcuffed, get him off his stomach."

Williams and Obayashi agree that the officers in Alameda should have known that they needed to get Gonzalez onto his side more quickly. In fact, the video captures an officer suggesting they do so about 15 seconds before Gonzalez loses consciousness. Another officer refused, apparently fearing he would lose his grip.

The video shows one officer putting an elbow on Gonzalez's neck and a knee on his shoulder, while another appears to put a knee on his back and leaves it there for about four minutes, even as Gonzalez gasps for air. Officers handcuffed him about two minutes after they pinned him to the ground but didn't turn him on his back until three minutes later, when he had lost consciousness.

From a medical standpoint, any restriction of oxygen or blood flow is too long, said University of California, San Francisco, neurologist Nicole Rosendale.

"There are no kind of safe, defined ways to have someone in a position like this and reduce oxygen," she said. "There's no way to predict who might be at higher risk or lower risk of complications from this positioning."

That's the premise of the proposed California ban, which would outlaw applying pressure or body weight to a restrained person's neck, torso or back or laying them face up or face down without proper monitoring.

The California State Sheriffs' Association said the language is too broad, violations would be too difficult to judge and a ban would leave officers fewer options against violent suspects and more likely to use batons or stun guns.

The National Conference of State Legislatures said Nevada enacted a similar ban last year as part of broader legislation.

After Floyd's death, California last year barred police from using arm-based grips, including chokeholds that apply pressure to a person's windpipe and carotid holds that slow the flow of blood to the brain.

It was similarly once common to hog-tie, or hobble, combative suspects by binding their ankles to their wrists behind their backs, though the Los Angeles and New York police departments were among those that abandoned that practice nearly a quarter-century ago after it was blamed for too many deaths.

An attorney for the Alameda officers, Alison Berry Wilkinson, said they "used the lowest degree of force possible given the intensity of Mr. Gonzalez's efforts to evade their grasp." She said officers never pressed down hard enough to stop his breathing.

Eugene O'Donnell, a former New York City police officer and professor of police studies at New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said the body camera footage of Gonzalez's arrest "is a training video for anybody who's reasonably fair to see how hard it is if a situation becomes physical."

"What you have now in many police departments is prohibitions that make physical arrests very hard — avoiding the chest, avoiding putting somebody on their stomach, avoiding their neck," O'Donnell said. "And there's always the possibility somebody can die in an arrest situation."

3 killed as suspected smuggling boat capsizes off San Diego

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A packed boat suspected of being used in a human smuggling operation capsized

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and broke apart in powerful surf along the rocky San Diego coast, killing three people and injuring more than two dozen others, authorities said.

Lifeguards, the U.S. Coast Guard and other agencies responded Sunday following reports of an overturned vessel in the waves near the rugged peninsula of Point Loma, according to the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department.

The original call was for a handful of people overboard but as rescuers arrived in boats and Jet Skis they quickly realized "it was going to be a bigger situation with more people," said San Diego Lifeguard Services Lt. Rick Romero.

"There are people in the water, drowning, getting sucked out the rip current there," he said.

People were pulled from the water and others made it to shore on their own.

The Coast Guard searched overnight and suspended the work Monday, saying 32 people had been accounted for. Three were declared dead and 29 were alive, including one who remained hospitalized in critical condition.

The local coroner's offices listed the dead as a 41-year-old woman, a 35-year-old woman and a man of unknown age. No identities were released.

"Once we arrived on scene, the boat had basically been broken apart," Romero said. "Conditions were pretty rough: 5 to 6 feet of surf, windy, cold."

Romero said there were "a wide variety of injuries," including hypothermia. Most of the victims were able to walk themselves to ambulances, he said.

Officials said the group was overcrowded on a 40-foot (12-meter) cabin cruiser that is larger than the typical open-top wooden panga-style boats often used by smugglers to bring people illegally into the U.S. from Mexico.

"Every indication from our perspective was this was a smuggling vessel. We haven't confirmed their nationality," said Jeff Stephenson, a supervising agent with U.S. Border Patrol.

Under a pandemic-related order in effect since March 2020, migrants from Mexico and people from Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras picked up at the border are immediately expelled to Mexico without an opportunity to seek asylum. President Joe Biden has exempted unaccompanied children from expulsions but the vast majority of adults are quickly sent back without facing any consequences.

Border Patrol agents went to hospitals to interview survivors of the capsizing, including the boat's captain, who Stephenson described as a "suspected smuggler." Smugglers typically face federal charges and those being smuggled are usually deported.

San Diego Fire-Rescue Department spokesman Jose Ysea said that when he arrived, there was a "large debris field" of splintered wood and other items in the choppy waters.

"In that area of Point Loma it's very rocky. It's likely the waves just kept pounding the boat, breaking it apart," he said.

There were life preservers on board, but it wasn't known how many or whether any passengers were wearing them, officials said.

Among the rescuers was an unnamed Navy sailor who was in the area with his family and jumped in the water to assist someone in an effort described by Romero as a "huge help."

On Thursday, border officials intercepted a panga-type vessel traveling without navigation lights 11 miles (18 kilometers) off the coast of Point Loma with 21 people on board. The crew took all 15 men and six women into custody.

Agents determined all were Mexican citizens with no legal status to enter the U.S., according to a statement released by Customs and Border Protection. Two of the people on the boat, the suspected smugglers, will face charges, it said.

Border Patrol on Friday said law enforcement officials would be ramping up operations to disrupt maritime smuggling off the coast of San Diego this past weekend.

As warmer weather comes to San Diego, there is a misperception that it will make illegal crossings safer

or easier, the agency said in a statement.

In March, an SUV packed with migrants collided with a tractor-trailer in the farming community of Holtville, about 125 miles (200 kilometers) east of San Diego. The crash killed 13 of the 25 people inside a 1997 Ford Expedition, including the driver, in one of the deadliest border-related crashes in U.S. history.

Cop, police chief resign 2 days after Black motorist's death

By MOHAMED IBRAHIM and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

BROOKLYN CENTER, Minn. (AP) — A white police officer who fatally shot a Black man during a traffic stop in a Minneapolis suburb resigned Tuesday, as did the city's police chief — moves that the mayor said he hoped would help heal the community and lead to reconciliation after two nights of protests and unrest.

But police and protesters faced off once again after nightfall Tuesday, with hundreds of protesters gathering again at Brooklyn Center's heavily guarded police headquarters, now ringed by concrete barriers and a tall metal fence, and where police in riot gear and National Guard soldiers stood watch. "Murderapolis" was scrawled with black spray paint on a concrete barrier.

"Whose street? Our street!" the crowd chanted under a light snowfall.

About 90 minutes before the curfew deadline, state police announced over a loudspeaker that the gathering had been declared unlawful and ordered the crowds to disperse. That quickly set off confrontations, with protesters launching fireworks toward the station and throwing objects at police, who launched flashbangs and gas grenades, and then marched in a line to force back the crowd.

"You are hereby ordered to disperse," authorities announced, warning that anyone not leaving would be arrested. The state police said the dispersal order came before the 10 p.m. curfew because protesters were trying to take down the fencing and throwing rocks at police. The number of protesters dropped rapidly over the next hour, until only a few remained. Police also ordered all media to leave the scene.

The resignations from Officer Kim Potter and Police Chief Tim Gannon came two days after the death of 20-year-old Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center. Potter, a 26-year veteran, had been on administrative leave following Sunday's shooting, which happened as the Minneapolis area was already on edge over the trial of an officer charged in George Floyd's death.

Brooklyn Center Mayor Mike Elliott said at a news conference that the city had been moving toward firing Potter when she resigned. Elliott said he hoped her resignation would "bring some calm to the community," but that he would keep working toward "full accountability under the law."

"We have to make sure that justice is served, justice is done. Daunte Wright deserves that. His family deserves that," Elliott said.

A decision on whether prosecutors will charge Potter could come as soon as Wednesday. Meanwhile, the cities of Brooklyn Center, Minneapolis and St. Paul imposed 10 p.m. curfews.

Gannon has said he believed Potter mistakenly grabbed her gun when she was going for her Taser. She can be heard on her body camera video shouting "Taser! Taser!" However, protesters and Wright's family members say there's no excuse for the shooting and it shows how the justice system is tilted against Blacks, noting Wright was stopped for an expired car registration and ended up dead.

Activists who attended the mayor's news conference called for sweeping changes to the Brooklyn Center Police Department and sharply criticized the acting police chief, Tony Gruenig, for not yet having a plan.

Elliott said the department has about 49 police officers, none of whom live in Brooklyn Center. He said he didn't have information on racial diversity at hand but that "we have very few people of color in our department."

The modest suburb just north of Minneapolis has seen its demographics shift dramatically in recent years. In 2000, more than 70% of the city was white. Today, a majority of residents are Black, Asian or Hispanic.

After stopping Wright for the expired license plates, police tried to arrest him on an outstanding warrant. The warrant was for his failure to appear in court on charges that he fled from officers and possessed a gun without a permit during an encounter with Minneapolis police in June.

Body camera footage released Monday shows Wright struggling with police when Potter shouts, "I'll

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Tase you! I'll Tase you! Taser! Taser! Taser!" She draws her weapon after the man breaks free from police outside his car and gets back behind the wheel.

After firing a single shot from her handgun, the car speeds away, and Potter says, "Holy (expletive)! I shot him."

Wright died of a gunshot wound to the chest, according to the medical examiner.

Protests began within hours.

In her one-paragraph letter of resignation, Potter said, "I have loved every minute of being a police officer and serving this community to the best of my ability, but I believe it is in the best interest of the community, the department, and my fellow officers if I resign immediately."

Wright's father, Arbuey Wright, told ABC's "Good Morning America" that he rejects the explanation that Potter mistook her gun for her Taser.

"I lost my son. He's never coming back. I can't accept that. A mistake? That doesn't even sound right. This officer has been on the force for 26 years. I can't accept that," he said.

Chyna Whitaker, mother of Daunte's son, said at a news conference that she felt police "stole my son's dad from him."

The Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association said in a statement Tuesday that "no conclusions should be made until the investigation is complete."

Prosecutors in Hennepin County, where the shooting occurred, said they have referred the case to nearby Washington County — a practice county attorneys in the Minneapolis area adopted last year in handling police deadly force cases. Washington County Attorney Pete Orput told WCCO-AM that he had received information on the case from state investigators and hoped to have a charging decision on Wednesday. Orput did not immediately respond to a message from The Associated Press.

Elliott, the mayor, called for the governor to move the case to the attorney general to prosecute.

Asked to comment, John Stiles, spokesman for the attorney general's office, said the attorney general has confidence in Orput's review of the case.

Ben Crump, the Wright family's attorney, spoke outside the Minneapolis courthouse where a fired police officer is on trial in Floyd's death. Crump compared Wright's death to that of Floyd, who was pinned down by police when they tried to arrest him for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 at a neighborhood market last May.

Daunte Wright "was not a threat to them," Crump said. "Was it the best decision? No. But young people don't always make the best decisions. As his mother said, he was scared."

Potter has experience with investigations into police shootings. She was the police union president and one of the first officers to respond after Brooklyn Center police fatally shot a man who allegedly tried to stab an officer with a knife in 2019, according to a report from the Hennepin County Attorney's Office.

After medics arrived, she told the two officers who shot the man to get into separate squad cars, turn off their body cameras, and not to speak to each other. She accompanied two other officers involved in the shooting while investigators interviewed them.

Asian American business leaders seek to fight discrimination

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

Asian American business leaders are launching a foundation to challenge discrimination through what they call the largest philanthropic commitment in history by Asian Americans geared to support members of their own community.

The Asian American Foundation, which announced its launch on Monday, said it has raised \$125 million from its board members to support Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations over the next five years. The foundation has also raised an additional \$125 million from individual and corporate donors through its "AAPI Giving Challenge."

Donors include Care.com founder Sheila Lirio Marcelo; Li Lu, the founder and chairman of the investment firm Himalaya Capital; Joseph Bae, the co-president of the investment firm Kohlberg Kravis & Roberts; Jerry

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Yang, the co-founder of Yahoo; Joseph Tsai, the co-founder and executive vice chairman of the Chinese technology company Alibaba; and Peng Zhao, the CEO of the financial services firm Citadel Securities.

The announcement coincides with Asian American Heritage month and with the aftermath of the March killings of eight people, including six Asian women, in Atlanta, which led to a spike in philanthropic pledges and donations to Asian American groups and causes.

Experts cautioned that it was unclear whether those donations would be sustained for Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations. Though Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders make up about 6% of the population of the United States, organizations that focus on those communities have historically been neglected in philanthropy. One report from the advocacy organization Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy shows that just 0.2% of contributions from U.S. foundations went toward these communities in 2018, the latest year for which the group has adequate analysis of awarded contributions.

The Asian American Foundation says its giving will focus on three areas: supporting organizations and leaders who are measuring and challenging violence against Asian American and Pacific Islanders; developing a common data standard that tracks violence and hate incidents; and helping create K-12 and college curriculums that "reflect the history of Asian American and Pacific Islanders as part of the American story."

It has already made some grants. Before its launch, the foundation contributed a total of \$3 million to Asian Americans Advancing Justice, National Asian American Women's Forum and Stop AAPI Hate, a group that has reported an increase in hate crimes targeting Asian Americans in several cities across the U.S. since March 2020.

Asian American and Pacific Islander communities "need systemic change to ensure we are better supported, represented, and celebrated across all aspects of American life," said the foundation's President Sonal Shah, who previously served as a deputy assistant to former President Barack Obama. She added in a statement that the foundation "plans to spark that systemic change and help fundamentally transform AAPI empowerment and support well into the future."

The group, whose founding advisory council included CNN hosts Lisa Ling, Fareed Zakaria, basketball player Jeremy Lin and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, will kick off on Tuesday by hosting a virtual event called "Claiming Power: The Future of Asian Americans." Former Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama are scheduled to speak.

US and UK reject reports of imminent prisoner deal with Iran

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.S. and the U.K. dismissed reports coming out of Iran that they are thrashing out a prisoner exchange deal with Tehran that could see the imminent release of a British-Iranian woman, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and four Americans, among others.

Iran was a key topic of discussions Monday between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his host in London, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab. Their meeting took place a day before the first face-to-face meeting of foreign ministers from the Group of Seven leading industrial nations in two years, largely due to the coronavirus pandemic. Iran, Ukraine, China, Russia, climate change and COVID-19 are expected to dominate the talks.

Blinken's visit to London, his first since being appointed by President Joe Biden, comes amid mounting speculation of a prisoner swap deal with Iran. Such exchanges are not uncommon and were a feature of the 2015 nuclear accord between Iran and the world's leading powers. Biden has indicated he is looking to restart nuclear talks with Tehran after his predecessor, Donald Trump, pulled the U.S. out of the agreement in 2018.

"The reports coming out of Tehran are not accurate," Blinken said at a press briefing after their meeting, adding that he had "no higher priority" than bringing all detained Americans home.

"More broadly on this, we have to take a stand against the arbitrary detention of citizens for political purposes," he said.

Raab also dismissed the prospects of an imminent breakthrough amid reports in Iran that Britain would

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pay a 400 million-pound (\$550 million) debt to secure Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release. He insisted that the British government was working "very intensively" on the release of detained British citizens in Iran.

"I would say it's incumbent on Iran unconditionally to release those who are held arbitrarily and in our view unlawfully," Raab said.

In Britain, there's particular interest in the well-being of Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was last week sentenced to an additional year in prison on charges of spreading "propaganda against the system."

The two diplomats discussed an array of subjects, such as sanctions on Russian citizens, climate change and Biden's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan later this year, a process that began in earnest over the weekend. Russia and its aggressive actions toward Ukraine were also on the agenda, with Blinken set to travel to the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on Wednesday.

Biden is also set to take a new approach with regard to North Korea following a policy review completed last week. Blinken, who met in London with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts earlier Monday, said the new approach will be "practical and calibrated" and urged the leadership in Pyongyang to "take the opportunity to engage diplomatically."

On Tuesday, the top diplomats from the full G-7 — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the U.K. and the U.S. — will meet along with their foreign minister colleagues from selected other countries, including Australia, India and South Africa.

Ahead of the gathering, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas warned that "authoritarian states" around the world are "trying to play us against each other" and that breaches of international law have become commonplace.

"It is important that we hold our values of democracy, state of law, human rights and a global order based on rules against them, united and credibly," he said.

Britain's Foreign Office said the G-7 ministers will invest \$15 billion in development finance over the next two years to help women in developing countries access jobs, build resilient businesses and recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

They are also expected to pledge to get 40 million more girls into school and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10 in poorer nations by 2026.

100 years old: Low-key centenary for Northern Ireland

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Northern Ireland marked what is widely considered to be its centenary on Monday, with Queen Elizabeth II stressing the need for "reconciliation, equality and mutual understanding" as she sent her "warmest good wishes" to its people.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on a visit to London, said the U.S. will continue to encourage the U.K. and the European Union "to prioritize political and economic stability in Northern Ireland" as they work through their post-Brexit relationship.

Northern Ireland was created on May 3, 1921, when the Government of Ireland Act came into effect and partitioned the island of Ireland into two separate entities. Northern Ireland became part of the U.K. alongside England, Scotland and Wales, while Ireland would later that year become what was then known as the Irish Free State.

Much like the day that Northern Ireland was founded 100 years ago, there were no huge celebrations or grand ceremonies Monday, given the sharply differing views on its creation and subsequent history. Restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic have also led to all commemorations this year being scaled back.

Since its creation, Northern Ireland society has been split between those who want to remain in the U.K. and those who wish to see Northern Ireland become part of the Republic of Ireland. For decades, that fissure fueled sectarian violence: the so-called Troubles, which resulted in around 3,500 deaths.

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 formalized power-sharing arrangements between unionists and nationalists. It's not always been a smooth process politically, with the two sides often unable to reach

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agreement on how to govern, and there's been sporadic outbreaks of violence.

"This anniversary reminds us of our complex history, and provides an opportunity to reflect on our togetherness and our diversity," the queen said in a statement.

"It is clear that reconciliation, equality and mutual understanding cannot be taken for granted, and will require sustained fortitude and commitment," she added.

The queen also referred to "treasured" memories she shared in Northern Ireland with her late husband, Prince Philip, who died last month at 99.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also marked the date, describing it as a "very significant" anniversary and stressed the importance of reflecting on the "complex history" of the past 100 years.

"People from all parts of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom and across the globe, will approach this anniversary in different ways, with differing perspectives," he said.

In recent weeks, there have been outbreaks of violence across Northern Ireland, with the unionist community particularly aghast at post-Brexit trade rules that took effect this year. These imposed customs checks on some goods moving between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K., which did not exist when the U.K. was part of the EU.

Blinken urged all politicians and parties to prioritize peace and stability.

"The United States remains a steadfast supporter of a secure and prosperous Northern Ireland, in which all communities have a voice and can enjoy the gains of the hard-won peace," he told reporters on Monday.

Although no major celebrations were held, plans to mark the centenary this year included tree-planting projects. Every school was given a native tree to plant in their grounds and many will explore what the future will look like in the next 100 years.

"Across generations, the people of Northern Ireland are choosing to build an inclusive, prosperous, and hopeful society, strengthened by the gains of the peace process," the queen said. "May this be our guiding thread in the coming years."

Germany cancels Oktoberfest for 2nd year over virus fears

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Bavarian officials on Monday canceled Oktoberfest festivities for a second year in a row due to concerns over the spread of COVID-19, saying there are too many risks in hosting the celebrations — which bring in visitors from around the world — during a global pandemic.

Bavarian Governor Markus Soeder said it was with "heavy hearts" that they decided to call off the festival for which the state is known globally, but that with coronavirus numbers still stubbornly high and German hospitals already struggling, it had to be done.

"Oktoberfest will be held again, and will be big again," he pledged.

Germany is in the middle of a coronavirus lockdown that includes a ban on large gatherings, with an infection rate of 146.9 new weekly infections per 100,000 residents.

Bavaria is slightly below the national average with 145.4 new weekly infections per 100,000, according to the country's disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute.

Oktoberfest typically attracts about 6 million visitors from around the world and had been scheduled from Sept. 18 to Oct. 3.

The combination of huge tents full of people and the consumption of large quantities of alcohol, as well as the possibility for mutated varieties of the virus to be brought in from abroad, made it particularly hazardous to go ahead with the festival, Soeder said.

After Oktoberfest was canceled last year, about 50 of the southern German city's beer halls and other establishments hosted smaller parties under strict coronavirus guidelines. Mayor Dieter Reiter said the hope was that it again would be possible to have open-air beer gardens and patios open under certain restrictions.

However difficult the decision to cancel Oktoberfest, it would have been worse if the city waited too long and had to call it off after preparations were already underway, he said.

"For me, personally, it was no easy decision because it is a huge date in the calendar for the mayor," he said. "Much more importantly, it's a huge shame for the millions of fans worldwide."

Under Germany's national "emergency brake" legislation passed last month, measures limiting personal contacts, closing leisure and sports facilities and shutting or restricting access to many stores kick in for areas which have more than 100 weekly new cases per 100,000 residents for three consecutive days. Restrictions also include a 10 p.m.-5 a.m. curfew.

'Football City, USA' killings raise sport safety concerns

By MICHELLE LIU Associated Press/Report for America

ROCK HILL, S.C. (AP) — Any visitor to Rock Hill, South Carolina, soon learns that "Football City, USA" basks in the glory of the dozens of youth leaguers who have gone on to win college championships and land coveted NFL contracts.

Competitive football is so essential to the city of 75,000 that a longtime high school coach can't even pause to watch a nearby middle school game, lest he be accused of recruiting. But in the aftermath of a mass shooting by a popular homegrown player whose family blamed football for his troubles, some parents and coaches are facing tough questions about the role the sport plays in children's lives.

Phillip Adams, whose NFL career is still celebrated on the county tourism website, is accused of killing Dr. Robert Lesslie, his wife, their two grandchildren and two air conditioning technicians at the doctor's home before killing himself last month. Investigators haven't said what might have prompted the deadly attack.

His father, Alonzo Adams, told WCNC-TV that "he was a good kid, and I think the football messed him up." And his sister, Lauren Adams, told USA Today that her brother's "mental health degraded fast and terribly bad" in recent years, leaving him with "extremely concerning" signs of mental illness, including an escalating temper.

People who knew the Rock Hill High graduate as a kind and mild-mannered young man are wondering if head injuries he suffered as a player affected his mental health. A probe of his brain was ordered to see whether he had chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, a possibly degenerative disease that has been shown to cause violent mood swings and other cognitive disorders in some athletes.

Adams, 32, played in 78 NFL games over six seasons for six teams — San Francisco, New England, Seattle, Oakland and the New York Jets before retiring with Atlanta in 2015. He suffered a severe ankle injury as a rookie with the 49ers, and was recorded as having two concussions with the Raiders.

There may never be a definitive link between his concussions and the act of deadly violence this month. But in the aftermath, some leaders in the city's football community are reflecting on how to frame what happened to the many young players still in the game.

Rock Hill is renowned for bringing up aspiring players through small fry teams and catapulting them into the pros. At least 37 athletes from the city's three public high schools have played in the NFL, according to a list maintained by one of the coaches that goes back to the 50s. Current pros include New England Patriots cornerback Stephon Gilmore and No. 1 overall draft pick Jadeveon Clowney, who signed with the Cleveland Browns this offseason.

But awareness is growing nationwide among parents, players and spectators about the potentially lasting impacts of sports concussions, and that includes Rock Hill.

Ed Paat, who runs a nonprofit in town, played football as a kid decades ago. Now 42, he and his wife are steering their four kids toward other sports, like gymnastics and jiu jitsu, in light of the emerging research and events including the shooting.

"For our family, it's not something that's an option," Paat said. "The more we learn about CTE, brain injuries, traumatic brain injuries -- for us there are just other avenues for athletics that don't have such a potential for long term medical effects."

Paat acknowledges his view is probably unpopular in the town: "The mindset my wife and I have, I would assume is a minority in the South, not only in the South but in Rock Hill," Paat said.

David Sweem, a former athletic trainer and football coach who now serves on South Carolina's Brain Injury Safety Net Task Force, said he's noticed that parents are definitely more aware of football's head

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injury risks. "It's made me rethink some things with my own children. And I love football. Still very passionate about the sport," he said.

Children, too, are taking notice. Ronnie Collins, an accountant, said he's trying to get his son interested in playing, but 12-year-old Jackson is worried about getting injured after learning about concussions and watching players get hurt on television.

Some youth coaches in town object to seeing football singled out for safety reasons when other contact sports also face inherent physical risks. Perry Sutton, who's coached youth football for three decades, said his 7-year-old grandson's soccer games are rough: "Them kids kicking each other in the head and everything. You don't get that in football."

Still, Rock Hill's youth programs have responded by putting coaches through hours of concussion training each year and teaching kids to tackle with their bodies, not their heads. And while participation rates for youth and high school sports have dropped nationally, most coaches interviewed here said the number of kids playing football in Rock Hill remains about the same.

Lawrence Brown, a youth coach who grew up with Adams and played on the same small fry team, said the killings changed his perspective. He's been thinking lately about emphasizing that players need to live their lives outside the game, too. "We know we can't play football forever. We know we can't play any sport forever," Brown said.

Growing up alongside future football stars has been exciting for Kia Wright, but now she's worried for her own 12-year-old son Kaleb. She wants him to play baseball, but her son's passion for football outshines any other sport.

She said Kaleb heard about the shooting on the news, but wouldn't talk about it, probably fearing she'd pull him out of football if he did.

"I can't take him out of a game that he loves," Wright said.

Eilish, Chalamet, Gorman and Osaka headline fall Met Gala

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The star power is back. When the Met Gala returns in September, it will feature a heavy-hitting contingent of celebrity co-chairs: Actor Timothée Chalamet, musician Billie Eilish, poet Amanda Gorman and tennis star Naomi Osaka.

Honorary chairs for the evening will be designer Tom Ford, sponsor Instagram's Adam Mosseri, and Vogue's Anna Wintour.

The museum made the announcement Monday on the traditional day of the Met Gala — the first Monday in May. Those plans, of course, were upended by the pandemic. The September 13 gala will be a more intimate affair, to be followed by a larger one on May 2, 2022. Both will launch a two-part exhibition, a survey of American fashion to be on view for almost a year.

"In America: A Lexicon of Fashion," opening Sept. 18, will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the museum's Costume Institute and "explore a modern vocabulary of American fashion," the museum has said. Part two, "In America: An Anthology of Fashion," will open in the museum's popular American Wing period rooms on May 5, 2022, and will explore American fashion, with collaborations with film directors, by "presenting narratives that relate to the complex and layered histories of those spaces." Both parts will close on Sept. 5, 2022.

Filmmaker Melina Matsoukas ("Queen & Slim") has been commissioned to create an open-ended film to project in the galleries, with content changing during the course of the exhibition.

The gala, which was canceled last year, is a major fundraiser, providing the Costume Institute with its primary source of funding.

As always, the exhibits will be the work of star curator Andrew Bolton. In a video preview Monday, Bolton noted how challenging the past year had been for the fashion community.

"It's been incredibly inspiring to see how designers have responded to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, how they've found new outlets to express their creativity and new ways to present their col-

lections," he said.

Bolton added that many designers had been at the vanguard of the discussion about diversity and inclusion: "The social justice movements of last summer reinforced their commitment to these issues and also consolidated their leadership in advancing the conversation."

In addition to Matsoukas, other confirmed collaborators from the film world include cinematographer Bradford Young, whose projects have included "Selma" and "When They See Us;" production designers Nathan Crowley and Shane Valentino; and Franklin Leonard, film executive and founder of The Black List, a listing of top unproduced screenplays.

Attention travelers! EU proposes reopening external borders

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — In an announcement sure to be welcomed by travelers worldwide, EU officials on Monday proposed easing restrictions on visiting the 27-nation bloc as vaccination campaigns across the continent gather speed.

Travel to the European Union is currently extremely limited except for a handful of countries with low infection rates. But with the summer tourist season looming, the bloc's European Commission hopes the new recommendations will dramatically expand that list.

The Commission hopes the move will soon allow travelers reunite with their friends and relatives living in Europe and support the bloc's economy this summer.

"Time to revive EU tourism industry and for cross-border friendships to rekindle — safely," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. "We propose to welcome again vaccinated visitors and those from countries with a good health situation."

Under the Commission's proposal, entry would be granted to all those fully vaccinated with EU-authorized shots. Coronavirus vaccines authorized by the European Medicines Agency, the bloc's drug regulator, include Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. The EMA has not approved any vaccines from Russia or China as of yet but is looking at data for Russia's Sputnik V jab.

EU nations could also individually decide to accept travelers immunized with vaccines listed by WHO for emergency use. The U.N. health agency has approved the same four vaccines as the EMA, and is expected to make a ruling soon on China's Sinopharm vaccine.

EU officials believe the bloc's COVID-19 vaccination campaigns will soon be "a game changer" in the fight against the deadly virus. Its proposal will be discussed with EU ambassadors this week and the Commission hopes it could start by June, once it is adopted by member states. Still, the recommendation is non-binding and EU countries will be entitled to keep travel restrictions in place if they want.

Commission spokesman Adalbert Jahnz said fully-vaccinated travelers coming from outside the EU should be allowed to visit Europe but insisted that the proposal's goal is not to exempt them from testing or quarantines upon arrival.

"This still remains very much in the hands of the member states," he said.

The Commission also proposed raising the threshold of new COVID-19 cases that is used to determine the countries from which all travel should be permitted.

"Nonessential travel regardless of individual vaccination status is currently permitted from seven countries with a good epidemiological situation," it said, proposing to increase 14-day cumulative COVID-19 infection rate per 100,000 inhabitants from 25 to 100.

"This remains considerably below the current EU average, which is over 420," it said.

It was unclear which countries would actually make the cut but an EU official who was not authorized to be quoted by name because the proposal has yet to be adopted said Israel would definitely be on the list.

"The UK, question mark, the U.S., for the time being, not quite," he said. "But we see how quickly the situation in the U.S. is evolving, notably for the rate of vaccination."

In case the infection situation deteriorates in a non-EU country, the Commission proposed an "emergency brake" to stop dangerous virus variants from entering the bloc through quickly enacted travel limits.

EU officials and nations are also talking about introducing COVID-19 certificates aimed at facilitating

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travel across the region this summer. The documents, sometimes called coronavirus passports or green certificates, would be given to EU residents who can prove they have been vaccinated, can provide a negative coronavirus test, or prove they have recovered from COVID-19.

"Until the digital green certificate is operational, member states should be able to accept certificates from non-EU countries," the Commission said, adding that unvaccinated children should be able to travel with their vaccinated parents if they provide a negative PCR test.

Greece, which is heavily reliant on tourism, has already lifted quarantine restrictions for the U.S., Britain, Israel, and other non-EU countries. On Saturday, Hungary loosened several COVID-19 restrictions for residents with government-issued immunity cards, given to those who have had one vaccine dose or recovered from COVID-19.

People with the plastic cards could enter indoor dining rooms, hotels, theaters, cinemas, spas, gyms, libraries, museums and other recreational venues in Hungary.

The whole issue of COVID-19 passports is fraught in many parts of the world, with critics saying they discriminate against people in poorer nations or younger people who do not have access to vaccines in many countries. The Hungarian government moved ahead with its own certificates because it has been inoculating people with a variety of vaccines, including jabs from China and Russia that have not been approved by the EMA.

Supreme Court won't take Maryland bump stock ban case

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is declining to take up a challenge to Maryland's ban on bump stocks and other devices that make guns fire faster.

The high court on Monday turned away a challenge to the ban, which took effect in October 2018. A lower court had dismissed the challenge at an early stage and that decision had been upheld by an appeals court. As is typical, the court didn't comment in declining to take the case.

Maryland's ban preceded a nationwide ban on the sale and possession of bump stocks that was put in place by the Trump administration and took effect in 2019. The Supreme Court previously declined to stop the Trump administration from enforcing that ban. Both Maryland's ban and the nationwide one followed a 2017 shooting in Las Vegas in which a gunman attached bump stocks to assault-style rifles he used to shoot concertgoers from his hotel room. Fifty-eight people were killed and hundreds were injured.

US begins reuniting some families separated at Mexico border

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The Biden administration said Monday that four families that were separated at the Mexico border during Donald Trump's presidency will be reunited in the United States this week in what Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas calls "just the beginning" of a broader effort.

Two of the four families include mothers who were separated from their children in late 2017, one Honduran and another Mexican, Mayorkas said, declining to detail their identities. He described them as children who were 3 years old at the time and "teenagers who have had to live without their parent during their most formative years."

Parents will return to the United States on humanitarian parole while authorities consider other longer-term forms of legal status, said Michelle Brane, executive director of the administration's Family Reunification Task Force. The children are already in the U.S.

Exactly how many families will reunite in the United States and in what order is linked to negotiations with the American Civil Liberties Union to settle a federal lawsuit in San Diego, but Mayorkas said there were more to come.

"We continue to work tirelessly to reunite many more children with their parents in the weeks and months ahead," Mayorkas told reporters. "We have a lot of work still to do, but I am proud of the progress we have made and the reunifications that we have helped to achieve."

More than 5,500 children were separated from their parents during the Trump administration going

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back to July 1, 2017, many of them under a "zero-tolerance" policy to criminally prosecute any adult who entered the country illegally, according to court filings. The Biden administration is doing its own count going back to Trump's inauguration in January 2017 and, according to Brane, believes more than 1,000 families remain separated.

While family separation under "zero-tolerance" ended in June 2018 under court order and shortly after Trump reversed course, Biden has repeatedly assailed the practice as an act of cruelty. An executive order on his first day in office pledged to reunite families that were still separated "to the greatest extent possible."

The ACLU is happy for the four families but their reunifications are "just the tip of the iceberg," said attorney Lee Gelernt. Among the more than 5,500 children known to have been separated, more than 1,000 may still be apart from their parents and more than 400 parents have yet to be located, he said.

"We need the Biden administration to provide relief to all of them, including providing them a permanent pathway to citizenship and care," Gelernt said.

The reunifications begin as the Biden administration confronts the third major increase in unaccompanied children arriving at the border in seven years. It has made major strides moving children from grossly overcrowded Border Patrol facilities to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shelters, which are more suited to longer-term stays until children are placed with sponsors in the United States, typically parents or close relatives.

The average stay for an unaccompanied child in Border Patrol custody has plummeted to about 20 hours, below the legal limit of 72 hours and down from 133 hours in late March, Mayorkas said. There are 677 unaccompanied children in Border Patrol custody, down from more than 5,700 in late March.

Health and Human Services opened 14 emergency intake centers, raising capacity to nearly 20,000 beds from 952 when the Federal Emergency Management Agency was dispatched March 13, Mayorkas said. About 400 asylum officers from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have been assigned as case managers to speed the release of children to sponsors. As of Thursday, Health and Human Services had 22,557 children in its care.

Russia turns to China to make Sputnik shots to meet demand

By HUIZHONG WU and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Russia is turning to multiple Chinese firms to manufacture the Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine in an effort to speed up production as demand soars for its shot.

Russia has announced three deals totaling 260 million doses with Chinese vaccine companies in recent weeks. It's a decision that could mean quicker access to a shot for countries in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa that have ordered Russia's vaccine, as the U.S. and the European Union focus mainly on domestic vaccination needs.

Earlier criticism about Russia's vaccine have been largely quieted by data published in the British medical journal The Lancet that said large-scale testing showed it to be safe, with an efficacy rate of 91%.

Yet, experts have questioned whether Russia can fulfill its pledge to countries across the world. While pledging hundreds of millions of doses, it has only delivered a fraction.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said demand for Sputnik V significantly exceeds Russia's domestic production capacity.

To boost production, the Russian Direct Investment Fund, which bankrolled Sputnik V, has signed agreements with multiple drug makers in other countries, such as India, South Korea, Brazil, Serbia, Turkey, Italy and others. There are few indications, however, that manufacturers abroad, except for those in Belarus and Kazakhstan, have made any large amounts of the vaccine so far.

Airfinity, a London-based science analytics company, estimates Russia agreed to supply some 630 million doses of Sputnik V to over 100 countries, with only 11.5 million doses exported so far.

RDIF declined to disclose how many doses are going to other countries. Through April 27, less than 27 million two-dose sets of Sputnik V have been reportedly produced in Russia.

The Russian Direct Investment Fund, which has been in charge of international cooperation for Sputnik

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V, said in April it would produce 100 million doses in collaboration with Hualan Biological Bacterin Inc., in addition to an earlier deal announced in March for 60 million doses with Shenzhen Yuanxin Gene tech Co.

The two deals are in addition to a deal announced last November with Tibet Rhodiola Pharmaceutical Holding Co, which had paid \$9 million to manufacture and sell the Sputnik V vaccine in China. RDIF said in April the terms of the deal were for 100 million doses with a subsidiary company belonging to Tibet Rhodiola.

Russia is "very ambitious and unlikely to meet their full targets," said Rasmus Bech Hansen, founder and CEO of Airfinity. Working with China to produce Sputnik V could be a win-win situation for both Russia and China, he added.

In recent years, Chinese vaccine companies have turned from largely making products for use domestically to supplying the global market, with individual firms gaining WHO preapproval for specific vaccines — seen as a seal of quality. With the pandemic, Chinese vaccine companies have exported hundreds of millions of doses abroad.

Chinese vaccine makers have been quick to expand capacity and say they can meet China's domestic need by the end of the year.

"This is an acknowledgment of the Chinese vaccine manufacturers who can produce at volume," said Helen Chen, head of pharmaceuticals LEK Consulting, strategy consultancy firm in Shanghai, in an email.

However, none of the three Chinese companies have yet to start manufacturing Sputnik V.

Tibet Rhodiola started constructing a factory in Shanghai at the end of last year and expects production to start in September, the company said at an annual meeting for investors last month. Tibet Rhodiola's chairman Chen Dalin also said that after the successful technology transfer, they will start with an order of 80 million doses to sell back to Russia. An employee at the company declined to transfer a phone call request to the company's media department for comment.

The timeline for the newest deals are also unclear. Hualan Bio was among the 10 largest vaccines manufacturers in China in 2019. Phone calls to Hualan Bio went unanswered.

A spokeswoman for Shenzhen Yuanxing declined to say when the company will start production but said their order would not be for sale within China. RDIF had said the production will start this month.

In spite of the delays, Russia's vaccine diplomacy has made gains.

From the outset, Russia, the first country to approve a coronavirus vaccine, aimed to distribute it globally. Within weeks of giving Sputnik V regulatory approval, RDIF started actively marketing it abroad, announcing multiple deals to supply the shot to other countries. It is so far winning the "public relations" battle, analysts said in a new report examining Russia and China's vaccine diplomacy from the Economist Intelligence Unit.

"Russia has been able to build stronger diplomatic ties and in areas where it hasn't been able to," before, said Imogen Page-Jarrett, an analyst at EIU. "They have this window of opportunity while the US, E.U. and India are focusing on domestic and the rest of the world is crying out for a vaccine supply."

Impact of devastating Indian virus surge spreads to politics

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — As a catastrophic surge of the coronavirus sweeps through India, the leaders of 13 opposition parties urged the government to launch a free vaccination drive and ensure an uninterrupted flow of oxygen to all hospitals.

Several hospital authorities sought court intervention over the weekend to provide oxygen supplies in New Delhi, where a lockdown has been extended by a week in an attempt to contain the wave of infections.

The New Delhi High Court said it would start punishing government officials if supplies of oxygen allocated to hospitals are not delivered.

"Water has gone above the head. Enough is enough," it said.

India reported 368,147 new coronavirus cases and 3,417 deaths on Monday — numbers that experts believe are vast undercounts because of a widespread lack of testing and incomplete reporting.

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The health ministry says it has confirmed 19.9 million COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, behind only the U.S., which has counted more than 32.4 million. It says more than 218,000 people have died.

On Monday, 24 COVID-19 patients died at a government-run hospital in the southern state of Karnataka amid reports of an oxygen shortage. It was unclear how many died due to a lack of oxygen, but the chief minister ordered an investigation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been severely criticized over its handling of the surge, which has pushed India's already fragile and underfunded health system to the brink. Massive election rallies organized by his Bharatiya Janata Party and other parties as well as a giant Hindu festival on the banks of the Ganges may have exacerbated the spread, experts said, adding that new variants could also be increasing cases.

Modi's party on Sunday suffered a resounding election defeat in a key state, West Bengal, failing to dislodge its firebrand chief minister, Mamata Banerjee. It retained power in northeastern Assam state but lost in two southern states.

While the four states were already stiff election challenges for Modi's party apart from the pandemic, analysts said the results weaken Modi's position as surging infections cripple the already fragile health system.

Meanwhile, the world's biggest cricket tournament, the Indian Premier League, said Monday's match between the Royal Challengers Bangalore and Kolkata Knight Riders would be rescheduled after two players tested positive for the coronavirus. The two players have self-isolated and medical personnel were tracing their contacts.

Despite rising cases, the league has held matches every evening behind closed doors since it kicked off in April.

India opened its vaccination campaign to people ages 18-44 on Saturday, a mammoth task undermined by limited supplies. India is the world's biggest producer of vaccines, but even the ongoing effort to inoculate people above 45 is stuttering. Since January, 10% of Indians have received one dose but only around 1.5% have received both required doses.

Currently, only those over 45 can receive free vaccines at government inoculation centers. Private hospitals charge for the shots,

UN program inks Moderna deal on 500M doses, starting in Q4

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — U.S. biotech company Moderna will provide up to 500 million doses for the U.N.-backed program to ship coronavirus vaccines to needy people in low- and middle-income countries, but shipments won't begin until the fourth quarter, the company and program leaders said Monday.

The advance purchase agreement from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, comes just days after the World Health Organization announced emergency approval of the Moderna vaccine that paves the way for its inclusion in the U.N.-backed COVAX program.

Gavi, a Geneva-based public-private partnership, has been scrambling to try to strike deals with vaccine makers at the same time as trying to persuade rich countries that have secured millions of doses — some of which they aren't even using — to donate them to poorer ones.

Also Monday, the alliance announced that Sweden's government has committed to donate 1 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine "to help COVAX urgently address immediate-term supply delays."

Moderna has already struck, and been delivering on, supply agreements with many rich countries, which have received millions of doses of its vaccine. WHO has repeatedly decried a lack of equity in access to COVID-19 vaccines.

The rollout of Moderna vaccines for COVAX isn't set to begin until the fourth quarter of this year, and the vast majority of the doses in the deal — 466 million — are planned for next year. The remaining 34 million are expected this year.

Stephane Bancel, the Moderna CEO, expressed support for the COVAX mission and called the deal "an important milestone" to ensure access to its vaccine worldwide.

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"We recognize that many countries have limited resources to access COVID-19 vaccines," Bancel said in a statement. "We remain committed to doing everything that we can to ending this ongoing pandemic with our mRNA COVID-19 vaccine."

The company said the doses were offered "at Moderna's lowest tiered price, in line with the company's global access commitments," without specifying. Gavi didn't provide financial terms, but has said the per-dose prices of vaccines for COVAX will eventually be made public.

Many experts say the COVID-19 crisis is acute now, with India in particular facing an unprecedented surge in cases. The Moderna vaccine has generally been considered among the most effective so far in combating new variants like the one that is spreading in India.

Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, which is a public-private partnership, hailed the access to "yet another efficacious vaccine."

"Expanding and having a diverse portfolio has always been a core goal for COVAX, and to remain adaptable in the face of this continually evolving pandemic – including the rising threat posed by new variants," he said. "This agreement is a further step in that direction."

The arrangement means Cambridge, Mass.-based Moderna can join the COVAX rollout that already includes vaccines from Oxford-AstraZeneca, which has the biggest role so far in the program, and Pfizer-BioNTech, which has committed far fewer doses to it.

Supplies of the AstraZeneca vaccine for COVAX that are being produced in India have been limited in recent month as the New Delhi government and a key Indian subcontractor — the Serum Institute of India — divert much of its production to combating the devastating outbreak at home.

The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation, a public-private partnership that co-manages COVAX with Gavi and WHO, made an early investment into the Moderna vaccine as the pandemic arose. The first official link-up between the company and the program has come nearly 18 months into the pandemic.

The WHO go-ahead for an emergency use listing for Moderna's vaccine, announced late Friday, took many months because of delays that WHO faced in getting data from the manufacturer.

Many countries without their own advanced medical regulatory and assessment offices rely on the WHO listing to decide whether to use vaccines. U.N. children's agency UNICEF also uses the listing to deploy vaccines in an emergency like the pandemic.

Gavi's rush to get vaccines to poorer countries — particularly in light of the delays in supply from India — got a boost when Sweden's government announced plans to donate 1 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccines to India through COVAX.

"We need to do everything we can to face this pandemic and fight it across the world," Per Olsson Fridh, the Scandinavian country's international development cooperation minister, told Swedish broadcaster SVT.

COVAX has shipped tens of million of doses to dozens of low- and middle-income countries since February, and has plans to deploy 2 billion by the end of the year.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed Sweden's commitment as "a superb gesture that must be replicated urgently, and repeatedly, by governments around the world to accelerate the equitable rollout of vaccines globally."

AP-NORC poll: Government should help Americans age at home

By EMILY SWANSON and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A majority of Americans agree that government should help people fulfill a widely held aspiration to age in their own homes, not institutional settings, a new poll finds.

There's a surprising level of bipartisan agreement on some proposals that could help make that happen, according to the late March survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Still, Republicans lag Democrats in support of some policies, including the most far-reaching idea: Only 42% of Republicans favor a government long-term care insurance program for all Americans, compared with 78% of Democrats. Overall, 60% of the public supports that approach.

Other government options to help people deal with the costs of long-term care get solid support across

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the political spectrum.

For example, 63% favor more funding to help low-income people age at home, a policy reflected in President Joe Biden's stimulus plan and his COVID-19 relief law. That includes about half of Republicans and about three-quarters of Democrats. Overall, only 10% are opposed.

There's also bipartisan alignment about proposals involving public-private partnerships.

The poll found broad backing for facilitating the purchase of long-term care coverage through a supplemental insurance plan like Medicare Advantage (supported by 70% of Americans, including 77% of Democrats and 65% of Republicans) and for tax breaks to help purchase long-term care insurance (supported by 61%, including 64% of Democrats and 58% of Republicans).

Behind it all is a deep desire among Americans to maintain their independence in an aging society.

Contrary to common belief, Medicare does not cover long-term care. Relatively few people plan ahead, and it remains prohibitively expensive for most middle-class people. Nationally, nursing home care averages more than \$100,000 a year. Home and community-based services can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Private long-term care insurance has failed to catch on because premiums are high and preexisting conditions restrictions apply.

"I'd like to age in place as long as I can," said Steven Martens, of Nashville, Tennessee, retired from a career in banking. "It's the privacy, the feeling of independence. That feeling that you are still taking care of yourself means something to me and others. We feel good about ourselves because we are still taking care of ourselves."

The poll found that 88% would prefer to get long-term care services as they age at home or with loved ones. Just 12% would want to receive care in a senior community or nursing home.

However, Americans' concerns about nursing homes have eased somewhat since the ravages of the pandemic last year. The share saying they'd be very or extremely concerned about a loved one needing long-term care in a nursing home dropped from 60% in September to 44% in March. Nursing homes and senior communities are coming out of a year in lockdown because of a sustained campaign to vaccinate residents and staff, to break the cycle of infections and deaths.

Los Angeles-area resident Tevina Quintana says she's now able to see her mother, who lives in a community for older adults. Both are vaccinated. During the COVID-19 surges last year, "it seems like they were never not on lockdown," said Quintana, who works with special education children.

Although Quintana is in her 30s, she says long-term care should be part of the foundation of social supports. She favors a government program like Social Security to provide long-term care.

"I think it should be available for everybody," she said.

"If we have to get taxed a little bit more, we get taxed for lots of things anyway," added Quintana, who describes herself as a progressive Democrat. "We might as well do something that benefits our elders."

But Nashville retiree Martens doesn't think that's the best way.

"I'm concerned that fiscally, how do we pay for that?" said Martens, who describes himself as a moderate Republican. "Our Medicare and Social Security systems are challenged the way it is. If we increase the level of support for long-term care, how do we fund it?"

It would be a challenge. Democrats, who control both chambers of Congress and the White House, are working slowly and deliberately, testing the feasibility of potential approaches.

In the House, Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Frank Pallone, D-N.J., has been working on a plan that would establish a new benefit under Medicare, paying a modest daily sum to help defray the cost of home-based or institutional care. And Rep. Thomas Suozzi, D-N.Y., has proposed a public-private partnership to provide long-term care insurance for services in the home.

A new Medicare benefit would have the advantage of leaving no one behind, since all Americans would be guaranteed a basic level of coverage. But public-private partnerships would also make long-term care insurance more widely available. It's not necessarily an either-or choice. For example, many Medicare recipients buy private insurance to fill the gaps in their government benefits.

Retired dentist Fred Rich, of Syracuse, New York, said he tried to buy private long-term care insurance

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but wasn't able to get it because his medical history includes cancer.

"There's a great need," Rich said. "The baby boomers are getting older. They've had fewer children, and their children aren't as affluent as they were. So I think it's going to be a problem."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, May 4, the 124th day of 2021. There are 241 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 4, 1961, the first group of "Freedom Riders" left Washington, D.C. to challenge racial segregation on interstate buses and in bus terminals.

On this date:

In 1626, Dutch explorer Peter Minuit landed on present-day Manhattan Island.

In 1776, Rhode Island declared its freedom from England, two months before the Declaration of Independence was adopted.

In 1886, at Haymarket Square in Chicago, a labor demonstration for an 8-hour work day turned into a deadly riot when a bomb exploded.

In 1932, mobster Al Capone, convicted of income-tax evasion, entered the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. (Capone was later transferred to Alcatraz Island.)

In 1942, the Battle of the Coral Sea, the first naval clash fought entirely with carrier aircraft, began in the Pacific during World War II. (The outcome was considered a tactical victory for Japan, but ultimately a strategic one for the Allies.)

In 1945, during World War II, German forces in the Netherlands, Denmark and northwest Germany agreed to surrender.

In 1959, the first Grammy Awards ceremony was held at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. Domenico Modugno won Record of the Year and Song of the Year for "Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu (Volare)"; Henry Mancini won Album of the Year for "The Music from Peter Gunn."

In 1968, the Oroville Dam in Northern California was dedicated by Gov. Ronald Reagan; the 770-foot-tall earth-filled structure, a pet project of Reagan's predecessor, Pat Brown, remains the tallest dam in the United States, but was also the scene of a near disaster in February 2017 when two spillways collapsed, threatening for a time to flood parts of three counties in the Sierra Nevada foothills.

In 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire during an anti-war protest at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding nine others.

In 1998, Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee) was given four life sentences plus 30 years by a federal judge in Sacramento, California, under a plea agreement that spared him the death penalty.

In 2006, a federal judge sentenced Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee) to life in prison for his role in the 9/11 attacks, telling the convicted terrorist, "You will die with a whimper."

In 2010, a Pakistani-born U.S. citizen was charged with terrorism and attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction in the botched Times Square bombing. (Faisal Shahzad (FY'-sul shah-ZAHD') later pleaded guilty to plotting to set off the propane-and-gasoline bomb in an SUV and was sentenced to life in prison.)

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama said he had decided not to release death photos of Osama bin Laden because their graphic nature could incite violence and create national security risks. Officials told The Associated Press that the Navy SEALs who'd stormed bin Laden's compound in Pakistan shot and killed him after they saw him appear to lunge for a weapon. Los Angeles Clippers forward Blake Griffin was named the Rookie of the Year, becoming the NBA's first unanimous choice for the award in 21 years.

Five years ago: The last man standing in Donald Trump's path to the Republican presidential nomination, Ohio Gov. John Kasich (KAY'-sihk), ended his campaign. Sipping filtered city water to show it was again drinkable, President Barack Obama promised to ride herd on leaders at all levels of government until every drop of water flowing into homes in Flint, Michigan, was safe to use.

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One year ago: New York state reported more than 1,700 previously undisclosed coronavirus deaths at nursing homes and adult care facilities. The Supreme Court heard arguments by phone and allowed the world to listen in live for the first time. The U.S. Senate convened for the first time since March. California Gov. Gavin Newsom, one of the first governors to impose a statewide stay-at-home order, announced that some businesses could reopen by week's end. Struggling fashion brand J.Crew became the first major retailer to file for bankruptcy protection since the start of the pandemic. Former Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula died at 90; he'd won more games than any other NFL coach. Colson Whitehead won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for "The Nickel Boys," about a brutal Florida reform school during the Jim Crow era; it was his second consecutive Pulitzer-winning novel, following "The Underground Railroad."

Today's Birthdays: Katherine Jackson, matriarch of the Jackson musical family, is 91. Jazz musician Ron Carter is 84. Pulitzer Prize-winning political commentator George Will is 80. Pop singer Peggy Santiglia Davison (The Angels) is 77. Actor Richard Jenkins is 74. Country singer Stella Parton is 72. Actor-turned-clergyman Hilly Hicks is 71. Irish musician Darryl Hunt (The Pogues) is 71. Singer Jackie Jackson (The Jacksons) is 70. Singer-actor Pia Zadora is 69. Rhythm-and-blues singer Oleta Adams is 68. Violinist Soozie Tyrell (Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band) is 64. Country singer Randy Travis is 62. Actor Mary McDonough is 60. Comedian Ana Gasteyer is 54. Actor Will Arnett is 51. Rock musician Mike Dirnt (Green Day) is 49. Contemporary Christian singer Chris Tomlin is 49. TV personality and fashion designer Kimora Lee Simmons is 46. Sports reporter Erin Andrews is 43. Singer Lance Bass ('N Sync) is 42. Actor Ruth Negga is 40. Rapper/singer Jidenna is 36. Actor Alexander Gould is 27. Country singer RaeLynn is 27. Actor Amara (uh-MAH'-ruh) Miller is 21. Actor Brooklynn Prince (Film: "The Florida Project") is 11.