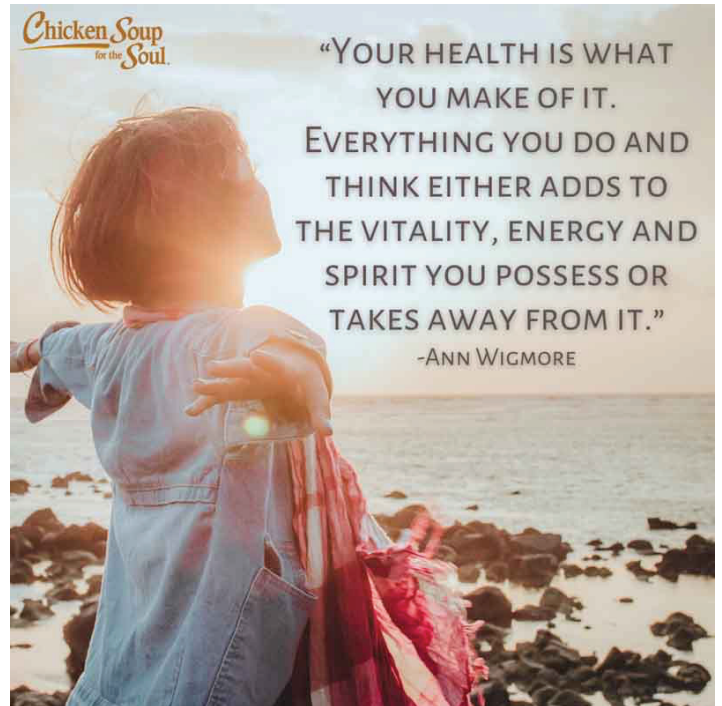


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NOW HIRING

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



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

**Weber
Landscaping
Greenhouse
IS NOW
OPEN!**



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

Open

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

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

Sunday: Noon to 4 p.m.

602 West Third Ave., Groton

LET US HELP YOU BRIGHTEN UP YOUR YARD!

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Mason and Ethan Fall Out of Top 10

Olivia and Liam are once again America's most popular baby names in 2020. It appears parents chose to stick with the familiar during an unprecedented time, with the top three names for both girls - Olivia, Emma, and Ava - and boys - Liam, Noah, and Oliver - remaining the same for the second year in a row. In fact, out of both Top 10 lists combined, only two names changed, with the traditional names Henry and Alexander edging out Mason and Ethan. The name Henry has been steadily rising in popularity, last appearing in the Top 10 over a century ago, in 1910.

Here are the top 10 boys and girls names for 2020:

Boys:	1) Liam	Girls:	1) Olivia
	2) Noah		2) Emma
	3) Oliver		3) Ava
	4) Elijah		4) Charlotte
	5) William		5) Sophia
	6) James		6) Amelia
	7) Benjamin		7) Isabella
	8) Lucas		8) Mia
	9) Henry		9) Evelyn
	10) Alexander		10) Harper

For all of the top baby names of 2020, and to see where your name ranks, go to Social Security's website, www.socialsecurity.gov.

Social Security encourages everyone to enjoy the baby names list and, while online, create a my Social Security account at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount. my Social Security is a personalized online account that people can use beginning in their working years and continuing while receiving Social Security benefits.

Social Security beneficiaries have instant access to their benefit verification letter, payment history, and complete earnings record by establishing a my Social Security account. Beneficiaries also can change their address, start or change direct deposit information, and request a replacement SSA-1099 online. People receiving benefits can request a replacement Medicare card online.

People age 18 and older who are not receiving benefits can also sign up for a my Social Security account to get their personalized online Social Security Statement. The online Statement provides workers with secure and convenient access to their Social Security earnings and benefit information, and estimates of future benefits they can use to plan for their retirement. Residents of most states may request a replacement Social Security card online if they meet certain requirements.

Additional Baby Names Information:

Social Security began compiling the baby name list in 1997, with names dating back to 1880. At the time of a child's birth, parents supply the name to the agency when applying for a child's Social Security card, thus making Social Security America's source for the most popular baby names.p

Each year, the list reveals the effect of pop-culture on naming trends. Here are the top five fastest rising boys and girls names in 2020:

Boys:	1) Zyair	Girls:	1) Avayah
	2) Jaxtyn		2) Denisse
	3) Jakobe		3) Jianna
	4) Kylo		4) Capri
	5) Aziel		5) Rosalia

Upcoming Events

Monday, May 10

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

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Thursday, May 13

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

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

Friday, May 14

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

Sunday, May 16

2 p.m.: GHS Graduation, GHS Arena

Monday, May 17

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

Thursday, May 20

Noon: Region 1A Track Meet at Sisseton

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Smith, Bjerke ad Boys 3200 Relay take second at Sisseton

Groton Area placed second in three events at the Sisseton Track Meet held Friday. Isaac Smith took second in the 3200m run, Maddie Bjerke took second in the shot put and the boys 3200m relay take took second.

Girls 100m Hurdles: 15, Jayla Jones, 20.33.
Girls 300m Hurdles: 17, Trista Keith, 1:00.12.
Girls 100m Dash: 20, Emilie Thurston, 14.53; 32, Faith Fliehs, 15-51.
Girls 200m Dash: 7, Laila Roberts, 29.37; 19, Jayla Jones, 31.90.
Girls 400m Dash: 8, Jerica Locke, 1:05.87; 20, Rylee Dunker, 1:13.33.
Boys 800m Run: 25, Douglas Heminger, 2:49.41.
Girls 800m Run: 3, Faith Traphagen, 2:34.11.
Boys 1600m Run: 8, Isaac Smith, 5:11.20; 10, Jacob Lewandowski, 5:17.10; 19, Douglas Heminger, 6:13.82.
Boys 3200m Run: 2, Isaac Smith, 11:12.24.
Girls 400m Relay: 5, Groton (Jerica Locke, Aspen Johnson, Karsyn Jangula, Laila Roberts), 56.44.
Boys 400m Relay: 7, Groton (Keegan Tracy, Tate Larson, Ethan Gengerke, Cole Simon), 49.88.
Girls 800m Relay: 4, Groton (Jerica Locke, Aspen Johnson, Jayla Jones, Laila Roberts), 2:00.13.
Boys 800m Relay: 11, Groton (Keegan Tracy, Tate Larson, Ethan Gengerke, Jackson Cogley), 1:44.08.
Girls 1600m Relay: 6, Groton (Jerica Locke, Rylee Dunker, Laila Roberts, Faith Traphagen), 4:42.99.
Girls 1600m Sprint Medley Relay: 10, Groton (Emilie Thurston, Trista Keith, Karsyn Jangula, Mia Crank), 5:19.30.
Boys 1600m Sprint Medley Relay: 5, Groton (Ethan Gengerke, Tate Larson, Cole Simon, Jacob Lewandowski), 4:12.66.
Girls 3200m Relay: 5, Groton (Faith Traphagen, Rylee Dunker, Anna Fjeldheim, Mia Crank), 11:36.66.
Boys 3200m Relay: 2, Groton (Isaac Smith, Keegan Tracy, Cole Simon, Jacob Lewandowski), 9:12.28.
Girls High Jump: 15, Anna Fjeldheim, 4-01; 19, Trista Keith, 3-11; 23, Emilie Thurston, 3-9.
Boys High Jump: 5, Jackson Cogley, 5-5.
Girls Long Jump: 5, Aspen Johnson, 14-3.5; 11, Trista Keith, 13-5.25; 18, Emilie Thurston, 11-4.25.
Boys Long Jump: 17, Jackson Cogley, 16-4.75; 18, Tate Larson, 16-4.25; 19, Keegan Tracy, 16-1.5.
Girls Triple Jump: 10, Aspen Johnson, 29-3.5.
Boys Triple Jump: 13, Jackson Cogley, 34-10.5.
Girls Discus: 7, Chloe Daly, 79-7;
Boys Discus: 10, Caleb Furney, 106-2; 22, Caleb Hanten, 90-11; 29, Kaleb Antonsen, 82-7.
Girls Shot Put: 2, Maddie Bjerke, 31-5.75; 4, Chloe Daly, 28-8.25; 12, Faith Fliehs, 26-6; 32, Tina Zoellner, 19-0.25; 33, Cadence Tullis, 18-3.75.
Boys Shot Put: 16, Caleb Furney, 36-4; 22, Caleb Hanten, 33-7; 23, Holden Sippel, 32-11; 29, Kaleb Antonsen, 29-7; 30, Seth Johnson, 29-6.

Girls Golf Results from Lee Park

The girls golf team took part in a meet at Lee Park Golf Course in Aberdeen. Carly Guthmiller placed third with a score of 89 (45 in the front half and 44 in the back half). Shaylee Peterson shot a 123 (59 in the front half and 64 in the back half) and Emma Schinkel a 127 (59 in the front half and 68 in the back half.)

GFP Commission Proposes Firearms Antelope Season; Finalizes Archery Antelope

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission proposed the firearms antelope seasons at their May meeting.

The proposed firearms season would run from Oct. 2-17.

The proposal calls for 4,857 licenses; 4,115 one-tag and 600 two-tag resident licenses and 118 one-tag and 24 two-tag nonresident licenses.

The proposal for the archery antelope season had no changes from 2020. This season is set with season dates of Aug. 21 - Oct. 31. (The archery antelope season is closed from Oct. 2 - 17 for the firearms season.)

Individuals can comment on this proposal by visiting gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions. Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501.

To hear the discussion on this proposal, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive. To see the proposal in its entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on May 30.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held June 3-4.

GFP Commission Proposes Beaver Trapping Season; Finalizes Several Furbearer Seasons

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission proposed to align the east and west river season dates (year-round) for the beaver trapping and hunting season.

The commission also proposed to expand the use of body-grip trap sets to be used for beaver in all counties east of the Missouri River, due to the proposed extended season.

The proposed dates for the beaver season would be:

Year-round

Statewide, except that portion of the Black Hills Fire Protection District south of Interstate 90 and west SD Highway 79.

November 1, 2021 – April 30, 2022

Portions of the Black Hills Fire Protection District south of Interstate 90 and west of SD Highway 79 that are not owned by the US Forest Service.

January 1 – March 31, 2022

US Forest Service land in the Black Hills Fire Protection District south of Interstate 90 and west of SD Highway 79.

The commission also proposed no change to several seasons, finalizing the following seasons:

Skunk, Opossum, Jackrabbit, Fox, Raccoon and Badger Season

Year round

Statewide

Mink, Weasel, Muskrat

Nov. 1, 2021 - Jan. 31, 2022

Statewide

The commission is also proposing to correct an error regarding the end date that traps can be placed in or on muskrat houses east of the Missouri River, changing it to April 30.

Muskrat Hunting (Only landowners, lessees, or township highway officials within public road right-of-ways)

April 1, 2022 - Aug. 31, 2023

River Otter

Nov. 1, 2021 - Dec. 31, 2021, with a harvest limit of 15 river otters. If the limit of 15 otters is reached on or before November 10, an additional five otters will be added to the harvest limit.

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Aurora, Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Brown, Charles Mix, Clark, Clay, Codington, Davison, Day, Deuel, Douglas, Grant, Hamlin, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Marshall, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Turner, Union and Yankton Counties.

Individuals can comment on this proposal by visiting gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions. Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501.

To hear the discussion on this proposal, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive. To see the proposal in its entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on May 30.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held June 3-4.

GFP Commission Will Keep Sage Grouse Season Closed

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission proposed to keep the sage grouse hunting season closed for 2021.

Preliminary survey results indicate a similar or slightly fewer number of males as documented in 2020 and below the threshold of the season recommendation guidelines found within the sage-grouse management plan.

The sage grouse season has been closed for 7 of the past 8 years, except in 2016 when 10 birds were harvested.

GFP Commission Sets Custer State Park Bison Hunts

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission proposed to maintain the Custer State Park Trophy Bison and Non-Trophy Bison for 2021.

The Trophy Bison season will offer eight licenses. This season will run from November 15, 2021 – January 14, 2022. License holders are restricted to three days for the harvest and must arrange their hunting dates with the Custer State Park Office and be accompanied by an authorized park official when hunting.

The Non-Trophy Bison season will offer fifteen licenses. This season will run from October 4, 2021 – November 12, 2021. License holders are restricted to one day for the harvest, must arrange the hunt date with the Custer State Park office and shall be accompanied by an authorized park official when hunting.

The bison seasons are a management tool to maintain herd health and also support the bison population of the park overall.

Statewide Deer and Elk Carcass Disposal Rules Change

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission (GFP) changed the way deer and elk hunters must dispose of carcass remains for the management of chronic wasting disease (CWD).

All hunters transporting a deer or elk from the county of harvest, must dispose of all carcass remains in a garbage container or at a permitted landfill. This applies statewide regardless of CWD status in the respective county. For taxidermists and game processors, all carcass remains need to be disposed of in the same way regardless of harvest location.

“This is a big change for hunters,” said GFP Terrestrial Section Chief, John Kanta. “We will be working hard to get the word out and to make sure our hunters know why this important.”

“We all need to do our part to protect our deer and elk herds and make sure that carcasses are disposed of properly.”

GFP Commission Creates Disabled Veterans Deer and Pheasant Hunting Seasons

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission (GFP) created an avenue for non-profit organizations to apply for deer licenses for disabled veterans and purple heart recipients. Nonprofit organizations can now obtain up to 10 any deer licenses that would be valid on private lands only.

Sponsoring nonprofit organizations will be required to complete and submit an application to the Department stating the name, address, and phone number of the sponsoring organization; the requested date of the season; the location of the hunt; and the name of any landowner providing private land access for the hunt.

The commission also modified the season dates for disabled veterans to pheasant hunt. The new rules detail the process for nonprofits to offer pheasant hunts for qualifying veterans, beginning Sept. 1 and running through the end of the regular pheasant hunting season.

GFP Commission Makes Changes to The Apprentice, Youth and Mentored Deer Hunting Seasons

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission simplified Youth and Apprentice deer licenses at their May meeting.

The commission laid out the following parameters:

Any resident or nonresident hunter under the age of 18 is eligible to purchase a Youth license.

Any resident hunter over the age of 18 who has not had a deer license in the past 10 years would qualify for an Apprentice license.

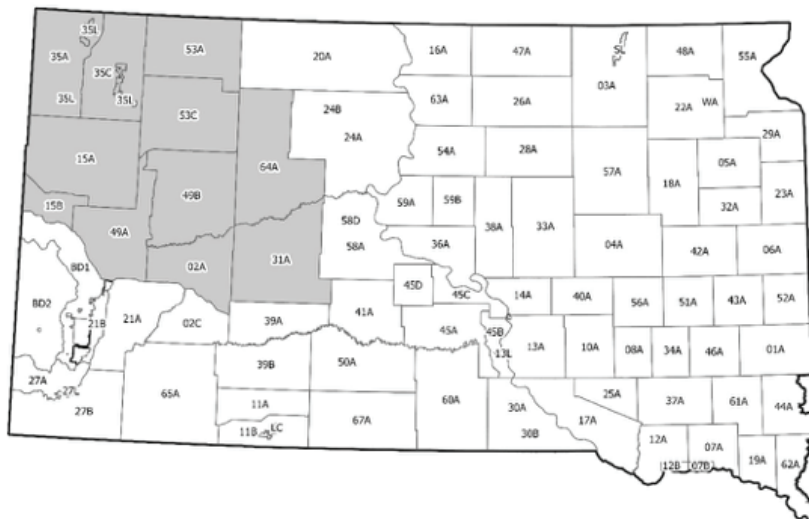
Apprentice license holders will no longer be required to have adult accompaniment.

"Anytime we can make the rules cleaner and simpler for outdoor families and youth hunters, that's a good thing," GFP Secretary Kevin Robling said.

"Every year, parents had questions on who qualified for what license and our team worked together to remove those frustrations. Getting outside to recreate in our awesome state should be easy. My team and I, while working in partnership with our Commission, are committed to continuously making it easy to do business with us."

In addition, the commission reduced the harvest of antlerless mule deer in select units for these seasons.

The change creates two units, Unit MHD-03/YOD-03/APD-03 (shaded) and Unit MHD-13/YOD-13/APD-13 (white) for mentored, youth, and apprentice licenses.



Mentored, Youth, and Apprentice hunters can obtain either a single tag "any antlerless deer" license for Unit MHD-03/YOD-03/APD-03 or a single tag "antlerless whitetail deer" license for Unit MHD-13/YOD-13/APD-13.

The establishment of these units and license types will reduce harvest of antlerless mule deer in select hunting units to increase mule deer population numbers, while maintaining current apprentice, youth, and mentored deer harvest and desired growth rates in other hunting units.

The Mentored, Youth, and Apprentice Hunter Deer Seasons will be:

Sept. 11, 2021 – Jan. 1, 2022

Sept 10, 2022 – Jan. 1, 2023

GFP Commission Increases West River Deer Licenses; Decrease to Black Hills and Custer State Park Licenses

PIERRE, S.D. - The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission made changes to the licenses available for the West River and Black Hills Deer Hunting Seasons at their May meeting.

The commission increased the number of licenses available for the 2021 and 2022 West River Deer Hunting Seasons.

The West River season will have: 11,453 single tag, 8,970 double tag, and 864 triple tag resident licenses and 920 single tag, 718 double tag and 64 triple tag licenses available for nonresidents.

The West River Deer Season will be:

November 13-28, 2021 (All units excluding Gregory County):

November 6-9 and November 22-28, 2021 (Unit 30A-Gregory County):

November 13-28, 2021 (Unit 30B-Gregory County):

December 11-19, 2021 Antlerless deer tags only.

The commission decreased the number of "any whitetail" licenses to 3,000 for residents and 240 for nonresidents for the Black Hills Deer Hunting Season. Additionally, the number of "antlerless whitetail" licenses decreased to 300 resident and 24 nonresident licenses.

Black Hills "any deer" licenses will be 200 for resident and 16 for nonresidents.

The Black Hills Deer Hunting Season is Nov. 1-30.

The Commission also set 25 "any whitetail" and 50 "antlerless whitetail" licenses for the Custer State Park Deer Hunting Season.

GFP Commission Sets Muzzleloader, Refuge Deer Seasons; Decreases East River Deer Licenses

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission set the Muzzleloader Deer and East River Deer Hunting Seasons at their May meeting.

The commission changed the area where "antlerless whitetail" licenses are valid during the muzzleloader season

Season dates for the muzzleloader seasons are:

December 1, 2021 – January 1, 2022

December 1, 2022 – January 1, 2023

The commission decreased available licenses for the East River Deer Hunting Season.

The proposal calls for 24,940 single tag and 1,300 double tag licenses for the 2021 and 2022 seasons.

The East River Deer Hunting Seasons will be:

November 20 – December 5, 2021

December 11-19, 2021 – for antlerless deer tags only

The commission set seasons for three National Wildlife Refuges.

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Sand Lake NWR
November 13-17, November 18-22, November 23-28, November 29 – December 5, December 6-12, and
December 13-21 (unfilled antlerless licenses only)
Lacreek NWR
October 20-26 and November 24-30
Waubay NWR (Including the Waubay State Game Bird Refuge)
November 13-21 and November 27 – December 5

License numbers available for each refuge will be:

Sand Lake NWR
Resident: 80 "any deer" and 25 "antlerless whitetail deer" licenses
Nonresident: 8 "any deer" and 2 "antlerless whitetail deer" licenses
Lacreek NWR
Residents: 20 "any deer" licenses
Nonresidents: 2 "any deer" licenses
Waubay NWR
Residents: 20 "any deer" licenses
Nonresidents: 2 "any deer" licenses

Commission Finalizes Grouse and Pheasant Hunting Seasons

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission changed the grouse hunting season on the Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge. Grouse season on Lacreek will begin the third Saturday in September, extending that season by a month.

The Commission amended their proposal to keep the Prairie Grouse Hunting Season closing the first Sunday of January.

The grouse hunting season for 2021 will be Sept. 18, 2021 – Jan. 2, 2022.


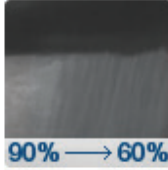



The commission changed the closing dates of the pheasant seasons on the Renzienhausen Game Production Area and the Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge to align with the statewide season's closing date of January 31.

Dates for those seasons will be:

Renzienhausen GPA – Dec. 1, 2021 – Jan.31, 2022
Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge – Dec. 13, 2021 – Jan. 31, 2022.

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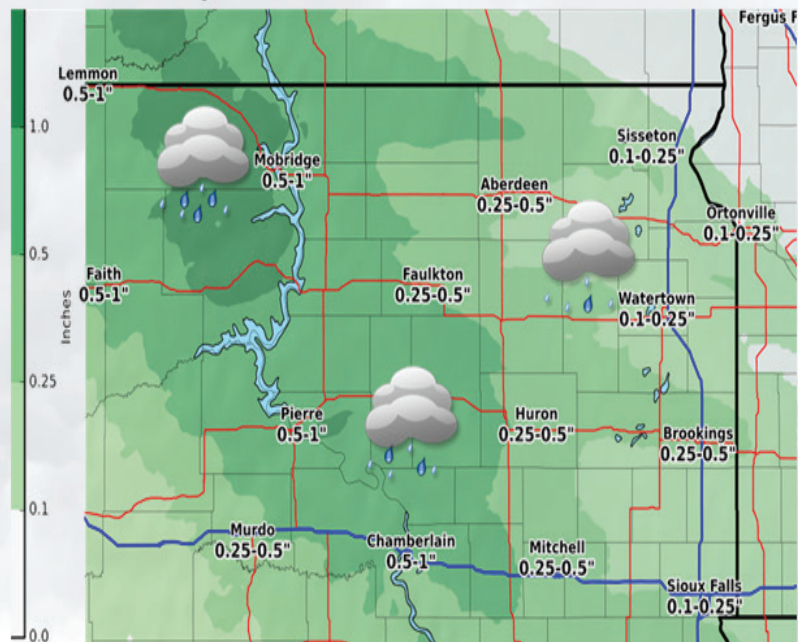
Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
80%	90% → 60%	20%		
Showers	Showers then Showers Likely	Slight Chance Showers	Decreasing Clouds	Sunny
High: 50 °F	Low: 36 °F	High: 56 °F	Low: 30 °F	High: 58 °F

Rain Showers Tonight Through Sunday AM

What to expect

- Rain showers move in from west to east tonight
- North central SD should see the heaviest rains, though a slight shift east is still possible
- Rumble of thunder possible mainly across portions of central SD
- High temps of 45-55 F on Saturday
- Rain tapers off Saturday night through Sunday AM (a bit of light snow may mix in at this time as well across north central SD).

Most likely storm total rainfall



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 5/7/2021 3:43 PM Central

A cloudy, cool and wet Saturday is in store. In fact, some parts of north central SD could receive about as much rain over the next 48 hours as they've had total since the start of the year (0.93" observed at Mobridge year-to-date; about 0.60" at McIntosh). Below normal temperatures persist through the weekend and into the new work-week.

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Today in Weather History

May 8, 1934: Pierre recorded its' earliest 100 degrees when the high temperature reached 103 degrees. Mobridge also reached 103 degrees, which is the earliest yearly date for the city Mobridge.

May 8, 1965: The strongest tornado recorded in South Dakota tracked across eastern Tripp County. It was part of a larger tornado outbreak in Nebraska and South Dakota during the afternoon through late evening hours. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the NWS Office in Rapid City.

May 8, 1986: Thunderstorms produced torrential rainfall of two to four inches over much of central and eastern South Dakota. The very heavy rains caused extensive flooding with Walworth and Potter Counties reporting the most damage. In those counties, most roads were under water. Several bridges and roads were also washed out in that area. The heavy rain washed out the dam at Lake Byre in Lyman County, which produced water waist deep in Kennebec. The city of Kennebec lost their sole source of water when the dam broke. Cow Creek in Lyman County also flooded and broke a part of a dam, causing minor property damage. Rain continued to fall into the morning hours on the 9th. Some two-day rainfall totals include; 4.33 inches in Kennebec; 4.21 in Shelby; 3.91 at 4 miles west of Mellette; 3.30 in Gettysburg; 3.06 in Blunt; 2.99 in Eureka; 2.75 at 2 NNW of Mobridge; 2.70 inches 2 miles south of Ashton and in Britton.

May 8, 1995: Flooding caused by snowmelt from two significant snowstorms in April continued throughout May. The flooding was aggravated by widespread torrential rains, especially from the early morning of the 8th through the early morning of the 9th. Rainfall amounts ranged from one to four inches. Some higher rainfall amounts include; 5.50 inches at Wakpala, 4.50 at Chelsea and Leola, 4.20 at Ipswich, 4.10 inches 12 north of McLaughlin, and 3.91 inches at Aberdeen. A worker was injured near Claremont when the train derailed due to the weakening of the rail-bed caused by high water. The extensive flooding continued to cause road damage and many road closures.

1784: Deadly hailstorm in South Carolina hits the town of Winnsborough. The hailstones, measuring as much as nine inches in circumference, killed several persons, and a great number of sheep, lambs, and birds.

1902: On May 7th, Martinique's Mount Pelee began the deadliest volcanic eruption in the 20th century. On this day, the city of Saint Pierre, which some called the Paris of the Caribbean, was virtually wiped off the map. The volcano killed an estimated 30,000 people.

1979: Widespread damage occurred in the Tampa Bay area. The 19 tornadoes reported are the most in one day in Florida history. Three people drowned in Pinellas County where flooding was most severe. Rainfall amounts of 18 inches in 24 hours were reported with 12.73 inches falling at Tampa, FL; with 7.84 inches of that in just six hours. Worst hit was the Polk County community of Auburndale where a tornado made a direct hit on the Auburndale School. Flying debris hurt only eight students. An 83-year-old woman was killed as she hid in an unreinforced concrete block storage shed. 98 trailers were damaged or destroyed, and 40 people were injured.

2003: This was the second of three consecutive days with strong to violent tornadoes around Oklahoma City. A violent F4 tornado that affected Moore, Oklahoma City, Midwest City and Choctaw took on a path very similar to the 5/3/1999 devastating tornado. This particular storm back in 2003 affected areas from Newcastle and Moore to Del City and Choctaw. Although over 130 people were injured, there were no fatalities.

2009: A deadly derecho squall line crosses far southern Illinois at midday devastating the Carbondale area on its way across a 1,200-mile swath of terrain covering sections of nine states. Hundreds of homes and businesses are damaged or destroyed in Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri. The wind gusts to 106 mph in the Carbondale area with sustained winds measured at up to 90 mph. In southern Illinois, the storm system peels siding and roofs off homes and other buildings, blowing out car windows and tearing up trailer parks.

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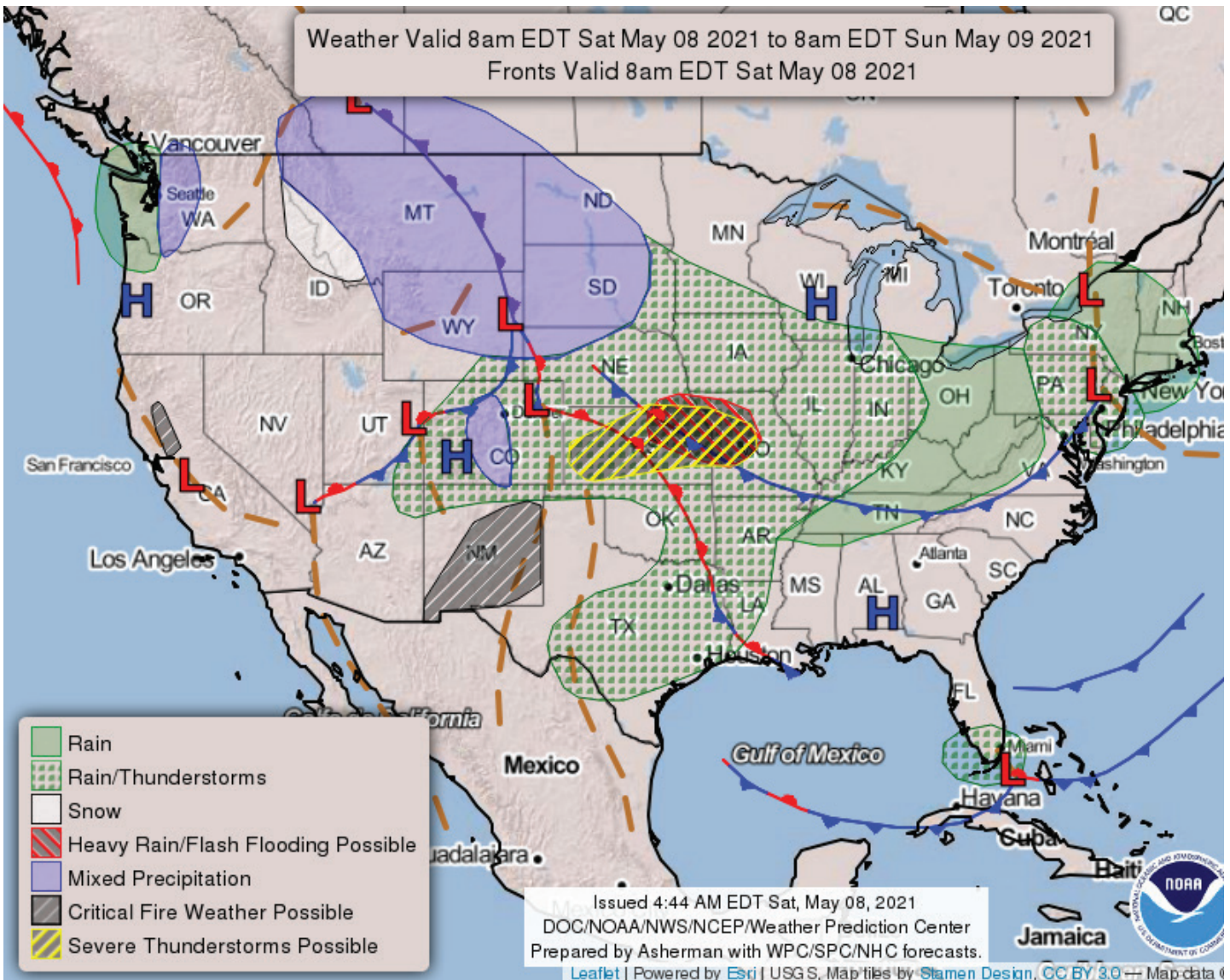
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 5:28 PM
Low Temp: 33 °F at 6:05 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 12:17 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 105° in 1934
Record Low: 22° in 1945
Average High: 67°F
Average Low: 41°F
Average Precip in May.: 0.76
Precip to date in May.: 0.12
Average Precip to date: 5.73
Precip Year to Date: 2.89
Sunset Tonight: 8:50 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:10 a.m.



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DON'T FORGET YOUR GOD!

Recently an item appeared on the news that told the story of a 34-year-old man suing his parents for "not preparing him to earn a living." He asked the judge to force his parents to sell their home and from the proceeds purchase him a restaurant. Parents, he argued, are responsible for providing a useful education for their children. However, the parental task he expected of them, is as old as mankind. It began with the children of Israel.

Psalm 48 begins with a call to praise the Lord. He is "great," said the Psalmist, and "worthy of praise." In between verses one and fourteen, the author gives many descriptions of the greatness of God and several reasons why He was worthy of praise. But why is He great and why is He worthy of praise?

Contained in the Psalm is a description of the City of Zion – the "joy of the whole earth." And what is this joy or where does it come from? It is the City of the Great King – God Himself! And we read that "God is in her citadels; He has shown Himself to be her fortress; when kings joined forces and 'saw her' they fled in terror; it is the city of our God and in her temple, God makes her secure forever; in His temple they meditate on His unfailing love; people in the villages are glad because of His judgments."

The people in the Psalm are then told to "walk about Zion, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, and view her citadels so that you may tell of them the next generation!"

Why were the contents of this Psalm important to the children of Israel? In His wisdom God advised the writers of this Psalm to produce a document that contained a historical record of God's love and faithfulness, His goodness and guidance, His strength and power. This Psalm contains a most significant fact: Parents are to pass on to their children the fact that God, in His grace and goodness, will provide, protect, and care for His children as long as they are faithful to Him.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for the record of Your might and majesty, Your power and presence that gives us reasons to trust You for our salvation! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Take note of the fortified walls, and tour all the citadels, that you may describe

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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

South Dakota men turn Flyover Country into budding brand

By MAKENZIE HUBER Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Vaney Hariri already knew what people would say when they found out where he was from:

“What’s in South Dakota?”

“What is there to do?”

“Why would you live there?”

“That’s flyover country.”

South Dakota and the Midwest is more than a filler state, though. It’s filled with people who are making a difference in their communities, pursuing their passions and calling this “flyover country” home, he said. So, he decided to take ownership in the insult.

Hariri, co-owner in Think3D solutions, started the Flyover Country apparel line in June 2020 alongside Joshua Novak, who founded Main St. Media House.

And the business is growing quickly. The two are renting space in downtown to store their products, and Hariri said they might consider a storefront at some point in the journey.

While there are plenty of state pride shirts already, the two didn’t find something that united the entire area.

“I love repping this state, but I’m not going to wear a pheasant,” Hariri said. “This is not an anti-coast thing. This is a pro-us thing. This is loving where you’re from and investing in your community.”

They settled on a simple airplane design, displayed on T-shirts, sweatshirts, masks and other apparel pieces. But it’s not just a piece of clothing: it’s a message, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

“People can buy stuff from whoever, but for us it’s about having a real connection and teaching each other about each other,” Hariri said.

To accompany their products, the two create video series interviewing people in Sioux Falls about why they live in South Dakota and what difference they’re making while living here. Eventually, the two want to expand to interview people across the region.

Scott Heckel, co-owner and head brewer at Severance Brewing Co., shared his story with Flyover Country to inspire others who grew up in the Midwest and “thought they had to move out to accomplish something.”

“We could have tried to start a brewery anywhere,” the Aberdeen native said. “But we saw the potential in Sioux Falls and thought it was a good opportunity to celebrate what my wife and I believe in and stick to our Midwest roots.”

“Every winter when the temperature drops, you ask why you live here, and you reflect on those things that make you want to stay,” he added.

Heckel partnered with Flyover Country to launch a collaboration beer called “Why you’re here” beer, which is brewed with local ingredients from flyover country. The beer includes grain from Two Track Malting in Bismarck, North Dakota and hops from Herds to Hops in western Sioux Falls.

The launch party for the beer will also release Flyover County’s latest limited release shirt, which features the Sioux Falls flag inside its logo. Hariri believes the limited edition T-shirts will sell out quickly, so they’ll have pre-order sales on their website through the end of May.

“Be here on purpose. Be here because you want to help make this community one to be proud of,” Hariri said. “For so long we would lose a lot of our youth because they sought out more diversity, culture and opportunities outside their home. Now we’re starting to witness people coming home and staying home. The better option is always staying here and making it better.”

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:
Mega Millions
05-10-19-21-50, Mega Ball: 10, Megaplier: 4
(five, ten, nineteen, twenty-one, fifty; Mega Ball: ten; Megaplier: four)
Estimated jackpot: \$370 million
Powerball
Estimated jackpot: \$157 million

Mobile home standoff with gunman ends with arrest

PIEDMONT, S.D. (AP) — A man accused of firing a gun during a domestic violence incident was arrested after a long standoff at a mobile home park and campground in Meade County.

Sheriff's deputies responded to the Sacora Station park and campground in Piedmont about 7 p.m. Thursday on a report of shots fired.

They encountered a man who retreated into a trailer home. Law enforcement evacuated the area, according to the Rapid City Journal.

The Meade County Sheriff's Office requested help from the Rapid City-Pennington County SWAT team. The state Highway Patrol also responded.

Law enforcement blocked off the entrance to the property and attempted to communicate with the suspect over a loudspeaker.

After about three hours had passed, officers set off at least two flash bang grenades and the suspect surrendered a short time later.

No one was injured during the incident, authorities said.

The man is being held on possible charges of aggravated assault/domestic violence, according to Pennington County sheriff's officials.

South Africa's royal scandal: New Zulu king's claim disputed

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — A new Zulu king in South Africa was named amid scenes of chaos Friday night as other members of the royal family questioned Prince Misuzulu Zulu's claim to the title and bodyguards suddenly whisked him away from the public announcement at a palace.

The controversy over the next king, a largely ceremonial role but one with great significance for South Africa and its 12 million Zulu people, has arisen after the death in March of King Goodwill Zwelithini, who had reigned since 1968.

Zwelithini apparently named one of his six wives, Queen Mantfombi Shiyiwe Dlamini Zulu, as the "regent of the Zulu kingdom" in his will, but her death just over a week ago after holding the title for only a month has thrown the royal succession into turmoil.

The commotion broke out at the reading of Queen Mantfombi's will and hours after a memorial service for her. Her will named 46-year-old Prince Misuzulu, her eldest son with King Zwelithini, as the next king.

But another prince objected and interrupted the announcement at the KwaKhangelamankengane Royal Palace in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, while two princesses have already questioned whether the late king's will gave Queen Mantfombi the right to nominate a successor on her death.

King Zwelithini reportedly had 28 children with his different wives, and Queen Mantfombi was not his first wife. The dispute over succession has been rumbling for a month since the former king's death, fascinating many South Africans with their very own royal scandal.

Earlier on Friday, Prince Misuzulu, who wore a traditional leopardskin headband reserved for royalty, called for unity among the Zulu royals at his mother's memorial service.

"We have no doubt we will unite as a family," he said in his tribute to the queen, which was read out by his younger sister, Princess Ntandoyesizwe Zulu. "Let us emulate the king by being peaceful."

The Zulu king has no political or even constitutional position but his traditional authority is recognized

in KwaZulu-Natal, where he is said to "reign but not rule." More than that, he holds an important role in bridging the gap between South Africa's traditional customs and its modern democracy, with Zulus the largest ethnic group among South Africa's 60 million people.

King Zwelithini, who had diabetes, reportedly died from a COVID-19 related illness at the age of 72.

EU says US stand on patent virus waiver is no 'magic bullet'

By RAF CASERT and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

PORTO, Portugal (AP) — European Union leaders cranked up their criticism of the U.S. call to waive COVID-19 vaccine patents Saturday, arguing the move would bring no short or midterm relief. They instead urged Washington to lift export restrictions if it wants to have a global impact on the pandemic.

"We don't think, in the short term, that it's the magic bullet," said EU Council President Charles Michel on the second day of an EU summit in Portugal. French President Emmanuel Macron insisted that giving any priority to discussing intellectual property rights now, "is a false debate."

Instead, they joined previous EU calls for U.S. President Joe Biden to start boosting U.S. vaccine exports to contain the global COVID-19 crisis, insisting it was the most urgent need.

"We encourage all the partners to facilitate the export of (vaccine) doses," said Michel.

While the U.S. has kept a tight lid on exports of American-made vaccines so it can inoculate its own population first, the EU has become the world's leading provider, allowing about as many doses to go outside the 27-nation bloc as are kept for its 446 million inhabitants. The EU has distributed about 200 million doses within the bloc while about the same amount had been exported abroad to almost 90 countries.

"First of all, you must open up," said Macron. "In the United States, in the United Kingdom, 100 percent of what has been produced has been used in the domestic market." Macron said that "first of all, the Anglo Saxons must stop their bans on exports."

The EU is trying to regain the diplomatic initiative on vaccines after Biden put it on the back foot with his surprising endorsement of lifting patent protections on COVID-19 vaccines, seeking to solve the problem of getting shots into the arms of people in poorer countries.

Macron and other EU leaders have insisted that first of all production capacity must be ramped up by, among other things, reconverting factories so they can quickly start producing vaccines through a transfer of technology. Developed nations should also increase vaccine donations to poorer countries.

Only after that, Macron said, can the debate on patent waivers start having an impact.

"Today, there is not a factory in the world that cannot produce doses for poor countries because of a patent issue," Macron said.

India's surge hits southern states, prompts more lockdowns

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Two southern states in India became the latest to declare lockdowns, as coronavirus cases surge at breakneck speed across the country and pressure mounts on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to implement a nationwide shutdown.

At over 300,000, Karnataka's capital of Bengaluru has the highest active caseload of any Indian city. But experts warn the worst is still ahead as India's third-largest city buckles under oxygen shortages, overrun hospitals and crowded crematoriums. In Tamil Nadu state, the lockdown announcement followed a daily record of more than 26,000 cases on Friday.

Infections have swelled in India since February in a disastrous turn blamed on more contagious variants as well as government decisions to allow massive crowds to gather for religious festivals and political rallies.

On Saturday, India reported 401,078 confirmed cases, including a record high of 4,187 deaths. Overall, India has more than 21.8 million confirmed infections and nearly 240,000 deaths. Experts say even those dramatic tolls are undercounts.

One doctor in Bengaluru said he's had to reject patients "left, right and center" as his hospital struggled to find more oxygen.

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"The problem is the demand is so high that we need constant oxygen," said Dr. Sanjay Gururaj, the medical director at Shanti Hospital and Research Center. The hospital is sending a truck twice a day to oxygen plants on the outskirts of the city to bring back 12 jumbo oxygen cylinders. "In normal times, this would have lasted over two weeks — now, it lasts just over a day," he added.

The state's oxygen shortages prompted the high court on Wednesday to order the federal government to increase the daily liquid medical oxygen supplied to Karnataka. The ruling came after 24 virus patients died in a government hospital on Monday. It's unclear how many of them died due to the lack of oxygen, but an investigation is ongoing.

Modi has so far left the responsibility for fighting the virus in this current surge to poorly equipped state governments, and faced accusations of doing too little. His government has countered that it is doing everything it can amid a "once-in-a-century crisis." Meanwhile, many medical experts, opposition leaders and even Supreme Court judges are calling for national restrictions, arguing that a patchwork of state rules is insufficient to quell the rise in infections.

Experts caution that the surge in Bengaluru is fast eclipsing other hard-hit cities like the capital, New Delhi, and Mumbai. Cases have increased 100-fold since February, said Murad Banaji, a mathematician modeling COVID-19 growth in India, citing official data. Test positivity has jumped to over 30%, which indicates the infection is much more widespread than confirmed figures, he added.

"Disaster was looming by early March, when cases started to shoot up," he said. "Bangalore is more than a ticking time bomb right now — it is in the middle of an explosion." Bengaluru was previously known as Bangalore.

Much of the focus in recent weeks has been on northern India, led by New Delhi, where television stations have broadcast images of patients lying on stretchers outside hospitals and of mass funeral pyres that burn throughout the night.

The situation unfolding in Karnataka has thrown attention to other southern states also battling a rise in cases. Daily cases have breached the 20,000 mark for the past three days in Andhra Pradesh state, leading to new restrictions there.

Kerala, which emerged as a blueprint for tackling the pandemic last year, began a lockdown on Saturday. With daily cases crossing 40,000, the state is aggressively boosting resources, including converting hundreds of industrial oxygen cylinders into medical oxygen, said Dr. Amar Fettle, the state's officer for COVID-19.

"The magnitude of cases from last year to now is vastly different," he said, adding that increasing numbers have meant more hospitalizations and more strain on health care systems, with hospitals running nearly full. "It's become a race between occupancy and how fast we can add beds. We're trying to stay ahead of the virus as best as we can."

It's clear infections are rapidly rising across the southern region, but there has been "less visible outcry" than in the north because of relatively better health infrastructure and government initiatives that address problems at the community level, said Jacob John, professor of community medicine at Christian Medical College, Vellore.

But while the virus has ripped through large cities in waves, smaller towns and villages where health care is less accessible are now exposed.

"These places are quickly getting affected, which means we may not have sustained the worst yet in south India," he said.

Medics: 200 Palestinians hurt in Al-Aqsa clashes with police

By JOSEPH KRAUSS and FARES AKRAM Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A night of heavy clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound and elsewhere in Jerusalem left more than 200 Palestinians wounded, medics said Saturday, as the city braced for even more violence after weeks of unrest.

Nightly protests broke out at the start of the holy month of Ramadan over police restrictions at a popular gathering place and have reignited in recent days over threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinians from

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their homes in east Jerusalem, which is claimed by both sides in the decades-old conflict.

It was unclear what set off the violence at Al-Aqsa, which erupted when Israeli police in riot gear deployed in large numbers as thousands of Muslim worshippers were holding evening prayers at the sprawling hilltop esplanade.

Throughout the night large groups of protesters could be seen hurling rocks as Israeli police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades. At one point, the police entered one of the buildings in the complex, which includes the Al-Aqsa mosque and the iconic golden Dome of the Rock.

The Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service said 88 of the wounded were hospitalized. The Palestinian Health Ministry said 83 people were wounded by rubber-coated bullets, including three who were shot in the eye, two with serious head injuries and two with broken jaws.

The Israeli police said protesters hurled stones, fireworks and other objects at them, wounding 17 officers, half of whom were hospitalized. "We will respond with a heavy hand to all violent disturbances, riots and attacks on our forces," it said in a statement late Friday.

The Al-Aqsa mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam. It is also the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the biblical temples. It has long been a flash-point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was the epicenter of the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

Some 70,000 worshippers had attended the final midday Friday prayers of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa, the Islamic endowment that oversees the site said. Thousands protested afterwards, waving the green flags of the Islamic militant group Hamas and chanting pro-Hamas slogans.

At the beginning of Ramadan in mid-April, Israel blocked off a popular gathering spot where Palestinians traditionally socialize at the end of their daylong fast. The move set off two weeks of clashes before Israel lifted the restrictions.

But in recent days, protests have grown over Israel's threatened eviction in Sheikh Jarrah in east Jerusalem of dozens of Palestinians embroiled in a long legal battle with Israeli settlers trying to acquire property in the neighborhood.

The United States said it was "deeply concerned" about both the violence and the threatened evictions, and was in contact with leaders on both sides to try and de-escalate tensions.

"It is critical to avoid steps that exacerbate tensions or take us farther away from peace," the U.S. State Department said in a statement. "This includes evictions in East Jerusalem, settlement activity, home demolitions, and acts of terrorism."

The European Union also urged calm. It said the potential evictions were of "serious concern," adding that such actions are "illegal under international humanitarian law and only serve to fuel tensions on the ground.

Neighboring Jordan, which made peace with Israel in 1994 and is the custodian of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, has also condemned Israel's actions, as has the Gulf kingdom of Bahrain, which normalized relations with Israel last year in a U.S.-brokered deal.

Israelis and Palestinians are bracing for more unrest in the coming days.

Saturday night is "Laylat al-Qadr" or the "Night of Destiny," the most sacred in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Worshippers will gather for intense nighttime prayers at Al-Aqsa.

Sunday night is the start of Jerusalem Day, a national holiday in which Israel celebrates its annexation of east Jerusalem and religious nationalists hold parades and other celebrations in the city. On Monday, an Israeli court is expected to issue a verdict on the evictions.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza — territories the Palestinians want for their future state — in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally and views the entire city as its capital.

The Palestinians view east Jerusalem — which includes major holy sites for Jews, Christians and Muslims — as their capital, and its fate is one of the most sensitive issues in the conflict. In a call to Palestine TV late Friday, President Mahmoud Abbas praised the "courageous stand" of the protesters and said Israel bore full responsibility for the violence.

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Israel's Foreign Ministry had earlier accused the Palestinians of seizing on the threatened evictions, which it described as a "real-estate dispute between private parties," in order to incite violence.

Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip and opposes Israel's existence, has called for a new intifada.

Protest groups affiliated with Hamas said they would resume demonstrations and the launching of incendiary balloons along the heavily-guarded Gaza frontier. Hamas has largely curtailed such actions over the past two years as part of an informal cease-fire that now appears to be fraying.

In an interview with a Hamas-run TV station, the group's top leader Ismail Haniyeh addressed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by name, warning him not to "play with fire."

"Neither you, nor your army and police, can win this battle," he said. "What's happening in Jerusalem is an intifada that must not stop."

In the French language, steps forward and back for women

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

LE PECQ, France (AP) — The fight to make the French language kinder to women took steps forward, and back, this week.

Warning that the well-being of France and its future are at stake, the government banned the use in schools of a method increasingly used by some French speakers to make the language more inclusive by feminizing some words.

Specifically, the education minister's decree targets what is arguably the most contested and politicized letter in the French language — "e." Simply put, "e" is the language's feminine letter, used in feminine nouns and their adjectives and, sometimes, when conjugating verbs.

But proponents of women's rights are also increasingly adding "e" to words that normally wouldn't have included that letter, in a conscious — and divisive — effort to make women more visible.

Take the generic French word for leaders — "dirigeants" — for example. For some, that masculine spelling suggests that they are generally men and makes women leaders invisible, because it lacks a feminine "e" toward the end. For proponents of inclusive writing, a more gender-equal spelling is "dirigeant·es," inserting the extra "e," preceded by a middle dot, to make clear that leaders can be of both sexes.

Likewise, they might write "les élu·es" — instead of the generic masculine "élus" — for the holders of elected office, again to highlight that women are elected, too. Or they might use "les idiot·es," instead of the usual generic masculine "les idiots," to acknowledge that stupidity isn't the exclusive preserve of men.

Proponents and opponents sometimes split down political lines. France's conservative Republicans party uses "élus"; the left-wing France Unbowed tends toward "élu · es."

"It's a fight to make women visible in the language," said Laurence Rossignol, a Socialist senator who uses the feminizing extra "e."

Speaking in a telephone interview, she said its opponents "are the same activists who were against marriage for people of the same sex, medically assisted reproduction, and longer abortion windows. ... It's the new banner under which reactionaries are gathering."

But for the government of centrist President Emmanuel Macron, the use of "·e" threatens the very fabric of France. Speaking in a Senate debate on the issue on Thursday, a deputy education minister said inclusive writing "is a danger for our country" and will "sound the death knell for the use of French in the world."

By challenging traditional norms of French usage, inclusive writing makes the language harder to learn, penalizing pupils with learning difficulties, the minister, Nathalie Elimas, argued.

"It dislocates words, breaks them into two," she said. "With the spread of inclusive writing, the English language — already quasi-hegemonic across the world — would certainly and perhaps forever defeat the French language."

Arguments over gender-inclusive language are raging elsewhere in Europe, too.

A fault-line among German speakers has been how to make nouns reflect both genders. The German word for athletes, for example, could be written as "Sportler(asterisk)innen" to show that it includes both men and women, as opposed to the more usual, generic masculine "Sportler." For critics, the addition of

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the feminine "innen" at the end — sometimes with the help of an asterisk, capital letter or underscore — is plain ugly.

Italy has seen sporadic debate over neutralizing gendered titles for public officials, or making them feminine when they normally would remain masculine, such as "ministra" instead of "ministro" for women Cabinet members. Rome Mayor Virginia Raggi prefers to be called "sindaca" rather than "sindaco."

Inclusive language has also been a long battle for feminists and, more recently, of LGBTQ+ groups in Spain, although there is no consensus on how to make progress. Politics also play into the issue there. Members of the far-right Vox party have insisted on sticking with the traditional "presidente" when referring to Spain's four deputy prime ministers, all of them women, rather than opting for the more progressive "presidenta," even though the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language has accepted usage of that feminine noun.

The French Education Ministry circular that banished the "e" formula from schools did, however, accept other more inclusive changes in language that highlight women.

They include systematically feminizing job titles for women — like "présidente," instead of "président," or "ambassadrice" rather than "ambassadeur" for women ambassadors. It also encouraged the simultaneous use of both masculine and feminine forms to emphasize that roles are filled by both sexes. So a job posting in a school, for example, should say that it will go to "le candidat ou la candidate" — man or woman — who is best qualified to fill it.

Raphael Haddad, the author of a French-language guide on inclusive writing, said that section of the ministry circular represented progress for the cause of women in French.

"It's a huge step forward, disguised as a ban," he said. "What's happening to the France language is the same thing that happened in the United States, with 'chairman' replaced by 'chairperson,' (and) 'fireman' by 'firefighter.'"

Prospects dim for passage of LGBTQ rights bill in Senate

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and DAVID CRARY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Controlling Congress and the White House for the first time in a decade, Democrats were hopeful that this would be the year they finally secured civil rights protections for LGBTQ Americans.

Then came a new debate over women's and girls sports.

Legislation that would add sexual orientation and gender identity to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is running aground in the Senate, partly knocked off course by the nationwide conservative push against transgender participation in girls and women's athletics that has swept state legislatures and now spilled into the halls of Congress.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, said the House-passed legislation would "in effect repeal Title IX" by making it easier for transgender women to play on girls teams. Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith, R-Miss., said that allowing "male-bodied athletes" to compete against females would "totally undermine" girls basketball. Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Mo., said the bill would "decimate" female athletic competition.

Democrats are frustrated by the shift in the debate, saying there's ample evidence that the Republican claims are false and overblown.

The International Olympic Committee has allowed transgender athletes to compete for years under specific parameters, and, to date, there have been no known transgender women compete in the Olympics. Only one known transgender woman has competed at the Division I level in the NCAA. And though legislators in around 30 states have introduced legislation to ban or limit transgender athletes from competing on teams that align with their gender identity, few lawmakers have been able to cite specific cases in their home states where it became an issue.

"We are waiting for this avalanche of problems," said the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, characterizing the Republicans' argument. "They haven't really surfaced."

But Republicans are unyielding in their opposition to the legislation, spurred on by conservative groups who are pushing anti-transgender laws nationwide. With no Republicans signed on, for now, Democrats

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are unlikely to win the 60 votes needed to pass the Equality Act, potentially putting the issue in limbo indefinitely.

"It's very discouraging, but in many ways not surprising, that Republicans are so focused on the trans community to build up opposition," said Rep. David Cicilline, D-R.I. He called the GOP arguments over sports a solution in search of a problem.

Sports are just the latest front in the decadeslong GOP culture war over LGBTQ rights that has focused increasingly on transgender Americans since 2015, when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. Conservative groups including The Heritage Foundation, Family Policy Alliance and the Christian legal network Alliance Defending Freedom have been engaged for much of the past two decades in advocacy against the LGBTQ rights movement. An earlier push by those groups to enact laws requiring transgender people to use public bathrooms corresponding to the sex on their birth certificate sputtered amid backlash.

Republicans contend the Equality Act would open the floodgates for transgender girls and women to play on female sports teams and hurt others' chances to compete. While the bill does not explicitly mention sports or touch Title IX protections against sex-based discrimination, they say extending the protections to gender identity would eliminate "private spaces" for cisgender women, including sports teams.

They have repeatedly pointed to one example in Connecticut, where two transgender high school runners in Connecticut won several championships. A lawsuit filed by the runners' teammates was recently thrown out.

"I have to say, as the father of two young girls, that girls sports has had a profound impact in their lives," Cruz said at a hearing on the bill.

"The discipline, the teamwork, the camaraderie, the competitiveness, that girls sports teaches, is effectively destroyed from this bill."

Christiana Holcomb, a lawyer with Alliance Defending Freedom, contends that the Equality Act would supersede Title IX "and force vulnerable girls to share intimate spaces with men who identify as female."

GOP opposition to the bill goes beyond sports, however. Republicans have stalled earlier iterations of the legislation while making different arguments, including that it would infringe on religious freedom.

Democrats say that none of those objections hold weight and that it's long past time to make clear that the nation's civil rights laws explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identification. Passage of the law would outlaw discrimination in employment, housing, loan applications, education, public accommodations and other areas, as it did for women and racial minorities in an earlier era.

President Joe Biden pushed for the bill in his address to Congress last month, speaking directly to transgender Americans "watching at home, especially young people, who are so brave. I want you to know, your president has your back."

The lead sponsors of the bill, Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Cicilline, say they know they have work to do. Merkley says he is working with Republicans and civil rights organizations "to find a path forward that will bring senators together behind a vision of full equality for LGBTQ Americans."

The legislation has support from the Women's Sports Foundation, a group that has advocated for women's and girls sports for more than 40 years. The group says the GOP narrative on transgender athletes is a distraction from more important issues, including pay inequity and the harassment and abuse of female athletes.

"Let us be clear, there are many real threats to girls' and women's access and opportunity in sports," the group said. "However, transgender inclusion is not one of them."

Many of the state legislators who have pushed the bills to ban transgender girls from competing on girls sports teams couldn't cite any local examples, according to a review by The Associated Press in March. The AP reached out to two dozen state lawmakers sponsoring such measures as well as the conservative groups supporting them and found only a few times it's been an issue among the hundreds of thousands of American teenagers who play high school sports.

Stella Keating, a 16-year-old transgender girl from Washington state, testified to the Senate that she wanted to join her school's bowling team because her friends were on it.

"I can tell you that the majority of transgender people who join sports just want to hang out with their

friends," Keating said. "And that's basically it."

Online speech shield under fire as Trump Facebook ban stays

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lurking beneath Facebook's decision on whether to continue Donald Trump's suspension from its platform is a far more complex and consequential question: Do the protections carved out for companies when the internet was in its infancy 25 years ago make sense when some of them have become global powerhouses with almost unlimited reach?

The companies have provided a powerful megaphone for Trump, other world leaders and billions of users to air their grievances, even ones that are false or damaging to someone's reputation, knowing that the platforms themselves were shielded from liability for content posted by users.

Now that shield is getting a critical look in the current climate of hostility toward Big Tech and the social environment of political polarization, hate speech and violence against minorities.

The debate is starting to take root in Congress, and the action this week by Facebook's quasi-independent oversight board upholding the company's suspension of Trump's accounts could add momentum to that legislative effort.

Under the 1996 Communications Decency Act, digital platform companies have legal protection both for content they carry and for removing postings they deem offensive. The shelter from lawsuits and prosecution applies to social media posts, uploaded videos, user reviews of restaurants or doctors, classified ads — or the doxing underworld of thousands of websites that profit from false and defamatory information on individuals.

Section 230 of the law, which outlines the shield, was enacted when many of the most powerful social media companies didn't even exist. It allowed companies like Facebook, Twitter and Google to grow into the behemoths they are today.

Republicans accuse the social media platforms of suppressing conservative voices and giving a stage to foreign leaders branded as dictators, while Trump is barred. Democrats and civil rights groups decry the digital presence of far-right extremists and pin blame on the platforms for disseminating hate speech and stoking extremist violence.

"For too long, social media platforms have hidden behind Section 230 protections to censor content that deviates from their beliefs," Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the senior Republican on the Senate Commerce Committee, has said.

On this, Trump and President Joe Biden apparently agree. Trump, while president, called for the repeal of Section 230, branding it "a serious threat to our national security and election integrity." Biden said during his campaign that it "immediately should be revoked," though he hasn't spoken about the issue at length as president.

Facebook, with a strong lobbying presence in Washington and a desire to have an input into any changes, has stepped out in favor of revisions to Section 230. Congress should update the 1996 law "to make sure it's working as intended," CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said. And he's offered a specific suggestion: Congress could require internet platforms to gain legal protection only by proving that their systems for identifying illegal content are up to snuff.

Some critics see a clever gambit in that, a requirement that could make it more difficult for smaller tech companies and startups to comply and would ultimately advantage Facebook over smaller competitors.

Spokespeople for Twitter and Google declined to comment on the prospects for legislative action on Section 230 following the Facebook board ruling; a spokesperson for Menlo Park, California-based Facebook had no immediate comment.

The decision announced by the Facebook oversight board upheld the suspension of Trump, an extremely rare move that was based on the company's conclusion that he incited violence leading to the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol riot. But the overseers told Facebook to specify how long the suspension would last, saying its

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"indefinite" ban on the former president 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.

Trump was permanently banned after the riot from Twitter, his favored bullhorn. But it was Facebook that played an integral role in both of Trump's campaigns, not just as a way to speak to his more than 32 million followers but also as a fundraising juggernaut driving small-dollar contributions through highly targeted ads.

Critics of Facebook generally saw the oversight board's ruling as positive. But some view the board as a distraction by Facebook to skirt its responsibility and to stave off action by Congress or the Biden administration. What must be addressed, critics insist, are the broader problems for society from the fearsome power, market dominance and underlying business model of Facebook and the other tech giants — harvesting data from platform users and making it available to online advertisers so they can pinpoint consumers to target.

That's where the debate over changes to Section 230 comes in, as a key area for new regulation of social media.

Gautam Hans, a technology law and free-speech expert and professor at Vanderbilt University, said he finds the board to be "a bit of a sideshow from the larger policy and social questions that we have about these companies."

Last wild macaw in Rio is lonely and looking for love

By DAVID BILLER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Some have claimed she's indulging a forbidden romance. More likely, loneliness compels her to seek company at Rio de Janeiro's zoo.

Either way, a blue-and-yellow macaw that zookeepers named Juliet is believed to be the only wild bird of its kind left in the Brazilian city where the birds once flew far and wide.

Almost every morning for the last two decades, Juliet has appeared. She swoops onto the zoo enclosure where macaws are kept and, through its fence, engages in grooming behavior that looks like conjugal canoodling. Sometimes she just sits, relishing the presence of others. She is quieter — shier? more coy? — than her squawking chums.

Blue-and-yellow macaws live to be about 35 years old and Juliet — no spring chicken — should have found a lifelong mate years ago, according to Neiva Guedes, president of the Hyacinth Macaw Institute, an environmental group. But Juliet hasn't coupled, built a nest or had chicks, so at most she's "still just dating."

"They're social birds, and that means they don't like to live alone, whether in nature or captivity. They need company," said Guedes, who also coordinates a project that researches macaws in urban settings. Juliet "very probably feels lonely, and for that reason goes to the enclosure to communicate and interact."

Aside from Juliet, the last sighting of a blue-and-yellow macaw flying free in Rio was in 1818 by an Austrian naturalist, according to Marcelo Rheingantz, a biologist at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and there are no other types of macaws in the city. The lovebirds featured in the 2011 film "Rio" are Spix's macaws, which are native to a different region of Brazil and possibly extinct in the wild.

Being boisterous with brilliant plumage helps macaws find each other in dense forest, but also makes them easier targets for hunters and animal traffickers. They're often seen in other Brazilian states and across the Amazon, and it is suspected Juliet escaped from captivity.

Biologists at BioParque aren't sure if Juliet's nuzzling is limited to one caged Romeo, or a few of them. They're not even certain Juliet is female; macaw gender is near impossible to determine by sight, and requires either genetic testing of feathers or blood, or examination of the gonads.

Either would be interference merely to satisfy human curiosity with no scientific end, biologist Angelita Capobianco said inside the enclosure. Nor would they consider confining Juliet, who often soars overhead and appears well-nourished.

"We don't want to project human feelings. I look at the animal, and see an animal at ease," Capobianco

said, noting Juliet has never exhibited behavior to indicate disturbance, such as insistently pecking at the fence.

"Who am I to decide it should only stay here? I won't. It comes and goes, and its feathers are beautiful."

After more than a year of COVID-19 quarantine and travel bans, the appeal of roaming without restriction is evident to humankind. Macaws are used to flying great distances of more than 30 kilometers (20 miles) a day, Guedes said.

Last year, BioParque gave its macaws more space: a 1,000-square-meter (10,700-square-foot) aviary where they fly beside green parrots and golden parakeets to compose an aerial, technicolor swirl. It's a massive upgrade from prior enclosures that were roughly 100 square feet. BioParque reopened to the public in March, after privatization of Rio's dilapidated zoo and almost 17 months of renovations.

BioParque aims to feature species associated with research programs at universities and institutes. One such initiative is Refauna, which reintroduces species into protected areas with an eye on rebuilding ecosystems, and is participating with BioParque to start breeding blue-and-yellow macaws.

The plan is for parents to raise some 20 chicks that will receive training on forest food sources, the peril of predators and avoidance of power lines. Then the youngsters will be released into Rio's immense Tijuca Forest National Park, where Juliet has been sighted and is thought to sleep each night.

"Their role could be important in terms of ecosystem and reforestation. It's a big animal with big beak that can crack the biggest seeds, and not all birds can," said Rheingantz, the university biologist, who is also Refauna's technical coordinator. "The idea is for it to start dispersing those seeds, complementing forest animals that can't."

After some pandemic-induced delays, the project has slowly restarted and Rheingantz expects to release blue-and-yellow macaws into Tijuca park toward the end of 2022.

After two decades of relative solitude, Juliet will then have the chance to fly with friends. Neves said Juliet could teach them how to navigate the forest, or even find a love of her own.

Burkina Faso's army chaplains tested by extremist conflict

By SAM MEDNICK The Associated Press

KAYA, Burkina Faso (AP) — In the more than 15 years Salomon Tibiri has been offering spiritual succor as a military pastor in Burkina Faso, he's never fielded so many calls from anxious soldiers and their relatives as in recent years, when the army found itself under attack by Islamic extremist fighters.

"Before the crisis there was more stability," Tibiri said, seated in a military camp church in the city of Kaya, in the hard-hit Center-North region. "Now (the soldiers) are busier, and when you approach them you feel their stress — much more stress."

Once considered a beacon of peace and religious coexistence in the region, the West African nation has been embroiled in unprecedented violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State since 2016, throwing an ill-equipped and undertrained army into disarray — and overwhelming the chaplains tasked with supporting them.

In interviews in the Center-North and in Ouagadougou, the capital, military chaplains told The Associated Press that they are stretched thin by the unprecedented conflict and what assistance they are able to provide through phone calls and prayer services is insufficient.

Just seven chaplains, hailing from Protestant, Catholic and Muslim faiths, are charged with spiritually advising some 11,000 soldiers and helping maintain their morale. The army has not devoted what little resources it has for them to embed with units, and they say the distance only makes it harder to keep soldiers motivated.

The troops "face death every day. ... At this moment they also need to have much more spiritual help," said Noel Henri Zongo, a chaplain and Catholic priest.

It's crucial work as experts say the psychological effects of conflict like what's occurring in Burkina Faso can be particularly tough on soldiers who are experiencing it in their country for the first time. It can put them at greater risk for post-traumatic stress disorder and also increase the likelihood of them acting in

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ways contrary to their moral values.

Last year 524 civilians were killed by soldiers and local defense militias fighting alongside them, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, more than the 432 killed by the extremists. At least 180 bodies were found in mass graves near the government-controlled town of Djibo, with evidence of army involvement in large-scale executions according to Human Rights Watch.

Etienne Bonkougou, another of the chaplains, said he regularly counsels troops grappling with the question of whether their participation in the fight makes them defenders or killers.

"The Bible says not to kill, so as a soldier these questions often arise," Bonkougou said. "To kill another, to watch a colleague die (or kill someone yourself), should you kill? Should you not kill?"

To help them reconcile that dilemma, he uses biblical examples of devout people fighting in wars, and advises that "even sometimes God himself orders killing."

Soldier Luc Yelkouni acknowledged that the conflict "impacts our morale."

A 29-year-old veteran of nearly a decade with the military, he had never before suffered the kind of trauma as in recent years, with one colleague after another killed by the extremists. After a stint in the Sahel, he turned to a military priest for help dealing with an experience from his deployment that was so traumatic he said he didn't want to go into details, even three years later.

Speaking to the priest was reassuring, Yelkouni said.

The chaplains "play a key role for us," he said, "and the collaboration is really good."

While the chaplains did not say what they think the army should do, one said it would be helpful if there were four or five more of them. And they wish they could be physically closer to those deployed for dangerous duty.

"The role of a chaplain is to be present where the men are," Zongo said, "and what he needs to bring is the necessary capacity to face danger and to get up after failure."

The army, whose communications team facilitated the chaplain interviews and sat in on them, did not respond to a request for comment.

But last year, in an acknowledgment that its clergy needed help, it brought in U.S. military chaplains to train their counterparts.

Maj. Mike Smith, lead chaplain with U.S. Special Operations Command Africa, said the Burkina Faso chaplains had never been trained in tasks like caring for the wounded, counseling families, mourning the dead and motivating fighters.

"(The army was) seeing casualties on a regular basis, whether soldiers were being killed in attacks or wounded in attacks," Smith said. "And ... it was tearing at the resiliency of their force, just as a whole, and it even impacted their retention."

With the coronavirus pandemic also affecting operations, the U.S. supplied the Burkina Faso chaplains with iPads that they used to record sermons and broadcast them to the front lines through messaging apps.

How much they are able to lift spirits can have real consequences, with experts saying low morale in the ranks is impacting Burkina Faso's counter-terrorism strategy.

Héni Nsaibia, an analyst with the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project who specializes in the Sahel region that has been the epicenter of the violence, said it appears that volunteer militias have essentially "replaced" the army on the front lines as soldiers prefer to stay in their barracks.

A decision last month to conduct airstrikes and use special forces rather than launch a ground offensive after a deadly ambush in the eastern part of the country is also a likely indication of greater reluctance among regular troops, he added.

Despite the limited resources, soldiers said the chaplains have been a lifeline.

Yempabou Kobori, 30, said one thing that keeps him going is a Bible verse his pastor shared from him from the Book of Psalms, about staying safe even as thousands around you fall. He recites it before battle.

"It reminds me that I am not alone," Kobori said.

Stefanik's rise toward leadership job irks conservatives

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By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Conservatives in and out of Congress are expressing opposition to Rep. Elise Stefanik's rise toward House Republicans' No. 3 leadership job, grumbling that's unlikely to derail her but serves notice that the right wing is battling again to affect the party's future.

House Republicans plan to meet privately next week, probably Wednesday, and seem certain to oust Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., from that top post. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., seems likely to postpone a vote on replacing Cheney until sometime later, according to two House GOP aides who discussed the delay on condition of anonymity, giving restive conservatives a chance to coalesce behind an alternative.

It's unlikely any challenger would defeat Stefanik, who has the backing of former President Donald Trump, McCarthy and No. 2 House GOP leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana. That triumvirate — especially the former president, whose grip on the party seems as firm as ever — virtually assures victory for Stefanik, 36, a onetime Trump critic who evolved into his strident ally.

But with the hard right distrustful of Stefanik, owner of one of the House GOP's most moderate voting records, conservatives say forcing her to face a challenge would signal she's not universally accepted and will have to contend with them moving forward.

"We must not rush into a de-facto coronation of any handpicked replacement whose voting record does not reflect the views of the conference," first-term conservative Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., said in a statement. "We must select someone who will wholeheartedly support the conservative membership."

Good said Republicans should be allowed to "work through the process" of replacing Cheney. The conservative Club for Growth, wary of Stefanik's past opposition to tax cuts and easing environmental regulations, is also pushing for time so a Stefanik rival can emerge, a view Republicans say is widely shared among conservatives.

The hard-right House Freedom Caucus has taken no public position on Stefanik. But its members, said to number around 40, are known to be uncomfortable with her.

As she works to secure her election, Stefanik has told colleagues she'd serve as No. 3 leader only through the 2022 election year, said a GOP lawmaker and an aide speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations. She's said she'd take the top GOP slot on the House Education and Labor Committee the following year. The scenario was first reported by Politico.

Delaying the Stefanik vote could also help McCarthy, who hopes to be elected speaker should Republicans win House control in the 2022 elections. There's no need for him to risk support from conservatives, long skeptical of him, by denying them a chance to advance a Stefanik challenger.

The dustup is underscoring the disconnect that sometimes exists between Trump and the party's ideological right wing. It also poses a test of conservatives' clout when they don't have the former president behind them — a battle they seem likely to lose this time.

Conservatives have tussled for years for influence within the GOP. They've won some fights, like forcing the early retirement of Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, but lost many others.

"Leadership elections are always an opportunity for discussions about the future" of House Republicans, said Michael Steel, who was a top aide to Boehner and other leading GOP figures.

Stefanik, whose office declined to comment for this article, does have some significant conservative credentials. These include past support from the National Rifle Association, endorsements from the Susan B. Anthony List, an anti-abortion group, and recent praise from Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, a conservative leader.

But she's consistently gotten moderate scores for her voting record: a lifetime 48% from Heritage Action for America and 35% from Club for Growth, a pair of conservative organizations, among the lowest grades for House Republicans.

She voted with Trump 78% of the time when he was president, according to votes tracked by the website fivethirtyeight.com, again one of the lowest marks in the House GOP. That included voting to oppose Trump's signature 2017 tax cuts, his unilateral use of money to build the southern border wall and his

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withdrawal of troops from Syria.

Stefanik has "a lot of work to do" to win over the GOP's more conservative activists, said Adam Brandon, president of the conservative FreedomWorks.

Stefanik criticized Trump during his 2016 presidential campaign, including calling his remarks in a 2005 video about sexually assaulting women "offensive" and "just wrong." She said his crude description of African countries in 2018 was "contrary to our American ideals."

In 2019, she became a highly visible foe of Trump's first impeachment over his attempts to pressure Ukraine to produce political dirt about Joe Biden, who was then a presidential candidate.

She has since embraced many of Trump's evidence-free claims about 2020 election fraud. She declared this week that states unconstitutionally changed their election laws and said she supports an audit of Arizona votes that conservatives are using to bolster suspicions about the results.

Stefanik's northern New York district backed Barack Obama in the 2008 and 2012 presidential election, then Trump in 2016 and 2020.

"You can't really believe whether she is or isn't" a Trump supporter, the Club for Growth's McIntosh said. "I'd warn him that, in a couple of years, she won't be for you."

Cheney, on the other hand, was rated 80% by Heritage Action and 65% by Club for Growth, while voting 93% of the time with Trump.

Cheney is being deposed after voting to impeach Trump for encouraging supporters who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6 and for energetically contesting his false claims that his 2020 election defeat to Biden was fraudulent.

Some Republicans have said that as a party leader, she should have stifled her criticisms of Trump, which they fear are distracting from efforts to recapture the House. Cheney has cast her position as defending the Constitution.

Washington Post says US secretly obtained reporters' records

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump Justice Department secretly seized the phone records of three Washington Post reporters who covered the federal investigation into ties between Russia and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, the newspaper said Friday.

The disclosure sets up a new clash between the federal government and news organizations and advocates for press freedom, who regard the seizures of reporters' records as incursions into constitutionally protected newsgathering activity. Similar actions have occurred only rarely over the past decade, including a seizure of phone records of Associated Press reporters and editors over a 2012 story that revealed a foiled bomb plot.

In a statement published by the newspaper, Cameron Barr, the Post's acting executive editor, said: "We are deeply troubled by this use of government power to seek access to the communications of journalists. The Department of Justice should immediately make clear its reasons for this intrusion into the activities of reporters doing their jobs, an activity protected under the First Amendment."

The action is presumably aimed at identifying the reporters' sources in national security stories published in the early months of Trump's administration, as federal investigators scrutinized whether his 2016 campaign had coordinated with the Kremlin to sway the election.

The records' seizure was approved by Justice Department leadership last year. The reporters — Ellen Nakashima, Greg Miller and Adam Entous, who has since left the Post — were notified in letters dated May 3 that the Justice Department had obtained records for their home, work or cellphone numbers.

The records sought cover the period of April 15, 2017, to July 31, 2017, according to the newspaper. Justice Department guidelines for media leak investigations mandate that such actions are to be taken only when other avenues for obtaining the information have been exhausted, and that the affected reporters are to be notified unless it's determined that it would impede the investigation or interfere with national security.

"While rare, the Department follows the established procedures within its media guidelines policy when

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seeking legal process to obtain telephone toll records and non-content email records from media members as part of a criminal investigation into the unauthorized disclosure of classified information," department spokesman Marc Raimondi said in a statement.

"The targets of these investigations are not the news media recipients but rather those with access to the national defense information who provided it to the media and thus failed to protect it as lawfully required," he added.

Bruce Brown, the executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, said it "raises serious First Amendment concerns" for the government to obtain records of journalists' communications.

"It is imperative that the new Justice Department leadership explain exactly when prosecutors seized these records, why it is only now notifying the Post, and on what basis the Justice Department decided to forgo the presumption of advance notification under its own guidelines when the investigation apparently involves reporting over three years in the past," Brown said in a statement.

The government also said it had received a court order to get email records from the reporters that would have shown who they had emailed and when, but that it did not obtain those records, the newspaper said.

The Post said the Justice Department did not specify the purpose of the subpoena or identify any articles at issue. But the time period covered by the subpoena includes the publication of a story that suggested that intelligence intercepts indicated that Jeff Sessions, at the time Trump's attorney general, had discussed campaign issues with Russia's then-ambassador, Sergey Kislyak.

The Justice Department under former Attorney General Eric Holder in 2015 announced revised guidelines for obtaining records from the news media during criminal leak investigations, removing language that news organizations said was ambiguous and requiring additional levels of review before a journalist could be subpoenaed.

The updated policy was a response to outrage among news organizations over Obama administration tactics seen as overly aggressive and hostile toward newsgathering.

Sessions, Holder's successor, announced in 2017 a renewed crackdown on leaks of national security information to the media.

Rachel Zoll, much-admired AP religion writer, dead at 55

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Rachel Zoll, who for 17 years as religion writer for The Associated Press endeared herself to colleagues, competitors and sources with her warm heart and world-class reporting skills, died Friday in Amherst, Massachusetts, after a three-year bout with brain cancer. She was 55.

Zoll covered religion in all its aspects, from the spiritual to the political, and her stories reached a global audience. But her influence was far greater than that. Other publications often followed her lead, and AP staffers around the world depended on her generosity and guidance.

"Rachel was one of the most universally beloved colleagues we had," said AP's managing editor, Brian Carovillano. "She was also one of the best reporters, on any beat. ... She had a knack for finding the story or angle that no one else considered but is packed with insight and surprises."

"Most importantly," he added, "she was always the best kind of colleague, always available for help or consultation. ... She always had time for everyone."

Zoll was at the forefront of coverage of two papal transitions, the clergy sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, and tensions within many denominations over race, same-sex marriage and the role of women.

She often broke news, as in 2014, when she was the first to report Pope Francis' appointment of Blase Cupich to become the new archbishop of Chicago.

But she also told stories in depth: a 2016 election-year piece examining how conservative Christians felt under siege in a changing nation. A series about Christian missionaries from Africa launching initiatives in the United States. A feature about two churches in Georgia -- one black, one white -- trying to bridge build a connection by confronting racism.

Not all of her stories were so heavy. In 2005, she reported from Tullahoma, Tennessee, on a Bible study

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class called "Finding the Way Back to Mayberry" developed by two men who believed watching "The Andy Griffith Show" could lead to spiritual enlightenment.

"Mayberry may be fictitious, but its lessons are not," preacher Pat Allison told Zoll.

Her work was honored repeatedly by the Religion News Association; it gave her a Special Recognition Award in September 2018, saluting her work over the years and her collegiality.

"She was one of the great personalities in the profession -- or really anywhere," said RNA contest chairman Jeff Diamant at the awards banquet. "This makes it really hard to get mad at Rachel Zoll, even when she beats you on a story in your hometown."

Frank Baker, who was Zoll's editor when she joined the AP's Providence office in 1996, nominated her for the AP's most prestigious in-house honor -- a Gramling Award, which she won in 2018

"I've worked with countless outstanding journalists. None is better than Rachel," wrote Baker, now AP's news editor for California. "She never gets outworked. She never gets intimidated by a subject. And she never loses her sense of humor."

Zoll, who earned a bachelor's degree from Tufts University and a master's from the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, worked in her hometown at The Salem (Mass.) Evening News before joining the AP in Boston in 1995.

She moved on to Providence for a short stay before being appointed correspondent in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1998. She returned to Providence as correspondent the next year, and became a New York-based religion writer in May 2001.

Laurie Goodstein, The New York Times' religion writer from 1997 to 2019, said Zoll was revered by her competitors on the beat.

"Rachel mastered the art of interrogating powerful religious leaders and holding them to account without being confrontational or disrespectful," said Goodstein, now the Times' deputy international editor.

"She would go to the microphone at a press conference, face a panel of Catholic bishops peering down from a dais, and ask the pivotal question that cut right to the heart of the matter," Goodstein said via email. "Then amidst the hubbub in the press room, she would hammer out a clear, even-handed, compelling story on the religious controversy of the day."

One of Zoll's frequent sources was the Rev. James Martin, a Catholic priest who is editor-at-large of the Jesuit publication America. He recalled her laughter, staccato-like and frequent.

"Rachel was not only an amazing reporter, who was dogged in her pursuit of a story, but a wonderful person: warm, smart, funny," Martin told the AP. "Sometimes when she called me for a story, we spent more time laughing than talking about the story."

Zoll became ill in January 2018 as she was helping negotiate a major expansion of AP's religion coverage via a grant from the Lilly Endowment. A few weeks later, she was diagnosed with the incurable cancer glioblastoma.

Even after that diagnosis, her years of source-building and intricate preparation ensured that AP was first to receive the news of the death of renowned evangelist Billy Graham on Feb. 21, 2018.

Zoll was born in Salem, where her father, Samuel Zoll, served as city councilor and mayor before embarking on a judicial career that included 28 years as chief justice of the Massachusetts District Courts. He died in 2011.

She is survived by her mother, Marjorie Aronow Waldman; three older siblings and their spouses -- Barry Zoll and his wife, Susan; Cheryl Zoll and Eric Sawyer, and Risa Zoll and Tim Williams; and five nieces.

Cheryl said her sister had other talents, beyond journalism -- she was a gifted musician. Over the years, she played piano, French horn and trumpet.

She even joined an all-woman accordion orchestra -- the Main Squeeze. In 2006, she recalled a performance at a New York venue when one band member took a sledgehammer to a squeezebox.

"There were times in the first year or so when I wanted to quit. I felt humiliated onstage," she wrote. "But then I realized that no matter how many times we bombed, it was always great to step outside the dead-seriousness of adulthood and do something ridiculous like playing James Brown with 14 other ac-

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cordionists while a friend smashed an instrument into pulp in front of a crowd.

"That night at Irving Plaza, I realized how lucky I am: I'm with the band."

California leaving: State population declines for first time

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California's population fell by more than 182,000 last year, the first yearly loss ever recorded for the nation's most populous state that halted a growth streak dating to its founding in 1850 on the heels of a gold rush that prompted a flood of people to seek their fortune in the West.

The figures released Friday followed last week's announcement from the U.S. Census Bureau that California would lose a congressional seat for the first time because it grew more slowly than other states over the past decade. Still, California's population of just under 39.5 million and soon-to-be 52-member congressional delegation remain by far the largest.

California's population has surged and slowed in the decades since its founding, with notable increases following World War II and the tech boom of the 1980s and '90s that put Silicon Valley on the map.

In recent years, more people have left California for other states than have moved there, a trend Republicans say is a result of the state's high taxes and progressive politics. The average sale price of a single-family home in California hit a record \$758,990 in March, a 23.9% increase from a year ago.

"The numbers don't lie. People are leaving our state because it's not affordable to live here," tweeted Kevin Faulconer, the former mayor of San Diego and one of the Republican candidates hoping to unseat Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom in this year's expected recall election.

But the Newsom administration says California's population decline is an outlier, blaming it on the coronavirus pandemic that turned everything upside down in 2020.

California has been steadily losing people to other states for years. From 2010 to 2020, about 6.1 million people left for other states and only 4.9 million arrived from other parts of the country, according to an analysis of census data by the Public Policy Institute of California.

But the influx of international immigrants and births outpacing deaths have always been enough to overcome that loss. That changed in 2020.

In a normal year, California might have between 140,000 and 150,000 people move in from other countries. In 2020, it was just 29,000 people — a direct impact, state officials say, of the Trump administration halting new visas for much of the year.

Global lockdowns because of the coronavirus prompted a 29% decline in international students coming to California, or about 53,000 people.

Births continued their steady decline, mirroring a national trend. But deaths soared as the coronavirus killed 51,000 people in California last year, accounting for a 19% increase of the state's death rate compared to the previous three-year average.

"If it were not for the pandemic last year, we might be having a very different conversation today," said Walter Schwarm, California's chief demographer.

The deaths were more pronounced in the state's most populated cities, including Los Angeles, which saw a 27% increase over its three-year average. Overall, Los Angeles lost nearly 52,000 people, the third straight year of decline that has put its population at just over 3.9 million.

Eric McGhee, a senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, said the state's population decline is "largely a function of the pandemic." He says the state will likely return to its trend of slow growth this year as things return to normal.

But he said the underlying issues causing that slow growth will remain, including a housing shortage that is driving prices to an all time high. A recent PPIC analysis of census data showed people moving to California make more money and had higher education levels than people who moved out.

"The thing that policy makers have the most control over probably is creating an environment where life is affordable," he said.

The state's four most populated cities -- LA, San Diego, San Jose and San Francisco -- lost a combined

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88,000 people in 2020. Meanwhile, major inland cities including Sacramento, Fresno and Bakersfield added population, evidence of people fleeing high-priced coastal cities for cheaper living.

Population estimates released last week by the U.S. Census Bureau showed paltry growth in California. But those numbers showed California's population as of April 2020. The numbers the state released Friday reflect California's population as of January 2021.

The state's population estimate comes from a number of sources, including birth and death counts, the number of new driver's licenses and address changes, school enrollments and federal tax returns.

Weak jobs report spurs new arguments over big fed spending

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden insists an unexpected slowdown in companies' hiring is clear new proof the U.S. needs the multitrillion-dollar federal boost he's pushing. But his sales effort is challenged by critics who say Friday's jobless figures show his earlier aid legislation — successfully rushed through Congress — is actually doing more harm than good.

Biden's promised economic comeback hardly stalled on Friday. But it seemed to sputter a bit with a report that found merely modest April job gains of 266,000 and complicated his new \$4 trillion push for infrastructure, education and children.

The employment report failed to show that the U.S. economy was accelerating so much as stutter-stepping along as the unemployment rate ticked up to 6.1%. Economists had projected roughly one million added jobs last month, and the modest hiring indicated that the earlier \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package has provided an uneven boost so far.

The figures present Biden with a fresh challenge at a critical moment in his presidency. He is betting that an open embrace of massive government spending will help resolve the nation's public health and financial turmoil — and lift the political prospects for Democrats heading into next year's elections. But the disappointing jobs numbers could also embolden his critics and stiffen the Republican resistance to the infrastructure package Biden is trying to push through Congress.

Addressing the report, Biden sought to ease concerns.

"We knew this wouldn't be a sprint—it'd be a marathon," he said. The pandemic relief package "was designed to help us over the course of a year, not 60 days. A year. We never thought that after the first 50 or 60 days everything would be fine. Today, there's more evidence our economy is moving in the right direction. But it's clear we have a long way to go."

Biden's opponents say the legislation actually worsened problems in at least one way, with expanded unemployment benefits that gave the jobless a reason to stay at home instead of seeking work.

The president said the jobs data don't show that. And advocates for his plans argue that the report shows more spending is needed to sustain the economy.

There are also issues of supply shortages — for computer chips, lumber and more — that are holding back growth, a reminder that the world's largest economy seldom bends perfectly to the wishes of lawmakers.

The fate of the president's agenda may depend on how the public processes and understands the April jobs report in the coming weeks, said Jon Lieber, a managing director at the Eurasia Group, a political risk advisory and consulting firm.

"Are the Republicans able to seize on this as, 'This is what happens when the government gets involved in the economy and screws things up?' Or, does the public see this as the need for more government support?" Lieber said. "That's the argument for the next month."

One clear takeaway across partisan lines was a need for caution in interpretation. A single monthly report can be volatile. The three-month average of job gains is still a healthy 524,000.

Michael Strain, an economist at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, noted that many businesses have said they cannot find workers to hire despite increases in hourly pay. Strain said he plans to monitor upcoming reports to see if that pattern holds in what could be a troubling sign for Biden's vision of how to generate growth through government spending.

"If we continue to hear a growing chorus of businesses complaining about worker shortages and if wages continue to rise, then it will be tempting to conclude that a lot of the 8 million jobs we are currently missing aren't coming back," Strain said.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which represents businesses, put the blame squarely on the relatively generous unemployment benefits that Biden extended as part of his relief package. The group said the checks prevent people from accepting jobs.

"One step policymakers should take now is ending the \$300 weekly supplemental unemployment benefit," said Neil Bradley, chief policy officer at the Chamber. "Based on the Chamber's analysis, the \$300 benefit results in approximately one in four recipients taking home more in unemployment than they earned working."

Jared Bernstein, a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, said he has heard companies say they're struggling to find workers, but he didn't see those concerns reflected in the jobs report. For example, restaurants and bars added 187,000 jobs last month even though workers in that relatively low-wage sector would, in theory, have an incentive to just collect unemployment.

The jobs report hinted at other factors that could strengthen Biden's agenda. It showed losses for women, who were forced into caregiver roles for children and relatives because of the pandemic. The family demands stopped them from holding outside jobs.

There was a drop of 165,000 for women over the age of 20 last month who were holding or seeking jobs. By contrast, men saw gains of 355,000 in labor force participation.

One way to bring women back could be Biden's plans to fund child care, create a national family leave program and expand the child tax credit through 2025 — the idea being that government action is needed to unlock the job market.

"When you start squinting at this data to figure out what is going on, it looks like you need more government to get past a labor shortage," said Michael Madowitz, an economist at the liberal Center for American Progress.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi cited the "disappointing" jobs report as proof that Biden's \$4 trillion agenda must be approved quickly.

"The evidence is clear that the economy demands urgent action, and Congress will not be deterred or delayed from delivering transformational investments for the people," the Democratic congressional leader said.

AP Interview: NASA chief big on climate, hedges on moon date

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA's new administrator is big on tackling climate and diversifying the agency's workforce, but hedging on whether the U.S. can put astronauts on the moon by 2024.

In his first interview since becoming NASA's top official this week, former Sen. Bill Nelson told The Associated Press on Friday that tracking climate change is a top issue. He also wants to diversify the space agency's workforce so it reflects America.

His underlying vision for NASA: "to explore the heavens with humans and machines."

For landing astronauts on the moon, Nelson said the goal remains 2024, a deadline set by the Trump administration. But he said he needs more time to review the matter, especially with challenges to the contract for the astronauts' lunar lander.

"That is the intended schedule, but I think we have to put a dose of sobering reality into our analysis," he said from NASA headquarters in Washington.

The lunar expeditions will benefit the Martian crews, according to Nelson. Whether the 2030s is still feasible for human Mars missions, "all of that is being discussed," he said.

Nelson commended Elon Musk's SpaceX for its achievements over the past year — flying astronauts to and from the International Space Station for NASA, and just this week successfully launching and landing a full-scale Starship prototype for the first time. Starship is what NASA intends to use to land astronauts

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on the moon; that \$3 billion contract, however, is being protested by the two losing companies.

He's also in support of all the private flights coming up, first by Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin to the fringes of space in July and then by SpaceX all the way to orbit in September.

Might the 78-year-old Nelson — who flew on space shuttle Columbia in 1986 — be interested in a commercial space ride?

"I double-dare them to offer me the opportunity," he said, laughing. He quickly clarified, "It's time for the young ones."

But he noted: "I'm still doing my pushups and I'm still doing my pullups and I'm still jogging — so don't tempt me."

Nelson said he did not seek the NASA administrator job, and had recommended three women. He said he told the Biden administration he would accept the nomination only if one of the women could serve as his deputy. Selected for the job: former space shuttle commander Pam Melroy.

Nelson is NASA's 14th administrator, the third to fly in space. He was sworn in Monday by Vice President Kamala Harris, who will head the National Space Council. In a show of bipartisan space support, the two previous administrators took part in the ceremony, representing the Obama and Trump administrations.

Nelson steps into NASA's top job after 44 years of public service, 42 of them in an elected public office.

Nelson grew up near Cape Canaveral, graduating from high school a year before Mercury astronaut Alan Shepard became the first American in space 60 years ago this week.

His paternal grandparents were homesteaders on what is now Kennedy Space Center property. He has a copy of the deed signed by President Woodrow Wilson in 1917. The 160 acres were located at the north end of the runway used for shuttle landings.

Nelson went to law school and served in the U.S. Army Reserve during the Vietnam War. After a few terms in the Florida legislature, Nelson, a Democrat, won election to Congress, first in the House and then the Senate, before a 2018 defeat ended his political career.

It was while Nelson was a congressman that he rode on the shuttle — just two weeks before Challenger's astronauts perished during liftoff.

Following the shuttles' retirement in 2011, NASA had to rely on Russia to ferry its astronauts to and from the space station — until the first SpaceX crew flight last year.

"Despite the differences of the political governments, we've always had that space cooperation," Nelson said. "And it is my fervent hope that that will continue."

9 Super League clubs accept UEFA fines, 3 rebels face bans

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

Only nine of the 12 European clubs who launched an ill-fated bid to form a Super League have agreed to a peace deal with UEFA and accepted being fined millions of dollars.

The remaining trio of rebels are at risk of being banned from the Champions League for not renouncing the breakaway. Barcelona, Real Madrid and Juventus have refused to approve what UEFA on Friday called "reintegration measures," and they will be referred to UEFA disciplinary bodies for sanctions after backing the new largely closed competition.

The Super League project imploded three weeks ago after the English clubs — Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester United, Manchester City and Tottenham — backed out inside 48 hours after a backlash from the fans and British government.

The Premier League clubs along with Atletico Madrid, AC Milan and Inter Milan have officially signed up to a settlement with UEFA to participate only in the existing open European competitions and accepted giving up 5% of revenue for one season playing in Europe. It wasn't specified if that would be this or a future season. Teams from England and Spain reaching the final can earn more than 100 million pounds (\$122 million), meaning 5 million euros would be sacrificed.

The nine clubs will also make a combined payment of 15 million euros for what UEFA called a "gesture of goodwill" to benefit children, youth and grassroots football.

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In a move to prevent them deploying the Super League threat again, the clubs have also agreed to be fined 100 million euros if they seek again to play in an unauthorized competition or 50 million euros if they breach any other commitments to UEFA as part of the settlement.

"The measures announced are significant, but none of the financial penalties will be retained by UEFA," said Aleksander Čeferin, the UEFA president. "They will all be reinvested into youth and grassroots football in local communities across Europe, including the UK. These clubs recognised their mistakes quickly and have taken action to demonstrate their contrition and future commitment to European football.

"The same cannot be said for the clubs that remain involved in the so-called 'Super League,' and UEFA will deal with those clubs subsequently."

Ceferin previously told The Associated Press that the clubs not disavowing the Super League could be banned from UEFA's competitions.

"UEFA has reserved all rights to take whatever action it deems appropriate against those clubs that have so far refused to renounce the so-called Super League," UEFA said on Friday. "The matter will promptly be referred to the competent UEFA disciplinary bodies."

The 12 clubs were dubbed the "dirty dozen" by Ceferin in a heated period when he fought to prevent the clubs launching a competition that would lock in 15 places for teams for more than two decades, rather than having to qualify through annual domestic league placings as is required for the Champions League.

The nine clubs to sign up to UEFA's "club commitment declaration" will rejoin the European Club Association, which they quit on May 18 when the Super League was announced, and they will terminate their legal involvement with the company.

The English clubs could yet face separate sanctions from the Premier League and Football Association which is investigating their attempt to split from the established structure. UEFA indicated a desire for the agreement to settle with UEFA to serve as mitigation when domestic punishments are assessed.

UEFA said at the request of clubs it "will ask and support that due consideration be given by their respective national associations and national leagues to the spirit, content and purpose of the commitments given by the clubs to UEFA."

English clubs are trying to regain the trust of fans after infuriating them by trying to join the Super League without consulting them.

After protests at Old Trafford forced the postponement of Manchester United's Premier League game against Liverpool on Sunday, co-owner Joel Glazer on Friday showed a level of contrition never seen in the 16 years of his family owning the club.

Glazer pledged to accelerate discussions with fans about fans being able to have a greater say in United, which is listed on the New York Stock Exchange, but the family controls the shares with the key voting rights.

"One of the clearest lessons of the past few weeks is the need for us to become better listeners," Glazer wrote to the Manchester United Supporters' Trust which he has previously declined to talk to. "To this end, I can commit the club will engage across all of the issues raised."

The Manchester United Supporters' Trust, which boasts more than 200,000 members, responded cautiously to the letter, saying the commitments could represent "in theory only" a change in the right direction by the family which also owns the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"We will, however, determine our position based on the resulting actions rather than these words alone," the trust said in a statement. "We have seen empty words too many times previously."

The complaints by United fans are about the Glazers loading debt onto the club and not investing sufficiently in upgrading Old Trafford.

While Chelsea fans still back Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich, they protested against the Super League project. Chelsea this week pledged to allow fans to be represented in board meetings to bring them into the decision-making process.

Palestinians, Israel police clash at Al-Aqsa mosque; 53 hurt

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By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinian worshippers clashed with Israeli police late Friday at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, a major holy site sacred to Muslims and Jews, in an escalation of weeks of violence in Jerusalem that has reverberated across the region.

The Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service said 136 people were wounded in clashes with police there and elsewhere in Jerusalem, including 83 who were hospitalized. It says most were wounded in the face and eyes by rubber-coated bullets and shrapnel from stun grenades. Israel said six police officers were wounded.

Earlier Friday, Israeli troops shot and killed two Palestinians and wounded a third after the men opened fire on a base belonging to Israel's paramilitary Border Police force in the occupied West Bank, the latest in a series of deadly confrontations in recent weeks that has coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. More unrest appears likely next week.

Tensions have soared in recent weeks in east Jerusalem, which is claimed by both Israel and the Palestinians. At the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Israel blocked off a popular gathering spot where Palestinians traditionally socialize at the end of their daylong fast. The move set off two weeks of clashes before Israel lifted the restrictions.

But in recent days, clashes have resumed due to Israel's threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in east Jerusalem, who have been embroiled in a long legal battle with Israeli settlers trying to acquire property in the neighborhood.

The United States said it was "deeply concerned" about the heightened tensions and called on all sides to work to de-escalate them. It also expressed concern about the threatened evictions.

"It's critical to avoid unilateral steps that would exacerbate tensions or take us further away from peace. And that would include evictions, settlement activity, and home demolitions," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jalina Porter told reporters in Washington.

The Al-Aqsa mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam. The site is also the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount and revere it as the spot where the biblical Temples stood. It has long been a flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence and was the epicenter of the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

Israeli police deployed in large numbers as Muslim worshippers were holding evening prayers at the site. It was unclear what sparked the violence, but videos circulating online showed worshippers throwing chairs, shoes and rocks at police, who fired stun grenades and rubber-coated bullets to disperse them. Smaller clashes broke out elsewhere in Jerusalem.

The Israeli police said protesters hurled stones, fireworks and other objects at them, wounding six officers who required medical treatment. "We will respond with a heavy hand to all violent disturbances, riots and attacks on our forces," it said in a statement.

Earlier, some 70,000 worshippers had attended the final Friday prayers of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa, the Islamic endowment that oversees the site said. Thousands protested afterwards, waving the green flags of the Islamic militant group Hamas and chanting pro-Hamas slogans.

Neighboring Jordan, which serves as the custodian of Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites, had earlier warned Israel against further "provocative" steps, while Israel's archenemy Iran encouraged the violence.

In the attack on Friday morning, Israeli police said three attackers fired on the base near the northern West Bank town of Jenin. The Border Police and an Israeli soldier returned fire, killing two of the men and wounding the third, who was evacuated to a hospital.

Israelis and Palestinians are bracing for more violence in the coming days.

Sunday night is "Laylat al-Qadr" or the "Night of Destiny," the most sacred in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Worshippers will gather for intense nighttime prayers at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City.

Sunday night is also the start of Jerusalem Day, a national holiday in which Israel celebrates its annexation of east Jerusalem and religious nationalists hold parades and other celebrations in the city. On Monday, an Israeli court is expected to issue a verdict on the evictions.

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Iran was meanwhile marking its own Quds, or Jerusalem, Day on Friday. The national holiday typically features anti-Israel protests and fiery speeches by Iranian leaders predicting Israel's demise.

"The downward and declining movement of the Zionist regime has begun and will not stop," Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised address. He called for continuing armed "resistance" in the Palestinian territories and urged Muslim nations support it.

This year, Ramadan has coincided with an uptick in Israeli-Palestinian violence focused on Jerusalem.

On Thursday, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian suspected of carrying out a drive-by shooting earlier this week in the West Bank that killed an Israeli and wounded two others. The day before, Israeli troops shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian near the West Bank city of Nablus. The military said several Palestinians had thrown firebombs toward soldiers.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza — territories the Palestinians want for their future state — in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally and views the entire city as its capital.

The Palestinians view east Jerusalem — which includes major holy sites for Jews, Christians and Muslims — as their capital, and its fate is one of the most sensitive issues in the conflict. In a call to Palestine TV, President Mahmoud Abbas praised the "courageous stand" of the protesters and said Israel bore full responsibility for the violence.

Israel's Foreign Ministry had earlier accused the Palestinians of seizing on the threatened evictions, which it described as a "real-estate dispute between private parties," in order to incite violence.

"The (Palestinian Authority) and Palestinian terror groups will bear full responsibility for the violence emanating from their actions. The Israel police will ensure public order is maintained," it tweeted earlier in the day.

Neighboring Jordan, which made peace with Israel in 1994 and is the custodian of Al-Aqsa, said "Israel's continuation of its illegal practices and provocative steps" in the city is a "dangerous game."

"Building and expanding settlements, confiscating lands, demolishing homes and deporting Palestinians from their homes are illegal practices that perpetuate the occupation and undermine the chances of achieving a just and comprehensive peace, which is a regional and international necessity," Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi tweeted.

The Islamic militant group Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip and opposes Israel's existence, has egged on the violence, and Palestinian militants in Gaza have fired rockets in support of the protesters.

Earlier this week, the shadowy commander of Hamas' armed wing, Mohammed Deif, released his first public statement in seven years, in which he warned Israel it would pay a "heavy price" if it evicts Palestinians from their homes.

US job growth slows sharply in sign of hiring struggles

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The recovery of America's job market hit a pause last month as many businesses — from restaurants and hotels to factories and construction companies — struggled to find enough workers to catch up with a rapidly strengthening economic rebound.

Employers added just 266,000 jobs in April, sharply lower than in March and far fewer than economists had expected. With viral cases declining and states and localities easing restrictions, the recovery from the pandemic recession has been so fast that many businesses have been caught flat-footed in the face of surging consumer demand.

Last month's hiring slowdown appears to reflect a host of factors. Nearly 3 million people are reluctant to look for work because they fear catching the virus, according to government surveys. More women also dropped out of the workforce last month, likely to care for children, after many had returned in the previous two months.

In addition, construction companies and manufacturers, especially automakers, have been left short of parts because of clogged supply chains and have had to slow production for now. Both sectors pulled back

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on hiring in April. And some businesses say they believe that a \$300-a-week jobless benefit, paid for by the federal government, is discouraging some of the unemployed from taking new jobs.

Still, companies have added jobs for four straight months, the Labor Department said Friday, though the government lowered its estimate of job growth for February and March by a combined 78,000. April's total is far below March's gain of 770,000.

The resumption of hiring has encouraged some Americans to start looking for jobs, which means they are newly counted as unemployed if they don't immediately find work. This is what happened in April, when the unemployment rate ticked up from 6% to 6.1%.

Employers are now posting far more jobs than they did before the pandemic, and "help wanted" signs dot many restaurant windows. Other telltale signs of labor shortages have emerged as well: Average hourly pay rose 0.7% in April to \$30.17, which the government said suggests that the fast reopening of the economy "may have put upward pressure on wages." The average workweek also rose, evidence that companies are asking their employees to work more.

"Demand is outpacing supply," said Daniel Zhao, senior economist at Glassdoor, a job listings website. "That's something that is occurring across the economy, in semiconductors to lumber, and we're seeing a similar crunch in the labor market."

Steven Tamasi, CEO of Boston Centerless, which manufactures parts for medical device makers and aerospace companies, said his clients had estimated in January that it would take nine months to regain pre-pandemic sales levels.

"Well, it only took three months," he said. "It happened so fast, people were caught off guard."

Tamasi wants to add 10 workers to his staff of about 114, which would give him a larger workforce than he had before the viral outbreak. He is quickly dusting off old contacts at state labor agencies and community colleges. But some candidates disappear after an interview or even after accepting a job. To attract more applicants, he is considering raising entry-level pay and accelerating pay raises for new workers.

The drop in hiring suggests that the Federal Reserve is still months away from slowing its purchases of Treasuries and other bonds, which are intended to keep long-term interest rates low. Chair Jerome Powell has said that it would take "a string" of reports like the one for March to show that the economy was on track for a full recovery. Fed officials have signaled that they don't intend to raise their short-term benchmark rate until after 2023.

On Friday, the prospect of ongoing Fed stimulus helped fuel a stock market rally, with the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average both closing at record highs.

At a news conference, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen cautioned that a swift recovery from an event as catastrophic as a pandemic isn't likely to be free of disruptions. She cited shortages of lumber, computer chips and other goods.

"Starting up an economy again, trying to get it back on track after a pandemic in which there are a lot of supply bottlenecks is going to be, I think, a bumpy process," Yellen told reporters at the White House.

Some economists note, too, that the \$300-a-week federal jobless benefit, available until September, has come on top of state payments that average about \$320. The combined unemployment benefits mean that anyone earning less than \$32,000 a year can potentially receive more income from unemployment aid than from their previous jobs, according to economists at Bank of America.

Marie M., who asked that her full name not be used so her comments wouldn't affect her job prospects, said she had been juggling shifts at two restaurants in Los Angeles in the fall of 2019. Once the pandemic hit, she lost both jobs.

Last year, she collected around \$30,000 in unemployment aid — about the same amount she had earned working in 2019. In July, she plans to start looking for restaurant work again. This time, she feels more confident that she'll get the hours she needs. Restaurants are already reaching out to her about jobs, so she can afford to be more selective.

"Unemployment benefits have been like collective bargaining," she said. "They made a union out of all of us."

On Friday, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce responded to the April jobs report by calling for an end to

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the \$300-a-week federal unemployment supplement, saying it was giving some recipients less incentive to look for work.

Still, optimism about the economic recovery is growing. Many Americans are flush with cash after having received \$1,400 federal relief checks, along with savings they have built up after cutting back on travel, entertainment and dining out over the past year. Millions of consumers have begun spending their extra cash on restaurant meals, airline tickets, road trips and new cars and homes.

Most economists expect job growth to strengthen as more vaccinations are administered and trillions in government aid spreads through the economy. Even if another uptick in COVID-19 cases were to occur, analysts don't expect most states and cities to reimpose tough business restrictions. From month to month, though, the gains in the job market could prove choppy, as Friday's jobs report suggested.

The job losses by industry suggest that the economy is starting to rotate out of a pandemic economy. Transportation and warehousing, which had hired rapidly in the past year amid a burst of e-commerce, cut 74,000 jobs. Temporary workers, who are often added when companies are unsure of the future, dropped by more than 111,000.

By contrast, restaurants, hotels, and entertainment venues — businesses that have complained the loudest about a shortage of workers — added 331,000 jobs in April, even more than their 206,000 increase in March.

But other industries that are also facing worker shortages cut back. Construction companies added no jobs in April after having added 97,000 in March. Manufacturing lost 18,000 positions after hiring 54,000 the previous month.

As Americans release pent-up demand for entertainment, business is soaring at amusement parks and other venues. On Tuesday, at the Great Wolf Lodge in Williamsburg, Virginia, customers for the indoor water park and hotel were plentiful. Yet job-seekers for the company's hiring open house were relatively scarce.

Nick Licastro, general manager for the lodge, said customer demand is running higher than the company can accommodate because it's still limited to roughly 50% of its capacity by state rules. He said he expects business to return to pre-pandemic levels by summer if capacity restraints are lifted.

Licastro would like to hire about 100 workers — lifeguards, kitchen workers, hotel cleaners and others — to meet that demand. For now, the company has about 400 on staff, most of whom it recalled after it was allowed to reopen in September. The company had about two dozen interviews scheduled for Tuesday, along with some walk-ins.

"We'd love to have more, if you know of any," Licastro said. "It's becoming an increasingly more competitive market."

Other nearby entertainment venues are also staffing up for summer, including Busch Gardens, Kings Dominion and Colonial Williamsburg. Nationwide, Great Wolf wants to hire 2,000 employees across 16 locations.

David Earl, who worked at Great Wolf for three years until he left to focus on his college classes just before the pandemic, was among those applying for a job Tuesday. For now, Earl, who is 27, is working at a grocery store chain but said Great Wolf pays more. He tells friends that Great Wolf is hiring, but some are still fearful about catching the virus and are reluctant to apply.

Corruption, economic woes spark deadly protests in Colombia

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

BUCARAMANGA, Colombia (AP) — Kevin Anthony Agudelo wanted to live in a country where corruption was not part of everyday life. That dream motivated the electrician to join thousands of Colombians in a series of demonstrations against the government since last week.

He never returned home from his third protest.

Sobbing beside her 22-year-old son's coffin at a funeral home, Ángela Jiménez blamed Agudelo's shooting death on the same government he had hoped to change.

"It was like three protests. This was the last, and it was peaceful," Jiménez told The Associated Press on Thursday. "He told me that he was going to fight for the rights of Colombia, but he did not have bad

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things in mind because I didn't teach him that. My son said he wanted a better country, without so much corruption."

Deep social discontent that festered throughout the coronavirus pandemic is drawing thousands of Colombians into the streets to vent their anger at the government. But the mostly peaceful, nationwide protests have turned deadly, with at least 26 people killed and human rights groups warning of increasing abuses by security forces.

The unrest has become a clear warning sign of what other Latin American countries could face from a weary public frustrated by the health crisis, poverty and inequity.

Colombia's demonstrations erupted April 28, despite virus lockdown orders, after the government of President Ivan Duque introduced a tax reform that would have squeezed the middle class. The administration withdrew it four days later, but the protests continued and grew as reports emerged of police violence, deaths and disappearances.

Initially led by unions and supported by college students and social organizations, protesters have turned out in more than half of Colombia's municipalities, sometimes erecting roadblocks that officials say have led to food shortages, prevented vaccine deliveries and blocked ambulances. The response by security forces, heavily armed from decades of battling drug traffickers and guerrillas, is being scrutinized by human rights observers.

The government has promised investigations but also blames old foes, saying rebel groups have infiltrated protests and drug-trafficking enterprises are subsidizing the demonstrations.

At the funeral home, Jiménez blamed riot police for her son's death.

"I took a video of him at the morgue. The bullet entered through the right side of his chest and came out on the left side, went through his left arm," she said. "The friends who were with him told me that my son had done absolutely nothing and that they (the police) had killed him, that it had been a rifle shot."

Jiménez said Agudelo left home Monday for a rally in memory of young people who died in demonstrations in Cali, in southwest Colombia. She said her son's death is under investigation.

The Attorney General's Office and the agency responsible for monitoring human rights compliance reported Thursday that 26 people were killed in protests, including a police officer, and more than 800 injured. They did not specify the number of slayings in which police have been involved. Previously, the agencies alleged police involvement in a dozen.

Observers say the government count is low, in part because protesters don't always seek treatment for minor injuries. Human Rights Watch said it has received information on 36 deaths, of which it has confirmed that 11 occurred in the context of the protests.

"Every night, we are getting new reports of several protesters killed. The ongoing levels of police abuses and violence by protesters in Colombia are alarming," José Miguel Vivanco, the organization's director for the Americas, said in a statement. He added the Duque government "needs to take urgent and decisive steps to de-escalate the situation and protect human rights."

Duque on Thursday invited union leaders to talks. How far the dialogue can go is unclear, however, as popular frustration with his government predates the reform, which would have increased taxes on public services, fuel, wages and pensions.

What started as a protest over the government seeking to fill a \$6.3 billion gap has morphed into a general demand to pay longstanding debts to the most vulnerable in society, such as Indigenous and Afro Latino people. Protesters see a link to demonstrations of November 2019 on a host of issues: earlier tax increases, the murder of social leaders, official corruption, inequality and compliance with a peace agreement that led to the 2016 demobilization of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known by its Spanish acronym FARC.

Peter Tejada, 25, said he took part in demonstrations in the capital of Bogota, including what he described as a peaceful sit-in Tuesday that included children and senior citizens. He said he was wounded on his back and legs by tear gas canisters.

"Directly from the tank they were shooting," Tejada said of police, which he indicated were about 7 feet

(2 meters) away.

Vivanco tweeted that Human Rights Watch "corroborated the use of tanks with multiple projectile launchers aimed at protesters."

Police in Colombia have been "armed to the teeth" for decades as they fought along the military against guerrillas and drug traffickers, said Gladys McCormick, an associate professor of history at Syracuse University, noting that has led to a broader culture of law enforcement favoring a hard-line response.

"Many of these officers kind of came of age as a result of that culture, but also they have the weaponry," McCormick said. "So, their go-to response is always to sort of like go hard line and then ask questions later."

Colombians also have protested at their embassies in Mexico and Ecuador.

The demonstrations have the potential to spill into other countries where decades of corruption, flawed reforms, lack of investment in health care systems and other policies have made Latin America the most unequal region in the world. The pandemic has left millions without jobs amid the simmering anger.

The region "is ripe for unrest," especially in countries in need of major reforms or political changes, said Raul Gallegos, director and political risk adviser at the global firm Control Risks.

"Every country has their particular pressure points. One could argue that, you know, the pandemic has made all kinds of people angry," he said.

Texas GOP's voting restriction bill passes House

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press/Report for America

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas has become the latest Republican-dominated state to advance sweeping new limits on voting, despite no evidence of any problems with last year's vote and a coalition of state and federal officials calling the 2020 presidential election the most secure in history.

The GOP-led restrictions cleared the Texas House on Friday, starting with the a key vote at 3 a.m. It followed hours of debate that started the day before, and lawmakers are now likely to begin negotiating a final version of the legislation that will need approval before heading to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who signaled an eagerness to sign it.

"One step closer to my desk & making it TX law," he tweeted Friday.

From Florida to Georgia, Iowa and now Texas, Republican lawmakers have used unsubstantiated claims by former President Donald Trump and his allies to justify new voting restrictions. They argue the new limits, which largely target mail voting, are needed to boost public confidence and improve security. In some cases, the rules also create onerous requirements and penalties for local election officials.

In Texas, Democrats have virtually no path to stop the bill in the GOP-controlled Legislature, but they warned of legal fights ahead.

"You have your vote, you have your majority. But guess what? I look forward to seeing you in federal court," said Democratic state Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer before a final procedural vote Friday afternoon that sent the bill back to the Senate. He added that "history is on our side."

The vote in Texas came a day after Florida Gov. Rick DeSantis signed a wide-ranging list of new voting restrictions into law. New voting limits have also been signed into law in Georgia and Iowa. Elsewhere, Republicans in Ohio and Michigan are also pressing ahead with overhauls of various election procedures.

"We are seeing the strong effect of President Trump's big lie. We are seeing the Republican Party go all-in on supporting him and his lies," said Sylvia Albert, voting and elections director for Common Cause, which advocates for expanded voter access. "We are seeing them use this opportunity to create deliberate barriers to voting for Black and brown voters. It's un-American."

House Democrats had dug in for a long fight starting Thursday, then struck an agreement with Republicans that significantly watered down some of what advocates called the most problematic aspects of the bill, which passed 81-64. The session ends May 31.

The amendments lowered initially proposed enhanced criminal penalties, allowed poll watchers to be removed if they breach the peace and clarified that election judges and volunteers wouldn't be held liable for honest mistakes. Additionally, they instructed the state to develop an online format for tracking early

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ballots and to send voter registration applications to high schools.

Republican state Rep. Briscoe Cain, who authored the House version of the voting bill, said some of the changes were in response to recommendations made by disability rights groups and the NAACP.

"We don't need to wait for bad things to happen to protect the security of the election," Cain said. "I don't believe that this is voter suppression; I believe it is voter enhancement."

Other restrictions in Cain's bill would outlaw county officials from sending mail-ballot request forms to all registered voters, efforts voting officials in Harris County — where Cain is from — put in place last year to expand ballot access when in-person gatherings were more hazardous because of the coronavirus pandemic. Harris County, which includes Houston, is a Democratic stronghold where 44% of the nearly 5 million residents are Latino and 20% are Black.

Voting rights groups say poor and minority voters will bear the brunt of GOP restrictions, and that Republicans are counting on the privilege of their voters to overcome hurdles. Some Republicans across the country have expressed concern the new rules could end up hurting GOP voters as well. Republican voters, particularly seniors, have long embraced mail voting.

"What's even more perplexing is the proposed legislation attacks voting practices that Republicans have relied on for decades to turn out voters," Texas state Rep. Lyle Larson, a Republican, wrote in an opinion column this week.

On Tuesday, more than 50 companies and business organizations, including some in Texas, released an open letter expressing opposition to "any changes" that would make it harder to vote in that state.

Texas Republicans have angrily rejected those accusations. They say the measures merely would rein in powers that county leaders never had in the first place.

Angelina Jolie lets Taylor Sheridan drag her through hell

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Taylor Sheridan, initially brought on to rewrite the mountain thriller "Those Who Wish Me Dead," gradually got more invested in the movie. When another filmmaker dropped out, he called the studio with an offer.

"I said if I can get Angie to do this with me, I'll direct it for you," Sheridan says. "They said, 'Great. You'll never get Angie.'"

The skepticism on the part of Warner Bros. executives was warranted. Angelina Jolie, whose priorities have centered on filmmaking, international work and family, hasn't starred in a live-action film in six years. Over the last decade, her only leading performances have been two "Maleficent" movies and "By the Sea," which she directed and starred in alongside then-husband Brad Pitt.

But Sheridan's timing was right. Jolie, going through a painful and protracted divorce, was more interested in a quicker, simpler role on set. And the part of a Montanan smoke jumper haunted by trauma and guilt, was potentially cathartic.

"We all have times in our lives where we are broken. And we grieve and we're not sure we have anything left in us," Jolie said in an interview by Zoom from Los Angeles. "I identified more with a part of her that didn't feel she could do a lot, and hadn't done this in a long time. To be in this situation and have a director that is both sensitive and aware of the human experience, to go there and to feel it, but also to push you to find your strength and move forward."

"It was really what I needed at that time," says Jolie.

"Those Who Wish Me Dead," which will on May 14 open in theaters and on HBO Max, is an anomaly for other reasons, too. It's a star-led genre film not based on well-known intellectual property made by a major studio. (The film is based on Michael Koryta's 2014 book.) Like Sheridan's previous films — "To Hell or High Water," "Sicario" (both of which he wrote) and "Wind River" (which Sheridan wrote and directed), it's a tale of blood and justice across a vast and violent American landscape.

"To sound like a millennial, it's very on-brand for me," says Sheridan, chuckling. "But what's unique is we made this at a studio. This is a studio film and they trusted us to go do this. We made it like a '70s

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movie. They promoted it like a '70s movie. The biggest 21st century element is the fact that you'll be able to stream it or go to the theater."

In "Those Who Wish Me Dead," Jolie's Hannah Faber encounters a 12-year-old boy (Finn Little) in the wilderness who's fleeing two assassins. It was shot in New Mexico in May and June 2019 — a month after Jolie and Pitt were ruled legally single by a court. (A custody battle over their six children is ongoing.)

Snow was still falling in the mountains. Aside from the natural environs, Sheridan erected a faux forest and set it aflame. Jolie, an action star in "Mr. & Mrs. Smith," "Salt" and "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider," performed many of her stunts. Sheridan, accustomed to making films close to the land, had little luxury to offer beyond space heaters in tents and lavish, overbudget craft services. He cheerfully recalls the experience as miserable.

"You know, the character sort of drags Angie through emotional hell, and then I drug her through physical hell," Sheridan says from a remote lakeside quarantine in Ontario. "That's how we made the movie."

"And I loved every minute of it," Jolie says, smiling.

Jolie will next be seen in Marvel's "Eternals," by "Nomadland" director Chloé Zhao — another filmmaker drawn to fresh tales on old American frontiers. It's been an unexpected break from directing for Jolie, who last helmed 2017's Cambodian genocide drama "First They Killed My Father."

"I prefer directing but acting gives me more time at home," says Jolie. "It's less of a commitment."

Yet, if anything, the chances of such performances are getting slimmer. The pandemic, says the 45-year-old Jolie, has been a time of reevaluation — and movies are a diminishing priority.

"I was kind of spending more time at home regardless because of different family reasons. But if I was before spending half my time on my international work, I think I'll now be spending 80% of my time on this other work. I'll be doing less film work. Not quitting anything but a lot less," says Jolie. "I've mentally shifting into a different time in my life."

Jolie has been a special envoy to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees since 2012. She applauds President Joe Biden's recent expansion of U.S. refugee admissions but sees a global crisis only worsening, especially as countries struggling from the pandemic pull back on foreign aid.

"In the last decade, we saw numbers double. We're looking at 80 million displaced people. A lot of those people are displaced because of the climate and the way that's changing, and that's going to keep changing," says Jolie. "If we don't take it seriously, we're going to see a complete breakdown of some many things for so many people. Or this can be the turning point where we all pull together."

In juggling global inequity and personal turmoil, it's easy to see how the straightforward, physical demands of "Those Who Wish Me Dead" would appeal to Jolie.

"I like characters whose physical journey parallels the emotional journey they're going through," says Sheridan. "She was game. It was cold. I'd be like, 'Get in the river' and she'd be like, 'OK, I'm getting in the river.'"

NYC still storing COVID-19 victims in refrigerated trucks

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City is still using refrigerated trucks to store bodies of coronavirus victims, more than a year after they were first set up as temporary morgues as deaths surged at the height of the pandemic.

The city's medical examiner's office said Friday that 750 bodies are being kept in long-term storage in refrigerated trailers at a Brooklyn pier while family members sort out plans for their final resting places.

Dina Maniotis, a deputy commissioner with the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, told a city council committee on Wednesday that many of the bodies held at the 39th Street Pier could end up buried in the city's potter's field on Hart Island.

In April 2020, the city shortened the amount of time it would hold unclaimed remains to 14 days before burying them on Hart Island. At the time, officials said, they were exploring the option of interring unclaimed remains on the island temporarily so they could be moved later on.

Mark Desire, a spokesperson for the medical examiner's office, said permanent burial on Hart Island is

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an option for the next-of-kin of COVID-19 victims whose bodies remain in refrigerated trucks.

"Long term storage was created at the height of the pandemic to ensure that families could lay their loved ones to rest as they see fit," Desire said. "With sensitivity and compassion, we continue to work with individual families on a case by case basis during their period of mourning.

The non-profit news website The City reported on the matter this week. The website noted that between 500 and about 800 bodies have been kept in cold storage at any given time since April 2020.

Those figures were based on estimates by the medical examiner's office compiled by the website and Columbia University's Stabile Center for Investigative Reporting.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency sent 85 refrigerated trucks to serve as temporary morgues last year as COVID-19 deaths overwhelmed the city's permanent morgues and filled storage spaces in many hospitals to capacity.

Many were parked outside hospitals and workers in protective gear used forklifts to place bodies inside in what became a grim, daily ritual.

UK to ease holiday travel ban yet keeps most quarantines

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain announced a "first tentative step" Friday toward resuming international travel, saying U.K. citizens will be able to travel to countries including Portugal, Iceland and Israel later this month without having to quarantine upon their return.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said the country's current blanket ban on overseas vacations will be replaced on May 17 by a traffic-light system classifying countries as low, medium or high risk.

The "green list" of 12 low-risk territories also includes Gibraltar, the Faroe Islands and the Falkland Islands — but not major vacation destinations for Britons such as France, Italy, Spain and Greece, which are on the "amber" list. Britons traveling to those countries, and many others including the United States and Canada, will have to self-isolate for 10 days when they return.

Britons hoping for an overseas vacation this summer without a quarantine do not have a lot to choose from. Several countries on the green list are still closed to British visitors, including Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. Others are little-visited, such as the remote islands of Saint Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha.

"This is not a list generated and created to think about where people want to lie on beaches and then twist the science to fit it," Shapps said at a news conference.

He said the list would be reviewed regularly and would likely be expanded.

"We in this country have managed to construct a fortress against COVID. But the disease is still prevalent in other parts of the world, most notably at the moment in India," he said.

"That's why today's announcement, removing the 'stay in the U.K.' restrictions from May 17, is necessarily cautious," he said.

All but essential travel from Britain remains barred to "red list" countries with severe outbreaks, including India and South Africa, and people returning from them face 10 days of mandatory quarantine in a supervised hotel. On Friday the British government added Nepal, the Maldives and Turkey to that list.

Turkey's addition, which takes effect Wednesday, throws into doubt the ability of players and fans to travel to the Champions League soccer final between two English teams — Manchester City and Chelsea — which is due to be played in Istanbul on May 29.

Shapps said the government was "very open" to holding the game in Britain, but that it was a decision for soccer's European governing body, UEFA.

May 17 is the next date on the British government's roadmap out of lockdown. Pubs and restaurants in England can reopen indoor areas that day, and venues including theaters and cinemas can welcome limited audiences.

Britain has recorded more than 127,500 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe. But recent infections and deaths have plummeted thanks to extensive lockdowns and a rapid vaccination program.

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Two-thirds of U.K. adults have received at least one vaccine jab and almost a third have had both doses.

The campaign has relied heavily on the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, whose use has been restricted in some European countries because of a potential link to extremely rare blood clots.

In a change of advice, British authorities said Friday that people under 40 will not be given the AstraZeneca vaccine if another shot was available.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization said people aged 30 to 39 without underlying health conditions should receive an alternative vaccine, "where available and only if this does not cause substantial delays in being vaccinated." Last month it gave the same advice for people under 30.

"Any vaccine offered early is preferable to a vaccine offered too late," said Wei Shen Lim, who chairs the JCVI, an expert body that advises the government.

England's deputy chief medical officer, Jonathan Van-Tam, said the government expects to follow the new advice and still meet its target of giving everyone 18 and over a vaccine jab by July 31.

"We have to maintain the pace and scale of the U.K. vaccination program," Van-Tam said, adding that the AstraZeneca vaccine is safe and effective and "thousands are alive today" because they received it.

Britain is also using vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

British health officials say the risk from COVID-19 far exceeds any risk from the AstraZeneca vaccine for the vast majority of people, but the calculation is "more finely balanced" for younger groups, who tend not to suffer serious illness from coronavirus infections.

Up to April 28, Britain's medicines regulator had received 242 reports of blood clots accompanied by low platelet count in people who had received the AstraZeneca vaccine, out of 28.5 million doses given. There were 49 deaths.

The AstraZeneca vaccine, which is cheaper and easier to store than Pfizer or Moderna, is critical to global immunization campaigns. It is a pillar of the U.N.-backed program known as COVAX that aims to get vaccines to some of the world's poorest countries.

Talks 'intensify' on bringing US back to Iran nuclear deal

By DAVID RISING and PHILIPP JENNE Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — World powers held a fourth round of high-level talks Friday aimed at bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, with both sides signaling a willingness to work out the major stumbling blocks.

The talks began in Austria in early April. Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted following Friday's meeting that "the participants agreed on the need to intensify the process."

"The delegations seem to be ready to stay in Vienna as long as necessary to achieve the goal," he wrote.

The U.S. pulled out of the landmark 2015 deal in 2018 after then-President Donald Trump said the pact needed to be renegotiated. The deal had promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, and the Trump administration reimposed heavy sanctions on the Islamic republic in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Tehran into new talks.

Iran reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the deal by enriching uranium to a greater purity than permitted, stockpiling more enriched uranium than allowed and using more advanced centrifuges, among other moves to try and pressure the powers remaining in the deal — Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — for economic relief.

U.S. President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, but that Iran needs to return to compliance.

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Friday, Biden said he believed the Iranians were approaching the talks seriously.

"But how serious and what they're prepared to do is a different story," Biden said. "We're still talking."

The pact is meant to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb, something the country insists it does not want to do, and the government in Tehran has said it is prepared to reverse all of its violations but that Washington must remove all sanctions imposed under Trump.

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Still unresolved is what Iran's return to compliance would look like. Delegates to the Vienna talks concede, for example, that Iranian nuclear scientists cannot unlearn the knowledge they acquired in the last three years, but it is not clear whether Iran's new centrifuges would need to be destroyed, mothballed and locked away, or simply taken offline.

Because the U.S. is currently out of the deal, there were no American representatives at the talks. Diplomats involved are shuttling between the Iranian side and a delegation from Washington elsewhere in Vienna.

Iran's delegate to the talks, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, told Iranian state television after the meeting that his impression was that all sides were committed to finding a solution.

"The reports that are being conveyed to us from Americans is that they are also serious about returning to JCPOA. So far, they have announced that they are ready to lift most of their sanctions, but we do not think it is enough," Araghchi said.

"That is why the negotiations will continue until we reach all our demands in this regard," he added. "If our demands are met, Iran will be quite serious about returning to its obligations in the full implementation of JCPOA."

Between the high-level meetings in Vienna of the so-called Joint Commission, expert groups have been meeting to try and come up with solutions to the outstanding issues.

Alain Matton, a spokesperson for the EU delegation, which is chairing the meetings, said the expert discussions will continue in the days ahead.

"And the EU as a coordinator and facilitator of the JCPOA talks will continue with separate talks with all participants and with the U.S.," Matton told reporters. "The participants are continuing with discussions, which are held on various levels and which have as their objective the full and effective implementation of the deal by all sides and the U.S. return to the JCPOA."

Ahead of the talks, a senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. position, said Washington has laid out the concessions it's prepared to make and that success or failure now depends on Iran making the political decision to accept those concessions and to return to compliance with the accord.

The official said it remains possible to reach an agreement before Iran's June presidential election, which some believe are a complicating factor in the discussions.

Heading into the talks, Ulyanov tweeted that he saw positive signs from both sides.

"The head of the Iranian delegation is cautious in his assessment of the current state of affairs at the Vienna talks (very similar to assessments of the US colleagues)," he tweeted. "But both #Iran and #US refrain from pessimistic conclusions. This seems to be not a bad sign."

Q&A: Nancy Wilson on Eddie Van Halen and her 1st solo album

By JOHN CARUCCI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When Nancy Wilson befriended Eddie Van Halen, she learned the famed musician never played acoustic guitar. So she gifted him one.

Wilson said Van Halen called her the next morning to say he stayed up all night and penned a song with it. "It just broke my heart," Wilson said.

After the guitar virtuoso succumbed to cancer last year, Wilson thought it was fitting to honor him on her new album. "4 Edward," inspired by that first song he played for her on acoustic guitar, is the closing track on Wilson's first solo album "You and Me," released Friday.

As for the album, the Heart guitarist and co-founder had not considered doing a solo record in the past but being stuck at home during the pandemic changed things.

"It was kind of a forced opportunity to actually do the solo record," she said.

While most of the songs on the album were written by Wilson, she recorded a few covers, including Simon and Garfunkel's "The Boxer" and Bruce Springsteen's "The Rising." The album also has collaborators like former Van Halen singer Sammy Hagar, Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins and Guns N' Roses

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bassist Duff McKagan.

In an interview with The Associated Press, the Rock and Roll Hall of Famer spoke about her solo album, her day job in Heart and her friendship with Van Halen. Remarks have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: Something special happened when you toured with Van Halen, right?

Wilson: I gave him his first acoustic (guitar). He said, "You play great acoustic," and I go, "Why don't you play acoustic guitar?" He's like, "I don't have one." Well, so here it is. You do now. And I always love to tell the story because later, at the crack of dawn, he called my hotel room on the actual analog hotel phone in the day and said, "Listen, listen, listen. I wrote the song all night." And he played me this beautiful piece of music on this guitar, this acoustic. It just broke my heart. It was so beautiful.

AP: How did "4 Edward" come about?

Wilson: After he left us just recently, I was like, "Oh, I'm making an album. I'm going to write an acoustic instrumental for Eddie." It's a minute-and-a-half that ends the record. But it's my take on what his thing sounded kind of like with a bit of classical to start, a little bit of rock in the middle, and like a beautiful sort of sweet classical ending for him.

AP: What made this the right time for your first solo album?

Wilson: It's been a long time since I was off the road. I've been on the road since my early 20s. And so, you know, being on the road with Heart has been the main job for decades in my life. And having had the shutdown happen, for me was actually such a blessing in disguise.

AP: What's the biggest challenge when doing a solo record?

Wilson: One of the Hardest things about writing songs for me is to feel like you don't suck. The review board in your head that's going to say, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, that's not good enough," you know. So, just kind of grappling with the bravery of trying to write new songs outside of the context of the Heart framework was really, you know, a lesson in survival and a lesson in character study of my own original self, if that makes any sense.

AP: What's the status of your day job, you know, in Heart?

Wilson: There's an offer from Live Nation for a Heart tour, which would be 2022 most likely, probably not until the spring. So that offer is still on the table and I hope it stays there before everybody else, like, sweeps it up before we can get it. ...I would love to get back onstage with my sister because we're a really good band together and we have some good songs that people love.

AP: You and Ann have inspired girls around the world to play rock 'n' roll. How did you become role models?

Wilson: Nobody expected us to be out frontwomen rocking like that. We came from a military background, so, you know, our dad retired as a major in the Marine Corps and we traveled all the time, and we were tight knit, and our mom was strong because he was gone. And she raised us like as a dad and a mom. And she got a lot of music under our skin as well. So, we just felt like, "Why can't we be the Beatles?" Like, we love the Beatles, but not going to marry the Beatles. We just wanted to be the Beatles.

WHO panel OKs emergency use of China's Sinopharm vaccine

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization gave emergency use authorization Friday to a COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by China's Sinopharm, potentially paving the way for millions of the doses to reach needy countries through a U.N.-backed program rolling out coronavirus vaccines.

The decision by a WHO technical advisory group — a first for a Chinese vaccine — opens the possibility that Sinopharm's offering could be included in the U.N.-backed COVAX program in coming weeks or

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months and distributed through UNICEF and the WHO's Americas regional office.

Aside from efficacy numbers, the Chinese manufacturer has released very little public data about its two vaccines — one developed by its Beijing Institute of Biological Products and the other by the Wuhan Institute of Biological Products.

The Beijing shot is one the WHO advisory group considered for the emergency use listing.

"This afternoon, WHO gave emergency use listing to sign off on Beijing's COVID-19 vaccine, making it the sixth vaccine to receive WHO validation for safety, efficacy and quality," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhahom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

The Sinopharm vaccine will join ones made by Pfizer-BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, AstraZeneca, and a version of the AstraZeneca vaccine made by the Serum Institute of India, in receiving the coveted authorization from the U.N. health agency.

The announcement raised the prospect that the Chinese vaccine, which has already been exported by millions of doses in some countries, could join the U.N.'s arsenal against COVID-19 at a time when supplies of other Western-made or -developed vaccines have been lacking.

"The addition of (the Sinopharm) vaccine has the potential to rapidly accelerate COVID-19 vaccine access for countries seeking to protect health workers and populations at risk," said Dr. Mariangela Simao, WHO assistant director general for access to health products.

Arnaud Didierlaurent, a professor at the University of Geneva's medical school who chairs the advisory group, said it had requested additional studies from Sinopharm, and that there would be "continuous evaluation" of the vaccine.

"In fact, the work does not stop after the listing," he said.

Medical regulators in the European Union, Britain and the United States have not examined the Sinopharm jab, which relies on relatively old vaccine technology.

The WHO, in what it called a first, said the vaccine would come a small sticker on the vaccine vials that changes color as it is exposed to heat, which will inform health workers about whether the vaccine can be safely used.

Previously, a separate group advising WHO on vaccines said it was "very confident" the Sinopharm vaccine protects people ages 18-59. The group said it had a "low level of confidence" in the vaccine's efficacy for people 60 and over. Its members said they had "very low confidence" in the available data about serious side effects in that age group.

Sinopharm hasn't published its late-stage test results in scientific journals, so the WHO requested a breakdown of its data, which come mostly from the United Arab Emirates.

"(We) came to the conclusion that there is enough evidence of safety and the capacity of the vaccine to prevent severe disease or symptomatic and hospitalized cases up to 79%," said Dr. Alejandro Cravioto, who heads the WHO advisory group on immunizations. "The information we have for people over 60 is still very scarce."

"There is no reason to think that the vaccine would behave differently in this older age group," he added.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which co-runs COVAX, welcomed the announcement.

"This means the world has yet another safe and effective tool in the fight against this pandemic," the alliance said. The public-private partnership said it was in discussions with several manufacturers, including Sinopharm, "to expand and diversify the portfolio further and secure access to additional doses" for countries in the COVAX program.

COVAX aims to send vaccines for free to 92 lower-income countries and to help another 99 countries and territories procure them. It was not immediately clear when the Chinese vaccine might be made available to the COVAX portfolio

The program, which has already distributed over 54 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines but faces limited supplies from Western countries and India, has been working hard to strike deals as part of its goal to procure 2 billion doses by the end of the year.

Suerie Moon, co-director of the Global Health Program at Geneva's Graduate Institute, said the WHO decision on the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine and other Chinese vaccines will "carry a lot of weight" be-

cause of limited information publicly available about them.

"The decision is also sure to be scrutinized all around for any whiff of political bias, and no doubt the committee members were very well aware of this," she said, noting that the decision could also be a boon for developing countries in need of coronavirus vaccines.

"If there is a greenlight, these vaccines could boost the thin stream of supplies that has been channeled through COVAX to date," she said, as the program has been hit hard by export bans limiting vaccine supply from India. India has kept those doses amid a surge of cases at home.

Moon also said if Chinese suppliers start channeling large volumes, "this would signal a step-change in their participation in global vaccine markets." Before the pandemic, India was a well-integrated player in the global health vaccine supply system, but China was not, she said.

WHO's decision on Sinopharm, months in the making, was particularly complex because the vaccine has not faced the high-level scrutiny of a rigorous medicines regulator like those in Europe and the U.S.

The WHO panel relied frequently on those Western agencies' findings when it came to vaccines that it has already approved emergency use.

Many officials in countries without such regulatory structures rely on WHO's emergency use listings to authorize vaccine rollouts for their populations.

Hundreds of millions of Chinese vaccines have already been delivered to dozens of countries around the world through bilateral deals as many scrambled to secure supplies after rich countries had reserved the vast majority of supplies from Western pharmaceutical makers.

While China has five shots in use, the majority of its exports abroad come from two companies: Sinopharm and Sinovac. A decision on Sinovac is expected next week, WHO said.

The Chinese vaccines are "inactivated" vaccines, made with killed coronavirus. Most other COVID-19 vaccines being used around the world, particularly in the West, are made with newer technologies that instead target the "spike" protein that coats the surface of the coronavirus.

Sinopharm said last month that over 100 million doses of its two vaccines have been used across the world.

Sinovac, by comparison, has shared relatively more data. Last month, a study published by a team of scientists in Brazil confirmed a previously reported efficacy rate of over 50%. A real-world study in Chile also last month found an efficacy rate of 67%.

Brazil's Amazon deforestation surged in April after pledges

By DAVID BILLER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Preliminary data released Friday signaled deforestation of Brazil's Amazon in April was the highest for that month in at least five years, a report that comes two weeks after Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro said his government would dedicate more energy and resources toward curbing deforestation.

Deforestation rose 43% over the same month in 2020, to 581 square kilometers (224 square miles), according to the government's Deter monitoring system, which provides daily deforestation alerts based on satellite images.

At the U.S.-led climate summit on April 22, Bolsonaro shifted his tone on Amazon preservation and exhibited willingness to step up commitment, even though many critics remain doubtful of his credibility. He also said Brazil requires outside funds to curb deforestation of the world's largest tropical rainforest.

His environment minister this year began talks with officials from the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden, who has directly called on Brazil to take stronger action. Officials and activists are watching closely for signs whether Bolsonaro's shift in tone amounts to more than empty promises.

Bolsonaro has previously exalted the need to tap the Amazon's resources, cast aspersions on environmental activists who defend the rainforest and snarled at European leaders who decried its destruction. In the 12 months through mid-2020, deforestation reached its worst level in more than a decade.

Alerts since last July had indicated that Amazon deforestation was retreating from its peak, but April data

marks continuation of an upward trend after a five-year high in March. The data series of Brazil's national institute for space research starts in 2015-2016.

"This shows that there is no action of control of the government," The Climate Observatory, a network of environmental non-profits, said in a statement.

It also highlighted that cloud cover in April 2021 was the greatest for that month on record, which could conceal satellite views of even more deforestation.

Days before the climate summit, a group of 15 U.S. senators penned a letter to Biden complaining of Bolsonaro's environmental track record and urging the U.S. to condition any support for Amazon preservation on significant progress reducing deforestation.

Sherpa guide scales Mount Everest for record 25th time

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — A Sherpa guide scaled Mount Everest for the 25th time on Friday, breaking his own record for the most ascents of the world's highest peak.

Kami Rita and 11 other Sherpa guides reached the summit at about 6 p.m., Department of Tourism official Mira Acharya said.

They are the first group of climbers to reach the summit this year and were fixing the ropes on the icy route so that hundreds of other climbers can scale the peak later this month.

Everest was closed to climbing last year on both its southern side, which is in Nepal, and its northern side, which is in China, because of the coronavirus pandemic. Nepal has issued climbing permits this year to 408 foreign climbers despite a surging COVID-19 outbreak.

China has opened the northern slope to only a few dozen mountaineers who will be tested for the coronavirus and must keep their distance while climbing.

Rita, 51, first scaled Everest in 1994 and has been making the trip nearly every year since then. He is one of many Sherpa guides whose expertise and skills are vital to the safety and success of the hundreds of climbers who head to Nepal each year seeking to stand on top of the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) mountain.

His father was among the first Sherpa guides, and Rita followed in his footsteps and then some. In addition to his 25 times to the top of Everest, Rita has scaled several other peaks that are among the world's highest, including K-2, Cho-Oyu, Manaslu and Lhotse.

He was at Everest's base camp in 2015 when an avalanche swept through, killing 19 people. After that tragedy, he came under intense family pressure to quit mountaineering, but in the end decided against it.

Forty-three teams have been permitted to scale Everest during this year's spring climbing season and will be assisted by about 400 Nepalese guides.

Each May, there are usually only a few windows of good weather at the summit during which climbers can attempt to scale the peak.

Doctors in Nepal warn of major crisis as virus cases surge

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Across the border from a devastating surge in India, doctors in Nepal warned Friday of a major crisis as daily coronavirus cases hit a record and hospitals were running out of beds and oxygen.

Nepal reported 9,070 new confirmed cases on Thursday, compared to 298 a month ago. The number of fatalities also reached its highest with 58 on Wednesday and 54 on Thursday, for a total of 3,529.

"Right now there are no beds available today in any hospital that is treating COVID patients," said Dr. Jyotindra Sharma, chief of Hospital for Advanced Medicine & Surgery in Kathmandu. "Even if any beds were made available, there is a huge scarcity of oxygen and we are not at the peak of this crisis."

At the hospital, one of the leading facilities in Nepal for treating COVID-19 patients, extra beds were crammed to accommodate more people. They've all been taken and the only way to get admitted is through a waiting list.

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"In the extreme situation, people could be dying in the streets," Sharma said, adding it's "just not possible to immediately increase the capacity of the hospitals."

At the government-run Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, several COVID-19 patients were lying in beds set up on the veranda and hooked to oxygen cylinder. They're the lucky ones. Others were turned away because there's not enough space or equipment.

"We are under-prepared, under-resourced, and under-capacitated to perform any thing that is expected," said Dr. Bishal Dhakal, who has been working with coronavirus patients since the beginning of the pandemic.

A lockdown was imposed last month in major cities and towns, and Nepal this week stopped both domestic and international flights.

The government has pledged several times to increase the number of hospital beds and boost the treatment and preventive measures. However, there has not been any significant change.

Nepal began its vaccination campaign in January with 1 million doses of the AstraZeneca shots donated by India, but it had been suspended because of India's refusal to allow exports as its crisis worsened.

The vaccination resumed when China donated 800,000 doses, and Nepal is negotiating with Russia for supplies of the Sputnik V shots.

Packed trains, drinking: Japanese impatient over virus steps

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Trains packed with commuters returning to work after a weeklong national holiday. Frustrated young people drinking in the streets because bars are closed. Protests planned over a possible visit by the Olympics chief.

As the coronavirus spreads in Japan ahead of the Tokyo Olympics starting in 11 weeks, one of the world's least vaccinated nations is showing signs of strain, both societal and political.

The government — desperate to show a worried public it is in control of virus efforts even as it pushes a massive sporting event that a growing number of Japanese oppose hosting in a pandemic — on Friday announced a decision to expand and extend a state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas through May 31.

For Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, the emergency declaration is both a health measure and a political tightrope walk as domestic criticism rises of Japan's seeming determination to hold the Olympics at any cost.

"I understand there are concerns about hosting the Olympics," Suga said. He said foreign athletes and other participants will be strictly separated from the Japanese public and that "it is possible to hold a safe and secure Olympics while protecting the people's lives and health."

Suga said a donation of vaccines by Pfizer Inc. to the International Olympic Committee for athletes will be "a big contribution" to a safe games.

A speculated mid-May visit by International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach has become "extremely difficult" because of the extension of the emergency, Japanese organizing chief Seiko Hashimoto said at a news conference Friday.

The government has also been criticized over its snail-paced vaccination rollout, which has fully covered less than 1% of the population since inoculations began in mid-February.

Suga pledged on Friday to speed up inoculations so all 36 million elderly Japanese can be fully vaccinated by the end of July. He set a daily target of 1 million shots, more than 20 times the current daily average, but did not explain how that would be possible amid a dire shortage of medical workers who can give vaccinations.

Japan has avoided implementing a hard lockdown to curb infections, and past states of emergency have had little teeth, with people and businesses free to ignore the provisions. These measures have since been toughened, but they come as citizens show increased impatience and less desire to cooperate, making it possible that the emergency declaration will be less effective.

The current state of emergency in Tokyo and Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures in the west was scheduled to end Tuesday. Suga said his government has decided to extend it in those areas and expand it to Aichi in central Japan and Fukuoka in the south.

On Friday, two days after "Golden Week" holiday makers returned to their daily routine, Tokyo logged

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907 new cases of coronavirus infections, up sharply from 635 when the state of emergency began in the capital last month, but far above the target of 100 that some experts recommend.

Officials and experts say significantly fewer people may have been tested for the virus during the holiday, when many testing centers and hospitals were closed, and caution the numbers during and right after the holiday period may not reflect reality.

During the holidays, significantly more people than last year were seen at tourist spots in Kyoto and Nara despite stay-at-home requests. With drinking places closed, younger people carrying canned beer and snacks gathered in parks and streets in downtown Tokyo. When the holiday ended, many defied requests for remote work and returned to their offices on packed trains.

The extension deepens uncertainties over a speculated May 17 visit by International Olympics Committee President Thomas Bach, and whether Japan can safely host the Olympics postponed from last year and currently scheduled for July 23-Aug. 8.

Despite criticism for being slow to take virus measures, Suga has been reluctant to hurt the already pandemic-damaged economy and pledged to keep the state of emergency "short and intensive," though experts said just over two weeks would be too short to effectively slow the infections and even the extension may be insufficient.

Dr. Shigeru Omi, head of a government taskforce, cautioned officials Friday that a hasty lifting of the emergency would only invite an immediate resurgence.

The ongoing emergency is Japan's third and came only a month after an earlier measure ended in the Tokyo area.

Less stringent, quasi-emergency measures will be expanded to eight prefectures from the current six, where bars and restaurants are required to close early.

Japan has had about 621,000 cases including about 10,600 deaths since the pandemic began.

Medical systems in hardest-hit Osaka have been under severe pressure from a COVID-19 outbreak there that is hampering ordinary health care, experts say. A number of patients died at home recently after their conditions worsened while waiting for vacancies at hospitals.

Past emergency measures authorized only non-mandatory requests. The government in February toughened a law on anti-virus measures to allow authorities to issue binding orders for nonessential businesses to shorten their hours or close, in exchange for compensation for those who comply and penalties for violators.

Shutdown requirements will be eased somewhat. Bars, karaoke studios and most other entertainment facilities will be required to remain closed until the end of May, but department stores will be able to operate for shorter hours and stadiums and concert halls will be allowed to have up to 5,000 people or half their capacity.

Wearing masks, staying home and other measures for the general public remain non-mandatory requests.

Red meat politics: GOP turns culture war into a food fight

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Conservatives last week gobbled up a false news story claiming President Joe Biden planned to ration red meat. Colorado Rep. Rep. Lauren Boebert suggested Biden "stay out of my kitchen." Texas Gov. Greg Abbott tweeted out a headline warning Biden was getting "Up in your grill."

The news was wrong — Biden is planning no such thing — but it was hardly the first time the right has recognized the political power of a juicy steak. Republican politicians in recent months have increasingly used food — especially beef — as a cudgel in a culture war, accusing climate-minded Democrats of trying to change Americans' diets and, therefore, their lives.

"That is a direct attack on our way of life here in Nebraska," Gov. Pete Ricketts, a Republican, said recently.

The pitched rhetoric is likely a sign of the future. As more Americans acknowledge the link between food production and climate change, food choices are likely to become increasingly political. Already, in farm states, meat eating has joined abortion, gun control and transgender rights as an issue that quickly

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sends partisans to their corners.

"On the right, they are just going for the easiest applause line, which is accusing the left of declaring war on meat. And it's a pretty good applause line," said Mike Murphy, a Republican consultant. "It's politically effective, if intellectually dishonest."

Ricketts was among the first to seize on the issue in recent months. In March, the governor — whose state generated \$12 billion from livestock and meat products last year — slammed his Colorado counterpart, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis, for suggesting Coloradans lay off the red meat one day as a way of cutting back on greenhouse gas emissions.

Republican Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds followed Ricketts' comments quickly, claiming in a campaign fundraising email, "Democrats and liberal special interest groups are trying to cancel our meat industry."

In her weekly column a few weeks later, Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa blasted "everyone from out-of-touch politicians to Hollywood elites" as leading the left's "war on meat."

But the issue blew up last week after a Daily Mail news story — debunked within 24 hours — suggested the Biden administration could ration how much red meat Americans can consume as part of its goal to slash greenhouse gas pollution.

During the story's short life, conservative figures pilloried Biden's apparent invasion into America's dining room.

While the story was false, there's little doubt the livestock industry is a contributor to climate change.

A 2019 Environmental Protection Agency report noted agriculture was responsible for 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions, a quarter of which is emitted by livestock before they are butchered.

There are signs that Americans may be adjusting their diets out of concern for climate change. About a quarter of Americans reported eating less meat than they had a year earlier, according to a 2019 Gallup poll, chiefly for health reasons but also out of environmental concerns. About 30% of Democrats polled said they were eating less meat, compared to 12% of Republicans.

For some, it's hard to imagine Americans abandoning beef and easy to see its power as a political symbol, said Chad Hart, an Iowa State University agriculture economist.

Americans don't get overly sentimental about barns crammed with chickens or thousands of hogs, but few images are as quintessentially American as cattle grazing over rolling hills.

"When you think about American food, beef is what is in the center of that plate," Hart said. "And that's likely to remain a national identity when it comes to what an American food plate looks like."

To be sure, food isn't new to culture war politics.

First lady Michelle Obama was attacked as intrusive by conservatives for championing higher nutritional standards in school lunches.

As a presidential candidate in 2007, Barack Obama was accused of food elitism when he asked a group of Iowa farmers whether they had seen the price of arugula at Whole Foods, an upscale grocery chain that had not yet made it to Iowa. Obama still won the state's caucuses.

Even more famously, Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis was pilloried by Republicans as far out of touch with rural America in the midst of the 1980s farm crisis when he suggested Iowa farmers consider diversifying crops by planting Belgian endive.

That prompted GOP vice presidential nominee Dan Quayle to hold up a head of endive, a green used in salads, to show a crowd in Omaha "just how the man from Massachusetts thinks he can rebuild the farm economy."

In the past, food was a way of painting Democrats as out of touch with rural America. Today, the message is about climate and the economy.

There is a growing movement to discourage meat-eating and a massive market for meat replacement foods. The Green New Deal, a sweeping environmental outline championed by liberal New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, calls for a sharp reduction in livestock production.

Biden has called the plan an "important framework" but has not endorsed it.

As these policies remain only plans for now, Republicans complaining about them have offered little

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substance with their claims of a war on meat.

Still, Republicans have looked for ways to signal which side they're on. In April, Ernst introduced a bill that would bar federal agencies from setting policies that ban serving meat to employees.

Ricketts declared "Meat on the Menu Day" in March and came back Wednesday to name all of May "Beef Month."

These efforts do little to address the beef industry's substantial problems, including a backlog in slaughterhouses stemming from the pandemic, drought and the high cost of feed.

And a spokesperson for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association kept her distance from the food fight.

"When emotions and rhetoric run high on either side of the political aisle, NCBA remains focused on achieving lasting results," said spokesperson Sigrid Johannes.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 8, the 128th day of 2021. There are 237 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 8, 1984, the Soviet Union announced it would boycott the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

On this date:

In 1541, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto reached the Mississippi River.

In 1660, the British Parliament moved to restore the monarchy by declaring that Charles II had been the country's lawful king since the execution of his father, Charles I, in 1649.

In 1846, the first major battle of the Mexican-American War was fought at Palo Alto, Texas; U.S. forces led by Gen. Zachary Taylor were able to beat back Mexican forces.

In 1886, Atlanta pharmacist John Pemberton began selling the original version of Coca-Cola, which he'd invented.

In 1915, Regret became the first filly to win the Kentucky Derby.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced on radio that Nazi Germany's forces had surrendered, and that "the flags of freedom fly all over Europe."

In 1958, Vice President Richard Nixon was shoved, stoned, booed and spat upon by anti-American protesters in Lima, Peru.

In 1973, militant American Indians who had held the South Dakota hamlet of Wounded Knee for 10 weeks surrendered.

In 1978, David R. Berkowitz pleaded guilty in a Brooklyn courtroom to murder, attempted murder and assault in connection with the "Son of Sam" shootings that claimed six lives and terrified New Yorkers. (Berkowitz was sentenced to six consecutive life prison terms.)

In 1987, Gary Hart, dogged by questions about his personal life, including his relationship with Miami model Donna Rice, withdrew from the race for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1993, the Muslim-led government of Bosnia-Herzegovina and rebel Bosnian Serbs signed an agreement for a nationwide cease-fire.

In 1996, South Africa took another step from apartheid to democracy by adopting a constitution that guaranteed equal rights for Blacks and whites.

Ten years ago: Relations between Egypt's Muslims and Christians reached a new low after overnight riots left 12 people dead and a church burned. Fox television announced that Paula Abdul would be one of the judges on "The X Factor," reuniting her with former "American Idol" judge Simon Cowell (however, Abdul's stint did not last beyond the premiere season of the new talent show).

Five years ago: London's newly elected Muslim mayor, Sadiq Khan, paid respect to the millions of Jews slain in the Holocaust as his first public engagement in office, and received a hero's welcome from London's Jewish community at the end. William Schallert, a veteran TV performer and Hollywood union leader

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who played Patty Duke's father — and uncle — on television, died in Pacific Palisades, California at age 93.

One year ago: The White House said Katie Miller, Vice President Mike Pence's press secretary and the wife of top Trump adviser Stephen Miller, had tested positive for the coronavirus. The unemployment level surged to 14.7%, a level last seen when the country was in the throes of the Great Depression; the government reported that 20 million Americans had lost their jobs in April amid the economic fallout from the pandemic. A federal judge in Kentucky said the governor's temporary ban on mass gatherings could not apply to in-person religious services. California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that the state would send every voter a mail-in ballot for the November election. Magician Roy Horn of the famed Las Vegas act Siegfried & Roy died in a Las Vegas hospital at the age of 75 as a result of complications from the coronavirus.

Today's Birthdays: Naturalist Sir David Attenborough is 95. Singer Toni Tennille is 81. Actor James Mitchum is 80. Country singer Jack Blanchard is 79. Jazz musician Keith Jarrett is 76. Actor Mark Blankfield is 73. Singer Philip Bailey (Earth, Wind and Fire) is 70. Rock musician Chris Frantz (Talking Heads) is 70. Rockabilly singer Billy Burnette is 68. Rock musician Alex Van Halen is 68. Actor David Keith is 67. Actor Raoul Max Trujillo is 66. Sports commentator/former NFL coach Bill Cowher is 64. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is 60. Actor Melissa Gilbert is 57. Rock musician Dave Rowntree (Blur) is 57. Country musician Del Gray is 53. Rock singer Darren Hayes is 49. Singer Enrique Iglesias is 46. Blues singer-musician Joe Bonamassa is 44. Actor Matt Davis is 43. Singer Ana Maria Lombo (Eden's Crush) is 43. Actor Elyes Gabel is 38. Actor Domhnall Gleeson is 38. Actor Julia Whelan (WAY-lan) is 37. Actor Nora Anezeder is 32.