

# Groton Daily Independent

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"The path from dreams to success does exist. May you have the vision to find it, the courage to get on to it, and the perseverance to follow it."

-Kalpana Chawla

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

## 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!**

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## Basketball Awards Banquet

The boys' basketball awards banquet was held Wednesday evening at the Olive Grove Golf Course. Oh, by the way, next year's event is scheduled for March 27, 2022, 5 p.m., at the Olive Grove Golf Course.

Head Coach Brian Dolan and Assistant Coach Kyle Gerlach presented the awards.

Trey and Major Dolan were recognized by the starters for their great work as ball boys for the GHS Basketball team this year. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)



JV Team awards were presented to Holden Sippel, Best Teammate of the Year; Wyatt Hearnen, Offensive Player of the Year; Cole Simon, Teammate of the Year and Best Effort; and Cade Larson, Best Attitude; not pictured is Favian Sanchez, Defensive Player of the Year.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**C Team Awards were presented to Teylor Diegel, Offensive Player of the Year; Cade Larson, Best Attitude; Colby Dunker, Best Effort and Defensive Player of the Year; and Logan Ringgenberg, Best Teammate of the Year.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Statisticians Hailey Monson and Julianna Kosel received their basketball pins for this year.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Varsity Awards were presented to Wyatt Hearnen, Most Improved; Lane Tietz, Team Most Valuable Player, Offensive Player of the Year and named to the second team of the All Northeast Conference Team; Tristan Traphagen, Best Teammate of the Year; Isaac Smith, Best Teammate of the Year; Lucas Simon, Best Attitude; Jacob Zak, Best Effort and Defensive Player of the Year; and Kannon Coats, Best Teammate of the Year. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## Elementary Spring Concert



**The fifth grade band performed, "Armada" and "Caribbean Breeze."**



**The junior kindergarten and kindergarten group sang, "Oceans of Fun" and "Baby Shark."**

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**The first graders sang, "A Whale of a Tale" and "The Jellyfish."**



**The second graders sang, "How Far I'll Go." Then they sang, "Under the Sea" with the third graders.**

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**The third graders sang, "Surf's Up."**



**The fourth graders sang, "Yellow Submarine" and "Surf Crazy."**

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The fifth graders split up with half playing the ukuleles as they sang, "Someone to Lava." The group then sang, "Octopus's Garden" and "Surfin' USA."



Kim Weber (Center) was the recipient of the Groton Elementary PAC ROAR Award for this school year.

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## Upcoming Events

### 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

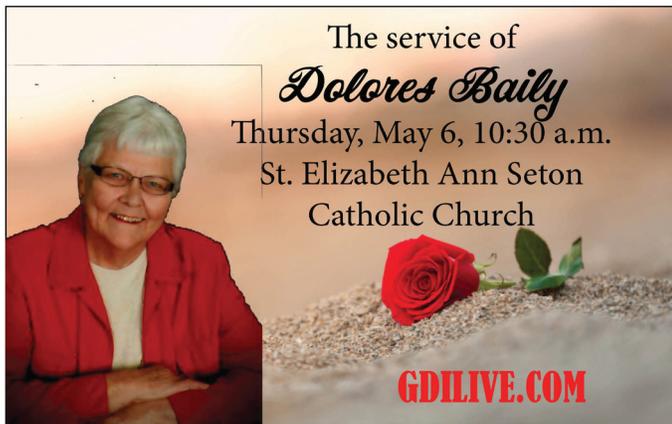
### Thursday, May 13

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



The service of  
*Dolores Baily*  
Thursday, May 6, 10:30 a.m.  
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton  
Catholic Church  
[GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)



**D.A.R.E.**  
GRADUATION  
On [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)  
Thursday, May 6, 2021, 10 a.m..  
Groton Area High School Arena

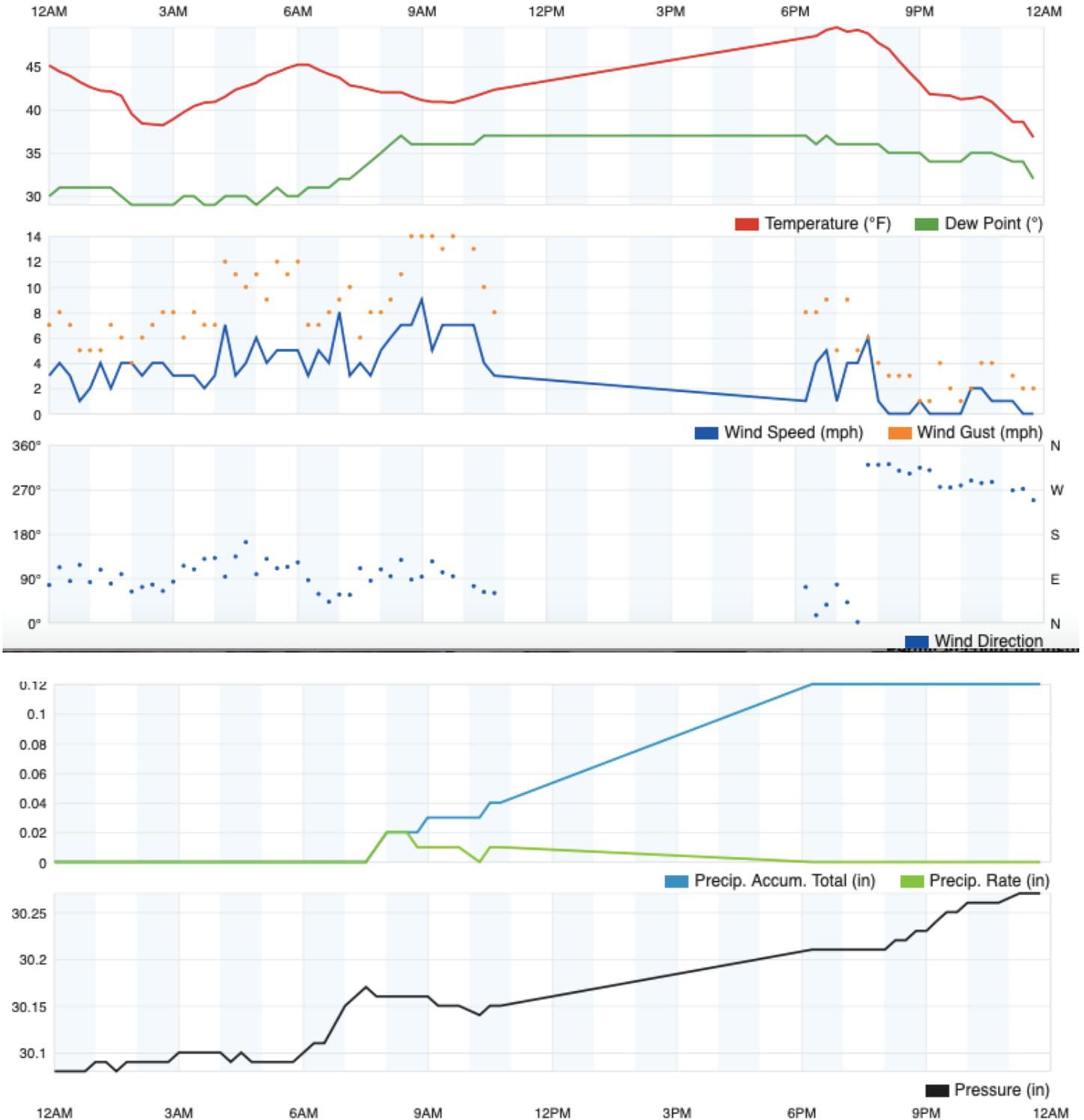


**HIGH SCHOOL  
SPRING CONCERT**  
On [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)  
Thursday, May 6, 2021, 7:00 p.m.  
Groton Area High School Gym

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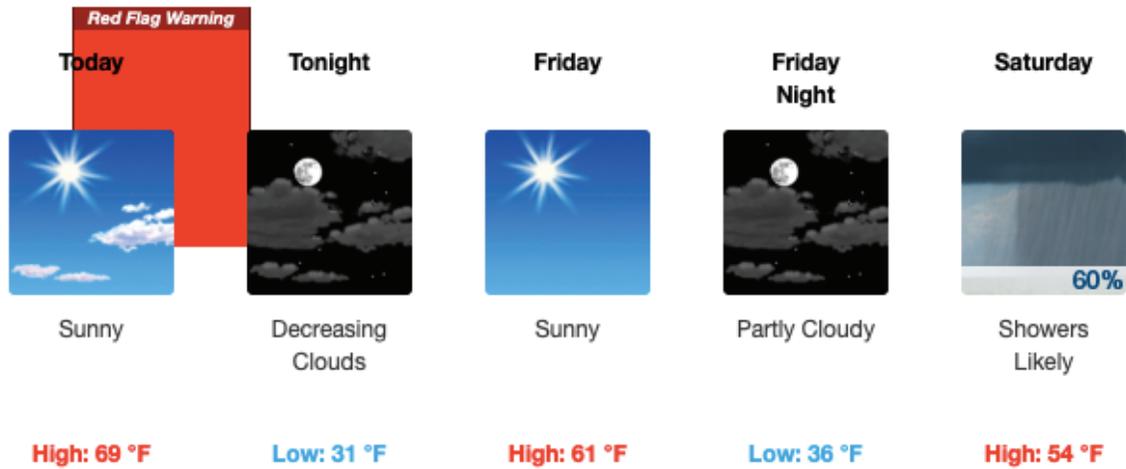
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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## Dry & Windy: Red Flag Warning

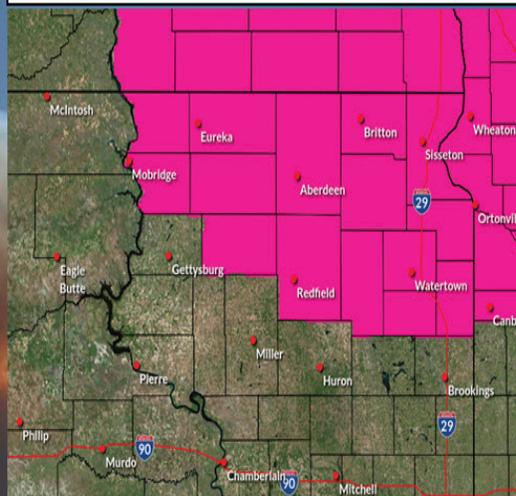
### Forecast

- Gusty West-Northwesterly Winds Between 20 and 30mph
- Relative Humidity As Low As 15%

### Impacts

- Easy Ignition From Any Source
  - Cigarettes
  - Hot Engines/Exhaust
  - Tow Chains
  - Embers (including from burning barrels/pits), etc.
- Any Fires That Catch Could Spread Rapidly

### Current Hazards for Thursday



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD  
Updated: 5/6/2021 5:02 AM Central

A northwest wind of 20 to 30mph, temperatures in the 60s and low afternoon humidity will result in critical fire weather conditions this afternoon.

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## Today in Weather History

May 6, 1988: High winds produced blowing dust which reduced visibilities to less than one-half mile in northeastern South Dakota. Wind gusts of 62 mph were reported at Aberdeen. A small building was destroyed in Gettysburg, and a building was damaged near Timber Lake. Winds also blew over a tractor-trailer injuring a man in Okaton.

May 6, 1999: High winds of 35 to 50 mph, gusting to over 60 mph blew across central and north central South Dakota from the early morning to the late evening hours causing some damage. In Pierre, the high winds blew a large tree down and tore loose a piece of the sheet metal cornice atop a downtown building. At the Legion Memorial Park in Mobridge, the high winds knocked the centerfield lights to the ground. In Jones County, a semi-tractor trailer was blown over and damaged. A fishing tournament at Lake Oahe had to be postponed as a result of the high winds.

1876: A tornado, estimated at F3 intensity, tracked four miles across Chicago, Illinois. The damaged buildings included a candy factory, a hospital, a freight depot, and a church. The tornado moved out over Lake Michigan and was observed to have multiple vortices by a reporter. Further south in Illinois, a tornado blew a moving passenger train off the tracks near Neoga, injuring all 19 people aboard.

1937: The German passenger airship LZ 129 Hindenburg caught fire and was destroyed during its attempt to dock with its mooring mast at Naval Air Station Lakehurst in Manchester Township, New Jersey, United States. Of the 97 people on board (36 passengers and 61 crewmen), there were 35 fatalities (13 passengers and 22 crewmen). One worker on the ground was also killed, making a total of 36 deaths. The Hindenburg was delayed two hours from docking due to thunderstorms in the area.

1975: A massive tornado hit Omaha, Nebraska killing three persons, injuring 133 others, and causing over 250 million dollars damage. The tornado struck during the late afternoon moving northeastward through the industrial and residential areas of west-central Omaha and lifting over the northern section of the city. The twister, which cut a swath ten miles long and as much as a quarter of a mile wide. It was the most costly in U.S. history up till that time.

1933 - Charleston, SC, was deluged with 10.57 inches of rain, an all-time 24 hour record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1975 - A massive tornado hit Omaha, NE, killing three persons, injuring 133 others, and causing 150 million dollars damage. The tornado struck during the late afternoon moving northeastward through the industrial and residential areas of west central Omaha, and lifting over the northern section of the city. The twister, which cut a swath ten miles long and as much as a quarter of a mile wide, was the mostly costly in U.S. history up til that time. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Eighteen cities in California and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 91 degrees at Portland OR, 101 degrees at Medford OR, and 104 degrees at Sacramento CA, were the warmest of record for so early in the season. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A major storm brought high winds to the western half of the country. A wind gust of 74 mph at Pueblo CO broke their May record established just four days earlier, and winds in the Arapahoe Ski Basin area of Colorado reached 85 mph. In North Dakota, the high winds reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust closing many roads. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Sixteen cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Morning lows of 17 at Bismarck ND and 26 at Minneapolis MN were the coldest of record for so late in the season. A reading of 43 degrees at the start of the Kentucky Derby was the coldest in 115 years of records. Light snow was reported in the Upper Midwest, with an inch reported at Chicago IL. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Snow and high winds prevailed behind a Pacific cold front crossing the northwestern U.S. Wind gusts above 50 mph were reported in southeastern Idaho, and heavy snow blanketed the Cascade Mountains of Washington State, with twelve inches reported at Stampede Pass. (The National Weather Summary)

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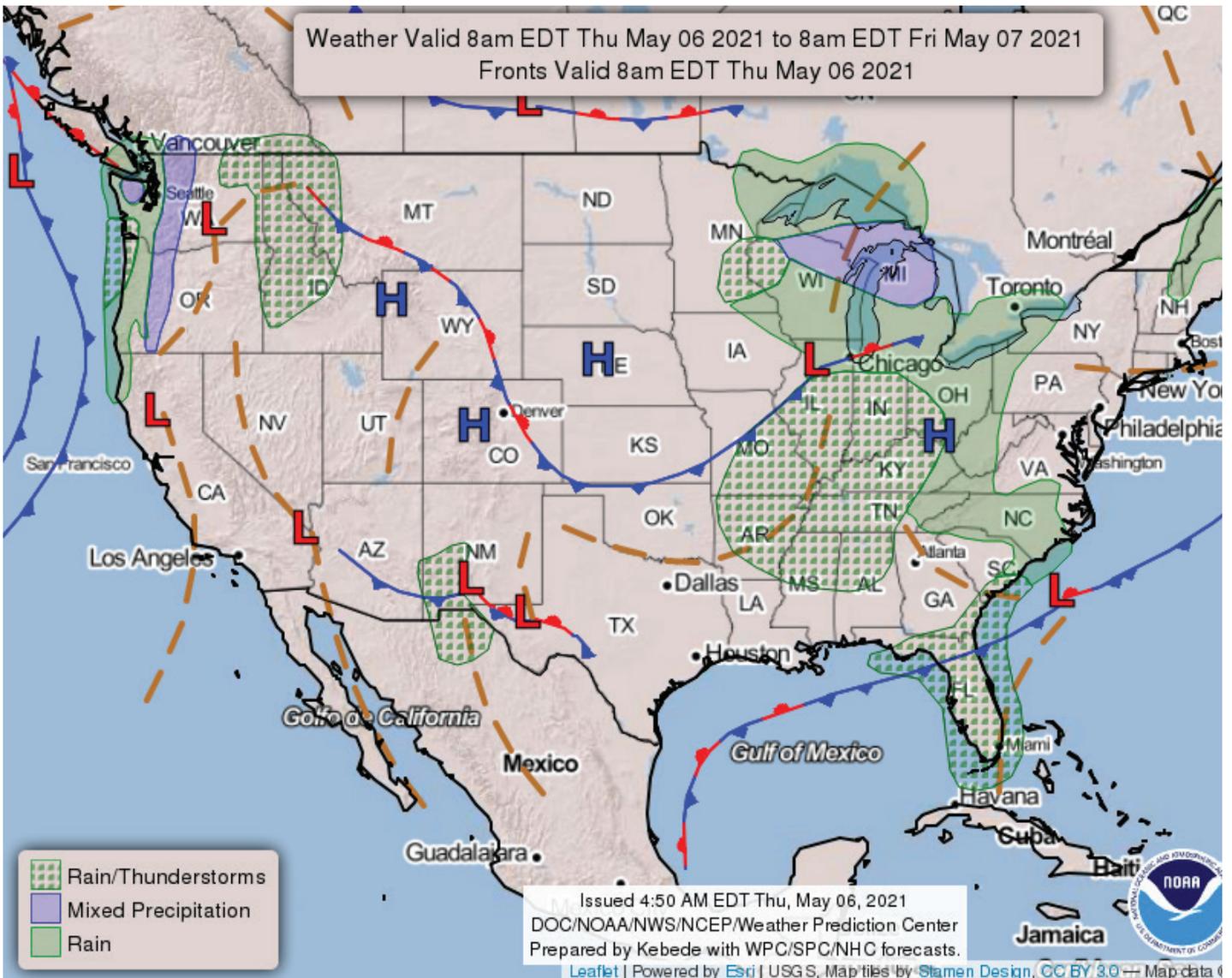
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 50 °F at 7:03 PM**  
**Low Temp: 36 °F at 11:56 PM**  
**Wind: 17 mph at 12:53 PM**  
**Precip: .12**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 93° in 2016**  
**Record Low: 23° in 1931**  
**Average High: 67°F**  
**Average Low: 40°F**  
**Average Precip in May.: 0.54**  
**Precip to date in May.: 0.12**  
**Average Precip to date: 5.51**  
**Precip Year to Date: 2.89**  
**Sunset Tonight: 8:47 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:13 a.m.**



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## CONFIDENCE THROUGH QUIETNESS

Noise is a major distraction. It interrupts our thoughts, disrupts our concentration, and interferes with our conversations. It prevents us from going to sleep and even awakens us when we do not want to be disturbed. It is often used in athletic contests and sporting events to destroy the focus of team members at critical times.

Wisely the Psalmist advises us to "Be still and know that I am God." Another translation presents it differently and with more clarity: "I will be still in Your presence, O God, so I can learn to know You more intimately." For us to grow into the likeness of Christ we must become still in the presence of God.

The word still implies the need for the Christian to stop, look around, think, relax, and learn the meaning of the great events that God is performing in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Our minds are usually occupied with the ordinary, day-to-day things of life that demand our constant attention. Then, suddenly and with no warning, we are overwhelmed with an event that consumes us and requires our complete attention – night and day - until the threat passes. It is indeed difficult to be still during life's challenges because life's "noises" bring deafness to God's voice.

However, when we do become still in His presence, He will bring calmness to our hearts and peace to our minds. And if we genuinely want to know Him, as He wants us to know Him, we will take time each day to do only one thing – experience Him as we experience any other person. We can only know others if we spend time in their presence, believe that they care for us, open our hearts to them in trust, share with them our deepest concerns and know that they do us no harm. It is the same with Jesus. Be still to know.

What a Friend we can have in Jesus if we take the time to be still to know Him!

Prayer: Help us, Father, to quiet our minds before You, open our hearts to You, and share our lives with You so that you can be our dear Friend. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Be still and know that I am God! Psalm 46:10a

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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

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

07-17-26-29-30

(seven, seventeen, twenty-six, twenty-nine, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

01-12-26-36-52, Star Ball: 3, ASB: 5

(one, twelve, twenty-six, thirty-six, fifty-two; Star Ball: three; ASB: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$5.65 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$370 million

Powerball

16-23-28-40-63, Powerball: 1, Power Play: 2

(sixteen, twenty-three, twenty-eight, forty, sixty-three; Powerball: one; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$142 million

### South Dakota reports 99 COVID-19 cases, 3 additional deaths

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Wednesday reported 99 new cases of COVID-19 and three new deaths due to complications from the coronavirus.

It's the third day in a row that officials have confirmed three deaths, raising the total number of fatalities to 1,976 since the start of the pandemic. The death count is the eighth highest per capita in the country at 224 deaths per 100,000 people, according to Johns Hopkins University researchers.

There have been 123,073 positive COVID-19 tests reported in South Dakota.

There were 183 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks 26th in the country for new cases per capita, researchers said. One in every 1,183 people in the state tested positive in the past week.

A total of 331,863 South Dakotans have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, which is more than 55% of the people who are eligible for shots.

### College pitcher turning theft of prosthetic arm into charity

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A college baseball player from South Dakota whose prosthetic arm was stolen plans to give away money donated by people who want to buy him a replacement.

Augustana's Parker Hanson, a right-handed pitcher, was born without a left hand, but found a way to adapt at a young age so he play his favorite game all the way up through the college level. His prosthetic arm and the attachments were in a backpack that was stolen from his unlocked pickup outside his home.

"It's only for me. I'm the only person in the world that can use that arm," Hanson said.

Hanson talked to his neighbor and got surveillance footage of the suspect in the theft. The footage was shared Monday on Facebook and on Tuesday Sioux Falls police found his bag on the side of the road near Hanson's home. The prosthetic attachments were returned to Hanson, but his arm is still missing, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

"I'm guessing the news stories kind of rattled them, maybe made them feel a little bad or guilty about what they took," Hanson said.

In the meantime, he's had people offer to give and raise money for a replacement. NCAA rules prohibit

him from accepting donations until the end of his season, at which time he said "whatever funds I don't need I'm looking to donate back into the community or charities that help people with disabilities."

In addition, some families who have seen his story want Hanson to meet their children who have disabilities and prove to them they can live a regular life, too. He's planning on having some of them visit him at practice.

"If I can make a positive impact in someone's life every single day, then that's my definition of a good day, I just want to bring a smile to people's faces," Hanson said.

## **Aberdeen approves study on transporting Missouri River water**

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Officials in a northeastern South Dakota city are looking into the possibility of getting some of its water from the Missouri River.

The Aberdeen City Council has approved a study on the feasibility of installing a raw transmission pipeline from an intake site on Lake Oahe near Mobridge to the Aberdeen water treatment plant.

The pipeline would run about 90 miles from the Missouri River to the Concord Grain Facility 5 miles west of Aberdeen, then 10 miles east to the city's water treatment plant, the Aberdeen American News reported.

The Bismarck, North Dakota engineering firm of Bartlett and West has been hired to draft plan scheduled to be completed in three months. It will cost the city up to \$200,000.

City Manager Joe Gaa said the water study grew from a facilities review that was completed for the water treatment plant in 2000 and one that is scheduled to be completed this year for the water reclamation plant.

"Both can't grow without water," Gaa said. "This is looking at additional source water."

## **2 South Dakota men killed in Minnesota highway crash**

AVOCA, Minn. (AP) — Two South Dakota men have died in a highway crash in southwestern Minnesota.

The men were driving separate vehicles when they collided in Murray County Monday night, according to the Minnesota State Patrol.

Officials said 26-year-old Alexander Bretsch, Frederick, was northbound on Highway 59 near Avoca when his pickup collided with a southbound car driven by 37-year-old Kyle Thompson, of Huron, near Lime Lake.

Both men were transported to Murray County Medical Center where they were pronounced dead.

The State Patrol says alcohol was not a factor in the crash.

## **Biden ready to sell \$2.3T infrastructure plan in Louisiana**

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

President Joe Biden will push the case for his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan in the reliably Republican state of Louisiana — directly challenging GOP lawmakers who say that low taxes for corporations and the wealthy will fuel economic growth.

Biden is leaning into the stagecraft of the presidency on Thursday by choosing to speak in the city of Lake Charles in front of a 70-year-old bridge that is 20 years past its designed lifespan.

Even as he engages with Republicans in Washington, Biden is trying to sell their voters on the idea that higher corporate taxes can provide \$115 billion for roads and bridges and hundreds of billions of dollars more to upgrade the electrical grid, make the water system safer, rebuild homes and jump-start the manufacturing of electric vehicles.

He's proposing to pay for his plan by undoing the 2017 tax cuts signed into law by President Donald Trump and raising the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%. Biden contends his programs would bolster the middle class and make the country stronger than tax cuts for big companies and CEOs.

Biden hinted at the theme when answering questions from reporters after a Wednesday speech at the White House that also emphasized his separate \$1.8 trillion plan for education and children to be funded by higher taxes on the wealthiest Americans.

"What's going to grow America more?" Biden said. "What's going to help you and your security more?"

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The super wealthy having to pay 3.9% less tax or having an entire generation of Americans having associate degrees?"

"Guess what," he added. "It grows the economy. Benefits everybody. Hurts nobody."

Republican lawmakers have doubled down on low taxes as a core pillar of their ideology and partisan identity. Several GOP senators favor spending \$568 billion on infrastructure over five years, a small fraction of what the Democratic president has proposed — a sign of how difficult a deal might be.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said that Republicans would rather finance infrastructure through user fees such as tolls and gasoline taxes, though he declined to specify which fees he would back.

"We're open to doing a roughly \$600 billion package, which deals with what all of us agree is infrastructure and to talk about how to pay for that in any way other than reopening the 2017 tax reform bill," McConnell said this week at the University of Louisville.

The Biden administration is banking that its message could play in Louisiana, which last backed a Democratic presidential candidate in 1996. Louisiana has been barraged by 30 extreme weather events over the past decade that caused \$50 billion worth of damage. Biden is seeking \$50 billion to make infrastructure better able to withstand storms, winds and flooding.

Hurricanes battered Lake Charles, a city of 78,000 residents, twice last year over the course of six weeks. Biden also plans to tour a water plant in New Orleans.

His infrastructure package received support in a newspaper editorial last week by Lake Charles Mayor Nic Hunter, a Republican, and Shreveport Mayor Adrian Perkins, a Democrat.

"The unfortunate truth is that our aging infrastructure and local government budgets cannot withstand the strain of increasingly frequent storms," they wrote. "As mayors of great American cities in the South, we lie awake at night dreading each forecasted storm."

There is general agreement among Democrats and Republicans in Washington about the need for infrastructure spending. But there are significant hurdles for Biden's proposal to garner Republican backing.

Republicans want to define infrastructure more narrowly, concentrating on roads, bridges, airports, transit and broadband rather than renewable energy and access to caregivers. They object to undoing the 2017 tax cuts and imposing higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy.

## General: China's Africa outreach poses threat from Atlantic

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top U.S. general for Africa is warning that a growing threat from China may come not just from the waters of the Pacific but from the Atlantic as well.

U.S. Gen. Stephen Townsend, in an interview with The Associated Press, said Beijing is looking to establish a large navy port capable of hosting submarines or aircraft carriers on Africa's western coast. Townsend said China has approached countries stretching from Mauritania to south of Namibia, intent on establishing a naval facility. If realized, that prospect would enable China to base warships in its expanding Navy in the Atlantic as well as Pacific oceans.

"They're looking for a place where they can rearm and repair warships. That becomes militarily useful in conflict," said Townsend, who heads U.S. Africa Command. "They're a long way toward establishing that in Djibouti. Now they're casting their gaze to the Atlantic coast and wanting to get such a base there."

Townsend's warnings come as the Pentagon shifts its focus from the counterterrorism wars of the last two decades to the Indo-Pacific region and threats from great power adversaries like China and Russia. The Biden administration views China's rapidly expanding economic influence and military might as America's primary long-term security challenge.

U.S. military commanders around the globe, including several who may lose troops and resources to bolster growth in the Pacific, caution that China's growing assertiveness isn't simply happening in Asia. And they argue that Beijing is aggressively asserting economic influence over countries in Africa, South America and the Middle East, and is pursuing bases and footholds there.

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"The Chinese are outmaneuvering the U.S. in select countries in Africa," said Townsend. "Port projects, economic endeavors, infrastructure and their agreements and contracts will lead to greater access in the future. They are hedging their bets and making big bets on Africa."

China's first overseas naval base was built years ago in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa and it is steadily increasing its capacity. Townsend said as many as 2,000 military personnel are at the base, including hundreds of Marines who handle security there.

"They have arms and munitions for sure. They have armored combat vehicles. We think they will soon be basing helicopters there to potentially include attack helicopters," said Townsend.

For some time, many have thought that China was working to establish a Navy base in Tanzania, a country on Africa's eastern coast, that has had a strong, longstanding military relationship with Beijing. But Townsend said it appears there's been no decision on that yet.

He said that while China has been trying hard to get a base in Tanzania, it's not the location he's most concern about.

"It's on the Indian Ocean side," he said. "I want it to be in Tanzania instead of on the Atlantic coast. The Atlantic coast concerns me greatly," he said, pointing to the relatively shorter distance from Africa's west coast to the U.S. In nautical miles, a base on Africa's northern Atlantic coast could be substantially closer to the U.S. than military facilities in China are to America's western coast.

More specifically, other U.S. officials say the Chinese have been eyeing locations for a port in the Gulf of Guinea.

The Defense Department's 2020 report on China's military power, said China has likely considered adding military facilities to support its naval, air and ground forces in Angola, among other locations. And it noted that the large amount of oil and liquefied natural gas imported from Africa and the Middle East, make those regions a high priority for China over the next 15 years.

Henry Tugendhat, a senior policy analyst with the United States Institute of Peace, said China has a lot of economic interests on Africa's west coast, including fishing and oil. China also has helped finance and build a large commercial port in Cameroon.

He said that any effort by Beijing to get a naval port on the Atlantic coast would be an expansion of China's military presence. But the desire for ocean access, he said, may be primarily for economic gain, rather than military capabilities.

Townsend and other regional military commanders laid out their concerns about China during recent congressional hearings. He, along with Adm. Craig Faller, head of U.S. Southern Command, and Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, are battling to retain their military forces, aircraft and surveillance assets as the Pentagon continues to review the shift to great power competition.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is conducting a global posture review to determine if America's military might is positioned where it needs to be, and in the right numbers, around the world to best maintain global dominance. That review is expected to be finished in late summer.

## India hits another grim virus record as oxygen demand jumps

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Infections in India hit another grim daily record on Thursday as demand for medical oxygen jumped sevenfold and the government denied reports that it was slow in distributing life-saving supplies from abroad.

The number of new confirmed cases breached 400,000 for the second time since the devastating surge began last month. The 412,262 new cases pushed India's official tally to more than 21 million. The Health Ministry also reported 3,980 deaths in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 230,168. Experts believe both figures are an undercount.

Eleven COVID-19 patients died when pressure in an oxygen line dropped suddenly in a government medical college hospital in Chengalpet in southern India on Wednesday night, possibly because of a faulty valve, The Times of India newspaper reported.

Hospital authorities said they repaired the pipeline last week, but the consumption of oxygen had doubled since then, the newspaper said.

Demand for hospital oxygen has increased sevenfold since last month, a government official said, as India scrambles to set up large oxygen plants and transport oxygen. India created a sea bridge on Tuesday to ferry oxygen tankers from Bahrain and Kuwait in the Persian Gulf, officials said.

Most hospitals in India aren't equipped with independent plants that generate oxygen directly for patients. As a result, hospitals typically rely on liquid oxygen, which can be stored in cylinders and transported in tankers. But amid the surge, supplies in hard-hit places such as New Delhi are running critically short.

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said India has enough liquid oxygen but it's facing capacity constraints in moving it. Most oxygen is produced in the eastern parts of India while the demand has risen in northern and western parts.

K. Vijay Raghvan, a principal scientific adviser to the government, said this phase of the pandemic was "a very critical time for the country."

The United States, Britain, Germany and several other nations are rushing therapeutics, rapid virus tests and oxygen, along with materials needed to boost domestic production of COVID-19 vaccines to ease pressure on the fragile health infrastructure.

India's vaccine production is expected to get a boost with the United States supporting a waiver of intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccine components from the U.S. that have arrived in India will enable the manufacturing of 20 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, said Daniel B. Smith, the senior diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.

Last month, Adar Poonawalla, chief executive officer of the Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, appealed to President Joe Biden to lift the embargo on U.S. export of raw materials, which he said was affecting its production of COVID-19 shots.

The government meanwhile described as "totally misleading" Indian media reports that it took seven days to come up with a procedure for distributing urgent medical supplies that started arriving on April 25.

The statement said a streamlined and systematic mechanism for allocation of the supplies received by India has been put in place for effective distribution. The Indian Red Cross Society is involved in distributing supplies from abroad, it said.

## Republicans promote pandemic relief they voted against

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Rep. Nicole Malliotakis, R-N.Y., said it pained her to vote against the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan.

But in the weeks that followed, the first-term Republican issued a news release celebrating more than \$3.7 million from the package that went to community health centers in her district as one of her "achievements." She said she prided herself on "bringing federal funding to the district and back into the pockets of taxpayers."

Malliotakis is far from alone.

Every Republican in Congress voted against the sweeping pandemic relief bill that President Joe Biden signed into law three months ago. But since the early spring votes, Republicans from New York and Indiana to Texas and Washington state have promoted elements of the legislation they fought to defeat.

The Republicans' favorite provisions represent a tiny sliver of the massive law, which sent \$1,400 checks to millions of Americans, extended unemployment benefits until September, increased the child tax credit, offered housing assistance for millions of low-income Americans and expanded health care coverage. Republicans tried to negotiate a smaller package, arguing that Biden's plan was too expensive and not focused enough on the nation's health and economic crises.

Democrats are promising to make the pandemic relief vote — and the Republican resistance to it — a central element in their political strategy moving into next year's midterm elections as they defend delicate

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House and Senate majorities. And there are early signs that Republicans may struggle to defend their opposition to the popular legislative package, which was designed to protect the nation's fragile economic recovery following the worst public health threat in a century.

GOP lawmakers have been especially bullish about promoting the rescue plan's Restaurant Revitalization Fund, which devoted \$28.6 billion to the struggling industry. Applications for the program opened this week.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., topped a group of at least eight Republicans who have encouraged constituents to apply in recent days. The others included Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., and Reps. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y.; Greg Pence, R-Ind.; Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Wash.; Beth Van Duyne, R-Texas; Troy Balderson, R-Ohio; and Anthony Gonzalez, R-Ohio.

"The Congresswoman is using her platform to inform her constituents of federal funds and resources available to them," Stefanik spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said. "She did not claim to support the bill in the tweet, and her constituents deserve to know about federal programs they can apply for regardless of how she votes."

Wicker's office noted that he voted against the full package, but led efforts to ensure the restaurant relief was included.

"Sen. Wicker co-authored the amendment that successfully added the Restaurant provision to the reconciliation bill. Why wouldn't he want to encourage participation?" Wicker spokesman Phillip Waller said.

The Independent Restaurant Coalition acknowledged the Republican's awkward position, but offered its thanks anyway.

"Senator Wicker did not vote for the package (we wish all members did!), but his work on the RESTAURANTS Act from the beginning made the relief fund possible," the industry group tweeted. "We are grateful for that work."

And White House spokesman Andrew Bates sarcastically expressed appreciation for the Republicans who have begun to tout elements of Biden's stimulus.

"The American people — majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans — have long been firmly unified behind the American Rescue Plan," Bates said. "So it's heartening to see Republicans in Congress reaching across the aisle to endorse it — even retroactively."

The politics of the Republican position are complicated.

The GOP ultimately benefited politically after uniting against the massive economic stimulus package signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009. Republicans scored massive gains in the House and Senate the following year. While the GOP is optimistic it will retake the House majority in 2022, it's far from clear whether the stimulus vote will help it get there.

Polling suggests the Biden stimulus is overwhelmingly popular. Two in 3 voters have consistently supported the \$1.9 trillion package in recent polling, while individual elements such as the \$1,400 direct payments to individuals are even more popular.

And just three months after the bill was signed into law, the Republican opposition has only begun to be tested.

The Democratic National Committee has already launched "digital takeovers" of local news websites in Arizona, Georgia, Wisconsin, Nevada, New Hampshire, Florida, North Carolina and Pennsylvania to thank Democrats and highlight the Republican obstruction. The White House's political arm has also put up billboards in 20 states calling out Republicans and focused on the Republican opposition in training for Democratic officials.

"Between now and next year's midterm elections, we're going to make sure every voter remembers how Republicans tried to stand in the way of this economic boom and our return to normalcy," said DNC spokesman Ammar Moussa. "And you can count on Democrats to call Republicans out for their hypocrisy when they try to tout the same programs they voted against."

Beyond funding for restaurants, Republicans have also touted millions of dollars in health care grants allocated to their districts in the latest stimulus plan.

Rep. Madison Cawthorn, R-N.C., in late March pointed to millions of dollars in such grants on social media, saying he was "proud" to see the taxpayer dollars returning to his district. A spokesman did not respond

to a request for comment.

Rep. Alex Mooney, R-W.Va., issued a news release at roughly the same time to promote more than \$41 million spread across 12 health care centers in his district.

"I am glad that this funding has been secured," he said, neglecting to mention how it was secured.

The four-term Republican congressman defended his decision to highlight the grants this week in a statement.

"Despite what anyone claims, all money that is appropriated by Congress is derived from the taxpayer, not President Biden," Mooney said. "Taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being spent, especially as it affects their towns and communities."

Malliotakis, who took office in January, promoted more than \$3.7 million in health care grants from the Biden stimulus among her achievements in a self-issued "First 100 Days Report Card."

"These grants were among the 9% of funds dedicated to COVID-19 relief that I was always in support of," Malliotakis said in a statement. "Regardless of any particular vote, I'm going to help individuals, small businesses and nonprofit organizations get funding they are entitled to."

## Anti-Olympic petition gains tens of thousands of signatures

By YURI KAGEYAMA and STEPHEN WADE Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — An online petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled has gained tens of thousands of signatures since being launched in Japan only days ago.

The rollout of the petition comes with Tokyo, Osaka and several other areas under a state of emergency with coronavirus infections rising — particularly new variants. The state of emergency is to expire on May 11, but some reports in Japan say it is likely to be extended.

The postponed Olympics are to open in just under three months on July 23.

The petition is addressed to International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, who has tentative plans to visit Japan later this month. He is expected to meet the Olympic torch relay on May 17 in Hiroshima, and perhaps also travel to Tokyo where small anti-Olympic protests are being planned.

Although 70-80% of Japanese citizens in polls say they want the Olympics canceled or postponed, there is no indication this will happen. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto, and Bach have repeatedly said the games will go on as scheduled.

Organizers and the IOC unveiled so-called Playbooks last week, explaining rules for athletes and others to show how the Olympics can be held in the middle of a pandemic. Several test events have been conducted in the last few days, and organizers have reported few problems.

The Olympic torch relay has been crisscrossing Japan for a month. Organizers say that eight people working on the relay have tested positive for the virus.

The Tokyo Olympics have become a face-saving exercise for Japan, which has officially spent \$15.4 billion to prepare them. For the IOC, the Tokyo Olympics are critical since 73% of its income comes from selling television rights.

Organizers say the Olympics will be "safe and secure," though this has been challenged by local medical specialists, and in an editorial last month in the British Medical Journal. It said mass events like the Olympics are "neither safe nor secure."

Organizers say they will need 10,000 health workers to support the Olympics. They have also requested 500 additional nurses — a nurses' federation balked at the request — and 200 sports medicine specialists.

The petition was organized by Kenji Utsunomiya, a lawyer who has run several times for Tokyo governor. It registered about 50,000 signatures in the first 24 hours after being launched.

"Government policies are being set with the Olympics in mind, and measures to curb the coronavirus pandemic are being neglected," Utsunomiya told The Associated Press. "Hospitals are stretched thin, and some people are dying at home."

The headline in English over the petition reads: "Cancel the Tokyo Olympics to protect our lives."

The petition suggests the Olympics cannot be held safely and says the games have drained finances

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away for other needs such as the rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine. Only 2% of the Japanese public have been vaccinated. Japan has attributed 10,500 deaths to the virus, good by global standards but not as good as many Asian neighbors.

"In order to host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in July, we must devote a large number of medical professionals, valuable resources such as medical facilities and medical equipment, and various other resources," the petition says.

In a survey conducted by the nationally circulated Mainichi newspaper, nine prefectural governors said they wanted the games canceled or postponed again. Most of the 47 governors declined to answer, saying they had no decision-making power.

## Ukraine wants aid, NATO support from Blinken's visit

By YURAS KARMAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with his Ukrainian counterpart in Kyiv Thursday, telling him that he was there to "reaffirm strongly" Washington's commitment to Ukraine's "sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence."

Blinken also assured Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba that the U.S. was committed "to work with you and continue to strengthen your own democracy, building institutions, advancing your reforms against corruption."

On the frontlines of the battle against Russia-backed separatists and in the halls of government in Kyiv, Ukrainians hold strong hopes for Thursday's visit — increased military aid and strong support for NATO membership among them.

By visiting so early in his tenure, before any trip to Russia, Blinken is signaling that Ukraine is a high foreign-policy priority for President Joe Biden's administration. But what he can, or will, deliver in the meeting later with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is unclear.

Zelenskyy has made it clear that he wants significant action.

"Ukraine needs a clear signal about the European and Euro-Atlantic prospect," Zelenskyy said Monday on Twitter, referring to Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO and the European Union. "Postponing these issues for 'later,' 'some day,' '(in) 10 years' has to end."

After the meeting with Kuleba, Blinken joined Metropolitan Epiphaniy — head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which split from Russia's Orthodox Church — in laying flowers at a memorial to Ukrainian soldiers killed in the conflict in the east of the country and touring St. Michael's Monastery.

On the front lines, those fighting for Ukraine were hopeful the meeting would bear fruit.

"We need to be more supported, given some special status — NATO membership," said a Ukrainian soldier on the eastern front lines, who gave his name and patronymic as Vasyl Adolfovich. "It would be good if we were more protected by this bloc and there would be support."

Soldiers' anxiety is high amid an increase in attacks this year. After a long period of tense quiet last year, 34 Ukrainian troops have been killed this year by firing from the separatists.

On Wednesday, a separatist artillery shell fell outside a hospital building in the town of Krasnohorivka near rebel-controlled territory, damaging part of the hospital's ward for treating coronavirus patients and cutting off electricity in the whole building.

Russia, which claims its soldiers are not on the ground in eastern Ukraine, caused fears to soar this year by conducting massive military exercises near the border with Ukraine. Russia said late last month that it has pulled the forces back to their bases, but Kyiv saw the drills as ominous.

Earlier this week, Kuleba said Ukraine is worried about Russia's announcement last month that it was redeploying warships from its Caspian flotilla to the Sea of Azov, an extension of the Black Sea that borders Ukraine and Russia.

"There is now a big threat in the Sea of Azov; it is unprecedentedly large," Kuleba said Monday.

Efforts have stalled to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which has killed more than 14,000 people since it broke out in 2014. Zelenskyy has called for the United States to try to push these efforts forward by

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joining the negotiations of the "Normandy Format" that consists of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France. Russia is almost certain to oppose any U.S. involvement in the negotiations.

Analyst Volodymir Fesenko of the Penta Center said Ukraine "expects the expansion and strengthening of U.S. assistance to Ukraine to successfully repel Russian aggression."

"Ukraine wants not only to receive encouraging political signals, but wants the United States to take a clear and very tough position on the further integration of Ukraine into NATO, so that the United States acts not just as a lawyer for Kiev, but as an insisting party," Fesenko said.

The U.S., meanwhile, expects reassurance from Ukraine that it is determined to fight endemic corruption. The State Department last week expressed strong concern about the government's decision to fire the reform-minded head of the state oil and gas company.

"There is a lot of hard work to be done to ensure a brighter future for all Ukrainians," the top U.S. diplomat for Europe, Phillip Reeker, said.

## World mulls next step as US backs IP waiver on vaccines

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Activists cheered, Big Pharma complained and government leaders assessed next steps on Thursday after the Biden administration's blockbuster move to support an easing of patent and other protections on COVID-19 vaccines that many hope will help poorer countries get more doses and speed the end of the pandemic.

The move to support waiving intellectual property protections on vaccines under World Trade Organization rules marked a dramatic shift for the United States, which had previously lined up with many other developed nations opposed to the idea floated by India and South Africa.

Attention is set to turn to those richer nations, notably in the European Union, to see whether they will come on board. A key hurdle: Any decision at the WTO, a Geneva-based trade body, has to be by consensus — meaning that any single country could hold up any waiver.

The EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the 27-nation bloc was ready to talk about the U.S. proposal — but cagily remained noncommittal for now.

"We are ready to discuss how the U.S. proposal for waiver on intellectual property protection for COVID vaccines could help" end the crisis, she said in a video address. "In the short run, however, we call upon all vaccine producing countries to allow exports and to avoid measures that disrupt supply chains."

That echoed the position of the global pharmaceutical industry, which insists a faster solution would be for rich countries that have vaccine stockpiles to start sharing them with poorer ones.

The industry insists that production of coronavirus vaccines is complicated and can't be ramped up by easing intellectual property protections. Instead, it insists that reducing bottlenecks in supply chains and a scarcity of ingredients that go into vaccines are the more pressing issues for now.

"A waiver is the simple but the wrong answer to what is a complex problem," said the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations. "Waiving patents of COVID-19 vaccines will not increase production nor provide practical solutions needed to battle this global health crisis."

The industry also says an IP waiver will do more harm than good in the long run by reducing the incentives that push innovators to make tremendous leaps, as they did with the vaccines that have been churned out in a blistering, unprecedented speed to help fight COVID-19.

But civil society, progressive groups and international institutions were euphoric about the Biden administration's new stance, which marks a nearly complete reversal in U.S. policy under the Trump administration that was critical of both the WTO and the World Health Organization.

"A waiver of patents for #COVID19 vaccines & medicines could change the game for Africa, unlocking millions more vaccine doses & saving countless lives. We commend the leadership shown by South Africa, India & the United States, & urge others to back them," WHO Africa chief Matshidiso Moeti tweeted.

Doctors Without Borders, an advocacy group also known as Medecins Sans Frontieres that sends health

workers to countries in need, said many low-income countries where it operates have only received 0.3% of the global supply of coronavirus vaccines.

"MSF applauds the U.S. government's bold decision to support the waiving of intellectual property on COVID-19 vaccines during this time of unprecedented global need," said Avril Benoît, executive director of MSF-USA.

She said any waiver should apply not just to vaccines, but other medical tools for COVID-19, including treatments for infected people and testing systems.

## Facebook's oversight board: Watchdog or distraction?

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

Facebook's oversight board, which on Wednesday upheld the company's ban of former President Donald Trump, also had some harsh words for its corporate sponsor: Facebook. "In applying a vague, standardless penalty and then referring this case to the Board to resolve, Facebook seeks to avoid its responsibilities," the board wrote in its decision.

But critics aren't convinced that the board's decision represents a triumph of accountability. Many, in fact, see its narrow focus on one-off content issues as a distraction from deeper problems such as Facebook's massive power, its shadowy algorithms that can amplify hate and misinformation, and more serious and complicated questions about government regulation.

"It's much easier to talk about Donald Trump" than about Facebook's business, said Color Of Change President Rashad Robinson, a longtime critic of Facebook. "They want to keep us in conversation about this piece of content or that piece of content, that this is about freedom of speech rather than about algorithms amplifying certain types of content, which has nothing to do with freedom of speech."

The board, Robinson said, is "is a ruse to stave off regulatory action."

Coming after months of deliberation and nearly 10,000 public comments on the matter, the board's decision on Trump told Facebook to specify how long the suspension of his account would last, saying that its "indefinite" ban on Trump was unreasonable. The ruling, which gives Facebook six months to comply, effectively postpones any possible Trump reinstatement and puts the onus for that decision squarely back on the company.

"They made the right choice," said Yael Eisenstat, a former CIA officer who worked for six months in 2018 as Facebook's global head for election-integrity operations for political advertising and is now a researcher at Betalab.

But the focus on the oversight-board process, she said, gives Facebook exactly what it wants. "We're diverting our time, attention and energy away from the more important discussion about how to hold the company accountable for their own tools, designs and business decisions that helped spread dangerous conspiracy theories," she said.

Facebook said it has publicly made clear that the oversight board is not a replacement for regulation.

"We established the independent Oversight Board to apply accountability and scrutiny of our actions," the company said in a statement. "It is the first body of its kind in the world: an expert-led independent organization with the power to impose binding decisions on a private social media company."

One major source of concern among Facebook critics: The oversight board reported that the company refused to answer detailed questions about how its technical features and advertising-based business model might also amplify extremism. The watchdog group Public Citizen said it was troubling that Facebook declined, for instance, to say how its news feed affected the visibility of Trump's posts.

"Not everybody sees what any individual posts, so the algorithms decide who sees it, how they see it, when they see it and Facebook presumably has all kinds of information about the engagement levels," said Robert Weissman, the group's president. "The company owes us all a post mortem on the way Facebook is used and operated — did it amplify what Trump was saying and contribute to the insurrection?"

Another worry: How Facebook's actions resonate overseas. The board looks at whether Facebook's decisions are accountable to international human rights norms as well as the company's own policies.

"The question that everybody's asking is if Facebook is in a lucrative market and is confronted with a political leader who incites violence, will Facebook choose human rights and human safety above its bottom line?" said Chinmayi Arun, a fellow at Yale Law School's Information Society Project. "It's fair to say a former U.S. president is not the only world leader seen as inciting violence."

Facebook created the oversight panel to rule on thorny content issues following widespread criticism of its mishandling of misinformation, hate speech and nefarious influence campaigns on its platform. The Trump decision was the board's 10th since it began taking on cases late last year. The board's nine previous decisions have tended to favor free expression over the restriction of content.

The company funds the board through an "independent trust." Its 20 members, which will eventually grow to 40, include a former prime minister of Denmark, the former editor-in-chief of the Guardian newspaper, plus legal scholars, human rights experts and journalists. The first four board members were directly chosen by Facebook. Those four then worked with Facebook to select additional members.

Facebook's most prominent critics — including misinformation researchers, academics and activists — are notably missing from the roster.

"These are very smart and capable people who put themselves on this board," Robinson said. But, he said, "the oversight board is a bunch of Mark Zuckerberg consultants. He hired them, he paid for them and he can get rid of them if he wants to."

Board spokesman Dex Hunter-Torricke urged critics to judge the board on the decisions it makes.

"This is not a group of people who feel any obligation to go soft on the company," said Hunter-Torricke, who previously served as a speechwriter for Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg. In Wednesday's decision, he added, "the board has very clearly said Facebook broke the rules as well as Mr. Trump, and that's not appropriate."

## On social media, memories pop up from a pandemic still going

By KANTELE FRANKO Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — When the pandemic passed the one-year mark, Lisa Phillips wasn't exactly eager to walk down memory lane. She had developed symptoms and quarantined with a suspected case of COVID-19 last spring, lost her mother to the disease in July and been hospitalized in November from what she describes as a nervous breakdown fueled by grief and isolation.

But Phillips also wasn't ready to delete the apps that provide those reminders that showed her each day what she'd shared on social media just a year earlier. That pain, she says, shouldn't be forgotten. So she still wanted to save the memories — but for later.

As we navigate these weeks that are unspooling a year after March, April and May 2020, memories from earlier in the COVID-19 crisis are popping up in people's social media feeds when throwbacks, reposts and commemorations crack open the digital time capsule of the pandemic before it's even over.

Out spill the first reminders of a zillion virus-inflected anniversaries, ranging from the relatively trivial to the tragic: the empty toilet paper shelves, the new masks, the start of remote work or school, the gratitude to exhausted health care staff, the In Memoriams.

For Phillips, 42, of Phoenix, the trauma still feels fresh. "If you're not ready to relive the anniversary and beginning of this ongoing pandemic, you're not alone," she tweeted.

Social media's insistence on serving our own experiences back up to us — even if desired — can complicate the coping. But experts say it also provides opportunities to realize connection — and to frame how we move forward.

"In certain ways — not all ways — we have more in common with more people on the planet than we probably have in any other year," says Jamil Zaki, a Stanford University psychologist who researches empathy.

People's circumstances vary widely, and the pandemic has exposed lots of inequities, disproportionately impacting communities of color. "But at some level," Zaki says, "many of us are dealing with a very similar type of anxiety, uncertainty, mourning and loss."

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Zillah Wesley, an organizer with the anti-poverty Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C., says she has known more than 40 people who have died during the pandemic, including several relatives and friends' relatives. Many of them died in the early months, she says, and nearly all of them were fellow members of the Black community.

Now posts about them are showing up again on her smartphone, she says, bringing a sinking feeling of loss.

"I sit with it and just let it flow through me so it won't pop up in other ways," she says. "It's like you can click off the thing and still go about your day, but the person is still gone."

The pandemic has been a collective trauma, and sharing personal emotional experience can help people feel supported and find meaning in that, says Sara Levens, a University of North Carolina at Charlotte psychology professor whose lab studies emotion.

Some people may find it helpful to look back on their own or others' experiences and reflect on what they've learned, what's been lost and gained, or where they've seen resilience or joy in the midst of greater hardship. To navigate that content in a healthy way, experts recommend that people pay attention to what kind of social media posts and stories they're viewing — how the content makes them feel and whether they're actually getting something useful from it.

"Just like you would be mindful of doom-scrolling, I think we need to be mindful of pandemic-scrolling," says Elana Newman, a University of Tulsa psychologist and trauma researcher.

If the posts you're reading start to feel more overwhelming and less like you're plugging into shared experience, it's probably a good idea to disengage and distract yourself with an activity that helps replenish you, Levens says.

Disabling social media notifications and muting or unfollowing accounts that negatively impact your mental health can help. Some users are even more proactive, intentionally limiting how they use digital tools that resurface their own memories.

Brian Acunis, a soon-to-be graduate student who has lived part of the past year in New York, says he deleted the reminiscing app Timehop from his phone just a few months into the pandemic. He gave up a three-year streak with it because he didn't want to keep seeing memories of all the activities and friends he was missing.

"It just was too sad of a reminder," says Acunis, 28.

That tension isn't lost on the folks behind the app. In March, on the anniversary of the pandemic declaration, Timehop tweeted a reminder that users can hide unwanted memories, noting they sometimes "need to be put away."

There's no surge in use of that option so far. But if things change in the coming months, Timehop might consider altering how people hide memories or encouraging breaks if that would benefit users, CEO Matt Raoul says.

"We try to balance that mantra of 'we do not want to curate your memories and we want to show you everything' with giving people the tools to control it in a way that's best for them," Raoul says.

Phillips, a vice president at a cloud computing services company, now skips Timehop and social media altogether on days when her grief feels especially sharp or she doesn't have mental or emotional space for what they might serve up. She says she also seeks help from others through professional care, therapy and talking with family and friends.

She still considers it valuable to document moments and milestones on social media so she can look back at the difference over time. "There's a part of me," she says, "that doesn't want to lose the sort of archival element."

Zaki, too, thinks the pandemic is worth remembering — not only because of what it caused, but because of what it revealed about the loneliness, depression and anxiety that people increasingly felt even before it descended.

"I really hope we don't forget this time and don't just snap back into whatever normal was before, because normal before was not that normal. ... We were fracturing as a culture. Trust was diminishing,"

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Zaki says. "And I think that in a lot of ways the pandemic, like other disasters, exposes some deep truths about who we are, what we need and who we can be."

## Netflix series signals racial breakthrough in Italian TV

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — The Netflix series "Zero," which premiered globally last month, is the first Italian TV production to feature a predominantly Black cast, a bright spot in an otherwise bleak Italian television landscape where the persistent use of racist language and imagery is sparking new protests.

Even as "Zero" creates a breakthrough in Italian TV history, on private networks, comedy teams are asserting their right to use racial slurs and make slanty-eye gestures as satire. The main state broadcaster RAI is under fire for attempting to censor an Italian rapper's remarks highlighting homophobia in a right-wing political party. And under outside pressure, RAI is advising against — but not outright banning — the use of blackface in variety skits.

With cultural tensions heightened, the protagonists of "Zero" hope the series — which focuses on second-generation Black Italians and is based on a novel by the son of Angolan immigrants — will help accelerate public acceptance that Italy has become a multicultural nation.

"I always say that Italy is a country tied to traditions, more than racist," said Antonio Dikele Distefano, who co-wrote the series and whose six novels, including the one on which "Zero" was based, focus on the lives of the children of immigrants to Italy.

"I am convinced that through these things — writing novels, the possibility of making a series — things can change," he said.

"Zero" is a radical departure because it provides role models for young Black Italians who have not seen themselves reflected in the culture, and because it creates a window to changes in Italian society that swaths of the majority population have not acknowledged.

Activists fighting racism in Italian television underline the fact that it was developed by Netflix, based in the United States and with a commitment to spend \$100 million to improve diversity, and not by Italian public or private television.

"As a Black Italian, I never saw myself represented in Italian television. Or rather, I saw examples of how Black women were hyper-sexualized," said Sara Lemlem, an activist and journalist who was part of a group of second-generation Italians protesting racist tropes on Italian TV. "There was never a Black woman in a role of an everyday woman: a Black student, a Black nurse, a Black teacher. I never saw myself represented in the country in which I was born and raised."

"Zero," which premiered on April 21, landed immediately among the top 10 shows streaming on Netflix in Italy.

Perhaps even more telling of its impact: The lead actor, Giuseppe Dave Seke, was mobbed not even a week later by Italian schoolchildren clamoring for autographs as he gave an interview in the Milan neighborhood where the series is set. Seke, a 25-year-old who grew up in Padova to parents from Congo, is not a household name in Italy. "Zero" was his first foray into acting.

"If you ask these children who is in front of them, they will never tell you: the first Black Italian actor. They will tell you, 'a superhero,' or they will tell you, 'Dave,'" Dikele Distefano said, watching the scene in awe.

In the series, Zero is the nickname of a Black Italian pizza bike deliveryman who discovers he has a superpower that allows him to become invisible. He uses it to help his friends in a mixed-race Milan neighborhood.

It's a direct play on the notion of invisibility that was behind the Black Lives Matters protests that erupted in Italian squares last summer following George Floyd's murder in the United States. Black Italians rallied for changes in the country's citizenship law and to be recognized as part of a society where they too often feel marginalized.

"When a young person doesn't feel seen, he feels a bit invisible," Seke said. "Hopefully this series can help those people who felt like me or like Antonio. ... There can be many people who have not found

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someone similar to themselves, and live still with this distress.”

That protest movement has shifted from targeting Italian fashion, where racist gaffes have highlighted the lack of Black creative workers, to Italian television, where a movement dubbing itself CambieRAI held protests last month demanding that Italian state and private TV stop using racist language and blackface in skits.

CambieRAI plays upon the name of Italian state TV, RAI, and the Italian language command “you will change.” The movement, bringing together second-generation Italians from a range of associations, also wants RAI — which is funded by mandatory annual fees on anyone owning a TV in Italy — to set up an advisory council on diversity and inclusion.

Last week RAI last responded to an earlier request by other, longer-established groups asking that it stop broadcasting shows using blackface, citing skits where performers darkened their skin to impersonate singers like Beyonce or Ghali, an Italian rapper of Tunisian descent.

“We said we were sorry, and we made a formal commitment to inform all of our editors to ask that they don’t use blackface anymore,” Giovanni Parapini, RAI’s director for social causes, told The Associated Press. He said that was as far as they could go due to editorial freedom.

The associations said they viewed the commitment as positive, even if it fell short of a sought-for ban, since RAI at least recognized that the use of blackface was a problem.

Parapini, however, said the public network did not accept the criticism of the CambieRAI group “because that would mean that RAI in all these years did nothing for integration.”

He noted that the network had never been called out by regulators, and listed programming that included minorities, from a Gambia-born sportscaster known as Idris in the 1990s to plans for a televised festival in July featuring second-generation Italians.

Dikele Distefano said for him the goal is not to banish racist language, calling it “a lost battle.” He sees his art as an agent for change.

He is working on a film now where he aims to have a 70% second-generation Italian cast and crew. “Zero” has already helped create positions in the industry for a Black hairstylist, a Black screenwriter and a director of Arab and Italian origin, he noted.

“The battle is to live in a place where we all have the same opportunity, where there are more writers who are Black, Asian, South American, where there is the possibility to tell the stories from the point of view of those who live it,” he said.

## Dubai luxury home market soars as world’s rich flee pandemic

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — After nearly three decades in London, Christophe Reech was fed up with the city’s pandemic lockdowns. This spring, he sold his luxury townhouse and jetted off to the desert sheikhdom of Dubai to start a new life with his family.

There was no turning back, he said. The French business magnate’s super wealthy foreign friends were doing the same, driving an unprecedented surge in sales of Dubai’s most-exclusive properties.

“Here in Dubai, there’s only one strategy: Business as usual,” said Reech, the chairman of an eponymous group that owns real estate and financial technology companies. The philosophy is simple: “Let’s make sure everyone’s vaccinated and keep everything open.”

“Of course that attracts people like me,” he said.

As vaccines roll out unevenly worldwide and waves of infections force countries to extend restrictions, foreign buyers flush with cash have flooded Dubai’s high-end property market, one of the few places in the world where they can dine, shop and do business in person. They’re snapping up record numbers of luxury villas and penthouses, sending prices rocketing in this boom-and-bust market.

Sales of Dubai’s upscale properties, once slow, soared 230% in the first quarter of 2021, compared to the same period last year. Prices in some top-end areas rose as much as 40%, according to Property Finder, the country’s largest real-estate website.

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A record-breaking 90 properties worth 10 million dirhams each (\$2.7 million) changed hands last month, on top of 84 in March, surpassing heights hit eight years ago, according to real estate consultancy Property Monitor. For comparison, there were 54 such transactions in all of 2020.

"Tons of people are coming in and buying multimillion dollar properties on the spot, with no due diligence time whatsoever," said Matthew Cooke, a partner at consultancy Knight Frank, who manages penthouse sales on Dubai's Palm Jumeirah artificial archipelago.

As with previous cycles, cash buyers started snatching up homes at bargain prices and flipping them for profits. Analysts say that will continue until prices rise too high and returns diminish.

How long the craze lasts and what awaits the skyscraper-studded city then remains unclear. Home prices are still falling in the middle tiers of the city's saturated property market, which has seen values drop sharply since peaks reached seven years ago due to overbuilding. Average residence sale prices in the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, collapsed to \$400 per square foot this month from \$1,300 in 2013.

"The market is going through a boom time ... but people are very aware that Dubai can run too quickly and it all falls apart," said Jackie Johns, partner at Premier Estates, an affiliate of Christie's International Real Estate, referring to the debt-driven crisis that brought the city to its knees in 2008.

The hot streak in the luxury market isn't unique to Dubai, as ultra-low interest rates and families' desire for more space has seen the wealthy in cities like New York and Paris decamp to suburban mansions. But there are other factors at play in the glitzy emirate, home to the long-haul carrier Emirates and tallest tower on Earth.

Since first reopening to tourists last summer, Dubai has pitched itself as the world's pandemic-friendly vacation spot. With no mandatory dayslong quarantines, foreign visitors now party in Dubai's bustling bars and on its beaches, their selfies at hotel-resorts and helicopter pads stirring resentment back home.

The tourist influx helped drive the country's dramatic surge in coronavirus cases in January, prompting the U.K. to suspend flights. But the United Arab Emirates, with its young population and low mortality rates, has fared relatively well during the pandemic. The country of over 9 million, which relied heavily on the Chinese state-backed Sinopharm vaccine for its inoculation campaign, has administered 10.6 million vaccine doses.

A global financial center known as an oasis in the volatile Middle East, Dubai long has benefitted from capital flight. Homeowners on the Palm Jumeirah — which saw 43% of all April transactions — include Afghan warlords and the political elite from countries like Nigeria, Syria and Lebanon, all searching for a safe place to park their savings.

Now, a big share of wealthy buyers on this man-made archipelago, popularly known as the Palm, and in other exclusive villa communities in Dubai come from Europe, India, China and Russia, seeking a better quality of life as the pandemic rages. In March, the Palm logged its second-highest residential sale ever when a Swiss family bought a waterfront mansion for \$30.2 million. Last month, an unidentified European family bought the city's third-most expensive home ever for \$28.6 million.

Plentiful vaccines underpin that demand. Although questions surround the efficacy of the Sinopharm shot, Dubai offers other options, including Pfizer-BioNtech and Oxford-Astrazeneca. To get a job, all one needs is a residence visa — which the city already extends to high-end property buyers and investors.

Reech, who plans to buy land in Dubai to build his dream home, booked a Pfizer appointment immediately after he received his residency. In the U.K., he said, he'd have to wait another four months.

New initiatives to lure affluent foreigners include remote work visas, retirement visas and long-term, renewable "golden" visas. In an unprecedented move, authorities are even offering Emirati citizenship to a select group of foreigners. To boost its brand as a cosmopolitan city, the UAE also has altered its strict Islamic legal code, allowing unmarried couples to live together and noncitizens to follow foreign laws for divorce and inheritance.

Dubai's vision for the post-pandemic high life has gained traction as foreign investors seek to "play a favorable role in the economic recovery," said Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

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And even if the market's meteoric rise comes crashing down, the wealthy are unlikely to bear the brunt of the fallout, analysts say. If anything, the pandemic has shown the world's high flyers thrive in a crisis. "The people who lose out are on the lower end," Mogielnicki said.

## On the ground and afar, diaspora boosts India's virus fight

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

India's large diaspora — long a boon to India's economy — is tapping its wealth, political clout and expertise to help its home country combat the catastrophic coronavirus surge that has left people to die outside overwhelmed hospitals.

Around the world, people of Indian descent are donating money, personally delivering desperately needed oxygen equipment and setting up telehealth consultations and information sessions in hopes of beating back the outbreak.

Two humanitarian groups in the U.S. led by people of Indian background raised more than \$25 million in recent days to help the teetering health care system. Indian American doctors, hotel owners and other entrepreneurs, some responding to requests for help from Indian leaders, have pledged or donated millions more.

In Britain, volunteers at three Hindu temples raised more than 600,000 pounds (\$830,000) last weekend by racking up 20,127 kilometers (12,506 miles) on stationary bikes, or roughly three times the distance from London to New Delhi. And in Canada, Sikhs have donated between \$700 and \$2,000 to each of dozens of people in need of costly oxygen cylinders.

The magnitude of the response reflects the deep pockets of many people in the overseas Indian community, as well as their deep ties to India, which have fueled similar efforts to help the country in the past.

"I feel that this crisis has kind of sparked or triggered a fresh and new emotional affiliation to India," said Nishant Pandey, CEO of the American India Foundation. The group launched a fundraising drive on April 24 that raked in roughly \$20 million in a week, much of it from the Indian diaspora. The money will be used in part to expand hospital capacity and oxygen production in India.

India's official count of coronavirus cases surpassed 20 million this week, and deaths officially topped 220,000, though the true numbers are believed to be much higher.

"Mother India is in dire need of the non-resident Indians to step up," Hemant Patel, a hotel developer from Miami, said in an appeal for aid on WhatsApp. His efforts helped generate more than \$300,000 in medical donations, he said.

Patel traveled to his hometown of Navsari in the state of Gujarat in March to visit his mother after getting vaccinated and is now serving as a liaison between local hospitals and Indians in the U.S.

He has also donated eight oxygen machines — holding a religious ceremony to bless the first one — and paid to have a van outfitted with a stretcher and oxygen to serve COVID-19 patients.

"God has put me in the right place at the right time," he said.

Some members of the overseas Indian community have appended harsh words to their support efforts, accusing the Indian government of botching the fight against the virus.

Others, especially medical professionals, wish they could go to India but face travel restrictions there and new ones in the U.S., Britain and Canada.

Sunil Tolani, CEO of a hotel and real estate company in California, said he donated \$300,000 to help people in India during the surge and lobbied the Biden administration to step up its support. Other prominent Indian Americans have also pressed the White House for action.

"If India would have put their act together, they wouldn't need this help in the first place," Tolani said, accusing the government there of "total complacency and incompetence."

The surge in infections since February has been blamed on more contagious variants of the virus as well as government decisions to allow huge crowds to gather for Hindu religious festivals and political rallies.

A spokesman for the Indian government, Prakash Javadekar, said it is ramping up hospital capacity and supplies of oxygen and drugs but is facing a "once-in-a-century crisis."

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The U.S. last week began delivering treatments, rapid virus tests and oxygen along with materials needed for India to boost production of COVID-19 vaccines. Britain is also sending a substantial amount of aid.

More than 6 million people of Indian descent live in the two countries — part of a diaspora the Indian government estimates at over 32 million, including nearly 3.5 million in the United Arab Emirates and just under 3 million in Malaysia. Donations are pouring in from non-Indians and corporations as well.

Sikhs for Justice, an advocacy group that calls for an independent state for Sikhs in India, said the Indian government blocked its COVID-19 relief website, oxygenfund.org, that aimed to connect Indians who can't afford surging prices for oxygen to Sikhs in the U.S., Canada and other countries willing to send them money.

The group turned to WhatsApp and by Monday had managed to provide assistance to nearly 150 people, said its general counsel, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.

An email to the Indian Embassy in Washington went unanswered. The Indian government has classified Sikhs for Justice as a terrorist group and banned it, Anshuman Gaur, India's deputy high commissioner to Canada, told The Canadian Press.

India is not shying away from soliciting help from its expatriates, continuing a long tradition of drawing on their money and patriotic fervor.

In 1998, Indian leaders urged non-resident Indians to invest in the country by buying government bonds after the U.S. and other nations imposed sanctions against India for conducting nuclear tests.

In 2001, disaster assistance from Indian Americans helped rebuild parts of Gujarat devastated by an earthquake that killed thousands. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in recent years has encouraged Indians overseas to contribute funds and expertise to his sanitation initiatives in India.

During the current crisis, Indian consulate officials reached out to the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, which responded by raising more than \$2 million in about a week, President Sudhakar Jonnalagadda said.

The group, which represents more than 80,000 doctors in the U.S., has used the money to buy oxygen concentrators and plans to expand a telehealth network to allow patients in India to consult with physicians in the U.S.

The virus's rapid spread in India has left few people in the diaspora untouched by tragedy. Sajal Rohatgi, co-founder of Subziwalla.com, a U.S.-based South Asian grocery delivery service, said dozens of friends and family in India have contracted the virus and two have died.

He and the company's other founder, Manav Thaker, arranged for a U.S. virologist to give a talk on Instagram about India's COVID-19 crisis and how people there can try to stay safe — information they say is lacking there.

Their hope is that Indian Americans will convey the importance of masks, social distancing and vaccinations to their friends and family in India.

"We really just want to give the right, credible information," Thaker said. "Then maybe we'll get some relief."

## US backs waiving intellectual property rules on vaccines

By JAMEY KEATEN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Wednesday joined calls for more sharing of the technology behind COVID-19 vaccines to help speed the end of the pandemic, a shift that puts the U.S. alongside many in the developing world who want rich countries to do more to get doses to the needy.

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai announced the government's position, amid World Trade Organization talks about a possible temporary waiver of its protections that would allow more manufacturers to produce the life-saving vaccines.

"The Administration believes strongly in intellectual property protections, but in service of ending this pandemic, supports the waiver of those protections for COVID-19 vaccines," Tai said in a statement.

She cautioned that it would take time to reach the required global "consensus" to waive the protections

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under WTO rules, and U.S. officials said it would not have an immediate effect on the global supply of COVID-19 shots.

In a tweet, the director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, John N. Nkengasong, said the Africa CDC welcomed the waiver and called the decision "leadership in action." He added: "History will remember this decision as a great act of humanity!"

Tai's announcement came hours after WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala spoke to a closed-door meeting of ambassadors from developing and developed countries that have been wrangling over the issue, but agree on the need for wider access to COVID-19 treatments.

The WTO's General Council took up the issue of a temporary waiver for intellectual property protections on COVID-19 vaccines and other tools, which South Africa and India first proposed in October. The idea has gained support among some progressive lawmakers in the West.

More than 100 countries have come out in support of the proposal, and a group of 110 members of Congress — all fellow Democrats of Biden — sent him a letter last month that called on him to support the waiver.

Opponents — especially from industry — say a waiver would be no panacea. They insist that production of coronavirus vaccines is complex and can't be ramped up by easing intellectual property. They also say lifting protections could hurt future innovation.

Stephen Ubl, president and CEO of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, said the U.S. decision "will sow confusion between public and private partners, further weaken already strained supply chains and foster the proliferation of counterfeit vaccines."

Dr. Michelle McMurry-Heath, chief executive of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization trade group, said in a statement that the decision will undermine incentives to develop vaccines and treatments for future pandemics.

"Handing needy countries a recipe book without the ingredients, safeguards, and sizable workforce needed will not help people waiting for the vaccine," she said.

Pfizer declined to comment on Biden's announcement, as did Johnson & Johnson, which developed a one-dose vaccine meant to ease vaccination campaigns in poor and rural areas. Moderna and AstraZeneca didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

The companies have made some efforts to provide vaccine doses to poor countries at prices well below what they're charging wealthy nations.

For instance, Johnson & Johnson agreed last week to provide up to 220 million doses of its vaccine to the African Union's 55 member states, starting in this year's third quarter, and agreed in December to provide up to 500 million vaccines through 2022 for low-income countries via Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance.

Shares of Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson — huge companies with many lucrative products — fell less than 1% on the news. But Moderna, whose vaccine is the company's only product, fell 6.2% in late-afternoon trading before gaining back two-thirds of a percent in after-hours trading.

It remained unclear how some countries in Europe, which have influential pharmaceutical industries and had previously shared U.S. reservations about the waiver, would respond.

WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell said a panel on intellectual property at the trade body was expected to take up the waiver proposal again at a "tentative" meeting later this month, before a formal meeting June 8-9. That means any final deal could be weeks away at best.

Authors of the proposal have been revising it in hopes of making it more palatable.

Okonjo-Iweala, in remarks posted on the WTO website, said it was "incumbent on us to move quickly to put the revised text on the table, but also to begin and undertake text-based negotiations."

"I am firmly convinced that once we can sit down with an actual text in front of us, we shall find a pragmatic way forward" that is "acceptable to all sides," she said.

Co-sponsors of the idea were shuttling between different diplomatic missions to make their case, according to a Geneva trade official who was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter. A deadlock persists, and opposing sides remain far apart, the official said.

The argument, part of a long-running debate about intellectual property protections, centers on lifting

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patents, copyrights and protections for industrial design and confidential information to help expand the production and deployment of vaccines during supply shortages. The aim is to suspend the rules for several years, just long enough to beat down the pandemic.

The issue has become more pressing with a surge in cases in India, the world's second-most populous country and a key producer of vaccines — including one for COVID-19 that relies on technology from Oxford University and British-Swedish pharmaceutical maker AstraZeneca.

Michael Yee, a Jefferies Group biotech analyst, wrote to investors that the key access issues for developing countries aren't patents or price, but an inadequate supply of the materials needed and the know-how to produce the vaccines and keep quality high — which one of Johnson & Johnson's contract manufacturers in the U.S. failed to do, ruining millions of doses.

"Manufacturing supplies, raw materials, vials, stoppers, and other key materials are in limited supply for 2021," and may still be next year and beyond, Yee wrote. That's partly because it takes time to make all those components, and Moderna and Pfizer have commitments to buy them "from major suppliers in huge bulk over the foreseeable future."

He added that Pfizer previously sought authorization to sell its vaccine to India, which rejected its application and asked that additional studies be run. The U.S., European Union and many other countries have given that emergency authorization.

Proponents, including WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, note that such waivers are part of the WTO toolbox and insist there's no better time to use them than during the once-in-a-century pandemic that has taken 3.2 million lives, infected more than 437 million people and devastated economies, according to Johns Hopkins University.

"This is a monumental moment in the fight against COVID-19," Tedros said in Wednesday statement. He said the U.S. commitment "to support the waiver of IP protections on vaccines is a powerful example of American leadership to address global health challenges."

## Ramadan in China: Faithful dwindle under limits on religion

By KEN MORITSUGU and DAKE KANG Associated Press

KASHGAR, China (AP) — Tursunjan Mamat, a practicing Muslim in western China's Xinjiang region, said he's fasting for Ramadan but his daughters, ages 8 and 10, are not. Religious activity including fasting is not permitted for minors, he explained.

The 32-year-old ethnic Uyghur wasn't complaining, at least not to a group of foreign journalists brought to his home outside the city of Aksu by government officials, who listened in on his responses. It seemed he was giving a matter-of-fact description of how religion is practiced under rules set by China's Communist Party.

"My children know who our holy creator is, but I don't give them detailed religious knowledge," he said, speaking through a translator. "After they reach 18, they can receive religious education according to their own will."

Under the weight of official policies, the future of Islam appears precarious in Xinjiang, a rugged realm of craggy snow-capped mountains and barren deserts bordering Central Asia. Outside observers say scores of mosques have been demolished, a charge Beijing denies, and locals say the number of worshippers is sinking.

A decade ago, 4,000 to 5,000 people attended Friday prayers at the Id Kah Mosque in the historic Silk Road city of Kashgar. Now only 800 to 900 do, said the mosque's imam, Mamat Juma. He attributed the drop to a natural shift in values, not government policy, saying the younger generation wants to spend more time working than praying.

The Chinese government organized a five-day visit to Xinjiang in April for about a dozen foreign correspondents, part of an intense propaganda campaign to counter allegations of abuse. Officials repeatedly urged journalists to recount what they saw, not what China calls the lies of critical Western politicians and media.

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Beijing says it protects freedom of religion, and citizens can practice their faith so long as they adhere to laws and regulations. In practice, any religious activity must be done in line with restrictions evident at almost every stop in Xinjiang — from a primary school where the headmaster said fasting wasn't observed because of the "separation of religion and education," to a cotton yarn factory where workers are banned from praying on site, even in their dormitory rooms.

"Within the factory grounds, it's prohibited. But they can go home, or they can go to the mosque to pray," said Li Qiang, the general manager of Aksu Huafu Textiles Co. "Dormitories are for the workers to rest. We want them to rest well so that they can maintain their health."

By law, Chinese are allowed to follow Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Roman Catholicism or non-denominational Protestantism. In practice, there are limits. Workers are free to fast, the factory manager said, but they are required to take care of their bodies. If children fast, it's not good for their growth, said the Id Kah mosque's imam.

Researchers at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a think tank, said in a report last year that mosques have been torn down or damaged in what they called the deliberate erasure of Uyghur and Islamic culture. They identified 170 destroyed mosques through satellite imagery, about 30% of a sample they examined.

The Chinese government rejects ASPI research, which also has included reports on Beijing's efforts to influence politics in Australia and other Western democracies, as lies promoted by "anti-China forces."

The government denies destroying mosques and allegations of mass incarcerations and forced labor that have strained China's relations with Western governments. They say they have spent heavily on upgrading mosques, outfitting them with fans, flush toilets, computers and air conditioners.

Xinjiang's biggest ethnic minority is Uyghurs, a predominantly Muslim group who are 10 million of the region's population of 25 million people. They have borne the brunt of a government crackdown that followed a series of riots, bombings, and knifings, although ethnic Kazakhs and others have been swept up as well.

The authorities obstruct independent reporting in the region, though such measures have recently eased somewhat. AP journalists visiting Xinjiang on their own in recent years have been followed by undercover officers, stopped, interrogated and forced to delete photos or videos.

Id Kah Mosque, its pastel yellow facade overlooking a public square, is far from destroyed. Its imam toes the official line, and he spoke thankfully of the government largesse that has renovated the more than 500-year-old institution.

"There is no such thing as mosque demolition," Juma said, other than some rundown mosques taken down for safety renovations. Kashgar has been largely spared mosque destruction, the Australian institute report said.

Juma added he was unaware of mosques being converted to other uses, although AP journalists saw one turned into a cafe and others padlocked shut during visits in 2018.

The tree-lined paths of the Id Kah Mosque's grounds are tranquil, and it's easy to miss the three surveillance cameras keeping watch over whoever comes in. The imam's father and previous leader of the mosque was killed by extremists in 2014 for his pro-government stance.

About 50 people prayed before nightfall on a recent Monday evening, mostly elderly men. A Uyghur imam who fled China in 2012 called such scenes a staged show for visitors.

"They have a routine of making such a scene every time they need it," said Ali Akbar Dumallah in a video interview from Turkey. "People know exactly what to do, how to lie, it's not something new for them."

Staged or not, it appears Islam is on the decline. The ban on religious education for minors means that the young aren't gaining the knowledge they should, Dumallah said.

"The next generation will accept the Chinese mindset," he said. "They'll still be called Uyghurs, but their mindset and values will be gone."

Officials say those who want to study Islam can do so after the age of 18 at a state-sponsored Islamic studies institute. At a newly-built campus on the outskirts of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, hundreds train to become imams according to a government-authored curriculum, studying a textbook with sec-

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tions like "Patriotism is a part of faith" and "be a Muslim who loves the motherland, abide by the national constitution, laws and regulations."

"Continue the sinicization of Islam in our country," the foreword reads. "Guide Islam to adapt to a socialist society."

Though Islam lives on, the sinicization campaign has palpably reduced the role of religion in daily life.

Near Urumqi's grand bazaar, several dozen elderly men trickled out of a mosque during an unannounced visit by an AP journalist. Prayers continue as usual, the imam said, though attendance has fallen considerably. A jumbo screen showing state media coverage of top Chinese leaders hung above the entrance.

Down the street, the exterior at the Great White Mosque had been shorn of the Muslim profession of faith. On a Wednesday evening at prayer time, the halls were nearly empty, and worshippers had to go through x-rays, metal detectors and face-scanning cameras to enter.

Freedom of religion in China is defined as the freedom to believe — or not believe. It was a mantra repeated by many who spoke to the foreign journalists: It's not just that people have the right to fast or pray, they also have the right not to fast or pray.

"I really worry that the number of believers will decrease, but that shouldn't be a reason to force them to pray here," Juma said.

His mosque, which flies a Chinese national flag above its entrance, has been refurbished, but fewer and fewer people come.

## Did agents raid home of wrong woman over Jan. 6 riot? Maybe.

By MARK THIESSEN and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — "We're looking for Nancy Pelosi's laptop," FBI agents told Marilyn Hueper after briefly handcuffing her.

Hueper shot back: "That still doesn't explain why you're in my home. Or in Homer, Alaska."

The search for the House speaker's laptop had taken a U.S. Capitol Police officer thousands of miles away from home for an FBI raid on Hueper's home, looking for something stolen during the Jan. 6 insurrection — and the person who did it.

The agents would walk out of Hueper's home with iPads, cellphones and a pocket-sized copy of the Declaration of Independence. They took a laptop, but it wasn't from Pelosi's office. And it's possible they may have the wrong person altogether — even though Hueper looks strikingly similar to the thief.

The Justice Department's massive prosecution of those who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 has not been without its problems, including this potential instance of mistaken identity. And as Republicans are increasingly seeking to minimize the insurrection and play down the horror of the day, any missteps by federal prosecutors could be used in that effort to discredit what actually happened.

Federal prosecutors have charged more than 400 people, the largest undertaking by the department, including scores of defendants who posted images of their crimes online and boasted about breaking into the hallowed building. Some are facing serious charges and considerable prison time.

Hueper and her husband first came to officials' attention this year when Alaska Airlines in February banned the couple for refusing to wear masks on a flight, according to court documents obtained by The Associated Press. Then two other people called in tips saying they recognized Hueper in photos that authorities had released of suspects wanted for storming the Capitol.

The insurrectionists sought to disrupt the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. Hundreds of officers were injured and five people died after the riot, including a Capitol Police officer.

Supporters of then-President Donald Trump ransacked offices, rifled through lawmakers' papers and desks, smashed through glass, shattered windows and tore down signs. Among the items stolen: the laptop from Pelosi's office, her lectern, an iPad belonging to Majority Whip Rep. Jim Clyburn and other electronics.

But the volume of people inside the Capitol building, along with the lack of arrests made at the time of the riot, has made it difficult to identify people, even with the glut of social media evidence. Federal agents have dug through thousands of social media posts, gotten sweeping warrants to obtain information on

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cellphones in the area of the Capitol, used facial recognition tools and obtained logs of devices that signed into the congressional Wi-Fi during the riot.

But by far the most effective tool for federal agents has been old-fashioned tips. Many of the rioters have been ratted out by their friends and family members.

The warrant, obtained by the AP, identifies Hueper as the woman who took the laptop.

But they're wrong, Hueper insists. She told the AP that another woman wearing her same coat and with a similar hairstyle was inside the Capitol during the insurrection, not her. She admits she was in Washington, D.C., for Trump's rally that day but says she didn't get any closer than 100 yards (91 meters) from the Capitol and spent part of the day being lost in an unfamiliar city.

She said agents showed her one photo of the woman inside the Capitol, and they looked so similar that Hueper wondered if someone had used photo-editing software to put her in the photograph.

The warrant details how FBI agents located an image showing Hueper wearing similar clothing in a photo on her husband's Instagram account. It said Hueper's husband had also posted photos of them near the Capitol. "BEST OF 2020," he wrote in one, showing her from behind nearing the building. "Marilyn approaching the Capital. As Patriots, there is a righteous revolution to take back our country ... To be there was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. STOP THE STEAL!"

Hueper said an agent came back with a different and larger photo of the woman, which showed the suspected thief wearing a black sweater with large white snowflakes on it. The agent asked where in the house they could locate the sweater.

Hueper said she reiterated she wasn't inside the building. "No. 2, why didn't you show me this photo to start with? Because we can both obviously see here this is a different person."

Plus, she said, the sweater was hideous.

Hueper said she grabbed the photo and held it next to her face, asking the female agent to look at both closely, "Me. Her. Me. Her," she told the agent. Hueper said the agent grabbed the paper and walked off.

Both women were wearing black Columbia down coats. However, in a photo posted on her husband's Facebook page from Jan. 6, Hueper is shown wearing a black face mask, a green blouse open at the collar and a light green scarf. The surveillance video released by the FBI shows the sought-after woman wearing the black sweater with a snowflake print and dangling earrings. Also, the woman in the photo has detached earlobes, while Hueper says hers are attached.

After insisting, Hueper was shown the front page of the warrant but not allowed to thoroughly read the document, she said. She read it only after receiving a copy as the dozen or so agents and Capitol Police officer left.

According to the search warrants, agents could collect any electronics that might be suspected to have been involved, items stolen from the Capitol, a laptop with descriptors and a serial number — "which they didn't find," she said — and any paperwork related to planning violence.

Hueper said she has not heard back from federal authorities, nor have agents returned her laptop, two iPads, two cellphones or the 50-cent pocket-sized Declaration of Independence booklet they confiscated April 28.

She has not been arrested. Justice Department officials would say only that the investigation is ongoing. But she decided to go public with her story, just in case.

"I better go online and protect myself before they call me in and make me this person," she said.

## Liz Cheney clings to GOP post as Trump endorses replacement

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No. 3 House Republican Liz Cheney was clinging to her post as party leaders lined up behind an heir apparent, signaling that fallout over her clashes with former President Donald Trump was becoming too much for her to overcome.

Unbowed, Cheney on Wednesday implored her GOP colleagues to pry themselves from a Trump "cult of personality," declaring that the party and even American democracy were at stake. "History is watch-

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ing," she said.

Trump issued a statement giving his "COMPLETE and TOTAL Endorsement" to Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York to replace Cheney. Stefanik, a 36-year-old Trump loyalist who's played an increasingly visible role within the GOP, responded quickly, highlighting his backing to colleagues who will decide her political future.

"Thank you President Trump for your 100% support for House GOP Conference Chair. We are unified and focused on FIRING PELOSI & WINNING in 2022!" she tweeted.

The day's events left the careers of Cheney and Stefanik seemingly racing in opposite directions, as if to contrast the fates awaiting Trump critics and backers in today's GOP.

The turmoil also raised questions about whether the price for political survival in the party entails standing by a former president who keeps up his false narrative about a fraudulent 2020 election and whose supporters stormed the Capitol just four months ago in an attempt to disrupt the formal certification of Joe Biden's victory.

Cheney showed no signs of backing off in an opinion essay posted Wednesday by The Washington Post.

She denounced the "dangerous and anti-democratic Trump cult of personality," and warned her fellow Republicans against embracing or ignoring his statements "for fundraising and political purposes."

She said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., has "changed his story" after initially saying Trump "bears responsibility" for the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. McCarthy, who is tacitly backing the drive to oust her, has since said Trump issued a video to try halting the violence.

Cheney, in the Post, agreed with Democrats that a bipartisan investigation should focus solely on the riot and not on disturbances at some of last summer's racial justice protests. In an apparent reference to her own situation, she said she would defend "basic principles" of democracy, "no matter what the short-term political consequences might be."

Dozens of state and local officials and judges from both parties have found no evidence to support Trump's assertions that he was cheated out of an election victory.

President Biden told reporters at the White House that the GOP is in the throes of a "significant sort of mini revolution."

He added, "I think Republicans are further away from trying to figure out who they are and what they stand for than I thought they would be at this point."

Cheney, a daughter of Dick Cheney, who was George W. Bush's vice president and before that a Wyoming congressman, seemed to have almost unlimited potential until this year. Her career began listing after she was among just 10 House Republicans to back Trump's impeachment for inciting supporters to attack the Capitol on Jan. 6, when five died.

Combined with a morning endorsement from No. 2 House Republican leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana and tacit backing from McCarthy, the momentum behind Stefanik's ascension was beginning to seem unstoppable.

Stefanik, who represents a mammoth upstate New York district, began her House career in 2015 as a moderate Republican.

She spoke out against Trump's ban on immigration from seven majority-Muslim countries, and joined Democrats in voting against Trump's effort to unilaterally redirect money to building a wall along the Southwest border. She also led an effort to recruit female candidates for her party.

Stefanik's rural district, which Barack Obama carried in his successful 2008 and 2012 presidential runs, was subsequently won twice by Trump. She morphed into a stalwart Trump defender and was given a high-profile role during the 2019 House Intelligence Committee impeachment hearings.

That was widely seen as a strategic move by the GOP to soften its image by giving a woman a prominent role. Stefanik's status and visibility within the GOP have soared since then, and she's also become a significant fundraiser for the party.

Cheney is the highest-ranking woman in the GOP leadership. Replacing her with Stefanik — and not a man — is seen as politically wise as the party tries to bolster its weak appeal among female voters.

There are just 31 Republican women in the House, about one-third of Democrats' total but up from the

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13 who served in the last Congress.

There were no other visible contenders for Cheney's post, with a secret ballot by House Republicans on her fate possible next week. A vote on a replacement, seemingly Stefanik, could come that day as well.

Two Republicans said another GOP woman, Rep. Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, was expected to make the formal motion to remove Cheney.

Cheney was making little noticeable effort to cement support by calling colleagues or enlisting others to lobby on her behalf, said two House GOP aides who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the situation. A third person familiar with Cheney's effort also said she was not lining up votes.

Cheney's opposition to Trump put her out of step with most House Republicans, 138 of whom voted against certifying the Electoral College vote for Biden's victory.

Trump's statement Wednesday underscored his bitter rift with Cheney.

He called Cheney "a warmongering fool who has no business in Republican Party Leadership." He praised Stefanik for supporting his America First agenda and added that she "has my COMPLETE and TOTAL Endorsement for GOP Conference Chair. Elise is a tough and smart communicator!"

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Scalise's backing was first reported by Punchbowl, a political news organization.

McCarthy said Tuesday that rank-and-file Republicans were concerned about Cheney's "ability to carry out her job" because of her public comments about Trump.

Republicans say a McCarthy speech backing Cheney at a closed-door House GOP meeting in February was largely credited with her surviving an earlier push by conservatives to oust her, in a 145-61 secret ballot.

A top House GOP aide has said McCarthy won't do that this time.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., kept his distance Wednesday from the House GOP struggle. Asked if he would help Cheney, he told reporters in Georgetown, Kentucky, "100% of my focus is on stopping this new administration."

## National Day of Prayer inspires pleas for unity and justice

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO, DAVID CRARY and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

U.S. soldiers were fighting in Korea when President Harry S. Truman signed a congressional resolution calling for an annual National Day of Prayer. The purpose was for people to gather in houses of worship to pray for world peace, according to an Associated Press report from April 17, 1952.

Since 1988 the event has taken place on the first Thursday in May, diligently observed by some churches, ignored by others. The 70th edition this week comes after a year wracked by a devastating pandemic, political polarization and turmoil related to racial injustice.

Faith leaders spoke to the AP about lessons learned from the recent challenges and about their prayers for the days ahead.

The Rev. Jacqui Lewis, whose Middle Collegiate Church in New York City was gutted by fire Dec. 5, said she'll share a prayer for the nation and the world with her multicultural congregation that goes beyond denominations and religion, what she called "a prayer to love, for love."

She's inviting people to pray for an end to the pandemic as well as the rebuilding of her historic church in lower Manhattan.

Lewis called it "a powerful symbol that the nation would pray on the same day at the same time." Yet she said that despite the day's nonpartisan nature, "it hasn't felt free of partisan politics in the last few years."

Citing the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol as a low point, Lewis said, "My prayer is that we can bounce from that place to a place where the nation's children belong to all of us ... where policing and safe communities are issues that belong to all of us. That disrupting racism belongs to all of us. An economy in which everyone can eat and be well and safe and have housing."

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In Brazoria, Texas, about 50 miles southwest of Houston, John Elkins said he and most of his congregation at Sovereign Grace Fellowship pray daily, which colors his view of the National Day of Prayer.

"It's when the rest of the nation gets on board with what we're already doing," the Southern Baptist pastor said. "We get excited. But we know that on Friday, much of the nation isn't going to be praying."

As for his own prayers, Elkins said a central aspiration is that people "begin to interact with each other with a love for humanity."

"What we saw in the last year was a lack of people looking at their neighbors as human and a lot more of looking at their neighbors as though they were in competition or they were the enemy," he said. "We have seen the divisions manifest and multiply — people grabbing hold of things that were not true, or that they wish were true, and clinging to those things."

Political divisiveness also was on the mind of Bishop Paul Egensteiner, who oversees 190 churches in the Metropolitan New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

"We need to pray for unity and the ability to come together around those things that matter," he said. "After the year we've been through, praying for more commitment to that would be a worthy effort."

Egensteiner lamented that even the pandemic and vaccinations are potential fodder for political differences and called for people to rediscover that "what binds us together is stronger and more important than what drives us apart."

Also in his thoughts: the vital, often-overlooked duties performed by front-line workers: from hospital employees to people delivering groceries.

"We realize how much we need them," Egensteiner said. "We need to show them our appreciation and care."

The Rev. David Fleming of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, said much of his prayers and ministry for the past year have focused on older, homebound parishioners, and on fellow pastors nationwide.

The executive director for spiritual care with Doxology, a denomination-wide program providing spiritual care and counseling for clergy, Fleming said that during the pandemic about 280 pastors participated in socially distanced in-person retreats and dozens more received counseling by telephone.

"The pastors have done an incredible job — they've been available 24/7," Fleming said. "The biggest problem: They work super-hard and they get wiped out."

"You can't work that hard week after week after week," he added. "At some point you've got to take some rest."

The interfaith group Religions for Peace USA has organized a national, virtual service reflecting on racism, as the country grapples with questions of racial injustice.

It's "looking at the original sin of our country, which is racism," executive director Tarunjit Singh Butalia said, pointing to last month's mass shooting at a FedEx warehouse where a former employee killed eight people including four members of Indianapolis' Sikh community.

As a Sikh, Butalia said he hopes the Day of Prayer can also follow in his faith's view of "chardi kala," which the Sikh Coalition defines as "resilience and boundless optimism, even in the face of adversity."

"The National Day of Prayer is symbolic," Butalia said, "but it represents a higher commitment for all of us."

Zahid Bukhari, who will deliver the closing prayer for the interfaith service, said people need divine guidance more than ever amid the global coronavirus crisis.

The Day of Prayer also offers a chance to reflect on other issues such as "why the systemic racism, discrimination, poverty, hunger, inequality, hate and police brutality still exist in our societies," said Bukhari, the executive director of the ICNA Council for Social Justice, a Muslim advocacy group.

He noted with delight that year it falls during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, worship, charity and contemplation.

"It is a wonderful coincidence," Bukhari said. "Ramadan is the month for reconnecting with God and sharing the blessings of God with other human beings."

**Biden hits schools goal even as many students learn remotely**

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By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

President Joe Biden has met his goal of having most elementary and middle schools open for full, in-person learning in his first 100 days, according to new survey data, but the share of students choosing to return has continued to lag far behind.

The survey, conducted in March by the Education Department and released Thursday, found that 54% of public schools below high school were offering full-time classroom learning to any student who wanted it. It marks steady progress since January, when the figure was 46%.

But even with that milestone achieved, most students continued to learn at least partly away from school. Almost 4 in 10 students continued to take all their classes remotely, the survey found, and another 2 in 10 were split between classroom and remote learning.

The disparity reflects a trend that has alarmed education officials at all levels: Even when schools reopen, many families have opted to keep students at home for remote learning. It has been most pronounced among Black, Hispanic and Asian American students, most of whom spent no time in a classroom in March, the survey found.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona applauded the nation's progress but also drew attention to racial disparities, saying schools must do more to reach all students.

"While we've made important progress, I will not be satisfied until 100% of schools are safely open for full time in-person learning for all students," Cardona said in a statement. "The department will continue to work with students, families, educators, states and districts, to ensure our education system serves all students, not just some."

Among students of all races, there was a modest shift toward classroom learning in March, but gains were largest among whites. Just more than half of white students were learning entirely in-person, compared to about a third of Black and Hispanic students. Only 15% of Asian Americans were learning entirely in the classroom.

Progress has been equally uneven based on geography, the survey found. Half of all students in the South and Midwest were learning entirely in-person in March, compared to less than 20% in the West and Northeast. Still, the Northeast saw the largest gains, with Connecticut doubling its share of fourth grade students learning fully in-person, from 17% to 35%.

Wyoming had the largest share of fourth grade students attending full-time in the classroom, at 94%, while California had the lowest, with 5%. Schools in rural areas were the most likely to be opened, while schools in cities have been the slowest to reopen.

Across the country, younger children — they are less likely than adults to get seriously ill from COVID-19 — have returned to the classroom at higher rates. As of March, more than 4 in 10 fourth grade students were back in the classroom full-time, the survey found, compared to a third of eighth graders.

The latest survey reflects a period of growing momentum in the push to open schools. In March, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said students could sit 3 feet apart in classrooms as long as they're wearing masks, down from a suggested 6 feet. Several states adopted the smaller recommendation, allowing more students to return to schools.

At the same time, Biden was pushing states to make teachers and other school workers a priority in vaccine rollouts. Some governors went on to order some or all of their schools to reopen in March, including in Arizona and Oregon.

Since then, schools have continued to reopen. States including Massachusetts and New Hampshire have ordered districts to invite students back to the classroom, and major districts elsewhere have started to reopen, including in San Francisco.

The Biden administration started the survey this year to track the pandemic's effect on schools and students. It's based on responses from 3,500 public schools that serve fourth graders and 3,500 schools that serve eighth graders. Several states have declined to participate, including Montana, West Virginia and Utah.

The survey does not include high schools, which pose additional challenges and have been the slowest

schools to reopen. Biden has acknowledged that high schools will take longer to reopen because of the higher risk of contagion among older students.

Schools have been a priority for Biden as he works to jump-start the economy and address learning setbacks among students. In March he signed a \$1.9 trillion relief bill that included \$123 billion to help schools reopen and recover from the pandemic. Last month he proposed a budget that would significantly expand education funding, with a proposal to double Title I funding for low-income schools.

Biden in December pledged to reopen "the majority of our schools" in his first 100 days in office. In February he reframed the goal, promising to have most schools from kindergarten through eighth grade opened five days a week in that period.

Cardona has rallied behind Biden's efforts, saying schools will need help addressing disparities that were worsened by the pandemic. On Thursday, he urged schools and education officials to "maintain a high level of urgency" even as more schools reopen.

"This success is the result of hard work and intentional collaboration between the administration, states, school districts, educators and families across the country," he said. "Nothing can replace in-person learning, and thousands of schools have made that a reality for millions of students."

## **Vigils, rallies mark day of awareness for Indigenous victims**

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Some shared agonizing stories of frustration and loss. Others prayed and performed ceremonies. All called for action.

Across the U.S. on Wednesday, family members, advocates and government leaders commemorated a day of awareness for the crises of violence against Indigenous women and children. They met at virtual events, vigils and rallies at state capitols and raised their voices on social media.

In Washington, a gathering hosted by U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and other federal officials started with a prayer asking for guidance and grace for the Indigenous families who have lost relatives and those who have been victims of violence.

Before and after a moment of silence, officials from various agencies vowed to continue working with tribes to address the problem.

As part of the ceremony, a red memorial shawl with the names of missing and slain Indigenous women was draped across a long table to remember the lives behind what Haaland called alarming and unacceptable statistics. More names were added to the shawl Wednesday.

Haaland, the first Native American U.S. Cabinet secretary and a former Democratic U.S. representative from New Mexico, recalled hearing families testify about searching for loved ones on their own and bringing a red ribbon skirt to a congressional hearing that represented missing and slain Native Americans.

She believes the nation has reached an inflection point, and said it's time to solve the crisis.

"Everyone deserves to feel safe in their communities, but the missing and murdered Indigenous peoples crisis is one that Native communities have faced since the dawn of colonization," Haaland said as she joined the event virtually.

In Montana, a few dozen members of the state's eight federally recognized tribes gathered in front of the Capitol in Helena, including many relatives of missing and slain Indigenous women. Some wore red or had handprints painted over their mouths, symbolizing the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's movement.

Marvin Weatherwax, a Democratic state representative and member of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, said legislative initiatives to address the issue have given tribal citizens hope. The Blackfeet tribe has two ongoing searches for missing members.

The event ended with a ceremony called the "Wiping Away of Tears," where victims' family members were given colorful shawls. The gifts marked the coming out of mourning, said Jean Bearcrane, a citizen of the Crow tribe and executive director of Montana Native Women's Coalition.

"Among the tribes, when people are grieving, they wear black," she said.

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The sisters, mothers and aunts of missing women shed tears as they received their shawls. Indigenous women have been victimized at astonishing rates, with federal figures showing that they — along with non-Hispanic Black women — have experienced the highest homicide rates.

Yet a 2018 Associated Press investigation found nobody knows the precise number of cases of missing and murdered Native Americans nationwide because many go unreported, others aren't well documented, and no government database specifically tracks them.

In New Mexico, members of the state's task force on Wednesday shared some of the findings of their work over the past year, which included combing through public records and requesting data from nearly two dozen law enforcement agencies to better understand the scope of the problem. Only five agencies responded.

Even with such limited data, they pointed to an estimated 660 cases involving missing Indigenous people between 2014 and 2019 in the state's largest urban center, putting Albuquerque among U.S. cities with the highest number of cases.

New Mexico's task force will be expanded and its work extended into 2022, with the goal of recommending policy changes and legislation.

Other states also have established task forces or commissions to focus on the problem, with Hawaii becoming the latest through legislation that points to land dispossession, incarceration and harmful stereotypes as reasons for Native Hawaiians' increased vulnerability to violence.

In Arizona, a couple of dozen people wearing red shirts and skirts gathered in front of the state Capitol in Phoenix. They included several state lawmakers, along with representatives of the Phoenix Indian Center and the motorcycle group Medicine Wheel Ride, which has been carrying a message of awareness for missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Shelly Denny, a citizen of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and member of Medicine Wheel Ride, noted support for the cause has been growing as more members of Native communities share their stories.

"This movement was started by Indigenous women, many of whom their names will probably never be known. But they've been inching the movement forward," she said.

Now, she said, "we'll need to move into prevention, protection and prosecution."

President Joe Biden has promised to bolster resources to address the crisis and better consult with tribes to hold perpetrators accountable and keep communities safe.

Haaland said that includes more staffing in a U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs unit dedicated to solving cold cases and coordinating with Mexico and Canada to combat human trafficking.

The administration's work will build on some of the initiatives started during former President Donald Trump's tenure. That included a task force made up of the Interior Department, the Justice Department and other federal agencies to address violent crime in Indian Country.

Advocates have said a lack of resources, language barriers and complex jurisdictional issues have exacerbated efforts to locate those who are missing and solve other crimes in Indian Country. They also have pointed to the need for more culturally appropriate services and training for how to handle such cases.

Over the past year, advocacy groups also have reported that cases of domestic violence against Indigenous women and children and sexual assault increased as nonprofit groups and social workers scrambled to meet the added challenges that stemmed from the coronavirus pandemic.

Bryan Newland, principal assistant secretary for Indian Affairs at the Interior Department, said staffing at the Bureau of Indian Affairs unit will go from a team of 10 to more than 20 officers and special agents with administrative and support staff it previously didn't have.

He also said the federal government has started distributing funding under the American Rescue Plan Act, including \$60 million for public safety and law enforcement in Indian Country.

"We're really looking to build upon many of the things that have been done, to expand them and bring focus to them," Newland said.

**Liz Cheney clings to GOP post as Trump endorses replacement**

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## US Justice Department worried about Arizona Senate recount

By BOB CHRISTIE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The U.S. Department of Justice expressed concern Wednesday about ballot security and potential voter intimidation arising from the Republican-controlled Arizona Senate's unprecedented private recount of the 2020 presidential election results in Maricopa County.

In a letter to GOP Senate President Karen Fann, the head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division said the Senate's farming out of 2.1 million ballots from the state's most populous county to a contractor may run afoul of federal law requiring ballots to remain in the control of elections officials for 22 months.

And Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Pamela S. Karlan said that the Senate contractor's plans to directly contact voters could amount to illegal voter intimidation.

"Past experience with similar investigative efforts around the country has raised concerns that they can be directed at minority voters, which potentially can implicate the anti-intimidation prohibitions of the Voting Rights Act," Karlan wrote. "Such investigative efforts can have a significant intimidating effect on qualified voters that can deter them from seeking to vote in the future."

Karlan wants Fann to lay out how the Senate and its contractors will ensure federal laws are followed.

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She pointed to news reports showing lax security at the former basketball arena where the ballots are being recounted by hand.

Fann said Senate attorneys were working on a response she promised to share when it was completed.

The Justice Department letter came six days after voting rights groups asked federal officials to intervene or send monitors to the Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Phoenix at the state fairgrounds, where the ballots are being recounted.

"We are very concerned that the auditors are engaged in ongoing and imminent violations of federal voting and election laws," said the letter sent by the Brennan Center for Justice, the Leadership Conference and Protect Democracy.

In other developments Wednesday, the Arizona Democratic Party has reached a deal with the Republican-controlled state Senate to ensure that voter and ballot privacy is guaranteed during an unprecedented recount of the 2020 presidential election results in Maricopa County.

The agreement reached Wednesday puts teeth in a court order that already required the Senate and its contractor, Florida-based Cyber Ninjas, to follow state laws around ballot privacy. Any violations of the agreement would be enforceable by seeking an emergency court order.

The agreement also puts in writing a verbal agreement between the Senate and Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs that allows her to have three observers inside the Veterans Memorial Coliseum at the state fairgrounds.

Under the court order, the Senate and Cyber Ninjas last week released their policies and procedures for the recount. Hobbs' elections director, Bo Dul, told The Associated Press there were major problems with those rules, including that they seemed haphazard, lacked specifics and left much room for interpretation — something that is never allowed in ballot counts.

Dul noted that the policies allow counters to accept a large enough error rate to perhaps show Trump won the state. Such an outcome would not change the outcome of the election because the results were certified months ago in the state and Congress.

Hobbs on Wednesday sent a letter to the Senate's liaison to its recount contractor, former Secretary of State Ken Bennett, formally laying out a series of problems with the policies.

"Mr. Bennett, as a former Secretary of State, you know that our elections are governed by a complex framework of laws and procedures designed to ensure accuracy, security, and transparency," Hobbs wrote. "You also must therefore know that the procedures governing this audit ensure none of those things."

The developments come as the counting of 2.1 million ballots from the November election won by President Joe Biden are off to a slow pace. Bennett told the Associated Press Tuesday night that teams doing a hand recount of the presidential race lost by former President Donald Trump and the U.S. Senate race won by Democrat Mark Kelly has tallied less than 10% of the ballots since starting on April 23.

Bennett said it is clear the count can't be done by the time the deal allowing the Senate to use the Coliseum ends on May 14. Several days of high school graduations are set to begin on May 15.

Bennett said the plan was to move the ballots and other materials into a secure area of the Coliseum to allow the events, then restart counting and continue until that is completed.

That seems far from certain, though, after a state fair board official told the Arizona Republic that extending the Coliseum lease is "not feasible." The fair board didn't immediately respond to a request for comment from the AP.

Trump and his backers have alleged without evidence that he lost Arizona and other battleground states because of fraud. Fann said she wants to prove one way or the other whether GOP claims of problems with the vote are valid and use the results of the audit to craft updated election laws.

## Rome jury convicts 2 US friends in slaying of police officer

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — A jury in Italy convicted two American friends in the 2019 slaying in Rome of a police officer in a tragic unraveling of a small-time drug deal gone bad, sentencing them to the maximum life in prison.

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More than 12 hours after deliberations began, the jury of two judges and six civilians delivered verdicts and sentences Wednesday night that set off a collective gasp in the courtroom: Finnegan Lee Elder, 21, and Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, 20, former schoolmates from the San Francisco area, were each found guilty of murder and four other counts and received Italy's stiffest punishment, life imprisonment.

Each had been charged with homicide, attempted extortion, assault, resisting a public official and carrying an attack-style knife without just cause. Presiding Judge Marina Finiti announced the jury found them guilty of all the charges in the trial indictment.

Prosecutors alleged Elder stabbed Vice Brigadier Mario Cerciello Rega 11 times with a knife that he brought with him on his trip to Europe and that Natale-Hjorth helped him hide the knife in their hotel room. Under Italian law, an accomplice in an alleged murder can also be charged with murder without materially doing the slaying.

The July 26, 2019, killing of the officer in the storied Carabinieri paramilitary police corps shocked Italy. Cerciello Rega, 35, was mourned as a national hero.

The slain officer's widow, who held a photo of her dead husband while waiting for the verdict, broke down in tears and hugged his brother, Paolo.

"His integrity was defended," Rosa Maria Esilio said outside the courtroom, between sobs. "He was everyone's son, everyone's Carabiniere. He was a marvelous husband, he was a marvelous man, a servant of the state who deserves respect and honor."

As the defendants were led out of the courtroom to be taken back to their jail cells, Elder's father, Ethan Elder, called out, "Finnegan, I love you." As the parents left the courtroom, as midnight neared, his mother, Leah Elder, sat on a curb, looking dazed, holding her head.

One of Elder's lawyers, Renato Borzone, called the verdicts "a disgrace for Italy."

A lawyer for Natale-Hjorth, Fabio Alonzi, said he was speechless, just as his client was. Natale-Hjorth was "completely shocked, he kept telling me he did not understand."

In the courtroom for Natale-Hjorth, who has Italian citizenship as well as U.S. citizenship, were his father and uncle, who lives in Italy.

Cerciello Rega had recently returned from a honeymoon when he was assigned along with partner, officer Andrea Varriale, to follow up on a reported extortion attempt. They went in plainclothes and, for reasons never clear in court testimony, didn't bring their service pistols on the mission.

Prosecutors contend the young Americans concocted a plot involving a stolen bag and cellphone after their failed attempt to buy cocaine with 80 euros (\$96) in Rome's Trastevere nightlife district. Natale-Hjorth and Elder testified they had paid for the cocaine but didn't receive it.

During the trial, which began on Feb. 26, 2020, the Americans told the court they thought that Cerciello Rega and Varriale were thugs or mobsters who had showed up, and not the go-between, for the appointment on a dark, nearly deserted street near their hotel. The plainclothes officers wore casual summer clothes, and the defendants insisted the officers never showed police badges.

Varriale, who suffered a back injury in a scuffle with Natale-Hjorth while his partner was grappling with Elder, testified that the officers did identify themselves as Carabinieri.

At the time of the slaying, Elder was 19 and traveling through Europe without his family, a trip his mother in court had said they hoped would bring him a fresh start on life after several years marked by battles with depression and a suicide attempt. Natale-Hjorth, then 18, was spending the summer vacation, as was his habit, visiting his Italian grandparents and uncle, who live near Rome.

The then-teens had met up in Rome for what was supposed to be couple of days of sightseeing and nights out.

Prosecutors alleged that Elder thrust a 7-inch (18-centimeter) military-style attack knife repeatedly into Cerciello Rega, who bled profusely.

Elder told the court that the heavy-set Cerciello Rega, scuffling with him, was on top of him on the ground, and he feared that he was being strangled. Elder said he pulled out the knife and stabbed him to avoid being killed, and when the officer didn't immediately let him go, he stabbed again.

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After the stabbing, the Americans ran to their hotel room, where, according to Natale-Hjorth, Elder cleaned the knife and then asked him to hide it. Natale-Hjorth, who testified that while he wasn't aware that his friend had brought the knife to the rendezvous, he stashed the knife behind a ceiling panel in their room, where it was discovered hours later by police.

The defendants had told the court that several hours before the stabbing, they attempted to buy cocaine in the Trastevere nightlife district of Rome. With the intervention of a go-between, they paid a dealer, but instead of cocaine they received an aspirin-like tablet.

Before Natale-Hjorth could confront the dealer, a separate Carabinieri patrol in the neighborhood intervened, and all scattered. The Americans snatched the go-between's knapsack in reprisal, and used a cellphone that was inside to set up a meeting with the goal of exchanging the bag and the phone for the cash they had lost in the bad drug deal.

From practically its start, the trial largely boiled down to the word of Varriale against that of the young American visitors.

Photos of the newlyweds, with Cerciello Rega in his dress uniform, after their wedding, were widely displayed in Italian media after the slaying and during the trial.

Elder's lawyer, Borzone, argued that his client had deep-set psychiatric problems, including a constant fear of being attacked.

Franco Coppi, a lawyer representing some of Cerciello Rega's family, said the jury's decision reflected the "gravity of the deed, an atrocious crime."

Still, he declined to pronounce himself satisfied, "because I can't help but think that such a harsh sentence falls upon two young men in their 20s."

The jury must lay out in detail its reasoning for its decisions within 90 days. The rationale would then form the basis for any appeal.

Coppi, one of Italy's most celebrated criminal defense lawyers, said that he believed it wasn't possible to assign less culpability to Natale-Hjorth, even though he did not wield the knife, since the jury apparently agreed with prosecutors' contentions that he was the architect of the ill-fated scheme to recover their drug money.

## Woman from Mali gives birth to 9 babies in Morocco

By BABA AHMED and TARIK EL BARAKAH Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — A Malian woman has given birth to nine babies at once — after expecting seven, according to Mali's Minister of Health and the Moroccan clinic where the nonuplets were born.

It appeared to be the first time on record that a woman had given birth to nine surviving babies at once.

The five girls and four boys, and their mother, "are all doing well," Mali's health minister said in a statement.

The mother, 25-year-old Halima Cisse, gave birth to the babies by cesarean section on Tuesday in Morocco after being sent there for special care, Mali's top health official announced.

Associated Press reporters saw some of the babies wiggling their hands and feet inside incubators Wednesday in the private Ain Borja clinic in Casablanca. Medical staff checked their status regularly in the neonatal ward wallpapered with cartoon characters.

Cisse had been expecting seven babies. Malian doctors, under government orders, sent her to Morocco for the births because hospitals in Mali, one of the world's poorest countries, are ill-equipped to provide adequate care for this exceptional multiple pregnancy.

The Casablanca clinic's director Youssef Alaoui told Moroccan state TV that they had been contacted by Malian doctors about the case a month and a half ago. They were not expecting nine babies, he said.

Cisse gave birth prematurely at 30 weeks and is now in stable condition after heavy bleeding for which she was given a blood transfusion, he said.

The cesarean was ordered after Cisse had "birth pains," Alaoui, the clinic director, said. The babies weigh between 500 grams and one kilogram (1.1 and 2.2 pounds).

The Guinness Book of World Records said in an email to The AP on Wednesday that its current record

for most living births at once is eight, and that it is verifying the Morocco birth.

The current holder of the Guinness record is American Nadya Suleman, who gave birth to eight premature but otherwise healthy children in 2009.

Alaoui, the clinic director, told The AP that as far as he was aware Cisse had not used fertility treatments. The Malian health ministry did not provide any other information about the pregnancy or births.

Yacoub Khalaf, a professor of reproductive medicine at King's College London, said that such births would be extraordinarily unlikely without fertility treatment, and noted the dangers involved with such multiple births.

The mother "was at severe risk of losing her uterus or losing her life," he said. The babies "could suffer physical and mental handicaps. The risk of cerebral palsy is astronomically higher."

He urged more awareness worldwide about monitoring fertility treatments and about the risks and costs of having so many premature babies at one time.

## Firing of Atlanta officer who shot Rayshard Brooks reversed

By KATE BRUMBACK and JEFF MARTIN undefined

ATLANTA (AP) — The firing of the former Atlanta police officer who's charged with murder in the shooting death of Rayshard Brooks was reversed after a review panel found the city failed to follow its own procedures for disciplinary actions.

Garrett Rolfe was fired last June, a day after he shot the Black man in the parking lot of a fast food restaurant. The Atlanta Civil Service Board on Wednesday released its decision on Rolfe's appeal of his firing.

"Due to the City's failure to comply with several provisions of the Code and the information received during witnesses' testimony, the Board concludes the Appellant was not afforded his right to due process," the board said in its decision. "Therefore, the Board grants the Appeal of Garrett Rolfe and revokes his dismissal as an employee of the APD."

Rolfe will remain on administrative leave until the criminal charges against him are resolved, Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms said.

Atlanta police spokeswoman Chata Spikes said she could not comment on whether he would receive back pay or would be paid while on administrative leave.

On Wednesday evening, a small protest formed outside of city hall in response to the board's decision. The group held signs and photos of Brooks, WXIA-TV reported.

Brooks' killing last June 12 happened amid weeks of sometimes violent protests across the U.S. after a Black man, George Floyd, was killed by a white Minneapolis officer last May 25. The night after Brooks died, the Wendy's restaurant where he was shot was set on fire. Protesters have denounced racial inequality and called for dismantling of police departments or the reallocation of their funding to social services.

Atlanta police Sgt. William Dean had testified that the firing seemed rushed, and Rolfe was not given sufficient time to respond, according to the decision.

Dean also said that during his tenure in the police department's internal affairs unit, he was not aware of any such termination of an officer for an alleged firearms violation without the department first conducting an investigation, the decision states.

"He further stated that the hurried dismissal may have been due in part, to a press conference that was on the horizon," it says.

Lance LoRusso, an attorney for Rolfe, applauded the board's decision, saying his client now has the opportunity to explain what happened that night.

"We are very pleased at this action and consider it the first step in the total vindication of Officer Garrett Rolfe," LoRusso said in an emailed statement.

Relatives of Brooks were disappointed and confused by the decision, said one of their lawyers, L. Chris Stewart.

"We find it mindboggling that our elected officials and the former chief weren't aware of the proper procedures for firing an officer," Stewart said during a Wednesday news conference.

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"The city of Atlanta cannot be the alleged blueprint for civil rights for other cities and not actually fulfill that promise," he added.

The Rev. James Woodall, president of the Georgia NAACP, said the decision to reinstate Rolfe "is not only a testament to a sustained commitment of enacting violence upon human lives but the lack of leadership and vision we currently have that will prevent further injustices from happening that leave our community grieving and begging for mercy."

Police responded to complaints that Brooks had fallen asleep in his car in the drive-thru lane of a Wendy's restaurant. Police body camera video shows the 27-year-old man struggling with two white officers after they told him he'd had too much to drink to be driving and tried to arrest him. Brooks grabbed a Taser from one of the officers and fled, firing it at Rolfe as he ran. An autopsy found Brooks was shot twice in the back.

Brooks assaulted both officers, and Rolfe was entitled, as an officer and a citizen, to respond to that assault with deadly force, LoRusso said.

Bottoms said the day after the shooting that she did not believe it was a justified use of deadly force. She called for Rolfe's immediate firing and announced she had accepted the resignation of then-Police Chief Erika Shields.

"Given the volatile state of our city and nation last summer, the decision to terminate this officer, after he fatally shot Mr. Brooks in the back, was the right thing to do," she said in a statement Wednesday. "Had immediate action not been taken, I firmly believe that the public safety crisis we experienced during that time would have been significantly worse."

Bottoms said it's important to note that the Civil Service Board did not determine whether Rolfe violated police department policies and that the department would determine whether additional investigation is needed.

Police Chief Rodney Bryant, who became interim chief after Shields' departure and this week was named chief permanently, said in an interview with The Associated Press that it's not unusual for officers to appeal disciplinary action and that he respected the board's decision.

Less than a week after the shooting, then-Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard held a news conference to announce charges against the two officers. Rolfe faces charges including murder. The other officer, Devin Brosnan, was charged with aggravated assault and violating his oath. Lawyers for both officers have said their clients acted appropriately. Both are free on bond.

The officers haven't been indicted yet.

Howard's successor, Fani Willis, who became district attorney in January, has asked Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr to reassign the case, saying actions by Howard made it inappropriate for her office to continue handling the case. Carr has refused, saying the potential problems she cited were specific to Howard, so the responsibility for the case remained with her office.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Christopher Brasher last month asked Willis to provide evidence showing why she should not be involved by this past Monday so that he can make a decision on the matter.

## **Did agents raid home of wrong woman over Jan. 6 riot? Maybe.**

By MARK THIESSEN and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — "We're looking for Nancy Pelosi's laptop," FBI agents told Marilyn Hueper after briefly handcuffing her.

Hueper shot back: "That still doesn't explain why you're in my home. Or in Homer, Alaska."

The search for the House speaker's laptop had taken a U.S. Capitol Police officer thousands of miles away from home for an FBI raid on Hueper's home, looking for something stolen during the Jan. 6 insurrection — and the person who did it.

The agents would walk out of Hueper's home with iPads, cellphones and a pocket-sized copy of the Declaration of Independence. They took a laptop, but it wasn't from Pelosi's office. And it's possible they may have the wrong person altogether — even though Hueper looks strikingly similar to the thief.

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The Justice Department's massive prosecution of those who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 has not been without its problems, including this potential instance of mistaken identity. And as Republicans are increasingly seeking to minimize the insurrection and play down the horror of the day, any missteps by federal prosecutors could be used in that effort to discredit what actually happened.

Federal prosecutors have charged more than 400 people, the largest undertaking by the department, including scores of defendants who posted images of their crimes online and boasted about breaking into the hallowed building. Some are facing serious charges and considerable prison time.

Hueper and her husband first came to officials' attention this year when Alaska Airlines in February banned the couple for refusing to wear masks on a flight, according to court documents obtained by The Associated Press. Then two other people called in tips saying they recognized Hueper in photos that authorities had released of suspects wanted for storming the Capitol.

The insurrectionists sought to disrupt the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. Hundreds of officers were injured and five people died after the riot, including a Capitol Police officer.

Supporters of then-President Donald Trump ransacked offices, rifled through lawmakers' papers and desks, smashed through glass, shattered windows and tore down signs. Among the items stolen: the laptop from Pelosi's office, her lectern, an iPad belonging to Majority Whip Rep. Jim Clyburn and other electronics.

But the volume of people inside the Capitol building, along with the lack of arrests made at the time of the riot, has made it difficult to identify people, even with the glut of social media evidence. Federal agents have dug through thousands of social media posts, gotten sweeping warrants to obtain information on cellphones in the area of the Capitol, used facial recognition tools and obtained logs of devices that signed into the congressional Wi-Fi during the riot.

But by far the most effective tool for federal agents has been old-fashioned tips. Many of the rioters have been ratted out by their friends and family members.

The warrant, obtained by the AP, identifies Hueper as the woman who took the laptop.

But they're wrong, Hueper insists. She told the AP that another woman wearing her same coat and with a similar hairstyle was inside the Capitol during the insurrection, not her. She admits she was in Washington, D.C., for Trump's rally that day but says she didn't get any closer than 100 yards (91 meters) from the Capitol and spent part of the day being lost in an unfamiliar city.

She said agents showed her one photo of the woman inside the Capitol, and they looked so similar that Hueper wondered if someone had used photo-editing software to put her in the photograph.

The warrant details how FBI agents located an image showing Hueper wearing similar clothing in a photo on her husband's Instagram account. It said Hueper's husband had also posted photos of them near the Capitol. "BEST OF 2020," he wrote in one, showing her from behind nearing the building. "Marilyn approaching the Capital. As Patriots, there is a righteous revolution to take back our country ... To be there was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. STOP THE STEAL!"

Hueper said an agent came back with a different and larger photo of the woman, which showed the suspected thief wearing a black sweater with large white snowflakes on it. The agent asked where in the house they could locate the sweater.

Hueper said she reiterated she wasn't inside the building. "No. 2, why didn't you show me this photo to start with? Because we can both obviously see here this is a different person."

Plus, she said, the sweater was hideous.

Hueper said she grabbed the photo and held it next to her face, asking the female agent to look at both closely, "Me. Her. Me. Her," she told the agent. Hueper said the agent grabbed the paper and walked off.

Both women were wearing black Columbia down coats. However, in a photo posted on her husband's Facebook page from Jan. 6, Hueper is shown wearing a black face mask, a green blouse open at the collar and a light green scarf. The surveillance video released by the FBI shows the sought-after woman wearing the black sweater with a snowflake print and dangling earrings. Also, the woman in the photo has detached earlobes, while Hueper says hers are attached.

After insisting, Hueper was shown the front page of the warrant but not allowed to thoroughly read the document, she said. She read it only after receiving a copy as the dozen or so agents and Capitol Police

officer left.

According to the search warrants, agents could collect any electronics that might be suspected to have been involved, items stolen from the Capitol, a laptop with descriptors and a serial number — “which they didn’t find,” she said — and any paperwork related to planning violence.

Hueper said she has not heard back from federal authorities, nor have agents returned her laptop, two iPads, two cellphones or the 50-cent pocket-sized Declaration of Independence booklet they confiscated April 28.

She has not been arrested. Justice Department officials would say only that the investigation is ongoing. But she decided to go public with her story, just in case.

“I better go online and protect myself before they call me in and make me this person,” she said.

## Broadway readies imminent ticket sales for a fall reopening

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Many Broadway productions are scrambling to resume ticket sales in the coming days to welcome theater-goers this fall after city and state leaders have green-lit a reopening of the Great White Way at full capacity by mid-September.

“We remain cautiously optimistic about Broadway’s ability to resume performances this fall and are happy that fans can start buying tickets again,” Charlotte St. Martin, president of the Broadway League, said in a statement Wednesday.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Broadway theaters can reopen Sept. 14 and will be allowed to decide their own entry requirements, like whether people must prove they’ve been vaccinated to attend a show. Selling tickets will allow theaters to gauge interest before stages open, said Robert Mujica, Cuomo’s budget director.

“Phantom of the Opera,” Broadway’s longest-running show, announced Wednesday it would resume performances on Oct. 22, with tickets going on sale Friday. More shows are expected to circle return dates in the coming weeks.

Actors’ Equity Association, the national labor union representing more than 51,000 actors and stage managers in live theater, said the news meant the theater community is “one step closer to the safe reopening” of Broadway.

“We look forward to continuing our conversations with the Broadway League about a safe reopening and know that soon the time will come when members can go back to doing what they do best, creating world-class theater,” said Mary McColl, executive director of Actors’ Equity.

The Broadway that reopens will look different. In May, the big budget Disney musical “Frozen” decided not to reopen when Broadway theaters restart, marking the first time an established show had been felled by the coronavirus pandemic. Producers of “Mean Girls” also decided not to restart.

But there will be new shows, including Antoinette Chinonye Nwandu’s “Pass Over” that is slated to reopen the August Wilson Theatre, the same venue “Mean Girls” has vacated. And a Shubert theater has been promised for playwright Keenan Scott II’s play “Thoughts of a Colored Man.”

The lifting of all capacity restrictions has long been considered by the industry as crucial to any reopening plan since Broadway economics demand full venue capacity. Some off-Broadway shows have already reopened with limited capacity.

All city theaters abruptly closed on March 12, 2020, knocking out all shows, including 16 that were still scheduled to open.

Some scheduled spring 2020 shows — like a musical about Michael Jackson and a revival of Neil Simon’s “Plaza Suite” starring Matthew Broderick and Sarah Jessica Parker — pushed their productions to 2021. But others abandoned their plans, including “Hangmen” and a revival of Edward Albee’s “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”

## US tribe shares vaccine with relatives, neighbors in Canada

By IRIS SAMUELS Associated Press/Report for America

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BABB, Mont. (AP) — On a cloudy spring day, hundreds lined up in their cars on the Canadian side of the border crossing that separates Alberta and Montana. They had driven for hours and camped out in their vehicles in hopes of receiving the season's hottest commodity — a COVID-19 vaccine — from a Native American tribe that was giving out its excess doses.

The Blackfeet tribe in northern Montana provided about 1,000 surplus vaccines last month to its First Nations relatives and others from across the border, in an illustration of the disparity in speed at which the United States and Canada are distributing doses. While more than 30% of adults in the U.S. are fully vaccinated, in Canada that figure is about 3%.

Among those who received the vaccine at the Piegan-Carway border crossing were Sherry Cross Child and Shane Little Bear, of Stand Off, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of the border.

They recited a prayer in the Blackfoot language before nurses began administering shots, with Chief Mountain — sacred to the Blackfoot people — rising in the distance. The prayer was dedicated to people seeking refuge from the virus, Cross Child said.

Cross Child and her husband have family and friends in Montana but have not been able to visit them since the border closed last spring to all but essential travel.

"It's been stressful because we had some deaths in the family, and they couldn't come," she said. "Just for the support — they rely on us, and we rely on them. It's been tough."

More than 95% of the Blackfeet reservation's roughly 10,000 residents who are eligible for the vaccine are fully immunized, after the state prioritized Native American communities — among the most vulnerable U.S. populations — in the early stages of its vaccination campaign.

The tribe received vaccine allotments both from the Montana health department and the federal Indian Health Service, leaving some doses unused. With an expiration date fast approaching, it turned to other nations in the Blackfoot Confederacy, which includes the Blackfeet and three tribes in southern Alberta that share a language and culture.

"The idea was to get to our brothers and sisters that live in Canada," said Robert DesRosier, emergency services manager for the Blackfeet tribe. "And then the question came up — what if a nontribal member wants a vaccine? Well, this is about saving lives. We're not going to turn anybody away."

The tribe distributed the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines over four days in late April at the remote Piegan Port of Entry, amid a backdrop of rolling grasslands to the east and Glacier National Park's snow-covered peaks to the west.

As news of the effort spread in Canada, first by word of mouth, then through social platforms and media reports, people traveled from farther away. Some drove five hours from the city of Edmonton.

The effort was particularly timely as Alberta sees a surge in new cases of the respiratory virus, with a caseload record reached this month.

Bonnie Healy, Blackfoot Confederacy health administrator, said she was glad the vaccination effort reached both First Nations and other communities in the province.

"We have family members that live in those areas," she said. "If we can get these places safe, then it's safe for our children to go to school there. It's safe for our elders to go shopping in their stores."

Canadians who got the vaccines were not allowed to linger in the U.S. They returned home with letters from health officials exempting them from the mandatory 14-day quarantine imposed on all those entering the country.

The tribe's initiative is one of a few partnerships that have cropped up between communities in the U.S. and Canada, where residents might otherwise have to wait weeks or months for a shot.

Canada has lagged in vaccinating its population because it lacks the ability to manufacture the vaccine and like many countries has had to rely on the global supply chain for the lifesaving shots. Although Canada's economy is tightly interconnected with the U.S., Washington hasn't allowed the hundreds of millions of vaccine doses made in America to be exported until very recently, and Canada has had to turn to Europe and Asia.

But vaccinations have ramped up in recent months, and the Canadian government expects to receive

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at least 10 million vaccines this month and millions more in June. First Nations have been prioritized from the start.

In the meantime, Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy has offered COVID-19 vaccines to residents of Stewart, British Columbia, with hopes it could lead the Canadian government to ease restrictions between that town and the Alaska border community of Hyder, a couple of miles away. In North Dakota, Gov. Doug Burgum and Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister unveiled a plan last month to administer vaccinations to Manitoba-based truck drivers transporting goods to and from the U.S.

On the Montana side of the border, vaccine recipients were often emotional, shedding tears, shouting words of gratitude through car windows as they drove away, and handing the nurses gifts such as chocolate and clothing. Some shared stories about what the vaccine meant to them – the possibility of safely caring for vulnerable loved ones, reuniting with grandparents or traveling again.

Recipients included 17-year-olds who are low on the country's priority list and parents who camped out with their young children in the backseat.

Maxwell Stein, 25, who plays the horn with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, arrived at the border crossing at 6 p.m. Wednesday and spent the night in his car, finally reaching the front of the line around 10 a.m. Thursday.

"It wasn't awesome, but you do what you need to to get a vaccine," he said. He predicted that if he had waited in Canada, he'd likely get his first dose sometime in late June, and it would be months before he would be fully vaccinated.

The Canadian government has recommended extending the interval between the two doses of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines from around three weeks to four months, with the goal of quickly inoculating more people amid the shortage. Some who attended the Blackfeet clinics had already gotten their first shot in Canada. More than 34% of Canada's population has received at least one dose of the vaccine, but around 3% have received both doses recommended by the drug manufacturers to reach full immunity. Canadian officials say partial immunity is better than none.

"With vaccines, I think it's really important to get the correct dosage in the right time period, so your body builds up the full resistance," Stein said.

When Stein heard about the vaccine clinic on the border, he didn't hesitate about the long drive, particularly as a professional musician who has a lot of free time with many concerts canceled.

"Really, I have no excuse. If I had to drive 10 hours to get the Pfizer or Moderna, I probably would have done it," he said.

## **Peloton recalls treadmills, halts sales, after a child dies**

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Peloton is recalling about 125,000 of its treadmills less than a month after denying they were dangerous and saying it would not pull them from the market, even though they were linked to the death of a child and injuries of 29 others.

The company said Wednesday that it will now offer full refunds for the Peloton Tread+ treadmills, which cost more than \$4,200. It will also stop selling them.

The recall comes after the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission warned on April 17 that people with children and pets should immediately stop using the Tread+ treadmill after a child was pulled under one of them and died.

At the time, Peloton pushed back against the safety commission saying the warning was "inaccurate and misleading" and that there was no reason to stop using the machines. CEO John Foley also said he had "no intention" of recalling the treadmills.

In a statement Wednesday, Foley apologized and said the company "made a mistake" in its initial response to the safety commission.

Shares of New York-based Peloton Interactive Inc. fell 14.6% to close at \$82.62 Wednesday, its second-biggest one-day percentage decline since the stock started trading in 2019.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat from Connecticut who is chair of the consumer safety committee, said in a statement that the recall was dangerously delayed.

"Peloton unacceptably put consumers at risk," Blumenthal said, adding that he would work to strengthen the safety commission so that "companies like Peloton no longer get to call the shots on consumer safety."

Under current laws, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has to negotiate with companies in order to release warnings about a product's hazards.

Peloton is best known for its stationary bikes, but it introduced treadmills about three years ago. Sales of its equipment have soared during the pandemic as virus-wary people have avoided gyms and worked out at home. In the last three months of 2020, the company brought in \$1 billion in revenue, more than double what it made the year before.

In all, Peloton said it received 72 reports of adults, kids, pets or other items, such as exercise balls, being pulled under the rear of the treadmill. Of those reports, 29 were of children who suffered injuries, including broken bones and cuts. One child, who was 6 years old, died.

Joseph Martyak, a spokesman at the Consumer Product Safety Commission, said the agency is still testing the treadmills, but it appears the design of the Peloton Tread+, including its belt and its height off the floor, could make it more likely to pull people, pets and items under the machine than other brands of treadmills.

Those who own the Tread+ treadmill have until Nov. 6, 2022, to get a full refund from Peloton. The safety commission still recommends that people stop using the treadmill, but for those that want to keep it, Peloton said it will move it free of charge to a room where children or pets cannot access it and update the software so a passcode is required to unlock it.

## **AP: Trooper charged in child rape hid checkered FBI past**

By JIM MUSTIAN and KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — An Alabama state trooper arrested last week on charges he raped an 11-year-old girl had been kicked out of the FBI amid a string of sexual misconduct allegations but was hired by the state agency with the apparent help of a fake bureau letter that scrubbed his record clean.

An Associated Press investigation found Christopher Bauer was suspended without pay and stripped of his security clearance in the FBI's New Orleans office in late 2018 — effectively fired — amid allegations that included a co-worker's claim that he raped her at knifepoint.

But Alabama authorities either overlooked or were unaware of that history. The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, the state police, told AP that it conducted a "full and thorough" investigation into Bauer's background when he applied to be a trooper in 2019 and that "no derogatory comments were uncovered by former employers."

Bauer indicated on his application that he was still employed by the FBI and had never been dismissed or forced to resign because of disciplinary action. And the state's law enforcement credentialing commission provided AP a copy of a letter — purportedly from FBI headquarters — that makes no mention of Bauer's ouster, confirms his decade of "creditable service" and deems him "eligible for rehire."

"The letter is not legitimate," the FBI said in a statement to the AP on Wednesday. Bureau officials would not say who they believe forged the letter.

Bauer, 41, was arrested last week in Montgomery on charges including sodomy and sexual abuse of a child under 12. The AP is withholding some details of the allegations to protect the girl's identity.

Bauer remained jailed Wednesday on \$105,000 bail, and court records do not list an attorney who could comment on his behalf. An attorney who represented Bauer in challenging his ouster from the FBI did not respond to requests for comment.

The FBI declined to say whether it was asked for any information about Bauer's suitability to be hired by the state police.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey's office referred questions on the matter to the state police, which did not respond to repeated queries about the details of Bauer's hiring.

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"You have to ask yourself why an agent from the FBI would want to leave after 10 years," said Lou Reiter, a policing consultant and former deputy chief with the Los Angeles Police Department. "They obviously didn't do any kind of due diligence with their background check."

"There have to be phone calls," added Michael Avery, a retired professor at Suffolk University's Law School and an expert on police misconduct.

Bauer resigned from the state police following his arrest, citing "personal reasons."

Bauer is the latest — and perhaps most extreme — example yet of an FBI agent accused of sexual misconduct moving on. An AP investigation last year found a pattern of FBI supervisors avoiding discipline — and retiring with full benefits — even after claims of sexual misconduct against them were substantiated.

"Nobody wants to take responsibility," the former co-worker who accused Bauer of rape told the AP, which does not typically identify those who say they are the victims of sex crimes. "I didn't want this to happen to anybody else."

An Air Force veteran, Bauer was a member of the Montgomery police force before joining the FBI in 2009, working a number of high-profile cases in the New Orleans field office. He has disputed the sexual misconduct claims made by his FBI co-worker, telling colleagues the acts were consensual.

FBI brass considered the misconduct case to be "egregious," according to a former senior law enforcement official with direct knowledge of the matter. Internal investigators interviewed several female FBI employees about their dealings with Bauer and believed the truth to be "somewhere in the middle" of what Bauer and the co-worker claimed, the former official said. The internal inquiry found Bauer violated FBI policy, including by having sex in an FBI vehicle.

"He flat-out needed to lose his job, and he really should have been charged criminally," said the former official, who wasn't authorized to discuss personnel matters and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Bauer's co-worker told AP that Louisiana authorities had been pursuing criminal charges in St. Tammany Parish, north of New Orleans, but she didn't believe she had enough evidence to go forward.

The allegations also played out in a restraining order obtained by the co-worker that names Bauer and had been in the public record in Louisiana for a year when Alabama hired him as a trooper. In it, the woman accuses the lawman of choking her, adding she was "scared for my life."

Bauer was ordered to surrender his "firearms, weapons, swords and knives" as part of the case.

"I couldn't see any more and felt my legs go out from under me," the woman wrote in her application for the order. "He told me many times if I went to war with him I would lose. He told me many times he would destroy me."

The woman told AP that Bauer sexually assaulted her so frequently her hair began to fall out.

"It was a year of torture," she said. "He quite literally would keep me awake for days. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep, and in six months I went from 150 pounds to 92 pounds. I was physically dying from what he was doing to me."

## **EXPLAINER: Will juror's march presence impact Chauvin case?**

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The revelation that a juror who helped convict a former Minneapolis police officer in the killing of George Floyd had participated in a march in Washington, D.C., months before the trial is unlikely to affect that guilty verdict, experts say.

But that's not always the case. Though rare, there have been cases in which convictions have been tossed out or reexamined after new information about a juror is discovered. Here's a look at the issue and what comes next:

### **WHAT HAPPENED?**

After juror Brandon Mitchell spoke to the media about his experience in the Derek Chauvin trial, a photo of him at the march last August commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "I have a Dream" speech began circulating online.

The photo shows Mitchell at the rally wearing a T-shirt bearing an image of King and the words "GET

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YOUR KNEE OFF OUR NECKS" and "BLM," for Black Lives Matter.

Mitchell didn't talk about the march during jury selection for Chauvin's trial. But he told the Star Tribune that he answered "no" to questions on a jury questionnaire about whether he or anyone close to him participated in marches speaking out against Floyd's death and police brutality.

He said the Washington rally was "100% not" a march for Floyd. He said: "It was literally called the anniversary of the March on Washington."

Members of Floyd's family spoke at the event along with relatives of others who were shot by police.

**COULD THIS IMPACT THE VERDICT?**

Experts say that's unlikely. Mike Brandt, a Minneapolis defense attorney not involved in the case, said the revelation alone wasn't enough to overturn Chauvin's conviction, but it could be combined with other issues in an appeal to say Chauvin was denied a fair trial.

Alan Tuerkheimer, a Chicago-based attorney and jury consultant, said: "I don't think the judge wants to do anything with this verdict."

**IS THERE LEGAL PRECEDENT?**

A 1984 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court set precedent on the issue of juror disclosures.

McDonough Power Equipment v. Greenwood was a case over injuries a boy received from the blades of a riding lawnmower. The boy's parents lost and sought a new trial after learning a juror, whose son broke a leg when a tire exploded, failed to answer yes to a question designed to elicit information about injuries that resulted in disability or prolonged suffering to an immediate family member.

The Supreme Court found the parents were not entitled to a new trial unless the juror's failure to disclose denied them the right to an impartial jury, saying: "To invalidate the result of a 3-week trial because of a juror's mistaken, though honest, response to a question, is to insist on something closer to perfection than our judicial system can be expected to give."

The justices said that to get a new trial, a party must show a juror did not answer a question honestly, and that a correct response would have provided a valid basis to have the juror removed.

**HAS THIS ISSUE AFFECTED OTHER CASES?**

In 2015, a Tennessee judge granted a mistrial in the case of two former Vanderbilt football players who were convicted in the 2013 dorm room rape of a student. The judge found that one of the jurors, the foreman, intentionally withheld information during jury questioning about being a victim of sexual assault.

During a hearing, the juror testified that he didn't withhold information because he didn't consider himself a victim of rape – he was 16 at the time and said the relationship was consensual. His parents pressed charges against the perpetrator.

But the judge found that "actual bias has been clearly shown" and granted a mistrial. The two former football players were convicted again in subsequent trials.

In California, a lower court is currently considering whether to order a new trial in the high-profile case of Scott Peterson, convicted in 2004 of killing his wife, Laci, who was eight months pregnant. The California Supreme Court ordered last fall that Peterson's convictions should get a second look after finding a juror committed "prejudicial misconduct" by failing to disclose information.

Laci Peterson, 27, disappeared on Christmas Eve 2002 and her body later washed ashore in the San Francisco Bay.

According to court documents, the juror had answered no to questions about whether she had ever been a victim of a crime or involved in a lawsuit. In fact, she had filed a lawsuit in 2000 to obtain a restraining order against her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend, saying the woman had harassed her while she was pregnant and that she feared for the life of her unborn child.

**WHAT'S NEXT IN CHAUVIN'S CASE?**

Defense attorney Eric Nelson asked Judge Peter Cahill for a hearing to impeach the verdict — which means to question its validity — on grounds that the jury committed misconduct and/or felt race-based pressure, among other issues. Nelson's request did not include details, and made no mention of recent information about Mitchell.

Nelson is expected to file more detailed briefs outlining his arguments.

Tuerkheimer said it's within Cahill's power to hold a hearing, and each side may present witnesses. Mitchell could be subpoenaed to answer questions. Then Cahill would have to decide whether Mitchell's participation in the march mattered.

"Nobody knows if it would've made a difference. Nobody knows who the juror would be if this juror was struck, had he disclosed he was at this MLK Jr. march," Tuerkheimer said. He also said Mitchell might have stayed on the jury anyway, even if his presence at the march had been known.

If Cahill rules against Nelson, it's another issue he could raise on appeal.

"It goes to the heart of a fair and impartial juror. And if there is a juror that was biased and not entirely forthcoming, that is an issue that is going to have to be looked at," Tuerkheimer said.

## Shooting highlights lack of body cams among Portland police

By SARA CLINE Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Two police officers raised their weapons while sheltering behind a tree in a Portland park. They yelled at a homeless man to put up his hands. Moments later, two shots rang out. The man collapsed onto the grassy field.

A replica gun with an orange tip was found at the scene on April 16. But some key details are unclear, including whether the fake weapon was in Robert Delgado's possession during the deadly encounter, or if he pointed it at officers.

Police have been tight-lipped, citing an ongoing investigation, and the only video from the scene — 11 minutes of footage taken by bystanders, not officers — shows just a portion of what happened.

Portland, which has become an epicenter of racial justice protests, is one of the few major U.S. cities where police are not required to wear body cameras, while elsewhere such footage is increasingly being released to provide an unaltered view of deadly incidents.

For years, city leaders and Portland police have advocated for the devices' use, stating they promote accountability and transparency.

But officials say the department lacks the funds following the mayor and City Council's decision last year to cut millions from its budget amid local and national calls to reform policing systems by "defunding" law enforcement and shifting money to other efforts.

"It's gotten to the point now, if you don't have a body cam policy, people wonder why," said Geoffrey Alpert, a criminal justice professor at the University of South Carolina. "And while it's really expensive, I think it's important to get these things down on video as much as possible because otherwise we're relying on written reports and then they can be inconsistent and not be remembered as well."

Delgado's family is relying on bystander video, police radio transmissions, photos and witness testimony to try to piece together the details. Officer Zachary DeLong killed Delgado, 46, after responding to Lents Park on reports of a man "quick drawing" and holding what looked like a handgun. He shot Delgado from a distance of about 90 feet (27 meters).

"The investigation is still underway, and we are waiting for information," said Ashlee Albies, the attorney for Delgado's family. "What we have seen from the videos and from witness statements is deeply disturbing and alarming."

Since 2010, Portland police have shot and killed 27 people, according to data from the department. Three of those cases remain under investigation, while a grand jury found all but one other were justified.

Statewide, body camera recordings exist for just seven of the past 100 deadly shootings by police, according to a Washington Post analysis.

In recent years, body camera footage has played a pivotal role in examining the use of force in police-involved fatalities across the U.S.

During the trial of Derek Chauvin, who was convicted of the murder and manslaughter of George Floyd, prosecutors showed footage from cameras worn by the former Minneapolis police officer and three colleagues. In the video, a handcuffed Floyd said he couldn't breathe as Chauvin kept his knee on the 46-year-old Black man's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds.

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In just the past month, police departments have released body camera footage of other deadly encounters: the shooting of 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant, as she swung a knife toward another girl, by a Columbus, Ohio, police officer; 13-year-old Adam Toledo appearing to drop a handgun and begin raising his hands less than a second before he was shot by a Chicago officer; and an hourlong video from Alameda, California, police that shows 26-year-old Mario Gonzalez dying after officers pinned him to the ground face down for more than five minutes.

Portland Police Chief Chuck Lovell says body cameras are a "good tool" and can bring clarity to certain incidents.

"There's a lot of agencies that have them, and they help them in situations like this and also just call-taking, even crowd control, public order-type events," Lovell said Tuesday.

Body-worn cameras are becoming a police standard nationwide, and have been acquired by over 80% of departments with more than 500 officers, according to 2016 U.S. Justice Department statistics.

The New York Police Department has distributed body cameras to more than 24,000 officers, or about two-thirds of its force. Since October, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has distributed cameras to about a fifth of its deputies.

Some departments implemented body camera policies after high-profile killings of Black people by white officers, including in places like Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore.

But not all have followed suit.

The Arizona Department of Public Safety, the state's largest police agency, does not have a requirement for its officers to wear cameras and has a relatively small number of cameras. New Orleans police use body cameras, but some nearby suburban departments don't.

In Anchorage, Alaska, voters passed a \$1.8 million proposition last month that includes funds for police body cameras.

Portland police are also hopeful the devices will soon become a reality in the country's 26th most populous city.

During recent bargaining talks, the Portland Police Association made a proposal that "included the issue of" body cameras, according to a statement from city officials. Specifics were not yet available.

In 2019, the Portland Police Bureau revived plans to pursue a body camera pilot program that was supposed to be implemented in 2020 and 2021. The bureau estimated it would cost roughly \$2.9 million to get a body-worn camera program up and running, with ongoing costs of about \$1.8 million a year.

But last year, as protesters took to the streets nightly to demand racial justice and reform, the City Council and mayor voted to cut \$15 million from the police budget, effectively halting the program.

"We often hear that body cameras will provide police accountability, but I disagree. I believe they are an expensive, false solution," Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, the first Black woman to serve on Portland's City Council, said in June.

Hardesty said if officers do get body cameras, the money for them should come from the existing police budget. In addition, she wants to make sure a new police oversight board has access to all footage and that officers are required to record all law enforcement interactions.

"It has taken filming the police as journalists (and) civilians to reveal the everyday life of interacting with the police while being Black," Hardesty said. "Even that hasn't led to substantial change in policy or behavior. That's why it's important to keep our eye on reinvesting in community."

## Facebook board upholds Trump ban, just not indefinitely

By MATT O'BRIEN and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Former President Donald Trump won't return to Facebook — at least not yet.

Four months after Facebook suspended Trump's accounts, having concluded that he incited violence leading to the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol riot, the company's quasi-independent oversight board upheld the bans. But it told Facebook to specify how long they would last, saying that its "indefinite" ban on the former president was unreasonable. The ruling, which gives Facebook six months to comply, effectively postpones

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any possible Trump reinstatement and puts the onus for that decision squarely back on the company.

That could leave Facebook in the worst of all possible worlds — one in which Trump's supporters remain enraged over the bans, his critics pushing for broader social-media regulation and the company stuck with a momentous issue it clearly hoped the oversight board would resolve.

The decision only "kicks the can down the road," said Jonathan Greenblatt, the head of the Anti-Defamation League, who said it highlighted the need for greater government oversight of social platforms.

The board ruled that Facebook was correct to suspend Trump's account four months ago. But it said the company erred by applying a vague penalty and then passing the question of whether to ban Trump permanently to the board.

"Indefinite penalties of this sort do not pass the international smell test," oversight board co-chair Michael McConnell said in a conference call with reporters. "We are not cops, reigning over the realm of social media."

In a statement, Trump did not address the decision directly, but said that actions by Facebook, Twitter, and Google are "a total disgrace and an embarrassment to our Country." He added: "These corrupt social media companies must pay a political price."

The board agreed with Facebook that that two of Trump's Jan. 6 posts "severely violated" the content standards of both Facebook and Instagram.

"We love you. You're very special," Trump said to the rioters in the first post. In the second, he called them "great patriots" and told them to "remember this day forever."

Those violated Facebook's rules against praising or supporting people engaged in violence, the board said, warranting the suspension. Specifically, the board cited Facebook's rules against "dangerous individuals and organizations," which prohibit anyone who proclaims a violent mission and bans posts that express support or praise of these people or groups.

But it insisted that the company needed to take responsibility for its decision.

"Facebook should either permanently disable Trump's account or impose a suspension for a specific period of time," said board co-chair Helle Thorning-Schmidt, a former Danish prime minister.

The board said that if Facebook decides to restore Trump's accounts, it must be able to promptly address further violations. Among other recommendations, it advised against drawing a firm distinction between political leaders and other influential users because anyone with a big audience can potentially cause serious risks of harm.

There was some dissent within the board, according to its report on the decision. A minority of board members sought to characterize Trump's statements about the election being stolen, coupled with praise for the rioters, as a violation of Facebook's rules against inciting violence through calls for action or by spreading misinformation and unverifiable rumors. But the board said that adding that as a violation wouldn't have affected its final ruling.

Facebook has long straddled that issue, granting political figures greater leeway than it allows ordinary users because, it argued, even their rule-breaking statements were important for citizens to hear.

"The same rules should apply to all users on Facebook, no matter how influential they are," said board spokesman Dex Hunter-Torricke, a former speechwriter for Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

If anything, he said, Facebook should look at the context of posts more carefully.

"A world leader or a very influential public figure has an enormous voice and reach, they are incredibly influential and that means their speech has the power to create all sorts of additional risks for people," Hunter-Torricke said. "And Facebook needs to take that into account when acting on things which may potentially create harm."

Facebook created the oversight panel to rule on thorny content issues following widespread criticism of its problems responding swiftly and effectively to misinformation, hate speech and nefarious influence campaigns. The board's earlier decisions — nine of them before Wednesday — have tended to favor free expression over the restriction of content.

The board, which has 20 members and will eventually grow to 40, did not reveal how it voted on Trump's suspension. It said a minority of members emphasized that Facebook should require users who seek

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reinstatement after being suspended to "recognize their wrongdoing and commit to observing the rules in the future."

The decision has implications not only for Trump but for tech companies, world leaders and people across the political spectrum — many of whom have wildly conflicting views of the proper role for technology companies when it comes to regulating online speech and protecting people from abuse and misinformation.

Despite the board's censure of Facebook, some renewed the argument that the oversight panel is nothing but a distraction.

"Let's be clear: what should have been swift and decisive action from Facebook to remove Trump from its platform years ago was instead a months-long bureaucratic process because Facebook's leadership refuses to take responsibility for their harms against our democracy," said Color Of Change President Rashad Robinson, a longtime critic of Facebook. The board "is a ruse to stave off regulatory action," he said. Facebook can't be trusted to regulate itself and Congress and the White House should step in.

A day before the decision, Trump unveiled a new blog on his personal website, "From the Desk of Donald J. Trump." While the page includes a dramatic video claiming, "A BEACON OF FREEDOM ARISES" and hailing "A PLACE TO SPEAK FREELY AND SAFELY," the page is little more than a display of Trump's recent statements — available elsewhere on the website — that can be easily shared on Facebook and Twitter, the platforms that banished him after the riot.

Barred from social media, Trump has embraced other platforms for getting his message out on his own terms. He does frequent interviews with friendly news outlets and has emailed a flurry of statements to reporters through his official office and political group.

## For first time in a long time, Netanyahu's rule threatened

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — For the past 12 years, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dominated Israeli politics, vanquishing a stream of challengers as he maintained his tight grip on power.

But after a bruising two-year cycle of political deadlock, Netanyahu is facing the toughest challenge of his record-setting rule and could soon find himself pushed into the opposition.

Israel's president said on Wednesday that he has given opposition leader Yair Lapid the task of trying to form a new coalition government. President Reuven Rivlin made the announcement after Netanyahu failed to meet a midnight deadline for forming a government himself the previous day.

Lapid, who was once Netanyahu's governing partner but has morphed into a formidable nemesis, now has 28 days to cobble together a majority coalition in parliament with a range of parties that have little in common.

While he faces a difficult task — and Netanyahu is expected to do everything possible to undermine him — Lapid expressed optimism he could make history and end the rule of Israel's longest-serving prime minister. Netanyahu has held the post for a total of 15 years, though his standing has been weakened in recent years after being charged in a series of corruption scandals.

Lapid, 57, vowed to form a broad, unity government as soon as possible to end the years of deadlock and heal a divided nation.

"We need a government that will reflect the fact that we don't hate one another," he said. "A government in which left, right and center will work together to tackle the economic and security challenges we face. A government that will show that our differences are a source of strength, not weakness."

Lapid, whose late father was a Cabinet minister, entered parliament in 2013 after a successful career as a newspaper columnist, TV anchor and author. His new Yesh Atid party ran a successful rookie campaign, landing Lapid the powerful post of finance minister.

But he and Netanyahu did not get along, and the coalition quickly crumbled. Yesh Atid has been in the opposition since the 2015 elections. The centrist party is popular with secular, middle-class voters, has been critical of Netanyahu's close ties with ultra-Orthodox parties and has led calls for the prime minister to step down while on trial.

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Israel's president, whose duties are mostly ceremonial, is responsible after each election for choosing the party leader he believes has the best chance of cobbling together a majority coalition in parliament.

Rivlin last month gave Netanyahu, whose Likud is the largest individual party, the first chance. But Netanyahu was unable to secure the support of the required 61-seat majority in parliament despite repeated meetings with his rivals and unprecedented outreach to the leader of a small Islamist Arab party.

In consultations with Rivlin on Wednesday, parties holding a total of 56 seats recommended giving Lapid an opportunity. While still short of a majority, Lapid appears to have a reasonable chance of working out a deal. That will require agreements among seven small and midsize parties, and possibly the outside support of an Arab party. An Arab party has never before been a member of an Israeli coalition.

Any agreement will need the support of Yamina, a nationalist party popular with religious voters and West Bank settlers. Lapid has already offered Yamina's leader, Naftali Bennett, a former Netanyahu aide turned rival, a rotation agreement splitting the job of prime minister. Under the proposal, Bennett would get the post first.

In a televised address, Bennett accused Netanyahu of "slamming the door" in his face. He vowed to seek an "emergency" unity government that would be "open to all parties."

"I can't promise we will succeed in forming such a government," he said. "I do promise we will try."

Gayil Talshir, a political scientist at Israel's Hebrew University, said it looked like Lapid and Bennett might be able to work out a deal. "What happened today is a huge victory to the anti-Bibi camp," she said, using Netanyahu's nickname.

She said the prospect of having to give up his official residence in Jerusalem would be a "painful process" for Netanyahu, and he will do everything possible to trip up his opponents.

"The main (goal) of Netanyahu over the next few days is to dismantle this emergency coalition government," she said.

In a brief televised statement, Netanyahu lashed out at Bennett, accusing him of abandoning the religious, nationalist right wing and being blinded by ambition.

"This will be a dangerous left-wing government, with a fatal combination of lack of direction, lack of ability and lack of responsibility," Netanyahu said.

In a small setback to Netanyahu's opponents, Amichai Chikli, a member of Bennett's party, said he would not join an alternate coalition. The announcement did not pose an immediate danger but could become a bigger problem if others in Bennett's hard-line party follow suit.

Over the years, Netanyahu has become a divisive figure in Israeli politics, alienating a long list of former allies during his lengthy tenure. Three parties were led by former top aides who fell out with him.

The past four elections were all seen as referendums on Netanyahu's polarizing rule and fitness for office as his legal troubles deepened. All of them ended in deadlock, with neither Netanyahu nor his opponents able to muster a majority.

He has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals in which he is accused of exchanging favors with rich and powerful associates.

Netanyahu, who denies all the charges, has been desperate to remain in office for the duration of the trial. He has used his position to lash out at prosecutors, police and journalists and explored the possibility of seeking immunity from prosecution.

Anshel Pfeffer, a columnist at the Haaretz daily and author of a Netanyahu biography, said it was far too early to write off the prime minister. Netanyahu will fight "every step of the way" to block the new coalition from forming, he said.

"Every potential member of this potential coalition is going to come under some kind of pressure," Pfeffer said. Likud activists, for instance, already have staged intimidating demonstrations outside homes of their rivals.

And even if Lapid prevails, he added that Netanyahu would likely remain at the helm of Likud as opposition leader. The party has never before ousted a leader, and Netanyahu remains popular among its rank and file.

Conceding defeat is not part of Netanyahu's DNA, Pfeffer said. "He will be waiting for this government

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to trip up and to get back into office.”

## 60 years since 1st American in space: Tourists lining up

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Sixty years after Alan Shepard became the first American in space, everyday people are on the verge of following in his cosmic footsteps.

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin used Wednesday's anniversary to kick off an auction for a seat on the company's first crew spaceflight — a short Shepard-like hop launched by a rocket named New Shepard. The Texas liftoff is targeted for July 20, the date of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic aims to kick off tourist flights next year, just as soon as he straps into his space-skimming, plane-launched rocketship for a test run from the New Mexico base.

And Elon Musk's SpaceX will launch a billionaire and his sweepstakes winners in September. That will be followed by a flight by three businessmen to the International Space Station in January.

“We've always enjoyed this incredible thing called space, but we always want more people to be able to experience it as well,” NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough said from the space station Wednesday. “So I think this is a great step in the right direction.”

It's all rooted in Shepard's 15-minute flight on May 5, 1961.

Shepard was actually the second person in space — the Soviet Union launched cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin three weeks earlier, to Shepard's everlasting dismay.

The 37-year-old Mercury astronaut and Navy test pilot cut a slick sci-fi figure in his silver spacesuit as he stood in the predawn darkness at Cape Canaveral, looking up at his Redstone rocket. Impatient with all the delays, including another hold in the countdown just minutes before launch, he famously growled into his mic: “Why don't you fix your little problem and light this candle?”

His capsule, Freedom 7, soared to an altitude of 116 miles (186 kilometers) before parachuting into the Atlantic.

Twenty days later, President John F. Kennedy committed to landing a man on the moon and returning him safely by decade's end, a promise made good in July 1969 by Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

Shepard, who died in 1998, went on to command Apollo 14 in 1971, becoming the fifth moonwalker — and lone lunar golfer.

Since Gagarin and Shepard's pioneering flights, 579 people have rocketed into space or reached its fringes, according to NASA. Nearly two-thirds are American and just over 20% Soviet or Russian. About 90% are male and most are white, although NASA's crews have been more diverse in recent decades.

A Black community college educator from Tempe, Arizona, sees her spot on SpaceX's upcoming private flight as a symbol. Sian Proctor uses the acronym J.E.D.I. for “a just, equitable, diverse and inclusive space.”

NASA wasn't always on board with space tourism, but is today.

“Our goal is one day that everyone's a space person,” NASA's human spaceflight chief, Kathy Lueders said following Sunday's splashdown of a SpaceX capsule with four astronauts. “We're very excited to see it starting to take off.”

Twenty years ago, NASA clashed with Russian space officials over the flight of the world's first space tourist.

California businessman Dennis Tito paid \$20 million to visit the space station, launching atop a Russian rocket. Virginia-based Space Adventures arranged Tito's weeklong trip, which ended May 6, 2001, as well as seven more tourist flights that followed.

“By opening up his checkbook, he kicked off an industry 20 yrs ago,” Space Adventures co-founder Eric Anderson tweeted last week. “Space is opening up more than it ever has, and for all.”

There's already a line.

A Russian actress and movie director are supposed to launch from Kazakhstan in the fall. They'll be followed in December by Space Adventures' two newest clients, also launching on a Russian Soyuz rocket. SpaceX will be next up in January with the three businessmen; the flight from Florida's Kennedy Space

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Center was arranged by Axiom Space, a Houston company run by former NASA employees. And as early as 2023, SpaceX is supposed to take a Japanese entrepreneur and his guests around the moon and back.

While no fan of human spaceflight — he prefers robotic explorers — Duke University emeritus history professor Alex Roland acknowledges the emergence of spaceflight companies might be “the most significant change in the last 60 years.” Yet he wonders whether there will be much interest once the novelty wears off and the inevitable fatalities occur.

Then there’s the high price of admission.

The U.S., Canadian and Israeli entrepreneurs flying SpaceX early next year are paying \$55 million — each — for their 1 1/2-week mission.

Virgin Galactic’s tickets cost considerably less for minutes versus days of weightlessness. Initially \$250,000, the price is expected to go up once Branson’s company starts accepting reservations again.

Blue Origin declined Wednesday to give a ticket price for future sales and would not comment on who else — besides the auction winner — will be on board the capsule in July. A couple more crew flights, each lasting minutes, would follow by year’s end.

As for SpaceX’s private flight on a fully automated Dragon capsule, tech entrepreneur Jared Isaacman won’t say what he’s paying. He considers his three-day flight a “great responsibility” and is taking no shortcuts in training; he took his crewmates hiking up Mount Rainier last weekend to toughen them up.

“If something does go wrong, it will set back every other person’s ambition to go and become a commercial astronaut,” Isaacman said recently.

John Logsdon, professor emeritus at George Washington University, where he founded the Space Policy Institute, has mixed feelings about this shift from space exploration to adventure tourism.

“It takes the romance and excitement out of going to space,” Logsdon said in an email this week. Instead of the dawn of a new era like so many have proclaimed, it’s “more like the end of the era when space flight was special. I guess that is progress.”

## Baseball’s sweetest song: Willie Mays, forever young, is 90

By FRED LIEF AP Sports Writer

Willie Mays is turning 90, and no mistaking that number. It strikes with the clarity of a line drive. Mays played in a sport measured by milestones — 3,000 hits, 500 homers, signposts he passed and then some — and now here’s one more.

On Thursday, when baseball’s oldest living Hall of Famer is serenaded with renditions of “Happy Birthday to You,” it might be time to expand the playlist. A player of such infinite variety deserves as much.

There’s plenty to choose from. References to the Giants center fielder cut across the years and the genres — rock, pop, folk, country, rap, hip hop.

The two most frequent mentions come in what have become ballpark anthems: John Fogerty’s “Centerfield” and Terry Cashman’s “Talkin’ Baseball (Willie, Mickey & The Duke).”

Fogerty grew up in San Francisco, his father a Joe DiMaggio fan. His song, released in 1985, is one of hope on a day when all seems possible: “We’re born again, there’s new grass on the field/A-roundin’ third, I’m headed for home/It’s a brown-eyed handsome man.” The “brown-eyed handsome man” streaking to the plate is a tribute to the 1956 song of the same name by Chuck Berry but may well be the Say Hey Kid himself.

Fogerty goes on to sing of a player riding the bench and dying to get into the game. He summons a pantheon of outfielders: “So say, ‘Hey Willie, tell Ty Cobb and Joe DiMaggio/Don’t say it ain’t so you know the time is now.” Finally, there is the plea and the heart of the song: “So put me in coach, I’m ready to play today/Look at me, I can be centerfield.” Mays, no doubt, would understand.

“Talkin’ Baseball” came out during the major league strike of 1981. It’s anchored around talk — fierce arguments across boroughs and barstools — about whether Mays, Mantle or Snider was the better center fielder in New York during the 1950s. Cashman’s vote is clear: “And me, I always loved Willie Mays/ Those were the days!” Mays also gets top billing in the title and when the names of the trio are sung in

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the refrain. And the song ends this way: "... (Say hey, say hey, say hey)."

Even Snider wasn't about to argue. In 1979, Mays was only player elected to the Hall of Fame by the baseball writers, with Snider finishing second. Snider said at the time, "Willie more or less really deserves to be in by himself." The Duke joined Mays in Cooperstown the next year.

Just about everyone saw something in Mays. Maybe it was the dash around the bases, his cap flying. Or the slashing hits to all fields. Or those stickball games with kids in Harlem not far from the old Polo Grounds. Or the gentle tap of his glove before a basket catch and his run back to the infield after an inning, carrying the ball as if it were a wounded bird. Or maybe the sheer joyful lyricism of the name "Willie Mays."

Those running the playlist on Mays' birthday have options apart from Fogerty and Cashman.

Certainly, Chuck Prophet's "Willie Mays is Up at Bat" deserves a listen. The song is from the 2012 "Temple Beautiful" album honoring San Francisco, the city Prophet calls home. It begins as a kind of hymn: "I hear the church bells ring, Willie Mays is up at bat/I hear the crowd go wild, all he did was touch his hat."

A litany of references to Prophet's city follows, and not all the lyrics passed the smell test of fact-checkers. Even Prophet acknowledges he didn't get everything right. Like this line: "And the only thing we know for sure is Willie always did swing for the fence."

So many ways to brush back that assertion. But Game 7 of the 1962 World Series will do. Giants at bat and trailing the Yankees 1-0 in the ninth. Matty Alou is on first with two out. Mays, hardly swinging for the fence, laces a double into the right field corner. Alou, wary of Roger Maris' arm in right, screeches to a stop at third. That sets up a wrenching finish for the Giants when Willie McCovey lines out to second baseman Bobby Richardson.

Bob Dylan, raised in the Minnesota town where Maris was born, had a soft spot for baseball. He wrote about pitcher Jim "Catfish" Hunter in the song "Catfish." Years earlier, in 1963, his "Freewheelin'" album features "I Shall Be Free." In it, President Kennedy asks a drunk "what we need to make the country grow." Dylan jumps from one cultural touchstone to another. And right along with bagels, pizza, Sophia Loren and Charles de Gaulle is this line: "What do you do about Willie Mays."

For Joe Henry, it was tantamount to asking about the soul of the country -- "this frightful and this angry land." Released in 2007, "Our Song" is a meditation on a lost America that opens in his imagination with Willie Mays and his wife looking to buy garage door springs at a Home Depot in Scottsdale, Arizona. Henry is close enough in the aisle to hear Mays say: "This was my country/This was my song." Mays, in Henry's telling, is a mythic figure, "Stooped by the burden of endless dreams/His and yours and mine."

But let's raise the volume for this birthday shout-out. Run-DMC will do the job, with its 1993 song "What's Next." A couple of bored guys are walking down Broadway in New York with "lots of lovely ladies like a-lookin' our way." How to respond? How to summon just the right amount of cool? Easy: "Play like Willie Mays all-star and 'Say Hey.'"

Wu-Tang Clan did likewise in "For Heaven's Sake" in 1997. This is someone whose "solar razor burn through shades" and who glides like "hovercrafts on the Everglades." But when it comes to the arbiter of all that's hip, Wu-Tang Clan is clear: "Yo, hey yo my rap style swing like Willie Mays."

But if the birthday honoree wants to recognize a familiar voice there's "Say Hey (The Willie Mays Song)" by The Treniers. Mays himself was part of the 1955 song, which was included on the soundtrack for the 1994 documentary "Baseball" by Ken Burns:

"He runs the bases like a choo-choo train  
Swings around second like an aeroplane  
His cap flies off when he passes third  
And he heads home like an eagle bird."

The group The Baseball Project takes listeners on a reverie through the mist of seasons in "Sometimes I Dream of Willie Mays": a father and son at a Dodgers-Giants game at Candlestick Park to watch Mays face Sandy Koufax; a jump to 1973, with Mays now on the New York Mets and letting a ball go through his legs; and then a return to the Polo Grounds and black-and-white footage of Mays' overhead catch and spinning throw in the 1954 World Series. "Sometimes I dream of Willie Mays," the lyric goes, "And the sun comes out, and the fog lifts, and he's there."

Yes, he is. So happy birthday, Willie Mays. Blow out the candles and, like an eagle bird, fly home.

## Yankees, Mets to lift capacity limits for vaccinated fans

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Yankees and Mets can increase capacity from 20% to 100% at their ballparks for home games starting May 19 — as long as fans are vaccinated against COVID-19.

And both teams will be giving away free tickets along with vaccinations.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo made the announcement at a news conference on Wednesday with Yankees president Randy Levine and Mets president Sandy Alderson.

"Theoretically if you had 100% vaccinated, you could fill the entire stadium with 100% vaccinated," Cuomo said. "Unvaccinated, it is still the 6-foot social distancing. In other words, our capacity restrictions have been relaxed subject to the federal CDC social-distancing guideline of 6 feet."

The Johnson & Johnson one-shot vaccination will be offered at the ballparks, and a person receiving a vaccination can get a free game ticket.

"If we can encourage more people to get vaccinated by giving away Yankees tickets, we are all in," the Yankees said in a statement.

The current requirement for fans to show proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test will be dropped because it is burdensome, Cuomo said. Masks will continue to be required. Sections for unvaccinated fans will be at 33% capacity.

Cuomo also announced that Broadway theaters will reopen Sept. 14 at 100% capacity and ticket sales could start Thursday. Broadway theaters were closed by Cuomo on March 12, 2020.

On Monday, Cuomo said New York City restaurants could raise capacity to 100% on May 19, two days after 24-hour subway service resumes.

All Major League Baseball teams were required to play the pandemic-shortened 2020 season in empty ballparks. Cuomo allowed the New York teams to start this season at 20% capacity (10,850 at Yankee Stadium, 8,384 at Citi Field) and said on April 26 they could increase to 33% starting on May 19. Cuomo expanded that even further Thursday.

"We've been polling our fans," Levine said. "I think the majority are vaccinated rather than unvaccinated who are coming in. And hopefully those numbers continue to rise. But we will have separate sections and accommodate all our season ticket holders, make sure that they're fine, and other people coming in."

Depending on whether season ticket holders and their guests are vaccinated, seat locations may have to be moved. Newly sold tickets will be specified as vaccinated or unvaccinated sections.

Levine is hoping for "full house after full house."

"The main resistance now is people's own fears and people's comfort level," Cuomo said. "And when you have a set of rules and protocols in place where people feel comfortable, I think it's going to have more people attending games. I think more people will go to restaurants. I think more people will go to museums if they know they are safe when they go there. You're vaccinated, you are going to sit with only vaccinated people. I think that's actually going to increase the public acceptance level."

Alderson said the Mets envision a gradual return to full capacity.

"There are some people who are just not comfortable being in large groups, even at an outdoor facility. And so, from our standpoint, we still need some social distancing," he said. "Generally speaking, we think a gradual return is appropriate in light of some concerns that people have about being in large groups even if they've been vaccinated. So we're working toward full capacity, of course, but we're happy with where we are and where we're going."

Alderson said the Mets have not yet succeeded in getting 85% of their players and tier 1 staff such as managers, coaches and athletic trainers to receive vaccines, the threshold set by MLB and the players' association to relax COVID-19 protocols such as mask requirements in dugouts and bullpens and restrictions on movement during travel.

"Our percentage right now is about 77%," Alderson said. "We continue to work on it. At this point, it's

a case-by-case, individual-by individual campaign on our part. We continue to provide education and as time passes we get one or two more every few days. But we're not at that level yet and we see the kind of resistance within the framework of the team that we see publicly, and all of the same reasons are being made to us by them as we see in the public domain."

The Yankees were able to relax the protocols starting last Friday.

"Virtually all of our players have been vaccinated," Levine said.

The Arizona Diamondbacks said they will lift seating restrictions beginning on May 25 but masks will be required and distancing encouraged.

"While the seating restrictions will no longer be in place, we believe seat selection for the majority of games should still allow fans to spread out," Diamondbacks CEO Derrick Hall said in a statement.

Arizona had been allowing up to 20,000 fans at games, about half of Chase Field's capacity, and averaged about 11,500 through 11 home games.

## States push back against use of facial recognition by police

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Law enforcement agencies across the U.S. have used facial recognition technology to solve homicides and bust human traffickers, but concern about its accuracy and the growing pervasiveness of video surveillance is leading some state lawmakers to hit the pause button.

At least seven states and nearly two dozen cities have limited government use of the technology amid fears over civil rights violations, racial bias and invasion of privacy. Debate over additional bans, limits and reporting requirements has been underway in about 20 state capitals this legislative session, according to data compiled by the Electronic Privacy Information Center.

Lawmakers say they want to give themselves time to evaluate how and why the technology is being used.

"I think people are just freaked out, and rightfully so, about this technology," said Freddy Martinez, director of Lucy Parsons Labs, a Chicago nonprofit that specializes in citizens' digital rights. "It's one of those rare issues that's seen bipartisan support, in that nobody wants to be tracked everywhere they go, especially when you don't have a choice."

The issue caught fire in statehouses after law enforcement applied facial recognition technology to images taken from street cameras during last year's racial justice demonstrations — and in some cases used those to make arrests.

Complaints about false identifications prompted Amazon, Microsoft and IBM to pause sales of their software to police, though most departments hire lesser-known firms that specialize in police contracts. Wrongful arrests of Black men have gained attention in Detroit and New Jersey after the technology was blamed for mistaking their images for those of others.

The American Civil Liberties Union began raising questions about the technology years ago, citing studies that found higher error rates for facial recognition software used to identify people of color. Concerns also have grown because of increasing awareness of the Chinese government's extensive video surveillance system, especially as it's been employed in a region home to one of China's largely Muslim ethnic minority populations.

In March, the ACLU sued Clearview AI, a company that provides facial recognition services to law enforcement and private companies, contending it illegally stockpiled images of 3 billion people scraped from internet sites without their knowledge or permission.

For many, news of that stockpile, first reported by The New York Times, raised concerns that the type of surveillance seen in China could happen in the U.S. and other countries. Cities that passed bans — including Boston; Minneapolis; San Francisco; Oakland, California; and Portland, Oregon — listed concerns about police using the technology secretly among their reasons.

Hoan Ton-That, CEO of Clearview AI, said his company collects only publicly available photos from the open internet that are accessible "from any computer anywhere in the world." He said its database cannot be used for surveillance.

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Ton-That said that, as a person of mixed race, it is important to him that the technology is not biased. "Unlike other facial recognition technologies that have misidentified people of color, an independent study has indicated that Clearview AI has no racial bias," he said in a statement. "We know of no instance where Clearview AI's technology has resulted in a wrongful arrest."

But the pushback against the technology has continued.

Last year, New York imposed a two-year moratorium on use of the technology in schools after an upstate district adopted facial recognition as part of its security plans and was sued. A state ACLU executive called it "flawed and racially-biased" technology that didn't belong in schools.

That came on the heels of the nation's first ban on government use of the technology, in San Francisco in 2019, and a statewide three-year moratorium on police departments using facial recognition from videos shot with body cameras that California imposed later that year.

No such restrictions exist at the federal level. Variants of facial recognition technology were used, including by ordinary people, to help identify those who took part in the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. Police also used it at some protests last year staged against coronavirus-related mask mandates, and some activists have used it to identify police officers engaged in misconduct.

This February, Virginia lawmakers passed one of the most restrictive bans of them all. It prohibits local law enforcement agencies and campus police departments — though not state police — from purchasing or using facial recognition technology unless expressly authorized by the state legislature.

Police groups are pushing for the prohibitions to be revisited.

"It's fear-mongering politics at its worst," said Jonathan Thompson, CEO and executive director of the National Sheriffs' Association.

He said facial recognition technology is just one tool used by police agencies — and not to the extent politicians suggest.

"I've never heard of anybody sitting around a computer monitor searching for people all day, every day. It doesn't work that way," he said. "Agencies have rules. They have governance of how and who has access to these databases. They have to have a legitimate, rational reason for doing it."

Thompson's association produced a report detailing example after example of the technology being used for good to snag drug dealers, to solve murders and missing persons cases, and to identify and rescue human trafficking victims. Most often, a face is compared against a database of known subjects. The vast majority of images are criminal mugshots, he said, not driver's license photos or random pictures of individuals.

A new Massachusetts law tries to strike a balance between civilian and police concerns. It allows police to benefit from the technology while adding protections that could prevent false arrests.

In Ohio, Republican Attorney General Dave Yost headed off a restrictive law on facial recognition data — at least so far — by conducting his own investigation into the state's images database in response to a Georgetown University Law Center report that found immigration officials were applying the technology to driver's license photos in some states.

Yost's review found local, state and federal authorities didn't use driver's license or other photos "to conduct mass surveillance, broad dragnets, political targeting or other illegitimate uses."

Martinez, of the Lucy Parsons Lab, said he's not reassured.

"I really do think this is one of these tools, let's say, science shouldn't be using. It's uniquely bad in ways other technologies are not," he said. "People nationally want police to do their jobs, but there are certain lines we don't let them cross. This crosses that line."

## Getting up Close with Glenn and Ted Nash, new duo in jazz

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Glenn Close recently made music-related headlines for her playful performance of "Da Butt" at the Academy Awards, but the revered actor has some real music news: she's releasing an album with Grammy-winning jazz saxophonist-composer Ted Nash on Friday.

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"I learned about Go-go (music) and certainly about the Washington (D.C.) music scene from those years; I was able to do that little piece of 'Da Butt' because I had looked at Spike's music video. Around the Oscars and afterward, I was doing this wonderful character for Gore Verbinski and his animated featured — it's not going to come out for a couple of years — but ... it was all funk (music). And now I'm back to jazz. So, yeah, mix it up! It's really fun and interesting."

The Emmy and Tony winner is used to her movies and TV shows premiering but having an album release is a first: "I'm very, very excited for it to be out in the world, especially now."

Close worked with Nash on his previous albums, but the two are co-stars on "Transformation: Personal Stories of Change, Acceptance, and Evolution," an 11-track spoken word jazz album that tackles heavy topics like race, politics, identity and more. Nash, a member of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, was tasked with composing music to match the words — both newly written lyrics along with hand-picked selections by Glenn from poets Ted Hughes and Conrad Aiken, biologist E.O. Wilson and playwright Tony Kushner.

Close, who offers her voice on three songs, called friends to help round out the album, including esteemed jazz musician and Jazz at Lincoln Center Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis, along with the epic players in the JLCO. Oscar-nominated actor Amy Irving reads "One Among Many," written by former radical Judith Clark at the request of Close and Emmy-winning entertainer Wayne Brady guest stars on three tracks and even wrote an original called "A Piece by the Angriest Black Man in America (or, How I Learned to Forgive Myself for Being a Black Man in America)."

"I feel like every time there's a new project, it's an opportunity to grow as an artist and embrace new ideas. I think that's something that as I get older, I realize is more important to me. It's not just, 'Oh, I want to write some hip (expletive),' " Nash said.

The musician added that his job was to help the album's speakers deliver with authenticity and "be absolutely supportive of somebody who's spilling their guts and support that in a way that helps it emotionally and gives them a safe space to do that."

Nash plays several roles on the album, from composer to instrumentalist to producer and conductor. But he also became a subject: His son Eli speaks about his experience coming out to him as a transgender man on "Dear Dad/Letter." His father responds — through instrumental music — on "Dear Dad/Response."

"It was very moving, and Ted didn't know whether he could get through it, actually. But when you put your soul into your instrument, into your music, I think it was a very healing experience for him," Close said. "A very transformative experience."

"When (my son) started reading the piece, I didn't expect to kind of feel the things that I felt," Nash explained. "All of a sudden it hits me that everyone else is hearing this. They're hearing this personal piece that was a letter to me, and I'm playing (music) along with it. And I got very full. But, if anything, that just helped me to have a more profound opportunity of expression."

Close, Nash, the orchestra and the special guests recorded the album at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City early last year before the coronavirus pandemic hit. Close said before making the album, jazz somewhat intimidated her.

"I thought you had to kind of know what you were hearing. But now I'm just inspired by it because I think it's deeply American and it's also deeply human," she said. "It is an expression of the human condition, dissonance, harmony — all of these different instruments playing off each other. In a good world, everybody gets a turn to stand up and play their bit."

Though Close, 74, is more known for film roles and eight Oscar nominations, as well as three Emmys for TV performances, she's always had ties to music. One of her three Tony Awards was for the musical "Sunset Boulevard" and she also earned a nomination for her performance in "Barnum." She even scored a best original song nod at the Golden Globes for co-writing "Lay Your Head Down" from "Albert Nobbs," a 2011 film Close produced, co-wrote and starred in.

When asked if she's ever picked up an instrument, she replied with a laugh: "I pick 'em up. I don't necessarily play them."

"My great dream is to learn how to play the electric bass. I want to sit in the background with a cool

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hat on. I actually have a really cool Gibson electric bass and I started lessons here. But then I go off and work and everything falls apart and I forget stuff," she said. "But if I can learn like six songs and do them really well, I think that would be fun."

Linking up with Nash allowed Close to fulfill another dream: release a full-length album about the real world. And Nash has big hopes for their collaborative project — he wants it to spark change around the globe.

"You can take away whatever it is you want from this project, whether it's just you enjoy Wayne Brady and how he talks or whether you think that what he's saying is deep enough to move you to some kind of action, or somewhere in between. My goal is to move people to some kind of thoughtful action, but it's maybe a lofty goal."

Another goal: winning a Grammy, especially since it brings Close closer to EGOT status.

"Accolades should never be the reason for doing anything ... but I do think for Glenn — this is just a personal thing — I would love to see her get a Grammy Award because then she's got three out of the four EGOTs," Nash said.

Close is no stranger to the Grammys. She's been nominated three times in the '80s, though she admits: "I forgot, actually, that I had been nominated for a Grammy."

At one point she even competed with John Lennon, Yoko Ono and Jesse Jackson. Who won over her? Jack Nicholson, Ben Kingsley and Robin Williams, who died in 2014.

"Awww," she said, putting her hand on her heart. "I'm very proud to lose to Robin Williams."

"Well, gosh, I'd be thrilled if this got a (Grammy), even to be nominated would be incredible," she added.

## Myanmar's military disappearing young men to crush uprising

By VICTORIA MILKO and KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Myanmar's security forces moved in and the street lamps went black. In house after house, people shut off their lights. Darkness swallowed the block.

Huddled inside her home in this neighborhood of Yangon, 19-year-old Shwe dared to peek out her window into the inky night. A flashlight shone back, and a man's voice ordered her not to look.

Two gunshots rang out. Then a man's scream: "HELP!" When the military's trucks finally rolled away, Shwe and her family emerged to look for her 15-year-old brother, worried about frequent abductions by security forces.

"I could feel my blood thumping," she says. "I had a feeling that he might be taken."

Across the country, Myanmar's security forces are arresting and forcibly disappearing thousands of people, especially boys and young men, in a sweeping bid to break the back of a three-month uprising against a military takeover. In most cases, the families of those taken do not know where they are, according to an Associated Press analysis of more than 3,500 arrests since February.

UNICEF, the U.N. children's agency, is aware of around 1,000 cases of children or young people who have been arbitrarily arrested and detained, many without access to lawyers or their families. Though it is difficult to get exact data, UNICEF says the majority are boys.

It is a technique the military has long used to instill fear and to crush pro-democracy movements. The boys and young men are taken from homes, businesses and streets, under the cover of night and sometimes in the brightness of day.

Some end up dead. Many are imprisoned and sometimes tortured. Many more are missing.

"We've definitely moved into a situation of mass enforced disappearances," says Matthew Smith, co-founder of the human rights group Fortify Rights, which has collected evidence of detainees being killed in custody. "We're documenting and seeing widespread and systematic arbitrary arrests."

The AP is withholding Shwe's full name, along with those of several others, to protect them from retaliation by the military.

The autobody shop in Shwe's neighborhood was a regular hangout for local boys. On the night of March 21, her brother had gone there to chill out like he usually did.

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As Shwe approached the shop, she saw it had been ransacked. Frantic, she and her father scoured the building for any sign of their beloved boy.

But he was gone, and the floor was covered in blood.

Ever since the military seized control in February, the conflict in Myanmar has become increasingly bloody. Security forces have killed more than 700 people, including a boy as young as 9.

In the meantime, the faces of the missing have flooded the Internet in growing numbers. Online videos show soldiers and police beating and kicking young men as they're shoved into vans, even forcing captives to crawl on all fours and hop like frogs.

Recently, photos of young people detained by security forces also have begun circulating online and on military-controlled Myawaddy TV, their faces bloodied, with clear markings of beatings and possible torture. The military's openness in broadcasting such photos and brutalizing people in daylight is one more sign that its goal is to intimidate.

At least 3,500 people have been detained since the military takeover began, more than three-quarters of whom are male, according to an analysis of data collected by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors deaths and arrests. Of the 419 men whose ages were recorded in the group's database, nearly two-thirds are under age 30, and 78 are teenagers.

Nearly 2,700 of the detainees are being held at undisclosed locations, according to an AAPP spokesman. The group says its numbers are likely an undercount.

"The military are trying to turn civilians, striking workers, and children into enemies," says Ko Bo Kyi, AAPP's joint secretary. "They think if they can kill off the boys and young men, then they can kill off the revolution."

After receiving questions from The Associated Press, the military, known as the Tatmadaw, called a Zoom press conference, during which it dubbed the AAPP a "baseless organization," suggested its data was inaccurate, and denied security forces are targeting young men.

"The security forces are not arresting based on genders and ages," said Capt. Aye Thazin Myint, a military spokeswoman. "They are only detaining anyone who is rioting, protesting, causing unrest, or any actions along those lines."

Some of those snatched by security forces were protesting. Some have links to the military's rival political party, most notably Aung San Suu Kyi, who led the elected government that the military toppled and is now under house arrest. Others are taken for no discernable reason. They are typically charged with Section 505(A) of the Penal Code, which, in part, criminalizes comments that "cause fear" or spread "false news."

Both the military and police — who fall under the Tatmadaw's command via the Ministry of Home Affairs — have been involved in the arrests and disappearances, sometimes working in tandem, according to interviews with detainees and families. Experts believe that suggests a coordinated strategy.

"The Myanmar police force and the Tatmadaw moved in in a very deliberate way, in a coordinated way, in similar ways, in disparate locations, which to us would indicate that they were working according to orders," says Smith of Fortify Rights. "It would appear as though there was ... some national level communication and coordination taking place."

Manny Maung, a Myanmar researcher for Human Rights Watch, says one woman she spoke with described being viciously beaten by police until what looked like a senior military official told them to stop.

"They're definitely following orders from military officials," Maung says. "And whether they're coordinating — they're certainly turning up to places together."

So desperate for information are the loved ones of the lost that some families have resorted to a grim experiment: They send food into the prisons and hope if it isn't sent back out, that means their relatives are still inside.

Myanmar human rights activist Wai Hnin Pwint Thon is intimately acquainted with the Tatmadaw's tactics. Her father, famed political activist Mya Aye, was arrested during a 1988 uprising against military rule, and the family waited months before they learned he was in prison.

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He was arrested again on the first day of this year's military takeover. For two months, the military gave Wai Hnin Pwint Thon's family no information on his whereabouts. On April 1, the family learned he was being held at Yangon's notorious Insein prison.

"I can't imagine families of young people who are 19, 20, 21, in prison... We are this worried and we're used to this situation," she says. "I'm trying to hold onto hope, but the situation is getting worse every day."

Mee, a 27-year-old villager in the northern region of Mandalay, watched as children on motorbikes raced past her house toward the woods. Not long after, the village elders arrived with a dire warning: All the boys must leave and get somewhere safe. The soldiers might be coming.

Just two hours later, Mee says, the elders asked the girls to hide, too.

The military's scare tactics have proven enormously effective. In villages and cities across the country, residents regularly take turns holding night watches, banging pots and pans or yelling to neighbors from the street if soldiers or police are spotted.

"I am more afraid of being arrested than getting shot," says one 29-year-old man who was arrested, beaten and later released, and who spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid retribution. "I have a chance of dying on the spot with just one shot. But being arrested, I am afraid that they would torture me."

Fearing for her life on that March afternoon, Mee and hundreds of fellow villagers fled to pineapple farms in the surrounding hills. When she arrived, she saw scores of people from other villages hiding in the forest.

That night, as mosquitos swarmed and sounds from the forest haunted them, the women stayed inside a small bamboo tent while the boys took turns standing guard. No one slept.

Mee was terrified but not surprised. Many of the villagers had run from the military and hidden in the woods before.

"It's heartbreaking," she says.

For decades, the Tatmadaw has used arbitrary arrests, disappearances, forced labor and other abuses to crush pro-democracy movements and suppress minorities, including its notoriously brutal 2017 campaign of persecution against Rohingya Muslims.

"Sometimes communities are asked to provide a number of young men on a 'voluntary' basis; sometimes they are taken," Laetitia van den Assum, a former diplomat and a member of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, said in an e-mail.

Arbitrary arrests continue across the country daily. Just two weeks earlier, a few minutes away from Mee's village, 24-year-old philosophy student Ko Ko was walking home from a protest with a friend when they were arrested. His parents learned of their imprisonment from friends of friends, not officials.

More than a month later, his parents still haven't heard from their only son, says Han, a neighbor. He's part of an unlucky cohort: at least 44 people taken from the town are yet to be released, Han says.

While many of the young men in Mee's village returned home after two nights in the pineapple fields, some continue to sleep there. Mee has since gone back to her village.

Whenever she sees a soldier, she runs. But her fear has largely given way to fury.

"I was angry that night, and I am still angry," she says. "It's so frustrating that the people who are supposed to be protecting our lives, our safety, our livelihoods and our homes are the people who are chasing us and killing us. ... We are helpless."

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The glass was shattering, and there was nowhere left for the 21-year-old university student to run. The soldiers were smashing through the front doors of the house in Mandalay.

The chaos of such raids is usually followed by a sinister silence, with the families of the taken rarely hearing from officials. But the accounts of some survivors who dare to speak about their ordeals help fill the void of what often happens next.

The student, who asked that his name be withheld out of fear of retaliation, had taken refuge in the house along with around 100 others after security forces stormed a rally they were attending. The soldiers had thrown tear gas at them, forcing them to flee.

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Now he and a half dozen others were cornered in a bathroom on the home's second level. Downstairs, the security forces used a slingshot and the butt of a gun to break through the doors.

The soldiers began beating the boys they found inside, so viciously that a few of their heads cracked open. They urinated on one young man.

The student watched as the glass above the bathroom door imploded. "They are here!" the soldiers yelled, then burst in, guns drawn.

He bowed his head, since anyone who looked at the soldiers was kicked. The soldiers kicked him anyway, twice in the waist, and hit him twice in the head. As he was marched down the stairs, he saw a soldier with a gun standing on nearly every step.

He and around 30 other young men were arrested and ushered into a prison van. Both the military and police were there. The soldiers threatened to burn the van and tauntingly offered the detainees juice before throwing it at them.

When they arrived at the prison, the young man saw 400 to 500 people in the temporary holding area. The next day, he was charged with Section 505(A) of the penal code. He and around 50 others spent nine days jammed into one room.

There were only two toilets. They were allowed out of the cell twice a day to clean themselves. The same water was used for showering, drinking, washing dishes and using the toilet.

When the young man learned he was being transferred to the main prison, he wanted to cry. A few days before his arrest, he had been looking at missing persons posts on social media. Now he realized most of those people were probably in prison like him.

The young man had good reason to be frightened.

"People are disappearing and turning up dead," says Maung, of Human Rights Watch. "We have had primary reports, also, of torture while they're in custody."

The group found that some people detained inside Insein prison were subjected to beatings, stress positions and severe interrogation tactics, up until March 4, Maung says. After that, guards began taking prisoners to second locations and torturing them, then returning them to Insein.

In Mandalay, the young man's family was sick with worry. Some of his friends told them he had been arrested; the authorities never called them.

His family sent food into the prison for him. But even when it wasn't returned, they couldn't be sure he was inside. They heard reports about protesters being tortured. His sisters cried constantly.

Thirteen days after his arrest, the young man was allowed ten minutes to speak with his sister.

A week later, an official ordered him to pack his things. In shock, he realized he was being released.

There was no time to say goodbye to his friends. The officials took videos and photos of him and around 20 others, and told them to sign statements promising they wouldn't break the law again. Then they were set free.

He didn't feel lucky — he felt horrible. He didn't understand why he'd been singled out for release while his friends were still stuck inside.

"None of us really feel safe living our normal lives now. For me now, I have reservations walking alone outside even in my neighborhood," he says. "And also, I feel worried to see the parents of my friends in the neighborhood, because I am out — and their children are not."

Back in Yangon, Shwe stared at the puddles of blood on the floor of the shop where her baby brother had been. It looked as if the security forces had half-heartedly tried to wash it away, but red pools remained. Maybe the blood wasn't his, she told herself.

Shwe's brother and three other young men from the shop had been hauled away. Neighbors told the family that both police and soldiers were there. The neighbors said the security forces may have targeted the boys because they spotted someone inside the shop with a steel dart slingshot.

At 2 a.m., a police officer called to say Shwe's brother was at a military hospital and had been shot in the hand. They later learned security forces had shot another young man's finger during the raid.

Shwe says her family told the police that her brother was underage. The officer, she says, reassured

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them that because he was a minor, he probably wouldn't be charged.

Around 7 a.m., the family went to the hospital to bring him food. But their pleas to see him were rejected. Shwe and her family were later told that he was being moved to a prison hospital.

Then, on the night of March 27, came the news that stunned them: Her brother and the three others had been charged with possession of weapons, and sentenced to three years in prison.

They were allowed one brief phone call with him when he was first in the hospital, and nothing since. Shwe remembers hearing her brother tell their anguished mother, "Thar ah sin pyay tal." I am OK.

Shwe has no idea if that is still true. She worries for her brother, a quiet boy who loves playing games. She worries, too, for their mother, who cries and cries, and for their father, who aches for his only son.

For now, they can do little more than wait and hope: That he won't be beaten. That he will get a pardon. That the people of Myanmar will soon feel safe again.

"Even though we are all in distress, we try to look on the bright side that at least we know where he is," she says. "We are lucky that he was only abducted."

## US parents excited over prospect of virus shots for children

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — After more than a year of fretting over her 13-year son with a rare liver disease, Heather Ousley broke into tears when she learned that he and millions of other youngsters could soon be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

"This day is the best day in the history of days!!! I love this day!!!" she texted, joining other parents and educators in welcoming the news that the Food and Drug Administration is expected to authorize Pfizer's vaccine by next week for children ages 12 to 15.

Ousley, president of the school board for the 27,000-student Shawnee Mission School District in Kansas, plans to get her 13- and 15-year-olds promptly vaccinated and then celebrate with ice cream. They have been learning from home with their younger brother since the start of the outbreak.

Pfizer is also anticipating the FDA will endorse use of its vaccine in even younger children sometime this fall. And results are expected by the middle of this year from a U.S. study of Moderna's shots in 12- to 17-year-olds.

Officials are hoping that extending vaccinations to children will drive down the nation's caseload even further and allow schools to reopen with minimal disruption this fall.

It could also reassure parents and teachers alike. While children rarely get seriously ill from the coronavirus, then can still get sick and spread it to others.

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

That is welcome news for Robin and Aaron Perry of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, who have five boys, ages 5 to 17. Their oldest, Cooper, has been battling leukemia and contracted COVID-19 in November, in what his mother described as a "terrifying" time for the family. The disease spread to the rest of the family.

They all pulled through, and Cooper and his parents have all since been vaccinated. But his mother can't wait for her 15-year-old, Reece, and 12-year-old, Tucker, to get their shots so their brother is as protected as possible.

"It feels like more security around Cooper with a compromised immune system," Robin Perry said. "It's just being part of the solution. That's what excites me the most. It's an added level of protection. Maybe you can take a deeper breath."

Educators have already embraced vaccines for students 16 and up, with some scheduling vaccine clinics during school hours and dangling prize drawings and other incentives.

In New York's Erie County, prom-themed vaccination clinics were held this past weekend, including one with a tropical feel where health care workers wore grass skirts and 16- and 17-year-olds went home with gift bags of masks and hand sanitizer. Similar efforts are expected to draw in 12- to 15-year-olds.

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Dan Domenech, executive director of AASA, the School Superintendents Association, said vaccinating younger students should help parents feel more comfortable about sending their children back to classrooms and ease concerns among some teachers.

"Say you have a class where every student is vaccinated and so is the teacher. That becomes a very different environment," Domenech said.

He added: "Schools were very pleased when the CDC came out with the 3-foot spacing as opposed to the 6-foot spacing, because that immediately allowed them to have more students in school at one time. This will have a similar effect."

Seventy-four-year-old Pat Shepard, a retired Spanish teacher from Lincoln, Nebraska, who has worked as a substitute during the outbreak, is eager to see eligibility expand, saying students are increasingly resisting wearing masks.

"You are starting to see more and more of them wearing them down below their nose because they are just tired of it," she said. "And then, too, they want to get out and do more things."

Keri Rodrigues, a co-founder of the education advocacy group the National Parents Union, said she rushed out to get vaccinated after becoming eligible but has more trepidation about immunizing her oldest son, who is 13.

She plans to go ahead with it, though, in part because he is demanding it.

"He has cabin fever and he wants to get out," explained Rodrigues, who lives near Boston.

The group's newly released survey from April of 1,151 parents around the country found that others are also conflicted. Forty percent planned to get their children vaccinated immediately, 22% eventually and 23% never, and the remaining 15% were unsure.

"Obviously parents are torn right now because you are watching your kids really go through an emotional struggle, especially our teens," she said. "I think we are all taking a leap of faith, but I think what we have to do is trust science in this moment."

President Joe Biden said Tuesday that if the FDA authorizes the use of Pfizer's vaccine in children as young as 12, the administration is prepared to ship doses to 20,000 pharmacies around the country and directly to pediatricians.

Coy Marquardt, associate executive director of Iowa's teachers union, said his 14-year-old son is excited to get vaccinated and has been asking for months when he would be eligible. Marquardt said that because of vaccine hesitancy, it doesn't look as if herd immunity is going to be achieved anytime soon.

"That makes it even more important to expand the use to 12- to 15-year-olds, including my son, just to protect him," he said.

Tom Rosenberg, president and CEO of the American Camp Association, which accredits 3,200 camps and works with about 12,000 others, said he has been deluged with messages since the news broke.

Last year, 40% of day camps and 82% of overnight camps didn't operate, but many were gearing up to reopen this summer, with masks and socially distancing, he said. He said the vaccine would offer another layer of protection and might persuade some hesitant parents to sign up their children.

"It could be a game changer," said Rosenberg, who plans to get his own 13-year-old vaccinated.

## COVID's US toll projected to drop sharply by the end of July

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Teams of experts are projecting COVID-19's toll on the U.S. will fall sharply by the end of July, according to research released by the government Wednesday.

But they also warn that a "substantial increase" in hospitalizations and deaths is possible if unvaccinated people do not follow basic precautions such as wearing a mask and keeping their distance from others.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention paper included projections from six research groups. Their assignment was to predict the course of the U.S. epidemic between now and September under different scenarios, depending on how the vaccination drive proceeds and how people behave.

Mainly, it's good news. Even under scenarios involving disappointing vaccination rates, COVID-19 cases,

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hospitalizations and deaths are expected to drop dramatically by the end of July and continue to fall afterward.

The CDC is now reporting an average of about 350,000 new cases each week, 35,000 hospitalizations and over 4,000 deaths.

Under the most optimistic scenarios considered, by the end of July new weekly national cases could drop below 50,000, hospitalizations to fewer than 1,000, and deaths to between 200 and 300.

"We are not out of the woods yet, but we could be very close," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said, while noting that variants of the coronavirus are a "wild card" that could set back progress.

The projections are probably in line with what many Americans were already expecting for this summer.

With COVID-19 deaths, hospitalizations and cases plummeting since January, many states and cities are already moving to ease or lift restrictions on restaurants, bars, theaters and other businesses and talking about getting back to something close to normal this summer.

New York's subways will start running all night again this month, Las Vegas is bustling again after casino capacity limits were raised, and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis this week suspended all restrictions put in place by local governments, though businesses may continue requiring people to wear masks and keep their distance, and many are still doing so.

Many people in Florida have resumed parties, graduations and recitals. Walt Disney World lets guests remove their masks for photographs.

"It does feel like life is returning to normal," said 67-year-old Vicki Restivo of Miami, who after getting vaccinated resumed outings with her friends at restaurants and traveled to Egypt — and felt "very comfortable" about it.

President Joe Biden on Tuesday set a goal of delivering shots to 70% of U.S. adults by July Fourth. Such a goal, if met, would fit in with the best-case scenarios, said one of the study's co-authors, CDC biologist Michael Johansson.

Under more pessimistic scenarios, with subpar vaccinations and declining use of masks and social distancing, weekly cases probably would still drop but could number in the hundreds of thousands, with tens of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths.

"Something I am asked often is when will the pandemic be over and when can we go back to normal. The reality is: It all depends on the actions we take now," Walensky said.

All the projections trend down, illustrating the powerful effect of the vaccination campaign. But there's a devastating difference between the more gently sloping declines in some scenarios and the more dramatic drops in others, said Jennifer Kates, director of global health and HIV policy at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

"Each of these differences are people's lives," said Kates, who is part of a Kaiser research team that has focused on COVID-19 and was not involved in the CDC study.

The U.S. death toll stands at more than 578,000. The CDC paper gives no overall estimate of how high the number of dead might go. But a closely watched projection from the University of Washington shows the curve largely flattening out in the coming months, with the toll reaching about 599,000 by Aug. 1.

More than 56% of the nation's adults, or close to 146 million people, have received at one dose of vaccine, and almost 41% are fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

Johansson said the paper is intended not so much as a prediction of exactly what's going to happen but as a way to understand how things might unfold if vaccination drives or other efforts stumble.

By September, assuming high vaccination rates and continuing use of prevention measures, the models indicate new cases could fall to just a few hundred per week and just tens of hospitalizations and deaths.

The paper also sketched out a worst-case scenario, in which cases could rise to 900,000 per week, hospitalizations to 50,000, and deaths to 10,000. That most likely would happen sometime this month, the projections said.

However, the paper's projections are based on data available through late March, when the national picture was somewhat darker.

The CDC paper "is already looking a little outdated, because we've seen cases continue to go down, and

hospitalizations go down, and deaths go down," Kates said.

Nevertheless, Johansson warned: "We're still in a tenuous position."

There is variation from state to state in how well vaccination campaigns are going and how fast restrictions are being abandoned, and that will probably mean some states will suffer a higher toll from COVID-19 than others in the coming months, Kates said.

"If you take the foot off the gas," she said, "you can really have some bad outcomes."

The paper doesn't look past September, and scientists cannot say for sure what the epidemic will look like next fall and winter because it's not known how enduring vaccine protection will be or whether variants of the virus will prove to be a greater problem.

Like the flu, COVID-19 could increase as people move indoors in the cold weather.

"My hope is with enough people vaccinated we will be able to get to something that will resemble maybe a bad flu season," said William Hanage, a Harvard University expert on disease dynamics who was not involved in the research. But "it's not going to go away. It's not going to be eradicated."

## Families mourn victims of Mexico City subway collapse

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — José Luis Hernández Martínez crossed Mexico City every day on subway Line 12 between his home on the city's south side and the body shop where he worked repairing mangled cars.

The 61-year-old's train had emerged from beneath the city and was jostling along the elevated portion far from downtown late Monday night when two of its bright orange cars suddenly fell into a void.

Hernández Martínez was killed instantly, his son Luis Adrian Hernández Juárez said, one of 25 people who died in one of the world's largest subway system's worst accidents. More than 70 others were injured.

"My father was recovered without vital signs, with trauma to his thorax, his brain, his feet, his knees," Hernández Juárez said, gripping the death certificate. He said emergency personnel told him his father was crushed beneath other passengers. "It's really terrible to see your father that way for the last time."

Hernández Juárez planned to bury his father Wednesday as a string of funerals began across the city of more than 9 million people.

Anger and frustration boiled among the victims' families and those who ride the sprawling subway daily.

"No one is going to give me my father back, even if they give me 10 million pesos," Hernández Juárez said, while expressing concern that his mother had been left without a source of income.

A preliminary review suggested a failure in the horizontal support beams caused the accident, authorities said.

Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum urged the public to avoid speculation and promised a thorough and independent investigation. Authorities expected to present a preliminary report on the accident Friday.

Line 12 is Mexico City's longest and newest, but has been plagued with problems since it began operating in 2012. At its farthest point, it carries commuters from the capital's still semi-rural south side to jobs across the city. Some 220,000 riders use Line 12 every day.

Early targets for the public's ire were already emerging, among them the subway's director, Florencia Serranía. Sheinbaum said she had not received any report about problems on Line 12 that suggested the possibility of a failure like the one Monday night.

Serranía said Tuesday that the line received a "very rigorous" daily inspection. It was also reviewed in June 2020 after an earthquake that was strong but did not cause significant damage in the city, she said. A city report in 2017 noted significant damage to a portion of the line after a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that year.

Foreign Relations Secretary Marcelo Ebrard, who was Mexico City's mayor from 2006 to 2012 when the line was constructed, was also feeling the heat. Widely viewed as a possible successor to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Ebrard said those responsible should be identified and he would make himself available to authorities.

While conclusions on what caused the accident could take months and assigning blame longer, many

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victims' families were faced with the immediate needs brought on by the loss of their primary breadwinners.

Gisela Rioja also spent Monday night and Tuesday morning scouring the city's hospitals for information on her husband, 42-year-old Miguel Angel Espinosa Flores, who worked in a department store at a mall a few stops from where the accident occurred.

Rioja finally found him Tuesday at a morgue in the Mexico City borough of Iztapalapa. She described him as a hard worker, responsible and happy. She and their two children depended on him.

"I want justice for my husband because a simple apology is not going to bring him back to us," she said. "He was my love; he was everything to me. It hurts so much, so much, so much because of the way it ended."

Luisa Martínez sat outside city government offices in Iztapalapa on Tuesday afternoon awaiting the release of the body of her niece's husband, Carlos Pineda, a 38-year-old dentist. Pineda leaves behind his wife and their two children ages 7 and 13.

"He was the one who supported the family. Now they are left without income," Martínez said. "They have to compensate us now. I don't want it in a year or two years like all bureaucratic procedures."

## Nature at its craziest: Trillions of cicadas about to emerge

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

COLUMBIA, Md. (AP) — Sifting through a shovel load of dirt in a suburban backyard, Michael Raupp and Paula Shrewsbury find their quarry: a cicada nymph.

And then another. And another. And four more.

In maybe a third of a square foot of dirt, the University of Maryland entomologists find at least seven cicadas -- a rate just shy of a million per acre. A nearby yard yielded a rate closer to 1.5 million.

And there's much more afoot. Trillions of the red-eyed black bugs are coming, scientists say.

Within days, a couple weeks at most, the cicadas of Brood X (the X is the Roman numeral for 10) will emerge after 17 years underground. There are many broods of periodic cicadas that appear on rigid schedules in different years, but this is one of the largest and most noticeable. They'll be in 15 states from Indiana to Georgia to New York; they're coming out now in mass numbers in Tennessee and North Carolina.

When the entire brood emerges, backyards can look like undulating waves, and the bug chorus is lawnmower loud.

The cicadas will mostly come out at dusk to try to avoid everything that wants to eat them, squiggling out of holes in the ground. They'll try to climb up trees or anything vertical, including Raupp and Shrewsbury. Once off the ground, they shed their skins and try to survive that vulnerable stage before they become dinner to a host of critters including ants, birds, dogs, cats and Raupp.

It's one of nature's weirdest events, featuring sex, a race against death, evolution and what can sound like a bad science fiction movie soundtrack.

Some people may be repulsed. Psychiatrists are calling entomologists worrying about their patients, Shrewsbury said. But scientists say the arrival of Brood X is a sign that despite pollution, climate change and dramatic biodiversity loss, something is still right with nature. And it's quite a show.

Raupp presents the narrative of cicada's lifespan with all the verve of a Hollywood blockbuster:

"You've got a creature that spends 17 years in a COVID-like existence, isolated underground sucking on plant sap, right? In the 17th year these teenagers are going to come out of the earth by the billions if not trillions. They're going to try to best everything on the planet that wants to eat them during this critical period of the nighttime when they're just trying to grow up, they're just trying to be adults, shed that skin, get their wings, go up into the treetops, escape their predators," he says.

"Once in the treetops, hey, it's all going to be about romance. It's only the males that sing. It's going to be a big boy band up there as the males try to woo those females, try to convince that special someone that she should be the mother of his nymphs. He's going to perform, sing songs. If she likes it, she's going to click her wings. They're going to have some wild sex in the treetop.

"Then she's going to move out to the small branches, lay their eggs. Then it's all going to be over in a

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matter of weeks. They're going to tumble down. They're going to basically fertilize the very plants from which they were spawned. Six weeks later the tiny nymphs are going to tumble 80 feet from the treetops, bounce twice, burrow down into the soil, go back underground for another 17 years."

"This," Raupp says, "is one of the craziest life cycles of any creature on the planet."

America is the only place in the world that has periodic cicadas that stay underground for either 13 or 17 years, says entomologist John Cooley of the University of Connecticut.

The bugs only emerge in large numbers when the ground temperature reaches 64 degrees. That's happening earlier in the calendar in recent years because of climate change, says entomologist Gene Kritsky. Before 1950 they used to emerge at the end of May; now they're coming out weeks earlier.

Though there have been some early bugs in Maryland and Ohio, soil temperatures have been in the low 60s. So Raupp and other scientists believe the big emergence is days away -- a week or two, max.

Cicadas who come out early don't survive. They're quickly eaten by predators. Cicadas evolved a key survival technique: overwhelming numbers. There's just too many of them to all get eaten when they all emerge at once, so some will survive and reproduce, Raupp says.

This is not an invasion. The cicadas have been here the entire time, quietly feeding off tree roots underground, not asleep, just moving slowly waiting for their body clocks tell them it is time to come out and breed. They've been in America for millions of years, far longer than people.

When they emerge, it gets noisy -- 105 decibels noisy, like "a singles bar gone horribly, horribly wrong," Cooley says. There are three distinct cicada species and each has its own mating song.

They aren't locusts and the only plants they damage are young trees, which can be netted. The year after a big batch of cicadas, trees actually do better because dead bugs serve as fertilizer, Kritsky says.

People tend to be scared of the wrong insects, says University of Illinois entomologist May Berenbaum. The mosquito kills more people than any other animals because of malaria and other diseases. Yet some people really dread the cicada emergence, she said.

"I think it's the fact that they're an inconvenience. Also, when they die in mass numbers they smell bad," Berenbaum says. "They really disrupt our sense of order."

But others are fond of cicadas -- and even munch on them, using recipes like those in a University of Maryland cookbook. And for scientists like Cooley, there is a real beauty in their life cycle.

"This is a feel-good story, folks. It really is and it's in a year we need more," he says. "When they come out, it's a great sign that forests are in good shape. All is as it is supposed to be."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 6, the 126th day of 2021. There are 239 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 6, 1954, medical student Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile during a track meet in Oxford, England, in 3:59.4.

On this date:

In 1527, unpaid troops loyal to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V attacked Rome, forcing Pope Clement VII to flee to safety; some scholars mark the ensuing sack of the city as the end of the Renaissance in Italy.

In 1882, President Chester Alan Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred Chinese immigrants from the U.S. for 10 years (Arthur had opposed an earlier version with a 20-year ban).

In 1910, Britain's Edwardian era ended with the death of King Edward VII; he was succeeded by George V.

In 1915, Babe Ruth hit his first major-league home run as a player for the Boston Red Sox.

In 1937, the hydrogen-filled German airship Hindenburg caught fire and crashed while attempting to dock at Lakehurst, New Jersey; 35 of the 97 people on board were killed along with a crewman on the ground.

In 1941, Josef Stalin assumed the Soviet premiership, replacing Vyacheslav (VEE'-chek-slav) M. Molotov. Comedian Bob Hope did his first USO show before an audience of servicemen as he broadcast his radio

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program from March Field in Riverside, California.

In 1942, during World War II, some 15,000 American and Filipino troops on Corregidor island surrendered to Japanese forces.

In 1957, Eugene O'Neill's play "Long Day's Journey into Night" won the Pulitzer Prize for drama; John F. Kennedy's "Profiles in Courage" won the Pulitzer for biography or autobiography.

In 2004, President George W. Bush apologized for the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers, calling it "a stain on our country's honor"; he rejected calls for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's resignation.

In 2010, a computerized sell order triggered a "flash crash" on Wall Street, sending the Dow Jones industrials to a loss of nearly 1,000 points in less than half an hour.

In 2013, kidnap-rape victims Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight, who went missing separately about a decade earlier while in their teens or early 20s, were rescued from a house just south of downtown Cleveland. (Their captor, Ariel Castro, hanged himself in prison in September 2013 at the beginning of a life sentence plus 1,000 years.)

In 2015, the NFL released a 243-report on "Deflategate" that stopped short of calling Patriots quarterback Tom Brady a cheater, but did call some of his claims "implausible" and left little doubt that he'd had a role in having footballs deflated before New England's AFC title game against Indianapolis and probably in previous games.

Ten years ago: Brimming with pride, President Barack Obama met with the U.S. commandos he'd sent after terror mastermind Osama bin Laden during a visit to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Al-Qaida vowed to keep fighting the United States and avenge the death of bin Laden, which it acknowledged for the first time in an internet statement.

Five years ago: In his first remarks about Donald Trump's status as the GOP's presumptive nominee, President Barack Obama urged the media to undertake tougher scrutiny of presidential candidates, saying from the White House, "This is not entertainment; this is not a reality show." For the second month in a row, the aerospace upstart SpaceX landed a rocket on an ocean platform just off the Florida coast, this time following the successful launch of a Japanese communications satellite.

One year ago: New York City began shutting down its subway system overnight to allow for additional cleaning and disinfecting of cars and stations. President Donald Trump reversed course on plans to wind down his COVID-19 task force; he said the force would shift its focus toward rebooting the economy and developing a vaccine. Three teenage McDonald's employees in Oklahoma suffered gunshot wounds after a customer opened fire; police said the woman was angry that the restaurant's dining area was closed because of the pandemic. Frontier Airlines said it was dropping plans to charge an extra fee for passengers to lock in an empty middle seat next to them. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos issued a new policy reshaping the way schools and universities dealt with complaints of sexual misconduct; the policy bolstered the rights of the accused.

Today's Birthdays: Baseball Hall of Famer Willie Mays is 90. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., is 87. Rock singer Bob Seger is 76. Singer Jimmie Dale Gilmore is 76. Gospel singer-comedian Lulu Roman is 75. Actor Alan Dale is 74. Actor Ben Masters is 74. Actor Richard Cox is 73. Actor Gregg Henry is 69. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair is 68. TV personality Tom Bergeron is 66. Actor Roma Downey is 61. Rock singer John Flansburgh (They Might Be Giants) is 61. Actor Julianne Phillips is 61. Actor-director George Clooney is 60. Actor Clay O'Brien is 60. Rock singer-musician Tony Scalzo (Fastball) is 57. Actor Leslie Hope is 56. Actor Geneva Carr (TV: "Bull") is 55. Rock musician Mark Bryan (Hootie and the Blowfish) is 54. Rock musician Chris Shiflett (Foo Fighters) is 50. Actor Stacey Oristano is 42. Model/TV personality Tiffany Coyne is 39. Actor Adrienne Palicki is 38. Actor Gabourey Sidibe (GA'-bah-ray SIH'-duh-bay) is 38. Actor-comedian Sa-sheer Zamata is 35. Rapper Meek Mill is 34. Houston Astros infielder Jose Altuve is 31. Actor-singer Naomi Scott is 28. Actor Noah Galvin is 27.