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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.

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Groton Area JH Track Teams win in 10 events

A junior high track meet was held in Groton on Friday with the Tigers picking up first place in 10 events. Teylor Diegel, Laila Roberts and Jerica Locke were all double winners in individual events. Faith Traphagen won an event while the 7th grade girls won both the 800m relay and the 800m medley relay events and the eighth grade girls won the 800m medley relay event.

7th Girls: 100m Hurdles: 2, Talli Wright, 20.6; 4, Hannah Sandness, 20.88.
8th Boys: 110m Hurdles: 6, Caden McInerney, 22.84.
7th Girls: 100m Dash: 5, Talli Wright, 15.32.
7th Boys: 100m Dash: 3, Ryder Johnson, 13.61; 6, Jarrett Erdmann, 14.01.
8th Girls: 100m Dash: 2, Laila Roberts, 14.14; 4, Kayla Lehr, 14.92.
8th Boys: 100m Dash: 1, Teylor Diegel, 21.14.
7th Girls: 200m Dash: 1, Jerica Locke, 30.67.
7th Boys: 200m Dash: 3, Jarrett Erdmann, 29.30.
8th Girls: 200m Dash: 1, Laila Roberts, 30.34; 5, Kayla Lehr, 33.32.
8th Boys: 200m Dash: 1, Teylor Diegel, 25.70; 6, Payton Mitchell, 29.67.
7th Girls: 400m Dash: 1, Jerica Locke, 1:07.71; 2, Rylee Dunker, 1:10.41.
7th Boys: 400m Dash: 3, Gage Sippel, 1:06.52.
8th Girls: 400m Dash: 1, Laila Roberts, 1:08.34.
8th Boys: 400m Dash: 6, Payton Mitchell, 1:05.93.
7th Boys: 800m Run: 2, Jayden Schwan, 3:01.89; 3, Ben Hoeft, 3:05.52; 4, Logan Warrington, 3:11.40.
8th Girls: 800m Run: 1, Faith Traphagen, 2:43.29.
7th Boys: 1600m Run: 2, Ben Hoeft, 6:26.98.
7th Girls: 800m Relay: 1, Groton (Dunker, Jones, Wright, Sandness), 2:10.07.
7th Girls: 800m Medley Relay: 1, Groton (Jones, Wright, Sandness, Dunker), 2:15.50.
8th Girls: 800m Medley Relay: 1, Groton (Locke, Lehr, Roberts, Traphagen), 2:10.48.
7th Boys: Long Jump: 2, Ryder Johnson, 14-6; 5, Jarrett Erdmann, 12-5; 5, Gage Sippel, 12-1.
8th Girls: Long Jump: 3, Faith Traphagen, 11-11.
8th Boys: Long Jump: 5, Carter Simon, 13-5.
7th Boys: Discus: 3, Karter Moody, 75-0.
7th Boys: Shot Put: 3, Karter Moody, 27-8.

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Bush's Landing Boat Ramp Closed; Target Date to Reopen May 28

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Department is working with a local contractor to complete an access road and extend the low-water boat ramp at Bush's Landing on Lake Oahe, north of Pierre.

"Due to low water conditions, the current high-water ramp is out of service. We have a target date of May 28 to finish the low-water ramp," said Planning and Development Administrator Adam Kulesa. "This ramp is an important and popular launching point for Lake Oahe anglers, and we are doing our best to get it done as quickly as possible."

Kulesa went on to say that low water and siltation issues at Bush's Landing create expensive and difficult circumstances to maintain water access.

"We have not extended the lower level ramp prior to this year because of the extreme financial cost and the higher water levels. This low-water ramp project is over a half-million dollars alone. The access road out to the low-water ramp goes under water when we experience high water levels and creates extremely challenging working conditions to access the low water ramp area to perform work."

Kulesa expects Sutton Bay and Little Bend access points to transition to low water ramps. These locations are currently open.

Upcoming Events

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

Flags at Half-Staff in Honor of Former Legislator Charles Welke

PIERRE, S.D. –Governor Kristi Noem has ordered that flags be flown at half-staff at the State Capitol from sunrise until sundown on Sunday, May 16 in honor of former State Representative Charles "Chuck" Welke. Chuck served as state senator from 2013 to 2014.

Funeral services for Chuck will be held on Sunday, May 16, 2:00 pm at the Warner Gym in Warner, SD.

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The draft might be in the rearview for the Minnesota Vikings, but things are heating up around the NFL. On Friday, the Vikings began rookie minicamps, getting all their first-year players – and other younger players who might be on the roster bubble – into the facilities for coaching, film sessions, and some fieldwork. The biggest story to come out of rookie minicamps so far is that rookie offensive guard Wyatt Davis is playing right guard at camp, which is a good indication the team plans to move Ezra Cleveland over to the left side – the side he played in college, and the move will also prevent the team from starting two rookies next to each other on the offensive line.



By Jordan Wright

The main storyline from this past week was the schedule release. In case you missed it, the NFL competition committee approved adding an additional game to the season, meaning teams will now play 17 games a season instead of 16. Besides a ton of records that will be broken now because of the additional game, don't be surprised if you see some healthy scratches throughout the season, as teams try and keep their best players fresh and healthy for the postseason.

Let's dig into the schedule!

Week 1 – At Cincinnati September 12. The Vikings open the season on the road, with head coach Mike Zimmer returning to face his old team. Justin Jefferson also reunites with his former LSU teammates Joe Burrow and Ja'Marr.

Week 2 – At Arizona September 19. Two consecutive games on the road to start the season. Patrick Peterson returns to the desert to compete against the team who drafted him.

Week 3 – Vs. Seattle September 26. Another year, another Vikings/Seahawks matchup. Hopefully, being the home opener and the first time fans can be present since the pandemic started will give the Vikings the edge they need to pull off the win.

Week 4 – Vs. Cleveland October 3. These aren't the same ol' Browns. Former Vikings' offensive coordinator Kevin Stefanski is now the head coach in Cleveland, and he has the team firing on all cylinders.

Week 5 – Vs. Detroit October 10. The first division game of the season for the Vikings. The Lions are undergoing a rebuild after trading away Matthew Stafford.

Week 6 – At Carolina October 17. The Panthers gambled this offseason, trading for QB Sam Darnold and trading away QB Teddy Bridgewater.

Week 7 – Bye week

Week 8 – Vs. Dallas October 31. This will be a Sunday night game on Halloween after a bye week. Scary.

Week 9 – At Baltimore November 7. The Ravens are one of the most dangerous teams in the NFL because of QB Lamar Jackson.

Week 10 – At LA Chargers November 14. Back-to-back games on the road against a great young quarterback.

Week 11 – Vs. Green Bay November 21. Will Aaron Rodgers and the Packers patch things up or will the team be rolling out Jordan Love at quarterback this season?

Week 12 – At San Francisco November 28. Former NDSU Bison QB Trey Lance will likely be starting for the 49ers by this point.

Week 13 – At Detroit December 5. After playing five straight playoff contenders after the team's bye week, this has the potential to be a trap game for the Vikings.

Week 14 – Vs. Pittsburgh December 9. Big Ben is getting up there in age, but the Steelers are always a tough team to beat. This is a Thursday night game.

Week 15 – At Chicago December 20. The Bears moved up in the draft to get their QB of the future Justin Fields, who should be starting by this point of the season. The Vikings will have plenty of rest, however, going from a Thursday night game week 14 to a Monday Night game this week.

Week 16 – Vs. LA Rams December 26. The day after Christmas, the Vikings welcome Matthew Stafford and the Rams (that seems strange to type).

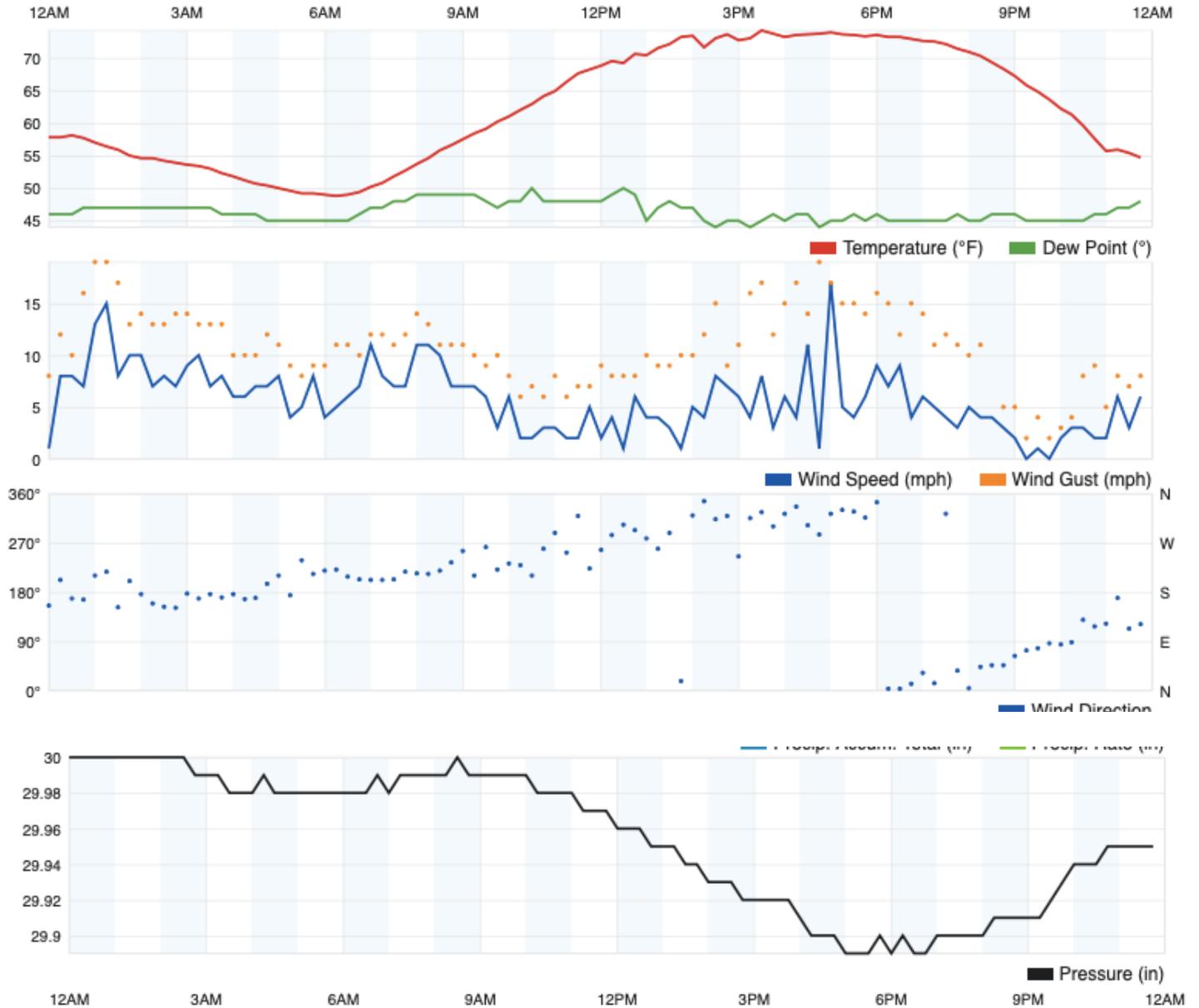
Week 17 – At Green Bay January 2. Hopefully the team isn't nursing a New Year's hangover, as this Sunday night game will likely decide the winner of the NFC North.

Week 18 – Vs. Chicago January 9. The Vikings close out the season at home against the Bears.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Patchy Fog then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 75 °F	Low: 48 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 81 °F

Partly to Mostly Cloudy Today

Today
Partly to mostly cloudy and dry
Highs: 72-78°

Tonight
Increasing cloudiness with showers and thunderstorms possible mainly along and west of the Missouri River
Lows: 48-51°

Sunday
Showers and Thunderstorms possible across the area. Best chances are in central South Dakota
Highs: 64-78°
(cooler in central SD)

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Aberdeen, SD 5/15/2021 3:48 AM

Conditions for today will be partly to mostly cloudy before showers and thunderstorms work their way into the region from the west this evening through the day Sunday. Most areas will only receive light rain, although central South Dakota has a better chance of seeing more persistent showers and thunderstorms. Thus, are more likely to see rainfall totals in excess of a quarter inch. Severe weather is not anticipated at this time.

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Today in Weather History

May 15, 1964: A two-day rainfall event ended with 3.57 inches at Rapid City. Damage to roads and bridges was reported in the northern Black Hills.

1896: An estimated F5 tornado struck Sherman, Texas, killing 73 people; 60 of them in downtown. Tornado victims were found as far as 400 yards away from their original location. A trunk lid was carried 35 miles by the twister.

1957: An F4 tornado killed 20 people in Silverton, Texas. A 5,000-pound gasoline storage tank was reportedly carried 1.5 miles and dropped into a lake. Residents said the tornado "looked like red sand, boiling and rumbling."

1968: Also, an F5 tornado moved through Butler, Chickasaw, Floyd, Franklin, and Howard Counties in northeast Iowa. The tornado touched down northeast from north of Hansell, passing east of Aredale and Marble Rock, before devastating Charles City. The tornado grew more massive and intense as it approached Charles City. The huge funnel passed directly through town, destroying 337 homes, and causing about \$30 million in damage. The tornado continued to the northeast hitting Elma. From there the tornado turned to the north and dissipated south of Chester, 4 miles south of the Minnesota border. Nearly 2000 homes were damaged or destroyed. All 13 deaths occurred in Floyd County. 450 injuries were reported in Floyd County and 12 injuries in Howard County. Another F5 tornado moved north-northeast from southwest of Oelwein to Maynard and east of Randalia in Fayette County, IA. Homes were leveled and swept away in both Oelwein and Maynard. The warning sirens had sounded for only 15 seconds before the power failed in Oelwein. Nearly 1000 homes were damaged or destroyed along the path, and 34 people had to be hospitalized. Almost 1,000 families were affected. In addition to these F5 tornadoes, an F2 tornado touched down 6 miles south of Cresco, IA and two weak F1 tornadoes touched down in Dodge County, MN. Also, baseball size hail fell in Fayette County, IA.

1972: The worst ice jam flooding of memory for long-time residents took place along the Kuskokwim River and Yukon River in Alaska. It was the first time since 1890 that the two rivers "flowed as one." The towns of Oscarville and Napaskiak have been entirely inundated.

1834 - The Northern Atlantic Coast States were in the midst of their greatest May snowstorm of record. The hills around Newbury, VT, were covered with two to three feet of snow. (David Ludlum)

1968 - A tornado touched down southwest of Anchorage, AK. It was the second of just three tornadoes reported in Alaska since 1950. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Unseasonably warm weather returned to the north central U.S. Seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Janestown, ND, with a reading of 96 degrees. Thunderstorms in Utah produced five inches of rain south of Bicknell. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced wind gusts to 80 mph in Oklahoma County, and baseball size hail at Pawnee. Hail piled up to a depth of 18 inches south of Pawnee. Hail damage in Oklahoma was estimated at close to 25 million dollars. Thunderstorms in the Upper Midwest produced golf ball size hail around Cleveland, OH, and wind gusts to 83 mph at Angola, IN. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along and north of a stationary front produced severe weather in the south central U.S. Thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes, and there were 145 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Softball size hail caused 2.1 million dollars damage at Sherman, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Central Plains Region and Oklahoma to Indiana and western Kentucky. Thunderstorms spawned fifteen tornadoes, including seven in Oklahoma, and there were 165 reports of large hail or damaging winds. A tornado killed one person, injured a dozen others, and caused four million dollars damage at Stillwater, OK. Another tornado injured eight persons at Foyil, OK. Thunderstorms in Oklahoma also produced wind gusts to 92 mph at Oologah Lake, and softball size hail at Canton and north of Oakwood. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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THE HIGH COST OF CLEANLINESS

"Liquid gold" is a hot, black-market commodity on the "streets" these days. With rising prices and shrinking incomes, people are becoming creative in making ends meet. One new "industry" is stealing "Tide" – the popular laundry detergent.

Last year, police in Maryland broke up a crime ring that was stealing Tide and taking it to a nail salon that was buying the detergent and then reselling it to stores in other countries. Thieves would fill up their shopping carts with the product and then run for the exit doors.

Tide became the "cleaning agent of choice" because it is such a popular brand and has high resale value. It is used by homes in all countries no matter their income bracket – upper, middle, or lower. One police detective told *The Daily*, "It's the item to steal."

We use cleaning products to get soil out of clothes and soap to get our bodies clean but they will not cleanse our hearts from sin. In fact, when David asked for God's "cleansing" for his sins, he used the word "purge" which means un-sin me – purify me – from my uncleanness. He was so disturbed by the guilt he felt from the sins he committed that he used a word that was often used to describe the cleansing of a leper's house. He wanted God to know he was serious and desperate for His cleansing.

Look at his words closely: "blot out," "wash," "cleanse me," "hide Your face from me." These words enable us to understand how much he wanted God's forgiveness. His cry for forgiveness opens the curtain of his soul where we see a heart that was broken by sin, a mind deeply troubled because of sin, the solution for the removal of sin, and his need for God to remove that sin and cleanse him.

What an example David set for every one of us!

Prayer: Father, trouble our hearts as You troubled David's heart when we sin. May we want Your cleansing. Give us no peace until we truly repent. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Psalm 51:7-8a

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

Unusual May FCS title game: South Dakota St vs Sam Houston

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

FRISCO, Texas (AP) — There are more twists to this FCS championship game than just being played in mid-May to wrap up a unique spring season.

Top-seeded South Dakota State takes on No. 2 seed Sam Houston on Sunday, guaranteeing that one of the Football Championship Subdivision playoff regulars will become a first-time champion. This is the 43rd title game in the division formerly known as I-AA.

A different Dakota is in Frisco with eight-time champion North Dakota State not there from Fargo for only the second time in 10 seasons. Sam Houston (9-0) has a shot at a perfect season while K.C. Keeler can become the winningest coach in FCS playoff history and the first to win titles at multiple schools.

Delaware grad Keeler won a championship in 2003 at his alma mater, which is what South Dakota State alumnus John Stiegelmeier is now attempting in his 24th season coaching the Jackrabbits (8-1).

For anyone who thinks an asterisk should be attached to the champion of this shortened and most unusual season for FCS, consider all it took to get to this point since the last title game in January 2020. There were constant COVID-19 tests, the uncertainty if they would play at all and now a finale only 3 1/2 months before kicking off another season.

"This season's been more draining mentally and physically than any other season in the past," South Dakota State linebacker Logan Backhaus said.

Fellow senior linebacker Preston Tetzlaff said anyone questioning the legitimacy of this season "probably aren't the ones playing this weekend. If they're playing this week, they wouldn't be saying that."

The Jackrabbits, in their ninth consecutive playoffs, are in their first championship game. Sam Houston is in its 12th FCS playoff, and twice lost in the title game played about 200 miles from its campus in Huntsville, Texas.

Sam Houston beat North Dakota State in the quarterfinals, then the Bearcats overcame a 21-point halftime deficit in their 38-35 semifinal win over No. 3 seed James Madison, the only team other than the Bison to win an FCS title since 2011. Sam Schmid had a 69-yard TD pass and two scoring runs as they scored 28 points in a 5 1/2-minute span.

"I don't think putting North Dakota State and James Madison in the same bracket as us is an asterisk at all," defensive lineman Jahari Key said. "So putting an asterisk by this championship is hilarious, and also ridiculous to even say such a thing."

THE COACHES

Keeler got his 23rd FCS playoff victory last week to match the record mark Jim Tressell had at Youngstown State before going to Ohio State and winning an FBS national title.

"I just think it's hilarious that they're mentioning me with Jim Tressell," Keeler said. "To me, it's just recognition of all the people that have worked for me or all the players that I've coached."

This is Keeler's 27th season as a head coach, his seventh at Sam Houston. He was at Division III Rowan before coaching his alma mater from 2002-2012, leading the Fightin' Blue Hens to their only FCS championship. Delaware also played in Frisco's first FCS title game in 2010.

Stiegelmeier's 174-106 record is all at South Dakota State, including 15 winning records in 17 seasons at the FCS level.

"We're excited to be in the final. It's been the goal of our program for a long time," he said. "We're not giddy excited, where you feel like you've accomplished the goal. ... The goal is to be 1-0 in Frisco, Texas."

RUNNING JACKS

South Dakota State dual-threat freshman quarterback Mark Gronowski is the seventh-leading rusher in the Missouri Valley Conference, third on his team behind junior Pierre Strong Jr. and freshman Isaiah Davis.

"It's really just a great combo of running backs," Gronowski said. "Pierre's just an elusive back who can

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make anyone miss. Isaiah can just basically be a bulldozer and run hard through the hole.”

Strong has 650 yards rushing while Davis, who averages 7.8 yards per carry, has 640. Gronowski has rushed for 567 yards and seven touchdowns, while also passing for 1,549 yards with 15 TDs and three interceptions.

The Jackrabbits average 231 yards rushing per game, fifth-best among FCS schools that played at least six games. Sam Houston has the third-best rushing defense (79 yards allowed).

EXTRA POINTS

A limited capacity crowd of about 7,500 is expected at Toyota Stadium, the 20,000-seat home of MLS team FC Dallas where the FCS championship game is set to be played through at least 2025. ... There are 24 players from South Dakota on the Jackrabbits roster. “I love my home state, and it’s a privilege to be able to represent them at the highest level possible in Division I football,” senior center Wes Genant said.

Wildlife officials hoping to tag black bear in Black Hills

By MARK WATSON Black Hills Pioneer

LEAD, S.D. (AP) — A black bear has been spotted roaming the Northern Hills lately.

Earlier this month it was captured on security camera at the Mystic Hills Hideaway south of Lead and Deadwood. It appeared as if it was the same one spotted earlier in Lead, and along Maitland Road in late April. Additional reports indicated a bear was around Spearfish just before that.

Bears occasionally roam through the Black Hills. For the last three years, residents have reported the bruins to the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks. In 2020, a bear, jet black in color, was spotted near Hermosa, loping through a field as a passerby videoed the bear from his car window.

In 2019, one was rummaging through garbage cans in the Mountain Plains subdivision near Spearfish. Several days later, it was spotted on a game camera in the Aspen Hills area.

The bear videoed at Mystic Hills ambled along in front of a building, while it strolled slowly through the backyard of a Lead residence, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

Kris Cudmore, the regional wildlife manager for the GF&P, said he would like to be able to catch the bear and place an ear tag on it to be able to identify if it is the same bear or multiple bears that have been spotted in the Hills.

But, they have to locate the animal in a timely fashion first.

“We can’t really catch up to him, at least at this point, to put some kind of marker in him to figure out, ‘OK, what are we working with here,’” Cudmore said.

“For us to trap any animal, we have to be able to pattern it,” he said. “As of right now, there is no pattern.”

He said the reports that are made come in a day or two later, and the bear has already traveled away.

A state trapper did place some bait near the site in Lead, and place a trail camera in hopes of getting a photo of the bear, but with no success.

If the department did place a trap for the bear, it would be a large cage trap — essentially, it is a very large barrel with a sliding door. The bear would walk in to feed on the bait placed at the front, and the door would drop down when the bear activated the trigger. Wildlife managers could then tranquilize the bear in the trap, remove it, and place the tracking device. They could also take biological data at that time.

The bear spotted in the Mountain Plains subdivision was reported to be cinnamon in color. Cudmore said it could truly be two different bears, or the way the light hit the animal made it look a different color.

There have also been reports of two bears being spotted together — supposedly a sow with a cub. The videos and photos Cudmore has seen have not been able to confirm that there were two bears together.

However, “It is a possibility. The Black Hills is a decent size space, and it sure is a possibility,” he said. “Especially being the third spring in a row we are getting sightings, it’s sure a possibility.”

Historically, black bears and grizzly bears have lived in the Black Hills. The closest population of black bears would be the Bighorn Mountains, which according to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, has, “a robust black bear population.”

Wildlife biologists captured nearly 100 bears from 1988 to 2005. Male bears ranged from 120 pounds to

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440 pounds while females weighed 85 to 250 pounds.

The GF&P has faced criticism in the past for euthanizing wildlife when in urban areas. Some people have already noted they are concerned the GF&P will do the same with this bear.

"That's not our intention with this critter, or really any critter," Cudmore reassured. "The only time an animal is removed is when it poses some type of public treat. So a mountain lion on a back porch, for example, public threat there, especially if they are in the heart of Spearfish or Rapid or someplace like that. ... We're not in the game of removing stuff to remove stuff. For me, the reason would want to ear tag it is to figure out if it is the same bear or area there multiple."

So far, there has not been a conflict with the bear.

"The biggest nuisance is they have been getting into garbage cans, or bird feeders, or deer feeders. That's what wild critters are going to do, especially bears. That's what bears do," Cudmore said. "If there is any type of food around — cat food, dog food, bear food, or any type in-between, you're going to want to secure it. Garbage is considered a food source too."

Black bear — *Ursus americanus*— is the name of the species, but that doesn't mean that all of them are black.

They can range in color from black to cinnamon to brown and even blonde. Some can have light blazes on their chests.

Most commonly on the East Coast, black bears are black. But in the Western US, bears have a more varied color.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

03-18-41-44-68, Mega Ball: 3, Megaplier: 2

(three, eighteen, forty-one, forty-four, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: three; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$430 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$183 million

Rapid City man charged with murder after injured victim dies

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City man is now charged with murder after a woman he's accused of sexually assaulting died of injuries related to her attack.

Fifty-eight-year-old Marlon Little Bald Eagle was indicted this week on charges of first-degree felony murder and alternative counts of second- and third-degree rape in the woman's death April 23.

According to authorities, an April 26 autopsy found injuries sustained during the assault played a role in the death of the 42-year-old woman. The autopsy found significant internal injuries, but the medical examiner needed more information to identify the cause of death.

Police said they zeroed in on Little Bald Eagle after a woman called 911 and told them he had taken responsibility for the woman's death.

Felony murder is when a victim dies while someone is committing a serious felony. A defendant can be convicted of felony murder even if they didn't mean to kill or cause anyone's death.

Pennington County State's Attorney Mark Vargo says that's the theory in this case, that Little Bald Eagle didn't mean to kill the woman, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The punishment is still the same as other first-degree murder cases: the death penalty or life in prison without the chance of parole.

The alternative rape counts mean that Little Bald Eagle could be convicted of one or neither, but not both, of the charges.

Girl injured at Sioux Falls daycare playground has died

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A young child who was injured at a Sioux Falls daycare center earlier this week has died, according to police.

The 3-year-old girl was using playground equipment on Monday afternoon at the daycare facility when a rope became tangled around her neck, according to police spokesman Sam Clemens.

A CaringBridge site identifies the child as Sophia Biver. A post says a CT scan on Wednesday showed there was no recovery possible from her brain injury. She died later that day.

Clemens said police are still investigating.

Israeli airstrike in Gaza destroys building with AP bureau

By FARES AKRAM and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — An Israeli airstrike has destroyed a high-rise building that housed The Associated Press' offices in the Gaza Strip.

The airstrike Saturday came roughly an hour after the Israeli military ordered people to evacuate the building. There was no immediate explanation for why the building was targeted.

The building houses The Associated Press, Al-Jazeera and a number of offices and apartments.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story is below:

An Israeli air raid on a densely populated refugee camp in Gaza City killed at least 10 Palestinians from an extended family, mostly children, early Saturday in the deadliest single strike of the current battle with Gaza's Hamas rulers. Both sides pressed for an advantage as cease-fire efforts gathered strength.

The latest outburst of violence began in Jerusalem and has spread across the region, with Jewish-Arab clashes and rioting in mixed cities of Israel. There were also widespread Palestinian protests Friday in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces shot and killed 11 people.

The spiraling violence has raised fears of a new Palestinian "intifada," or uprising at a time when there have been no peace talks in years. Palestinians on Saturday were marking Nakba (Catastrophe) Day, when they commemorate the estimated 700,000 people who were expelled from or fled their homes in what was now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation. That raised the possibility of even more unrest.

U.S. diplomat Hady Amr arrived Friday as part of Washington's efforts to de-escalate the conflict, and the U.N. Security Council was set to meet Sunday. But Israel turned down an Egyptian proposal for a one-year truce that Hamas rulers had accepted, an Egyptian official said Friday on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations.

Since Monday night, Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, which has pounded the Gaza Strip with strikes. In Gaza, at least 139 people have been killed, including 39 children and 22 women; in Israel, seven people have been killed, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier.

Early Saturday, an airstrike hit a three-story house in Gaza City's Shati refugee camp, killing eight children and two women from an extended family.

Mohammed Hadidi told reporters his wife and five children had gone to celebrate the Eid al-Fitr holiday with relatives. She and three of the children, aged 6 to 14, were killed, while an 11-year-old is missing. Only his 5-month-old son Omar is known to have survived.

Children's toys and a Monopoly board game could be seen among the rubble, as well as plates of uneaten food from the holiday gathering.

"There was no warning," said Jamal Al-Naji, a neighbor living in the same building. "You filmed people eating and then you bombed them?" he said, addressing Israel. "Why are you confronting us? Go and confront the strong people!"

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Hamas said it fired a salvo of rockets at southern Israel in response to the airstrike.

Later on Saturday, the military notified the building owner that it was about to strike the high-rise in Gaza City where The Associated Press and other media outlets, including Al Jazeera, have their offices. Residents of the building, including AP staff, evacuated. The army told the AP that staff should evacuate

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immediately.

A furious Israeli barrage early Friday killed a family of six in their house and sent thousands fleeing to U.N.-run shelters. The military said the operation involved 160 warplanes dropping some 80 tons of explosives over the course of 40 minutes and succeeded in destroying a vast tunnel network used by Hamas.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said the military aims to minimize collateral damage in striking military targets. But measures it takes in other strikes, such as warning shots to get civilians to leave, were not "feasible this time."

Israeli media said the military believed dozens of militants were killed inside the tunnels. The Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups have confirmed 20 deaths in their ranks, but the military said the real number is far higher.

Gaza's infrastructure, already in widespread disrepair because of an Israeli-Egyptian blockade imposed after Hamas seized power in 2007, showed signs of breaking down further, compounding residents' misery. The territory's sole power plant is at risk of running out of fuel in the coming days.

The U.N. said Gazans are already enduring daily power cuts of 8-12 hours and at least 230,000 have limited access to tap water. The impoverished and densely populated territory is home to 2 million Palestinians, most of them the descendants of refugees from what is now Israel.

The conflict has reverberated widely. Israeli cities with mixed Arab and Jewish populations have seen nightly violence, with mobs from each community fighting in the streets and trashing each other's property.

Late on Friday, someone threw a firebomb at an Arab family's home in the Ajami neighborhood of Tel Aviv, striking two children. A 12-year-old boy was in moderate condition with burns on his upper body and a 10-year-old girl was treated for a head injury, according to the Magen David Adom rescue service.

In the occupied West Bank, on the outskirts of Ramallah, Nablus and other towns and cities, hundreds of Palestinians protested the Gaza campaign and Israeli actions in Jerusalem. Waving Palestinian flags, they trucked in tires that they set up in burning barricades and hurled stones at Israeli soldiers. At least 10 protesters were shot and killed by soldiers. An 11th Palestinian was killed when he tried to stab a soldier at a military position.

In east Jerusalem, online video showed young Jewish nationalists firing pistols as they traded volleys of stones with Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah, which became a flashpoint for tensions over attempts by settlers to forcibly evict a number of Palestinian families from their homes.

On Israel's northern border, troops opened fire when a group of Lebanese and Palestinian protesters on the other side cut through the border fence and briefly crossed. One Lebanese was killed. Three rockets were fired toward Israel from neighboring Syria without causing any casualties or damage. It was not immediately known who fired them.

The tensions began in east Jerusalem earlier this month, with Palestinian protests against the Sheikh Jarrah evictions and Israeli police measures at Al-Aqsa Mosque, a frequent flashpoint located on a mount in the Old City revered by Muslims and Jews.

Hamas fired rockets toward Jerusalem late Monday, in an apparent attempt to present itself as the champion of the protesters.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed that Hamas will "pay a very heavy price" for its rocket attacks as Israel has massed troops at the frontier. U.S. President Joe Biden has expressed support for Israel while saying he hopes to bring the violence under control.

Hamas has fired some 2,000 rockets toward Israel since Monday, according to the Israeli military. Most have been intercepted by anti-missile defenses, but they have brought life to a standstill in southern Israeli cities, caused disruptions at airports and have set off air raid sirens in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Masks off, Poles cheer reopening of bars and restaurants

By VANESSA GERA and RAFAL NIEDZIELSKI Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Poles pulled off their masks, hugged their friends and made toasts to their regained freedom as restaurants, bars and pubs reopened for the first time in seven months and the

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government dropped a requirement for people to cover their faces outdoors.

The reopening, for now limited now to the outdoor consumption of food and drinks, officially took place on Saturday. Yet many could not wait for midnight to strike and were out on the streets of Warsaw and other cities hours earlier on Friday evening to celebrate, gathering outside popular watering holes. Some brought their own beer to hold them over until they could buy drinks at midnight — though some bars were also seen serving up beers and cocktails early.

"Now they are opening and I feel so awesome. You know, you feel like your freedom is back," said Gabriel Nikilovski, a 38-year-old from Sweden who was having beer at an outdoor table at the Pavilions, a popular courtyard filled with pubs in central Warsaw. "It's like you've been in prison, but you've been in prison at home."

DJs were finally back at work and waiters and waitresses were rushing to fill orders once again. Meanwhile, the end of a requirement to wear masks outdoors added to the sense of liberation. Masks will still be required in settings like public transport and stores.

Bar owners were also happy, thanks to the prospect of being able to finally start earning money, and many said they had been bombarded with reservation requests leading up to the opening.

"Today we feel as if it was New Year's Eve because we are counting down to midnight," said Kasia Szczepanska, co-owner of a bar, CAVA, on Warsaw's trendy Nowy Swiat street. "It's like New Year's in May."

Pandemic restrictions have meant that restaurants, cafes and other establishments have been limited to offering only takeout food and drinks since last fall.

"Everyone says they're fed up with takeout food, food served on plastic," Szczepanska said.

The easing of the country's lockdown is coming in stages but the reopening of bars with outdoor gardens or dining areas was clearly a key psychological step on the road back to normality. From May 29, indoor dining will again be allowed.

Not all businesses survived the long months of forced closure, however, even with some government assistance, and others will be working at first simply to recoup their losses.

The loosening of restrictions comes as vaccinations have finally picked up speed across the European Union, of which Poland is a member, and the numbers of new COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations have plunged in Poland in recent weeks.

Yet many people don't feel like they can fully relax yet.

Aleksandra Konopka, who manages a bar along a popular promenade on the Vistula River where people were lounging in deck chairs and sipping drinks in the sandy garden with a beach-like vibe, said she was thrilled that things were coming back. But she is also nervous there could be more lockdowns as new virus variants circulate. And she said there are new challenges coming from the difficulty of finding workers.

"Not everyone is willing to work in the gastronomy or hotel industry because they expect that they will lose their job," Konopka said. "They changed professions and it's hard to get service."

One of the customers lounging at her bar, Monika Rzezutka, said she had badly missed contact with people during the many months of lockdown and welcomed the resumption of normal life.

"What used to be the norm suddenly becomes something unbelievable," said Rzezutka, a 23-year-old psychology student. "It's a nice feeling."

Iran's hard-line judiciary chief registers presidential run

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The hard-line cleric in charge of Iran's judiciary who also took part in a panel involved in the mass execution of thousands of prisoners in 1988 registered Saturday to run for the country's presidency.

Ebrahim Raisi has been named as a possible successor to Iran's 82-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, leading some to suggest he wouldn't run in the race. However, his registration shows he still has interest in the office he failed to obtain in 2017.

His close ties to Khamenei and popularity in part from his televised anti-corruption campaign could make

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him a favorite in an election in which analysts already believe that hard-liners enjoy an edge. A crush of journalists followed Raisi through the Interior Ministry as he registered, the 60-year-old cleric waving to staffers as he passed.

In a statement just before his registration, Raisi promised to fight "poverty and corruption, humiliation and discrimination" if he becomes president. He added his tenure in office would seek to have a "popular administration for a powerful Iran," a dig at Iran's current president, the relatively moderate Hassan Rouhani, who has struggled under re-imposed U.S. sanctions after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the nuclear deal.

Raisi, wearing his black turban that identifies him as a direct descendant of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, offered fiery remarks to journalists on his campaign. He vowed that if he wins the June 18 vote, corruption will be "dried up."

"Those who founded and partnered with the current situation can't claim they can change it," Raisi said. "People are complaining about the current situation. They are upset. Their disappointment is on the rise. This should be stopped."

Activists, however, hold a far different view of Raisi over his involvement in the 1988 mass execution of prisoners at the end of Iran's long war with Iraq. After Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a U.N.-brokered cease-fire, members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, heavily armed by Saddam Hussein, stormed across the Iranian border in a surprise attack.

Iran ultimately blunted their assault, but the attack set the stage for the sham retrials of political prisoners, militants and others that would become known as "death commissions." Some who appeared were asked to identify themselves. Those who responded "mujahedeen" were sent to their deaths, while others were questioned about their willingness to "clear minefields for the army of the Islamic Republic," according to a 1990 Amnesty International report.

International rights groups estimate that as many as 5,000 people were executed, while the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq puts the number at 30,000. Iran has never fully acknowledged the executions, apparently carried out on Khomeini's orders, though some argue that other top officials were effectively in charge in the months before his 1989 death. Raisi reportedly served on a panel involved in sentencing the prisoners to death.

Raisi has never publicly acknowledged his role in the executions, even while campaigning for president in 2017. He ultimately lost to Rouhani, though he still garnered nearly 16 million votes in his campaign. Khamenei appointed him as head of the judiciary in 2019, signaling he still had hopes for Raisi's political career.

In 2016, Khamenei appointed Raisi to run the Imam Reza charity foundation, which manages a vast conglomerate of businesses and endowments in Iran. It is one of many bonyads, or charitable foundations, fueled by donations or assets seized after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

These foundations offer no public accounting of their spending and answer only to Iran's supreme leader. The Imam Reza charity, known as "Astan-e Quds-e Razavi" in Farsi, is believed to be one of the biggest in the country. Analysts estimate its worth at tens of billions of dollars as it owns almost half the land in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city.

Analysts have speculated that Khamenei could be grooming Raisi as a possible candidate to be Iran's third-ever supreme leader, a Shiite cleric who has final say on all state matters and serves as the country's commander-in-chief.

Within Iran, candidates exist on a political spectrum that broadly includes hard-liners who want to expand Iran's nuclear program, moderates who hold onto the status quo, and reformists who want to change the theocracy from within.

Those calling for radical change find themselves blocked from even running for office by the Guardian Council, a 12-member panel that vets and approves candidates under Khamenei's watch.

Other candidates who registered Saturday include Ali Larijani, a prominent conservative voice and former parliament speaker who later allied himself with Rouhani.

At the same time Larijani registered, so too did Mohsen Hashemi Rafsanjani, the eldest son of the late

former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani, a member of Tehran's city council, has been described as a reformist by political commentators.

Rouhani's senior Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, also registered Saturday, just days after authorities detained his brother to serve a two-year prison sentence over fraud and foreign currency smuggling charges.

Several other candidates have prominent backgrounds in the Guard, a paramilitary force answerable only to Khamenei. Hard-liners have increasingly suggested a former military commander should be president given the country's problems, something that hasn't happened since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution and the purge of the armed forces that followed.

Iran's former hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also registered Wednesday. Though his attempt to run in 2017 ultimately was blocked after Khamenei criticized Ahmadinejad, this year the supreme leader has not warned him off.

The Guardian Council will announce a final list of candidates by May 27, and a 20-day campaign season begins the following day.

Israeli military accused of using media to trick Hamas

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Early Friday, just after midnight, the Israeli military put out an ominous statement to the media: "IDF air and ground troops are currently attacking in the Gaza Strip."

The vaguely worded statement set off frenzied speculation that Israel had launched a ground invasion of Gaza — a much-feared scenario that would mark a bloody escalation of this week's operation against Hamas militants. Some reporters were even told outright the incursion had begun.

Hours later, the military issued a "clarification." There were no troops inside Gaza. But by then, several major news outlets had erroneously reported the ground offensive was under way.

While the army attempted to play down the incident as a misunderstanding, well-placed Israeli military commentators said the media had been used as part of an elaborate ruse to lure Hamas militants into a deadly trap that may have killed dozens of fighters.

"They didn't lie," said Or Heller, a veteran military correspondent on Israel's Channel 13 TV. "It was a manipulation. It was smart and it was successful."

This is how it unfolded:

Late on Thursday, after days of airstrikes, Israel announced it was calling up thousands of reservists and amassing troops along the border ahead of a possible ground invasion. In another sign of escalation, Israel began firing artillery shells across the border at targets inside Gaza, according to residents.

In previous rounds of fighting, ground incursions have resulted in widespread destruction in Gaza and heavy casualties on both sides.

That set the stage for the late-night deception. According to Heller, Israel began scrambling forces along the border in what appeared to be final preparations for an invasion. Then came the announcement to the media, issued simultaneously in Hebrew and Arabic on Twitter. There followed alerts in major outlets, including the New York Times, that the invasion was under way.

The Israeli moves sent Hamas fighters rushing into defensive positions in an underground network of tunnels known as "the Metro," according to Heller and other Israeli reports.

Israel called in 160 warplanes and bombarded the tunnels for 40 minutes, the military said. Heller said it was his understanding that scores of militants had been killed, though he said it was impossible to say.

"What we saw tonight was a very sophisticated operation that had a media aspect to it," Heller said.

Hamas has not commented on the incident, and it was impossible to confirm the Israeli reports.

Heller said veteran Israeli correspondents, who have close ties to the military and in many cases have served themselves, knew that there was no way Israel was sending troops across enemy lines at this stage. Heller and other military correspondents even put out statements on Twitter assuring the jittery public that there was no ground operation.

The Associated Press, based on its analysis of the army's statement, phone calls to military officials and on

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the ground reporting in Gaza, concluded there was no ground incursion and did not report there was one.

But others said the military had misled them or even lied when asked to clarify the initial statement and its ambiguous use of the word "in." Some felt the foreign media had been turned into an accessory of sorts.

Felicia Schwartz, correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, said she alerted news of a ground offensive after receiving explicit confirmation from Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman.

In a statement posted on Twitter, she said Conricus "told me directly, 'There are ground troops in Gaza.' That was the basis for a first story saying so. He retracted that statement two hours later and I changed the story to reflect that, and that is noted in the text and will be corrected."

Speaking to reporters on Friday morning, Conricus blamed an "internal miscommunication."

"These things can sometimes happen in the midst of a complex operation with many moving parts and with an unclear picture of what was happening," he said. "As soon as I understood that I had the wrong information, I updated the relevant people with a clarification."

But some correspondents still had questions.

"If they used us, it's unacceptable. And if not, then what's the story — and why is the Israeli media widely reporting that we were duped?" said Daniel Estrin, NPR's correspondent in Jerusalem, who was also told by the military that an invasion had begun.

Militaries around the world have long used deception and trickery against their enemies. Two years ago, the Israeli military reportedly faked the injuries of soldiers at the scene of a Hezbollah missile strike, going so far as to evacuate them in bandages to a hospital in a helicopter.

According to reports at the time, the army staged the injuries to trick Hezbollah into thinking it had inflicted casualties and therefore agree to a cease-fire.

Friday's misleading statement further strained what has often been a rocky relationship between the IDF and the foreign media.

Peter Lerner, a former military spokesman to the foreign media, said the Israeli public in general has long felt the international media focus too heavily on the Palestinian side of the story while minimizing Israeli concerns and suffering -- and the army is similarly inclined.

Lerner said he felt it was unlikely the military intentionally lied, but damage was done regardless.

"Your currency is credibility," he said. "I think this is a crisis of that credibility in the way it's being portrayed."

DIARY: In Gaza, bombs drop and the conflict again hits home

BY FARES AKRAM Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — On Friday morning, a military airstrike smashed my family's farm in the northern Gaza Strip into a jagged mass of metal and splintered trees. An Israeli bomb had slammed into the yard, carving a crater into the dirt and leaving rubble in its wake.

The conflict, once again, hit home.

The first Gaza war taught me that while our lush citrus grove might offer some breathing space from the congestion and difficulties of city life, it's no refuge. A previous Israeli airstrike killed my father, Akram al-Ghoul, on January 3, 2009. As fighting raged, he'd insisted on sleeping at the farm to tend to the cattle and chicken, and to nurture the trees.

In all, six of my relatives, three close friends and several colleagues have died in the three bloody wars and countless battles between Israel and Hamas. Each time the violence erupts and I report as a journalist on the people who lost their homes, their children or their lives, the memories creep back. I always think, "That could be me." When the thundering bombs, buzzing drones and pounding artillery refresh the pain and trigger the old fear, I seek refuge in work.

The Associated Press office is the only place in Gaza City I feel somewhat safe. The Israeli military has the coordinates of the high-rise, so it's less likely a bomb will bring it crashing down. But on a deeper level, it's speaking to people in Gaza, working to get their voices out of a territory they themselves cannot leave,

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that keeps me sane. When I tell the world what's happening here, I find some small solace.

Still, the work comes at a cost. The latest explosion of violence already has drained me. I can't imagine covering another 2014 — the year of Gaza's grisliest conflict, which killed some 2,200 Palestinians. I can't imagine returning to those seven sleepless, hellish weeks of bombardment, bloody hospitals and overflowing morgues. I may have no choice.

As the terrible nights grind on now, I feel fortunate to be alone here. My wife and two daughters are living safely in Canada. As Gaza marked Eid al-Fitr, one of the biggest Muslim holidays, under the long shadow of war this week, no longer were my girls leaping out from bed, screaming at the falling bombs, huddling terrified in the darkness. Instead, they feasted on chocolate and tried on new clothes.

At times, when their absence feels excruciating, I've regretted the choice to send my family abroad while I am trapped in this blockaded enclave, unable to see them without months of paperwork. But it's weeks like these, filled with worry for my mother and sister who also remain in Gaza, that bring certain and pure relief. At least my daughters are out of harm's way.

I know their hearts remain in this patch of earth. After I shared photos of our wrecked farm Friday, my 9-year-old called me crying. The blast had felled the fir tree she'd planted three years ago and cherished ever since.

Like my father, I grew up in Gaza City. His father grew up just across the border and, like hundreds of thousands of other Palestinians, fled the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. A decade later, he began planting citrus in Beit Lahiya, the northern Gaza Strip.

His nostalgic desire to live as close as possible to the border — to his original village in what is now Israel — has put the farm in what can be one of the territory's most dangerous corners. Seen from roof height, the Israeli frontier looms as an ominous vista, with fortified fences and troops staffing guard towers.

The Gaza that the world knows today — impoverished, under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade, always mired in conflict — was not the Gaza of my youth. People can't believe it when I tell them how as a teenager, before the second intifada erupted in the early 2000s, I flew from Gaza's airport (yes, airport) to Istanbul for a day of press conferences and back within 24 hours.

Now, thousands of Palestinians wait weeks to hear authorities call their names over a crackling loud-speaker to pass through the iron gate known as Rafah crossing into Egypt, where a harrowing journey through the lawless desert of North Sinai awaits.

When the Palestinian uprisings seized the world's attention, I dove into journalism with my TV producer uncle, Marwan Alghoul, a source of fascination and inspiration. Moments of hope for my homeland punctuated my career; in 2005, just after Israel pulled out, massive aid pledges flooded the tiny territory. Egypt flung open Rafah, and for once I imagined living a somewhat normal life.

But two years later, the Hamas militant group took over Gaza, and conditions went from bad to worse. The group is committed to confronting Israel, which has imposed a land, sea and air blockade.

Now, even as my daily fare is documenting the tragedies of the endless conflict between Hamas and Israel, people in Gaza often urge me to set hope against experience, to believe in a better future. Abraded by three wars, I've stopped heeding their advice and find hope only in planning a life far away.

The conflict never really changes. With Israel and Hamas locked in a violent loop, so much remains static. After an airstrike pummeled my uncle's home in 2014, he waited patiently for compensation to rebuild. Three years later, installments trickled in and he could finish most of the repairs.

On Thursday night, a shell from an Israeli tank crashed into his house.

Newsom's spending binge reshapes California recall election

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A fading coronavirus crisis and an astounding windfall of tax dollars have reshuffled California's emerging recall election, allowing Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom to talk about an end to most COVID-19 restrictions and propose billions in new spending as he looks to fend off Republicans who depict him as a foppish failure.

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The governor spent much of 2020 on the defensive for whipsaw decisions during the depths of the pandemic that angered many business owners and residents. But more recently he has appeared to steady his stride with the all-but-certain election looming this fall.

This week, flush with more than \$100 billion in surplus cash in his budget, he crisscrossed the state to unveil a string of proposals sure to bring smiles from many voters: \$12 billion to fight homelessness; checks up to \$1,100 for millions of low and middle-income earners who struggled during lockdowns; \$2.7 billion to pay for all of the state's 4-year-olds to go to kindergarten for free; and hundreds of millions to help small businesses recover from the economic downturn.

His budget released Friday was studded with initiatives favored by his progressive base, including \$7.2 billion to pay off people's outstanding rent and utility bills and \$300 million to forgive traffic and other fines for lower-income residents. There also was \$35 million to encourage local universal basic income programs and money to give Medicaid benefits to people 60 and older living in the country illegally.

As the virus threat diminishes, the economy rebounds and Californians return to familiar routines, Republican candidates will need to emphasize policy differences on issues like taxes and homelessness, rather than banking on lingering resentment from lockdowns and the pandemic, said Tim Rosales, a veteran GOP strategist who is sitting out the recall.

With conditions in the state improving "it's harder and harder to maintain that level of ... anger" during the worst days of the pandemic, he said, conceding Newsom is "on the right trajectory in terms of his approval ratings."

The goal for Newsom's team is not just surviving the recall. They are looking to position the governor for an expected 2022 re-election campaign that will kick off immediately following the recall election and, as importantly, restore his name to the national discussion about potential White House contenders.

Under a best-case scenario for the governor, a comeback story line from the recall might even help Newsom discredit the image popularized by his GOP gubernatorial rivals of a preening lightweight.

Republican businessman John Cox mocks Newsom as a "pretty boy." Former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer says the race is about "genuine versus phony."

Faulconer rolled out his own attention-grabbing proposal Wednesday: Ending the state income tax for individuals making up to \$50,000 and households up to \$100,000, which could find wide appeal with voters in a state where taxes seem to go relentlessly in one direction: higher.

Newsom was elected in a 2018 landslide over Cox, but his popularity tumbled as he contended with public unrest over long-running school and businesses closures during the pandemic, fallout from a multibillion-dollar unemployment benefits scandal and embarrassment over his decision to attend a lavish birthday dinner at an exclusive restaurant in November while lecturing residents to stay home for safety.

Look for the Republicans to continue to attack his image — he remains shackled to the French Laundry debacle. In one night at that restaurant with lobbyists and friends, he managed to reinforce a trifecta of loathsome stereotypes about politicians — hypocrisy, elitism and the whiff of improper backroom deal-making. He later apologized for what he called a "bad mistake."

While Newsom dominated the narrative of the race all week — the economy is "roaring back," he told reporters in Los Angeles — a sudden spike in virus cases or another epic season of wildfires would test him again. And schools could also be a vulnerable flank. California badly trailed other states in getting children back into classrooms, a reality Republicans repeat at every turn.

The leading GOP candidates in the race start at a disadvantage in heavily Democratic California, where registered Democrats outnumber GOP voters by nearly 2-to-1. A Republican candidate hasn't won a state-wide race since 2006, when Arnold Schwarzenegger won re-election after gaining office in a recall election.

Newsom's team has worked for months to tie the recall to national Republicans and supporters and operatives of former President Donald Trump, who is broadly unpopular in California outside his GOP base.

For Newsom, one of his advantages as a candidate was on vivid display this week: He used the power of his office to dominate the public stage as he made appearances in San Diego, Los Angeles, Oakland and the Central Valley, among other locations.

Cox, meanwhile, has been campaigning with a bear in a bid to attract publicity. He criticized Newsom Friday for the surge in spending: "We should be slashing taxes and making California more affordable and not ballooning the size of our government," he said.

Reality TV personality and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner so far has appeared more curio than contender, barely registering in recent polling. She tweeted Friday that "California should already be fully open!"

Faulconer's biggest challenge is becoming known outside his hometown area in San Diego. He said he intends to take his campaign to communities around the state, where voters are looking for "somebody who actually has the experience ... who can bring positive change and reform."

Thad Kousser, a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego, said a lot will change by the time voters go to the polls. Will the massive investment in homelessness make a change? Will Newsom suffer another self-inflicted wound like his trip to the French Laundry?

"Right now the recall is not in the hands of the governor or its backers. This is all about the direction of the state," he said. "What really matters is where we are in the fall."

Rep. Greene's combative behavior could spark ethics review

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A year before her election to Congress, Marjorie Taylor Greene searched for Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez at her Capitol office, taunting the New York Democrat to "get rid of your diaper" and "talk to the American citizens," as shown in video unearthed by CNN.

"I am an American citizen. I pay your salary through the taxes that you collect from me through the IRS," Greene says through the mail slot of a locked door. "I am a woman. I am a female business owner and I'm proud to be an American woman. And I do not support your socialist policies."

The Georgia Republican continued: "If you want to be a big girl, you need to get rid of your diaper and come out and be able to talk to the American citizens." Two men appear along with her in the video, also mocking Ocasio-Cortez and her staff through the mail slot.

The release of the since-deleted video, which was initially broadcast in February 2019 on Facebook Live, came the same week that Greene followed Ocasio-Cortez off the House floor, shouting that the Democrat supported "terrorists" and doesn't "care about the American people," as first reported by The Washington Post. She has been challenging Ocasio-Cortez to a debate on Twitter, entreaties that Ocasio-Cortez had been ignoring.

Asked Friday about the "context" of the 2019 video, Greene told reporters, "Walking around and talking to members of Congress who serve the taxpayers that, now we've got taxpayers aren't even allowed to come talk to us, that's the context."

The incidents add to a portrait of the activist-turned-lawmaker who has shown little interest in governing, but has instead used her platform to float conspiracy theories, push Donald Trump's false claims about a stolen 2020 election and further her own notoriety. Her combativeness toward colleagues has only grown after an unprecedented rebuke where the House stripped her of committee assignments, effectively ending her ability to shape legislation.

Another confrontation Friday involved a member of her staff.

Rep. Eric Swalwell said a staffer for Greene yelled at him to take his mask off after stepping off the House floor, an unusual breach of decorum. Though the CDC has relaxed mask-wearing guidelines for those who have been vaccinated, many lawmakers continue to wear them, and they are still required on the House floor.

"I had a mask on as I stepped off the Floor. An aide with @mtgreenee yelled at me to take my mask off. No one should be bullied for wearing a mask," Swalwell tweeted. "So I told the bully what I thought of his order."

On Twitter Friday, Greene said she had witnessed the confrontation and claimed, "No one yelled."

Greene's behavior has alarmed some members of Congress, where feelings remain raw after the deadly Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters intent on overturning the outcome of the

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"This is a woman that's deeply unwell and clearly needs some help," Ocasio-Cortez told reporters Friday. "Her kind of fixation has lasted for several years now" and the "depth of that unwellness has raised concerns for other members, as well."

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"This is beneath the dignity of a person serving in the Congress of the United States and is a cause for trauma, and fear among members, especially on the heels of an insurrection," Pelosi said Thursday..

Yet so far, Republicans have shown little appetite for punishing Greene. They rallied around her in February after some of her past comments came to light, including her endorsement of calls to assassinate leading Democrats. That left it to Democrats, who were joined by 11 Republicans, in voting to strip her of her committee assignments.

As a congressional candidate, Greene posted a photo in 2020 of herself with a gun next to images of Ocasio-Cortez and fellow Democratic Reps. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan.

Before her election, she also supported Facebook posts that advocated violence against Democrats and the FBI. One suggested shooting Pelosi in the head. In response to a post raising the prospect of hanging former President Barack Obama, Greene responded that the "stage is being set."

In one 2018 Facebook posts, she speculated that "lasers or blue beams of light" controlled by a left-wing cabal tied to a powerful Jewish family could have been responsible for sparking California wildfires.

And in February 2019, Greene appeared in an another online video filmed at the U.S. Capitol, arguing that Omar and Tlaib weren't "really official" members of Congress because they didn't take the oath of office on the Bible. Both women are Muslim.

Let's face it: Washington adjusts to new mask guidance

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jill Biden says finally going mask-free feels like "we're moving forward." A Republican senator says going unmasked "certainly helps the flow of conversation."

But the conversation on the House floor on Friday approached sniping as lawmakers objected to being required to keep masking up until all 435 of them get their COVID-19 shots.

Across Washington, the government is adjusting to new federal guidance easing up on when masks should be worn.

"So much for following the science," Rep. Greg Murphy, R-N.C., a urologist, said after complaining that he'd have to put his mask back on after his House floor speech despite being fully vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday that fully vaccinated people — those who are two weeks past their last required dose of a COVID-19 vaccine — can stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings. Partially vaccinated or unvaccinated people should keep wearing masks, the guidance says.

But on Capitol Hill, lawmakers have to keep wearing masks on the House floor, according to a memo from the Office of the Attending Physician, Dr. Brian Monahan.

"The present mask requirement and other guidelines remain unchanged until all Members and Floor staff are fully vaccinated," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a memo to her Democratic colleagues. "Returning the Capitol to the welcoming and safe venue that it has been requires us to not only secure it physically but to make it safe from the virus."

Recent surveys suggest that about 1 in 4 House lawmakers are not fully vaccinated.

Lawmakers can remove their masks while on the House floor to make speeches, but must mask up after they finish. They are, however, free to resume "pre-pandemic activities" elsewhere in the House complex of office buildings and public spaces.

In the Senate, Republicans Susan Collins of Maine and Joni Ernst of Iowa were among senators who didn't hesitate to remove their masks as soon as they heard the news. They were seen entering the Sen-

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ate chamber Thursday marveling at being mask-free and calling out, "Freedom!"

Senate leadership has not commented on the updated mask guidance, which came down as Biden and a group of Republican senators discussed infrastructure in the Oval Office.

"So we all looked at each other ... we took all of our masks off," Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., told Fox News on Friday. "It felt very freeing, and we had a great discussion after that. We all felt good about it, and it certainly helps the flow of conversation."

It was a much different scene Friday at the White House.

Reporters caught up with President Joe Biden as he made an unannounced appearance on the White House driveway to pose for photos with a departing staff member. Asked if he was enjoying his first workday without a mask, Biden replied "yes" as he reentered the West Wing.

For the first time in about a year, reporters went barefaced as they questioned White House press secretary Jen Psaki at the daily briefing.

After the CDC guidance went out, Psaki said, staff were immediately notified by email that they could stop wearing masks, including in meetings with Biden. Similar guidance was issued to the White House Correspondents' Association, which dropped its mask requirement for journalists on the premises.

Psaki said it may take a few days to put the new guidelines in place across government and figure out whether it means additional staff — many of whom have been working remotely — will be allowed onto the White House campus.

"We're eager to get back to a version of normal, but we need a little bit of time to implement it and also to review additional steps," Psaki said.

Some government departments didn't need any time figuring it out.

The Pentagon announced Friday that fully vaccinated Defense Department personnel no longer need to wear masks indoors or outdoors at DOD facilities.

Updated guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services said "fully vaccinated federal employees, fully vaccinated onsite contractors and fully vaccinated visitors to federal buildings are no longer required to wear masks."

Mask-wearing remained in force at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture as it reopened Friday. Jill Biden stopped in to greet the staff and said the relaxed mask guidance feels as though "inch by inch we're moving forward" against the pandemic.

The Smithsonian said it would keep mask requirements in place for anyone over age 2 while it reviews the new guidance.

During a House Republican caucus leadership vote, most members didn't wear masks, and several reporters removed them as well following guidance from the Capitol physician that said vaccinated people don't have to wear them in the hallways.

Some Republicans addressed the issue from the House floor.

Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, criticized Democrats for having argued that Republicans weren't following the science. He said it's Democrats who now are guilty of that.

"The House of Representatives has leadership who are claiming that we need to follow the science, refuses to do so," Gohmert said, seeming to refer to Pelosi. "But we're hoping we'll eventually get people here, at least the majority, to follow the science."

IRS to the rescue? Tax audits eyed for infrastructure cash

By KEVIN FREKING and MARCY GORDON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans say they won't raise taxes on corporations. Democrats say they won't raise taxes on people making less than \$400,000 a year. So who is going to pay for the big public works boost that lawmakers and President Joe Biden say is necessary for the country?

Enter the IRS.

Biden is proposing that Congress build up the depleted and often-maligned agency, saying that a more aggressive collection of unpaid taxes could help cover the cost of his multitrillion-dollar plan to boost infra-

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structure, families and education. More resources to boost audits of businesses, estates and the wealthy would raise \$700 billion over 10 years, the White House estimates.

It's just the latest idea emerging in the bipartisan talks over an infrastructure bill, which saw Biden huddle at the White House this week with congressional leaders and a group of Republican senators. The GOP senators, touting a \$568 billion infrastructure plan of their own, said they were "encouraged" by the discussion with Biden, but all sides acknowledged that how to pay for the public works plan remains a difficult problem.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Biden brought up his IRS proposal as he met Wednesday with the top four congressional leaders.

"My understanding is it's at least \$1 trillion, it could be a trillion-and-a-quarter, a trillion-and-a-half dollars of illegally, unpaid taxes in the country," Pelosi said. "Part of the answer is to beef up the IRS so they could take in those taxes, and that's a big chunk. That could go a long way."

She was referring to the tax gap, which is the difference between taxes paid and taxes owed. In a politically charged climate, there isn't agreement on how big the tax gap is, let alone how much of it could be captured. But it's a tantalizing target for lawmakers, raising the potential to raise hundreds of billions in revenue without needing to raise taxes at all.

The question is how big the tax gap really is — and how much it can realistically be closed.

The Internal Revenue Service has estimated the tax gap is \$440 billion per year. But IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig stunned his audience at a recent Senate hearing when he offered a new number: about \$1 trillion annually.

The old estimates don't take into account the recent boom in income made by self-employed "gig" workers, which can be underreported, concealed offshore income and the rising use of cryptocurrency, which makes it hard for the IRS to identify taxpayers in third-party transactions, experts say.

The \$1 trillion figure "is not crazy. That's totally possible," says Steve Wamhoff, director of federal tax policy at the left-leaning Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

But Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, the senior Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, called it "speculation." And he's worried it could push the IRS toward overzealous enforcement.

"It would be detrimental if IRS efforts do not strike the appropriate balance between taxpayer responsibilities and taxpayer rights," Crapo told Rettig in a letter this week.

The IRS has been on the losing end of congressional funding fights in recent years, taking a cut of about 20% since 2010, adjusting for inflation, even as its responsibilities have grown. Biden's new spending proposals include an extra \$80 billion over 10 years to bolster IRS audits of upper-income individuals and corporations.

But some experts say bolstered audits could fall far short of a \$700 billion windfall. The Penn Wharton Budget Model, a research organization associated with the University of Pennsylvania, projects the proposed spending on IRS collection efforts would bring in about \$480 billion from 2022 to 2031.

In selling its plan, the White House has emphasized what it describes as fixing a "two-tiered system of tax administration" in the U.S. While regular workers pay taxes on the wages they earn, some wealthy taxpayers find ways to maneuver around them.

Those with annual incomes under \$25,000 are audited at a higher rate (0.69%) than those with incomes up to \$500,000 (0.53%), according to IRS data. Taxpayers who receive the earned-income tax credit, which applies mainly to low-income workers with children, are audited at a higher rate than all but the very wealthiest filers. The audit rate for millionaires plunged from 8.4% in 2010 to 2.4% in 2019.

The IRS rejects the notion of unfair audit treatment, saying that critics have misinterpreted the data. Rettig bristled at the suggestion at the Senate hearing. High-income taxpayers "are audited more than any other taxpayer," he said, at a rate over 8% for those earning more than \$10 million.

So far, Republicans are only ruling out revisiting the 2017 tax cuts that they passed without any Democratic support. How much they are willing to boost the IRS as part of an infrastructure bill remains to be seen. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said Republicans would rather finance infrastructure

through user fees such as tolls and gasoline taxes.

But after pushing the agency's steep budget cuts over the past decade, it would be a remarkable shift for the GOP to back the kind of sustained investment in the IRS that Biden is talking about — and that experts say is necessary to narrow the tax gap.

Republican lawmakers with control over funding for the IRS have long accused it of overreaching into ordinary taxpayers' lives. Their hostility toward the IRS exploded into outrage in 2013 during the Obama administration, when the agency admitted having targeted conservative tea party groups with heightened, often burdensome scrutiny when they applied for tax-exempt status.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, wrote in his home state newspaper, the Des Moines Register, that he's not opposed to closing the tax gap, but he has concerns about the scope of the White House's efforts.

"Instead of promising a chicken in every pot, Biden's plan promises an auditor at every kitchen table," Grassley wrote.

Philadelphia now says MOVE victims' remains weren't cremated

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A day after Philadelphia's health commissioner was forced to resign over the cremation of partial remains belonging to victims of a 1985 bombing of the headquarters of a Black organization, the city now says those remains were never actually destroyed.

Mayor Jim Kenney released a statement late Friday saying that the remains of MOVE bombing victims thought to have been cremated in 2017, under orders from Health Commissioner Thomas Farley, were located at the medical examiner's office that afternoon. Among the 11 slain when police bombed MOVE's headquarters, causing a fire that spread to more than 60 row homes, were five children.

"I am relieved that these remains were found and not destroyed, however I am also very sorry for the needless pain that this ordeal has caused the Africa family," Kenney said, adding that "many unanswered questions" surround the case — including why Farley's order wasn't obeyed.

Kenney compelled Farley to resign Thursday, the 36th anniversary of the MOVE bombing, after consulting the victims' family members. At the time, the mayor said Farley's decision to order the cremation and disposal of the remains, without notifying the decedents' family members, lacked empathy.

In a statement released by the mayor's office Thursday, Farley said that he was told by the city's medical examiner, Dr. Sam Gulino, that a box had been found containing materials related to MOVE bombing victims' autopsies. The box turned out to contain bones and bone fragments.

It is a standard procedure to retain specimens after an autopsy ends and the remains are turned over to the decedent's next-of-kin, Farley said — but "not wanting to cause more anguish," he ordered their disposal on his own authority, without consulting other top city officials.

After recent reports that local institutions had remains of MOVE bombing victims, Farley said he reconsidered his actions. Kenney said Farley told him about his order late Tuesday, took responsibility and resigned from the \$175,000-a-year job he'd held for five years.

"I profoundly regret making this decision without consulting the family members of the victims and I extend my deepest apologies for the pain this will cause them," Farley wrote Thursday.

Gulino was also placed on leave pending an investigation. Kenney's statement Friday didn't mention Farley or Gulino by name, but promised the investigation would continue with "full transparency" for the victims' family.

An attorney for the victims' family members, Leon A. Williams, told The Philadelphia Inquirer that city officials, including Kenney, had notified the family Friday.

Kenney's statement said the family members and their representatives were able to ask the medical examiner's office questions and he pledged to turn over the remains once the investigation was complete.

"There are also clearly many areas for improvement in procedures used by the Medical Examiner's Office," he wrote.

A lawyer who had accompanied MOVE members to a meeting with Kenney prior to Friday's revelations, Michael Coard, had said they were "outraged, enraged, incensed, but mostly confused" by what was

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thought to have been the destruction of the remains. He said Thursday that a lawsuit was possible.

Williams did not describe the family's reaction to Friday's news to the Inquirer.

Late Thursday, dressed all in white, MOVE members read a minute-by-minute account of the bombing and the confrontation that led up to it: Philadelphia police, attempting to serve warrants on four members and evict the rest of the Black back-to-nature group, dropped a bomb from a helicopter, igniting fuel for a generator stored on the roof.

Members on Thursday recounted alleged comments from the city emergency officials directing first responders to let the house burn. Fire department leaders later said they were scared their firefighters could face gunfire if they attempted to get to the home in the middle of the block. The fire quickly spread, displacing more than 250 people.

The city appointed a commission to investigate the decisions that led to the bombing, and in 1986 it issued a report calling the decision to bomb an occupied row house "unconscionable." MOVE survivors were awarded a \$1.5 million judgment in a 1996 civil lawsuit.

City officials claimed at the time that neighbors had filed complaints, saying there were issues with sanitation, vermin and noise at odd hours. But documents gathered by the commission and in the research into the bombing showed city officials, including the mayor, had designated the group as a terrorist organization. Group members maintained they had been targeted since the 1978 eviction attempt where a police officer was killed and called the complaints explanation a lie.

"I hope that this latest discovery can give them some level of solace," Kenney said of MOVE members Friday.

Rep. Greene's combative behavior could spark ethics review

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A year before her election to Congress, Marjorie Taylor Greene searched for Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez at her Capitol office, taunting the New York Democrat to "get rid of your diaper" and "talk to the American citizens," as shown in video unearthed Friday by CNN.

"I am an American citizen. I pay your salary through the taxes that you collect from me through the IRS," Greene says through the mail slot of a locked door. "I am a woman. I am a female business owner and I'm proud to be an American woman. And I do not support your socialist policies."

The Georgia Republican continued: "If you want to be a big girl, you need to get rid of your diaper and come out and be able to talk to the American citizens." Two men appear along with her in the video, also mocking Ocasio-Cortez and her staff through the mail slot.

The release of the since-deleted video, which was initially broadcast in February 2019 on Facebook Live, came the same week that Greene followed Ocasio-Cortez off the House floor, shouting that the Democrat supported "terrorists" and doesn't "care about the American people," as first reported by The Washington Post. She has been challenging Ocasio-Cortez to a debate on Twitter, entreaties that Ocasio-Cortez had been ignoring.

Asked Friday about the "context" of the 2019 video, Greene told reporters, "Walking around and talking to members of Congress who serve the taxpayers that, now we've got taxpayers aren't even allowed to come talk to us, that's the context."

The incidents add to a portrait of the activist-turned-lawmaker who has shown little interest in governing, but has instead used her platform to float conspiracy theories, push Donald Trump's false claims about a stolen 2020 election and further her own notoriety. Her combativeness toward colleagues has only grown after an unprecedented rebuke where the House stripped her of committee assignments, effectively ending her ability to shape legislation.

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On Twitter Friday, Greene said she had witnessed the confrontation and claimed, "No one yelled."

Greene's behavior has alarmed some members of Congress, where feelings remain raw after the deadly Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters intent on overturning the outcome of the 2020 election.

"This is a woman that's deeply unwell and clearly needs some help," Ocasio-Cortez told reporters Friday. "Her kind of fixation has lasted for several years now" and the "depth of that unwellness has raised concerns for other members, as well."

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"This is beneath the dignity of a person serving in the Congress of the United States and is a cause for trauma, and fear among members, especially on the heels of an insurrection," Pelosi said Thursday.

Yet so far, Republicans have shown little appetite for punishing Greene. They rallied around her in February after some of her past comments came to light, including her endorsement of calls to assassinate leading Democrats. That left it to Democrats, who were joined by 11 Republicans, in voting to strip her of her committee assignments.

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US calls reports of migrant children in buses 'unacceptable'

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

Reports of unaccompanied migrant children being forced to stay overnight in parked buses at the Dallas convention center are "completely unacceptable" if true, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said Friday.

Dr. Amy Cohen, a psychiatrist and executive director of the advocacy group Every Last One, said a 15-year-old Honduran boy she is working with was held on a bus from Saturday to Wednesday, using the bus bathroom during that time and unable to move about freely or communicate with family. The boy encountered at least three other children who were held as long in the parking lot of the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, said Cohen, who also has been in contact with another child who was confined earlier to a bus for an extended period.

It is unclear how many children were kept on buses overnight.

"This is completely unacceptable," Becerra said. "We're quickly investigating this to get to the bottom of what happened, and we'll work to make sure this never happens again. The safety and well-being of the children is our priority."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said "there's no excuse for this kind of treatment."

The reports are "outrageous, they're unacceptable and they do not meet our standard for child care," Psaki said.

The Honduran boy's experience, first reported by NBC News, comes as Health and Human Services mas-

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sively expands its capacity to house migrant children until they can be placed with a sponsor in the United States, usually parents or close relatives, while their cases wind through immigration court. It comes in response to the largest influx of unaccompanied children on record.

The department, whose lodging is more suited to longer-term stays than Border Patrol holding facilities, has grown its capacity to about 20,000 beds from less than 1,000 in mid-February. It's opened 14 emergency intake centers, including at the Dallas convention center and other large venues. The Dallas facility opened in February with plans to house up to 3,000 children.

Health and Human Services had 20,397 unaccompanied children in its custody as of Wednesday.

The government flew the Honduran boy to Seattle to reunite with his mother and uncle after NBC News inquired about his status.

MVM Inc., a transportation contractor for the government, said it has "safely and professionally" transported migrant children and families for more than six years.

"Over the last seven weeks, the number of children needing escorts in this pandemic environment has increased to more than 7,100, creating challenging travel logistics and resulting in some extended wait times on their way to reunification sites," the company said in a statement.

MVM said it experienced some delays at a 24-hour regional hub where buses meet to get children on their way to join family, which resulted in "a child staying at that site longer than our target wait time of four hours. This is a violation of our policy and we are conducting an internal review of this incident."

The company said the child had access to an air-conditioned bus, food and snacks, bottled water and personal protective equipment.

West Bank erupts in protest amid more Israel-Hamas fighting

By FARES AKRAM and LEE KEATH Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Turmoil from the battle between Israel and Hamas spilled over into the West Bank on Friday, sparking the most widespread Palestinian protests in years as hundreds of young demonstrators in multiple towns clashed with Israeli troops, who shot and killed at least 11 people.

Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip continued into early Saturday, when an airstrike on a house in Gaza City killed at least seven Palestinians — the highest number of fatalities in a single hit. That strike came a day after a furious overnight barrage of tank fire and airstrikes that wreaked destruction in some towns, killed a family of six in their house and sent thousands fleeing their homes.

The Israeli military said the operation involved 160 warplanes dropping some 80 tons of explosives over the course of 40 minutes and succeeded in destroying a network of tunnels used by Hamas to elude airstrikes and surveillance.

Israel appeared determined to inflict as much damage as possible on Gaza's Hamas rulers before international efforts for a cease-fire accelerated. Since Monday night, Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, which has pounded the Gaza Strip with strikes. In Gaza, at least 126 people have been killed, including 31 children and 20 women; in Israel, seven people have been killed, including a 6-year-old boy and a soldier.

Houda Ouda said she and her extended family ran frantically into their home in the Gaza town of Beit Hanoun, seeking safety as the earth shook in the darkness.

"We even did not dare to look from the window to know what is being hit," she said. When daylight came, she saw the destruction: streets cratered, buildings crushed or with facades blown off, an olive tree burned bare, dust covering everything.

The latest airstrike targeted a three-story house on the edge of a refugee camp. Said Alghoul, who lives nearby, said Israeli warplanes dropped at least three bombs on the home without warning residents in advance.

"I could not endure and ran back to my home," he said. Rescuers called a bulldozer to dig through the rubble for survivors or bodies.

Shortly afterward, Hamas said it fired a salvo of rockets at southern Israel in response to the airstrike.

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The conflict, which was sparked by tensions in Jerusalem during the past month, has reverberated widely. Israeli cities with mixed Arab and Jewish populations have seen daily violence, with mobs from each community clashing and trashing each other's property. New clashes broke out Friday in the coastal city of Acre.

In the occupied West Bank, on the outskirts of Ramallah, Nablus and other towns and cities, hundreds of Palestinians protested against the Gaza campaign and Israeli actions in Jerusalem. Waving Palestinian flags, they trucked in tires that they set up in burning barricades and hurled stones at Israeli soldiers. At least 10 protesters were shot and killed by soldiers. An 11th Palestinian was killed when he tried to stab a soldier at a military position.

In east Jerusalem, online video showed young Jewish nationalists firing pistols as they traded volleys of stone with Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah, which became a flashpoint for tensions over attempts by settlers to forcibly evict a number of Palestinian families from their homes.

On Israel's northern border, troops opened fire when a group of Lebanese and Palestinian protesters on the other side cut through the border fence and briefly crossed. One Lebanese was killed. Three rockets were fired toward Israel from neighboring Syria, but they either landed in Syrian territory or in empty areas, Israeli media said. It was not immediately known who fired them.

The spiraling violence has raised fears of a new Palestinian "intifada," or uprising, at a time when the peace process has been virtually nonexistent for years. The tensions began in east Jerusalem earlier this month, with Palestinian protests against the Sheikh Jarrah evictions and Israeli police measures at Al-Aqsa Mosque, a frequent flashpoint located on a mount in the Old City revered by Muslims and Jews.

Hamas fired rockets toward Jerusalem late Monday, in an apparent attempt to present itself as the champion of the protesters. In the conflict that spiraled from there, Israel says it wants to inflict as much damage as it can on Hamas' military infrastructure in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed that Hamas would "pay a very heavy price" for its rocket attacks. Israel called up 9,000 reservists Thursday to join its troops massed at the Gaza border.

An Egyptian intelligence official said Israel had turned down an Egyptian proposal for a one-year cease-fire that Hamas had accepted. The official, who was close to Egypt's talks with both sides, spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the internal negotiations.

On Friday, the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Israel-Palestinian affairs, Hady Amr, arrived in Israel as part of an attempt by Washington to de-escalate the conflict.

U.S. President Joe Biden gave a show of support to Netanyahu in a call a day earlier, saying "there has not been a significant overreaction" in Israel's response to Hamas rockets. He said the aim is to get a "significant reduction in attacks, particularly rocket attacks."

Hamas has fired some 2,000 rockets toward Israel since Monday, according to the Israeli military. Most have been intercepted by anti-missile defenses, but they have brought life to a standstill in southern Israeli cities, caused disruptions at airports and have set off air raid sirens in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Rafat Tanani, his pregnant wife and four children, ages 7 and under, were killed after an Israeli warplane reduced their four-story apartment building to rubble in the neighboring town of Beit Lahia, residents said. Four strikes hit the building, Rafat's brother Fadi said. The building's owner and his wife also were killed.

"It was a massacre," said Sadallah Tanani, another relative. "My feelings are indescribable."

When the sun rose Friday, residents streamed out of the area in pickup trucks, on donkeys and on foot, taking pillows, blankets, pots and pans and bread. Thousands took shelter inside 16 schools run by the United Nations relief agency UNWRA, agency spokesman Adnan Abu Hasna said.

Mohammed Ghabayen, who took refuge in a school with his family, said his children had eaten nothing since the day before, and they had no mattresses to sleep on. "And this is in the shadow of the coronavirus crisis," he said. "We don't know whether to take precautions for the coronavirus or the rockets or what to do exactly."

Israeli military officials cheered the operation as a successful blow against the tunnel network. Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said 160 warplanes operated in a "synchronized manner" for

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about 40 minutes as part of the operation.

He said the military aims to minimize collateral damage in striking military targets. But measures the military takes in other strikes, such as warning shots to get civilians to leave, were not "feasible this time."

Military correspondents in Israeli media said the military believed dozens of militants were killed inside the tunnels. The Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups have confirmed 20 deaths in their ranks, but the Israeli military said the real number is far higher.

"We turned the tunnels which they thought were death traps for our soldiers into traps for them." Reserve Air Force Col. Koby Regev said on Israeli television.

States, business sort out what new CDC mask guidance means

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

More than a dozen states quickly embraced new federal guidelines that say fully vaccinated Americans no longer need to wear masks indoors or out in most cases. But other states and cities and some major businesses hesitated amid doubts about whether the approach is safe or even workable.

As many business owners pointed out, there is no easy way to determine who has been vaccinated and who hasn't. And the new guidelines, issued Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, essentially work on the honor system, leaving it up to people to do the right thing.

Labor groups and others warned that employees at stores, restaurants, bars and other businesses could be left exposed to the coronavirus from customers and could be forced into the unwanted role of "vaccination police."

But in Malvern, Pennsylvania, owner Sean Weinberg took down the mask signs Friday at Restaurant Alba, which he runs with his wife. He also emailed his employees to let them know they can forgo masks at work if they are fully vaccinated.

"It's just a headache we don't want to have to fight any more," Weinberg said.

Several major chains, including CVS, Home Depot, Macy's and supermarket giant Kroger Co., said they are still requiring masks in stores for the time being, though some said they are reviewing their policies.

But Walmart, the world's largest retailer, Costco and Trader Joe's said Friday that they won't require vaccinated shoppers to wear a mask in U.S. stores, unless state or local laws say otherwise.

Vaccinated shoppers can go maskless immediately, Walmart said. Vaccinated workers can stop wearing them on May 18. As an incentive, the company said it is offering workers \$75 if they prove they have been vaccinated. Both Costco and Trader Joe's said they would not require proof of vaccination, but employees at the grocery chain will still need to cover their faces.

Half the states had mask requirements in place for most indoor spaces when the CDC issued its recommendations amid tumbling cases and rising vaccination rates.

Nearly 47% of the U.S. population has received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and cases have dropped to their lowest level since September, at an average of about 35,000 a day. CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky noted in making the announcement that the vaccine has proved powerfully effective in preventing serious COVID-19 illness.

Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, Ohio, Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Kentucky, Washington, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, North Carolina, Kansas, Colorado and Rhode Island announced plans to fall in line with the CDC guidance either immediately or in the coming weeks. Some cities, including New Orleans and Anchorage, did the same.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said the new approach makes clear that vaccines are the fastest way to get back to doing the things "we all love." Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear called the guidance a "game-changer." And Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said the change is "a heck of a benefit."

Other states, such as California, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Hawaii and Massachusetts, and cities like Minneapolis and St. Paul kept mask rules in place for the time being.

"We're frankly not there yet," New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said. And Hawaii Gov. David Ige said, "We are unable to determine who is vaccinated and who is not vaccinated. The best mitigation measure is for

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everyone to wear a mask.”

Industry leaders warned of the potential for confusion and hard feelings among customers because of the varying rules from place to place. Even in states that have dropped mask mandates, stores and other businesses can still require face coverings if they want.

Confusion over the guidance extended to the White House, where press secretary Jen Psaki said, “I think we’re still figuring out how to implement it.”

The CDC and the Biden administration had faced pressure to ease restrictions on fully vaccinated people in part to highlight the benefits of the shots and motivate other people to get inoculated.

Restaurant workers in places where mask mandates remain are finding themselves caught in the middle, said Jot Condie, the president of the California Restaurant Association. He said his phone has been “blowing up” with reports of increasingly belligerent customers.

“The person who is not wearing a mask will say, ‘My president just told me that the CDC just issued guidance and I’ve been vaccinated and I’m not going to wear a mask,’” he said.

Scott Dolch, executive director of the Connecticut Restaurant Association, said owners are concerned about being put in a difficult position.

“They’re like, OK, now I have to deal with the honor system, hoping that that person that told me they’re totally vaccinated” is telling the truth, Dolch said.

The CDC announcement sent airline stocks soaring, though the guidance still calls for masks in crowded indoor settings such as planes, buses, trains, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters, and says people should obey all local and state regulations.

Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson, South Dakota’s lone congressman, marked the announcement by sharing a video demonstrating how cast-off masks can now be used for things like suit pocket handkerchiefs, bookmarks or beer cozies.

“It seems too wasteful to just throw them away,” he said. “I think I’ll have my mother make them into a quilt.”

Shelby Lofton, a reporter for WKYT-TV in Lexington, Kentucky, tweeted: “So, I guess I’ll start wearing lipstick again. Also need to work on my poker face.”

In Detroit, a fully vaccinated Christoph Cunningham, 28, wore a mask as he rode an electric scooter to a bar for lunch and said he agrees with the relaxed guidelines.

“I have confidence in the science behind it all,” said Cunningham, who runs a catering business. “I’ll eventually take my mask off more and more.”

The president of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, said the 1.7 million-member union is still trying to sort out what the change means for schools. Many school districts already ditched mask requirements in recent weeks, as had many states and cities, as virus numbers fell.

That meant the CDC announcement didn’t mean much in places like the tourist town of Branson, Missouri, which dropped its mandate early last month after several mask supporters were voted out of office.

“I think it just further supports the decision we made to lift the mask mandate,” said the town’s new mayor, Larry Milton. “It was dividing our community. We heard loud and clear from voters that they wanted the mask mandate repealed.”

Water crisis ‘couldn’t be worse’ on Oregon-California border

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The water crisis along the California-Oregon border went from dire to catastrophic this week as federal regulators shut off irrigation water to farmers from a critical reservoir and said they would not send extra water to dying salmon downstream or to a half-dozen wildlife refuges that harbor millions of migrating birds each year.

In what is shaping up to be the worst water crisis in generations, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation said it will not release water this season into the main canal that feeds the bulk of the massive Klamath Reclamation Project, marking a first for the 114-year-old irrigation system. The agency announced last month

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that hundreds of irrigators would get dramatically less water than usual, but a worsening drought picture means water will be completely shut off instead.

The entire region is in extreme or exceptional drought, according to federal monitoring reports, and Oregon's Klamath County is experiencing its driest year in 127 years.

"This year's drought conditions are bringing unprecedented hardship to the communities of the Klamath Basin," said Reclamation Deputy Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton, calling the decision one of "historic consequence." "Reclamation is dedicated to working with our water users, tribes and partners to get through this difficult year and developing long-term solutions for the basin."

The canal, a major component of the federally operated Klamath Reclamation Project, funnels Klamath River water from the Upper Klamath Lake just north of the Oregon-California border to more than 130,000 acres (52,600 hectares), where generations of ranchers and farmers have grown hay, alfalfa and potatoes and grazed cattle.

Only one irrigation district within the 200,000-acre (80,940-hectare) project will receive any water from the Klamath River system this growing season, and it will have a severely limited supply, the Klamath Water Users Association said in a statement. Some other farmers rely on water from a different river, and they will also have a limited supply.

"This just couldn't be worse," said Klamath Irrigation District president Ty Kliever. "The impacts to our family farms and these rural communities will be off the scale."

At the same time, the agency said it would not release any so-called "flushing flows" from the same dam on the Upper Klamath Lake to bolster water levels downstream in the lower Klamath River. The river is key to the survival of coho salmon, which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. In better water years the pulses of water help keep the river cool and turbulent — conditions that help the fragile species. The fish are central to the diet and culture of the Yurok Tribe, California's largest federally recognized tribe.

The tribe said this week that low flows from drought and from previous mismanagement of the river by the federal agency was causing a die-off of juvenile salmon from a bacterial disease that flourishes when water levels are low. Yurok fish biologists who have been testing the baby salmon in the lower Klamath River are finding that 70% of the fish are already dead in the traps used to collect them and 97% are infected by the bacteria known as *C. shasta*.

"Right now, the Klamath River is full of dead and dying fish on the Yurok Reservation," said Frankie Myers, vice chairman of the Yurok Tribe. "This disease will kill most of the baby salmon in the Klamath, which will impact fish runs for many years to come. For salmon people, a juvenile fish kill is an absolute worst-case scenario."

Irrigators, meanwhile, reacted with disbelief as the news of a water shut-off in the canals spread. A newsletter published by the Klamath Water Users Association, which represents many of the region's farmers, blared the headline, "Worst Day in the History of the Klamath Project." Farmers reported already seeing dust storms that obscured vision for 100 yards (91 meters), and they worried about their wells running dry.

About 30 protesters showed up Thursday at the head gates of the main dam to protest the shut-off and ask the irrigation district to defy federal orders and divert the water. The Herald and News reported that they were with a group called People's Rights, a far-right organization founded by anti-government activist Ammon Bundy.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and California Gov. Gavin Newsom, both Democrats, have declared drought emergencies in the region, and the Bureau of Reclamation has set aside \$15 million in immediate aid for irrigators. Another \$10 million will be available for drought assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Ben DuVal, president of the Klamath Water Users Association, urged his members to remain peaceful and not let the water crisis "be hijacked for other causes."

The seasonal allocations are the region's most dramatic development since irrigation water was all but cut off to hundreds of farmers in 2001 amid another severe drought — the first time farmers' interests

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took a backseat to fish and tribes.

The crisis made the rural farming region hundreds of miles from any major city a national political flashpoint and became a touchstone for Republicans who used the crisis to take aim at the Endangered Species Act, with one GOP lawmaker calling the irrigation shutoff a "poster child" for why changes were needed. A "bucket brigade" protest attracted 15,000 people who scooped water from the Klamath River and passed it, hand over hand, to a parched irrigation canal.

The situation in the Klamath Basin was set in motion more than a century ago, when the U.S. government began draining a network of shallow lakes and marshlands, redirecting the natural flow of water and constructing hundreds of miles of canals and drainage channels to create farmland. Homesteads were offered by lottery to World War II veterans.

The project turned the region into an agricultural powerhouse — some of its potato farmers supply In 'N Out burger — but permanently altered an intricate water system that spans hundreds of miles and from southern Oregon to Northern California.

In 1988, two species of sucker fish were listed as endangered under federal law. Less than a decade later, coho salmon that spawn downstream from the reclamation project, in the lower Klamath River, were listed as threatened.

The water necessary to sustain the coho salmon downstream comes from Upper Klamath Lake — the main holding tank for the farmers' irrigation system. At the same time, the sucker fish in the lake need at least 1 to 2 feet (30 to 60 centimeters) of water covering the gravel beds they use as spawning grounds.

The drought also means farmers this summer will not flush irrigation water into a network of six national wildlife refuges that are collectively called the Klamath National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The refuges, nicknamed the Everglades of the West, support up to 80% of the birds that migrate on the Pacific Flyway. The refuges also support the largest concentrations of wintering Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states.

Gas crunch from cyberattack intensifies in nation's capital

By JEFF MARTIN, FRANK BAJAK and NOMAAN MERCHANT undefined

Gas shortages at the pumps have spread from the South, all but emptying stations in Washington, D.C., following a ransomware cyberattack that forced a shutdown of the nation's largest gasoline pipeline. Though the pipeline operator paid a ransom, restoring service was taking time.

As Georgia-based Colonial Pipeline reported making "substantial progress" in restoring full service, multiple sources confirmed that the company had paid the criminals a ransom of nearly \$5 million in cryptocurrency for the software decryption key required to unscramble their data network.

The ransom — 75 Bitcoin — was paid last Saturday, a day after the criminals locked up Colonial's corporate network, according to Tom Robinson, co-founder of the cryptocurrency-tracking firm Elliptic. Prior to Robinson's blog post, two people briefed on the case had confirmed the payment amount to The Associated Press.

The FBI advises against paying such ransoms because it only encourages a global criminal feeding frenzy that has worsened during the pandemic. But many ransomware victims — especially those ill-prepared for a quick recovery with carefully managed backups — opt to pay.

President Joe Biden said Thursday that his administration would seek to put the responsible Russian-speaking ransomware syndicate out of business, and its operators later said they were shutting down. Biden has said he intends to speak directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin about his government's harboring of ransomware criminals that have caused tens of billions of dollars in damages in the West in the past year. The pipeline shutdown is the most damaging cyberattack on U.S. soil.

The tracking service GasBuddy.com on Friday showed that 88% of gas stations were out of fuel in the nation's capital, 45% were out in Virginia and 39% of Maryland stations were dry. About 65% of stations were without gas in North Carolina, and nearly half were tapped out in Georgia and South Carolina.

Colonial said Thursday that operations had restarted and gasoline deliveries were being made in all of its markets, but it would take "several days" to return to normal.

A gas station owner in Virginia said panic buying is the problem.

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"It's like a frenzy," Barry Rieger, who owns a gas station in Burke, Virginia, told WJLA-TV.

Many authorities are warning of the dangers of hoarding gas.

In South Carolina, a woman was severely burned after flipping a car that a deputy tried to pull over for a suspected stolen license plate Thursday night. The fire touched off multiple explosions due to fuel "that she was hoarding in the trunk of the vehicle," a Pickens County sheriff's statement said.

A cyberattack by hackers who lock up computer systems and demand a ransom to release them hit the pipeline on May 7. The hackers didn't take control of the pipeline's operations, but Colonial shut it down to prevent the malware from impacting its industrial control systems.

Biden has promised aggressive action against DarkSide, the syndicate responsible for the attack. Its public-facing darknet site went offline on Thursday, and its operators said in a cybercriminal forum post that the group had lost access to it and would be shutting down.

This does not necessarily mean U.S. or allied cyberjockeys knocked it offline. Cybersecurity experts said that DarkSide, which rents out its ransomware to partners to carry out the actual attacks, could have taken it down to prevent Western law enforcement from tracking down the rest of its infrastructure.

It could also be an "exit scam," many noted. Ransomware gangs have dissolved and 'rebranded' under different names in the past when the heat was on. In his blog post, Robinson of Elliptic said the cryptocurrency wallet used by DarkSide to receive the Colonial payment was emptied on Thursday.

Yelisey Boguslavskiy, director of research of the cybersecurity firm Advanced Intelligence, noted that the moderator of a top darknet forum for Russian-speaking cybercriminals, XSS, said Thursday that "he was officially prohibiting all ransomware-related activity and discussion on the forum."

That could suggest fears of a U.S. crackdown — or pressure from the Kremlin. While there is no indication the Kremlin benefits from ransomware extortion, U.S. officials say ransomware gangs are tolerated by Russia's security services, which have employed some of their members.

DarkSide stole information from Colonial's network prior to locking up the data on May 7. What it stole is unclear. The company is not saying. DarkSide is among the ransomware gangs that employ double extortion, threatening to dump online sensitive data they steal before activating the ransomware. In Colonial's case, that could potentially include data on contracts with suppliers that would be of keen interest to stock and commodities traders.

The Colonial Pipeline system stretches from Texas to New Jersey and delivers about 45% of the gasoline consumed on the East Coast.

Richard Joswick, global head of oil analytics at S&P Global Platts, said gas stations should be back to normal next week if the pipeline restart goes as planned and consumers are convinced they no longer need to panic-buy fuel. Full recovery would take several more weeks, he estimated.

City where Daunte Wright shot to vote on policing changes

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Leaders in the Minneapolis suburb where a police officer fatally shot Daunte Wright during a traffic stop in April are expected to vote Saturday on a resolution that would put the city on track to major changes to its policing practices.

The resolution, backed by Brooklyn Center Mayor Mike Elliott, would create new divisions of unarmed civilian employees to handle non-moving traffic violations and respond to mental health crises. It would also limit situations in which officers can make arrests.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota called the proposed changes "an important first move" in changing policing. But several police groups raised concerns, saying parts of the resolution conflict with state law and will put public safety at risk.

The city attorney said in a Friday memo to City Council members that adopting the resolution wouldn't be a final action, but would commit the city to change.

Elliott introduced the resolution last week, less than a month after then-Brooklyn Center Officer Kim Potter, who is white, fatally shot Wright, a 20-year-old Black motorist, setting off protests in the city. The city's police chief, who has since stepped down, said at the time he believed Potter meant to use

her Taser on Wright during the April 11 stop instead of her handgun. She's charged with second-degree manslaughter and has also resigned.

Some City Council members in Minneapolis failed last year to overhaul that city's police department in the wake of George Floyd's death, and are mounting another effort this year. The move in Brooklyn Center, an inner-ring suburb of just 30,000 people, echoes some of the ideas in the Minneapolis plan.

On Twitter last week, Elliott called the plan "a common sense approach to public safety" that would make police "not the only option when our community is in need."

Wright's death came after he was pulled over for what police said was expired tags — the kind of traffic stop that many community members say often unfairly targets people of color. It escalated when, according to police, they realized Wright was wanted on a felony warrant.

The Brooklyn Center resolution would put enforcement of non-moving traffic violations — such as Wright's expired tags — in the hands of unarmed civilians.

It would also create a department of unarmed workers trained to respond to medical and mental health calls, addressing another frequent criticism that 911 calls can end in the death of someone in crisis when confronted by armed officers.

And it would create a new Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention to oversee efforts on community health and public safety, led by a director with public health expertise.

The resolution would also require more de-escalation efforts by police before using deadly force; ban deadly force in some situations, such as firing on moving cars; and bar arrests or searches of people during non-moving traffic violations, non-felony offenses or warrants.

The Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association, the Law Enforcement Labor Services, the Minnesota Sheriffs' Association and the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association wrote to the City Council urging them to reject the resolution, saying parts of it conflict with several state statutes. And they said it would be dangerous to have civilians take over certain policing situations, both for the public and the civilian workers, and would likely lead to criminals fleeing.

The resolution is named for Wright and Kobe Dimock-Heisler, a 21-year-old man with autism and mental illness who was fatally shot by officers in June. Officers in that incident were not charged.

Oklahoma governor booted from Tulsa Race Massacre commission

By SEAN MURPHY and TERRY WALLACE Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — The commission formed to observe the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre announced Friday that it had booted Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt from his seat on the panel a week after he signed a bill outlawing the teaching of some race and racism concepts in public schools.

A statement from the commission did not indicate the reason for the parting, and a spokeswoman said the commission had no further comment. However, commission project manager Phil Armstrong this week had sharply criticized the Republican governor for signing a bill into law that prohibits the teaching of so-called critical race theory in Oklahoma schools.

"The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commissioners met Tuesday and agreed through consensus to part ways with Governor Stitt," the commission's statement said.

It went on to say that while the commission "is disheartened to part ways with Governor Stitt, we are thankful for the things accomplished together." It also said, "No elected officials, nor representatives of elected officials, were involved in this decision."

The Republican governor was informed of his ouster only when the commission issued its statement, said Stitt spokeswoman Carly Atchison.

Stitt's role "has been purely ceremonial and he had not been invited to attend a meeting until this week," her statement said.

The commission was formed to organize events for the anniversary of the massacre that occurred May 31 and June 1 in 1921. A white mob killed an estimated 300 people and wounded 800 while burning 30 blocks of Black-owned businesses and homes and neighborhood churches in Tulsa's Greenwood neighbor-

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hood, also known as "Black Wall Street." Planes were even used to drop explosives on the area, burning it to the ground.

In a letter to the governor Tuesday, Armstrong said the commission was "gravely disappointed" that neither Stitt nor a representative chose to attend a meeting Monday night to discuss the signing of the GOP-backed legislation on "critical race theory," which examines systemic racism and how race influences U.S. politics, legal systems and society. Among the concepts that are prohibited are that individuals, by virtue of race or gender, are inherently racist, sexist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Armstrong had said Stitt's signing of the bill on May 7 was "diametrically opposite to the mission of the Centennial Commission and reflects your desire to end your affiliation."

Atchison decried the commission's move in her statement Friday.

"It is disappointing to see an organization of such importance spend so much effort to sow division based on falsehoods and political rhetoric two weeks before the centennial and a month before the commission is scheduled to sunset," her statement said.

Another member of the commission, state Rep. Monroe Nichols of Tulsa, resigned from the panel Tuesday over Stitt's signing of the bill, saying it "cast an ugly shadow on the phenomenal work done over the last five years."

The commission has developed and promoted programs, events and activities to remember the 1921 massacre and memorialize its victims. Among the events are "Greenwood: An American Dream Destroyed," a presentation that wraps a monthlong run this weekend, and "Greenwood Rising: The Black Wall Street History Center," which is scheduled to be unveiled June 2.

In devotion to Trump, House GOP taps Stefanik for a top post

By ALAN FRAM and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans elevated Rep. Elise Stefanik to a leadership post Friday, highlighting how the party whose lodestar has long been conservative policies increasingly views allegiance to Donald Trump as its indispensable key to electoral success.

Stefanik, a Trump stalwart from upstate New York, was elected to the No. 3 leadership job that until this week belonged to Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming. Republicans tossed Cheney from that post for continually calling out former President Trump for helping spur the violent Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection and relentlessly pushing his false claims that voting fraud caused his November reelection defeat.

Local officials and judges from both parties around the country have declared there is no evidence Trump was cheated out of a win.

Stefanik easily defeated Rep. Chip Roy of Texas 134-46 in a secret ballot that gave GOP lawmakers a distinct choice about where to steer the party. Stefanik has a moderate voting record but strong backing from Trump and other party leaders, including some conservatives, while Roy is in the hard-right House Freedom Caucus and was actively opposed by the former president.

In remarks to reporters after her victory, Stefanik underscored how the twice-impeached Trump's clout within the GOP remains potent, a rarity for a defeated former president. Polling shows strong Trump loyalty among Republican voters, giving party leaders little incentive to ostracize him.

"Voters determine the leader of the Republican Party, and President Trump is the leader that they look to," said Stefanik, 36. She added, "He is an important voice in the Republican Party and we look forward to working with him."

While the GOP defines itself as conservative, Stefanik's win provided one measure of the diminished role ideology now plays for Republicans.

Her lifetime voting score from the conservative Heritage Action for America is 48, one of the most moderate marks of all House Republicans. That compares to Cheney's 80 and Roy's 96.

The conservative Club for Growth, which backed Roy, gives Stefanik a lifetime mark of 35. That is well below Cheney's 65 and Roy's 100, and even beneath Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, a member of the "squad" of young progressive House Democrats, who scored 38.

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"I would support Stefanik to be the most likely Republican to join the Squad but not Republican Conference Chair," tweeted Rep. Ken Buck, R-Colo., who nominated Roy Friday.

"Now, to have credibility in the Republican Party, you have to align yourself with Donald Trump. Everything else is secondary," said former Rep. Carlos Curbelo, R-Fla., a Trump critic. He called that a short-term "survival strategy," saying Trump's appeal nationally is limited and will fade.

Republicans hope Stefanik will help shift attention from their acrimonious purge of the defiant Cheney, and toward their drive to win House control in the 2022 elections. A Trump loyalist who has stood by some of his unfounded claims about widespread election cheating, Stefanik's elevation gives the GOP a fresh spokesperson who is one of the party's relative handful of women in Congress.

"We are unified working as one team," she said.

Yet GOP schisms are unlikely to vanish quickly. Roy's candidacy signaled that hard-right conservatives will battle for influence, and tensions remain raw over Cheney's rancorous ouster.

She has said she'll stay in Congress and use her prominence — as a GOP establishment pillar and daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney — to try to pry her party from Trump and to work against him if he attempts a White House return in 2024.

Cheney, who did not attend Friday's GOP meeting, demonstrated anew that she has no qualms confronting her adversaries.

Asked on CNN whether House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California would have let Congress formally certify Joe Biden's presidential election had he been speaker, she said that was "a legitimate concern." McCarthy helped engineer Cheney's ouster.

She told CNN she would have voted for Roy, not Stefanik, to replace her because the party needs conservative leaders who are "committed to the Constitution." And she said in an interview to be broadcast Sunday on ABC News' "This Week" that she regretted voting for Trump in last year's election.

Cheney was among 10 House Republicans who voted in January for Trump's second impeachment for inciting his supporters' Capitol attack.

Stefanik has told colleagues she'll serve in leadership only through next year, then try taking the top GOP spot on the influential House Education and Labor Committee. Her plans were described last week by a Republican lawmaker and an aide who discussed them only on condition of anonymity.

Besides support from Trump, Stefanik was backed by McCarthy and two of the chamber's most influential conservatives: No. 2 leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana and Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio.

In the past four presidential elections, Stefanik's rural district backed Barack Obama twice but then Trump twice. She was a Trump critic during his 2016 campaign, calling his videotaped comments on sexually assaulting women "just wrong" and at times avoiding stating his name.

She sprang to Trump's attention by defending him in 2019 during his first impeachment over his efforts to pressure Ukraine to produce political dirt on Biden, a Democratic presidential contender at the time.

She's remained a Trump booster. Hours after the Capitol attack, she voted against formally approving Pennsylvania's state-certified electoral votes for Biden.

Trump issued a statement Friday congratulating Stefanik, saying, "The House GOP is united and the Make America Great Again movement is Strong!"

Roy, a former aide to conservative Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, voted in January against Trump's effort to overturn his election defeat, infuriating him. Roy ally Buck, asked if Trump might turn his ire on him as well, conceded as much.

"I've been looking for an exit strategy for six and a half years, so if that's the exit strategy, that's OK," Buck said.

Retired Black players say NFL brain-injury payouts show bias

By MARYCLAIRE DALE and MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Thousands of retired Black professional football players, their families and supporters are demanding an end to the controversial use of "race-norming" to determine which players

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are eligible for payouts in the NFL's \$1 billion settlement of brain injury claims, a system experts say is discriminatory.

Former Washington running back Ken Jenkins, 60, and his wife Amy Lewis on Friday delivered 50,000 petitions demanding equal treatment for Black players to Senior U.S. District Judge Anita B. Brody in Philadelphia, who is overseeing the massive settlement. Former players who suffer dementia or other diagnoses can be eligible for a payout.

Under the settlement, however, the NFL has insisted on using a scoring algorithm on the dementia testing that assumes Black men start with lower cognitive skills. They must therefore score much lower than whites to show enough mental decline to win an award. The practice, which went unnoticed until 2018, has made it harder for Black former players to get awards.

"My reaction was, 'Well, here we go again,'" said Jenkins, a former running back. "It's the same old nonsense for Black folks, to have to deal with some insidious, convoluted deals that are being made." Jenkins is now an insurance executive and is not experiencing any cognitive problems, but has plenty of NFL friends who are less fortunate.

In March, Brody threw out a civil rights lawsuit that claimed the practice is discriminatory. But she later said in a filing that the practice raised "a very important issue" and asked a magistrate judge to compile a report on the problem. She told The Associated Press she did not know when it would be completed.

Class counsel Chris Seeger, through his spokesman, has said he wants to end the practice of race-norming and investigate any awards that were affected by adjustments in the past.

"We are investigating whether any claims have been impacted by a physician's decision to apply such an adjustment. If we discover an adjustment has been inappropriately applied, I will fight for the rights of Black players to have those claims rescored," Seeger said.

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy has declined to comment on the issue in the past, and did not immediately return an email seeking comment Friday.

The majority of the league's 20,000 retirees are Black. And only a quarter of the more than 2,000 men who sought awards for early to moderate dementia have qualified under the testing program. Lawyers for Black players have asked for details on how the \$800 million in settlement payouts so far have broken along racial lines, but have yet to receive them.

Race norming is sometimes used in medicine as a rough proxy for socioeconomic factors that can affect someone's health. Experts in neurology said the way it's used in the NFL settlement is too simplistic and restrictive, and has the effect of systematically discriminating against Black players.

"Because every Black retired NFL player has to perform lower on the test to qualify for an award than every white player. And that's essentially systematic racism in determining these payouts," said Katherine Possin, a neurology professor at the UCSF Memory and Aging Center.

In other major settlements, including those tied to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the Boston Marathon bombing, all claimants were treated the same.

"We concluded, fairly quickly, that we would take the top compensation for the white male and everyone would get the same, the top dollar," said lawyer Ken Feinberg, who has overseen many of the largest settlement funds. "We would cure this compensatory discrimination by having a rising tide raise all ships."

The first lawsuits accusing the NFL of hiding what it knew about the link between concussions and brain damage were filed in 2011. A trickle soon became a deluge, and the NFL, rather than risk a trial, agreed in 2013 to pay \$765 million over 65 years for certain diagnoses, including Alzheimer's disease and dementia. But as the claims poured in, Brody feared the fund would run out early and ordered the cap removed.

The NFL, which foots the bill, began challenging claims by the hundreds, according to the claims website.

In appealing one filed by Najeh Davenport, the NFL complained that his doctor had not used "full demographic norms" in the cognitive scoring. That meant factoring in age, education, gender — and race.

"I remain unsure what you are talking about. He was done using standard norms like everyone else. Using different racial standards is indeed discriminatory and illegal. We stand by our scores," the physician said in response, according to court records.

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Ultimately, the appeal was reviewed by a pair of University of Pennsylvania legal scholars serving as special masters for Brody. They rejected the original reviewer's finding that race norms were mandatory under the settlement. Still, they concluded that Davenport's doctor had to explain whether he typically uses them or only waived them so Davenport would get an award.

"Using race-specific norms can be enormously consequential, and the adjustments may often make the difference in a clinician's determination of cognitive impairment and a determination of normal functioning for retired NFL players seeking benefits," special masters David A. Hoffman and Wendell E. Pritchett wrote in the Aug. 20 decision.

Days later, Davenport and another former Pittsburgh Steeler, Kevin Henry, filed the civil rights lawsuit, calling public attention to the issue for the first time. Their lawyers hoped to learn through the litigation how often Black players are denied payouts.

Instead, Brody dismissed the suit, saying they were bound by the settlement because they had not opted out years ago. But as concerns about race-norming grew — and with the racial unrest of 2020 still simmering — Brody in April opened the door to changing the practice when she ordered lawyers for the league and the players back to the table to work out an agreement.

Jennifer Manly, a Columbia University neuropsychologist hired by Davenport's lawyers, called race norms in medicine ill-conceived and outdated in a court filing.

Race-based adjustments for neurology -- known as "Heaton norms" -- were designed in the early 1990s by Dr. Robert Heaton to estimate how socioeconomic factors affect someone's health. They are widely used, but in recent years, scientists in the field have begun to recognize the limitations of the normative comparison groups they have used for years.

The small sample group of Blacks Heaton chose to create his adjustment protocol came entirely from San Diego, a military town where the Black population hardly reflected the diversity of Blacks across the U.S. The racial classifications are also binary — Black or white — even though hundreds of NFL retirees, and millions of Americans, identify as mixed race.

"White and Black retired NFL players may be more similar to each other than they are to the reference populations ... used to develop Heaton or (other) race-specific norms," Manly wrote in her brief in the Davenport lawsuit. Several neurology experts have said the NFL's assessment program is flawed. Possin said UCSF had considered participating in the assessments but decided against it.

"We declined to participate in these evaluations because it just didn't feel like good clinical practice to us," Possin said. "There's probably a number of these players who, the neurologists who evaluated them were pretty sure they had a neurodegenerative disease and they had dementia. But maybe they didn't score quite low enough. They didn't pass the threshold, so they didn't meet the NFL settlement criteria for a payout. And that's really, I think, unfortunate."

Dr. Francis X. Conidi, a neurologist and former president of the Florida Society of Neurology, who has treated hundreds of former NFL players, wrote a critique of the settlement's assessment program in 2018, saying it had developed a system where players would be classified with "fictional diagnostic categories" of level 1, level 1.5 and level 2 neurocognitive impairments. Only those classified as levels 1.5 or 2 would qualify for a settlement.

Conidi said these categories could leave the patient confused about the cause of his symptoms and recommended that they adopt a protocol that includes a standard workup for dementia, including neuro-imaging and other testing that is not currently done under the assessments.

The NFL's dementia testing evaluates a person's function in two dozen skills that fall under five sections: complex attention/processing speed; executive functioning; language; learning and memory; and visual perception. A player must show a marked decline in at least two of them to get an award.

In an example shared with The Associated Press, one player's raw score of 19 for "letter-number sequencing" in the processing section was adjusted using "race-norming" and became 42 for whites and 46 for Blacks.

The raw score of 15 for naming animals in the language section became a 35 for whites and 41 for

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Blacks. And the raw score of 51 for "block design" in the visual perception section became a 53 for whites but 60 for Blacks.

Taking the 24 scores together, either a white or Black player would have scored low enough to reach the settlement's 1.5-level of early dementia in "processing speed." However, in the language section, the scores would have qualified a white man for a 2.0-level, or moderate, dementia finding — but shown no impairment for Blacks.

Overall, the scores would result in a 1.5-level dementia award for whites — but nothing for Blacks. Those awards average more than \$400,000 but can reach \$1.5 million for men under 45, while 2.0-level dementia yields an average payout of more than \$600,000 but can reach \$3 million.

Breton Asken, a neuropsychology fellow at the UCSF Memory and Aging Center, helped administer several assessments around 2016, when he was a student at the University of Florida. The assessments he was involved in took 4 to 6 hours, and produced a score, which would then be adjusted based on the Heaton norms.

"So the male Black athletes that we saw would be compared essentially to a group of otherwise healthy Black individuals with a similar number of years of education and of the same age," Asken said.

Even at the time, he said he and his colleagues worried the assessments and adjustments were not appropriate.

"I think we were always hesitant to be robotic about this," Asken said. "We understood from a legal standpoint why there's a push and a need for making something a little more algorithmic and robotic, that it can be standardized and so forth. But I think there's also a lot of challenges when you take expert clinical decision-making out of things."

They would report the person's level of impairment by the "letter of the law" and would also provide comments conveying "anything else we thought was relevant to the patient's brain health, physical health, mental health and so forth that we thought would be important for us to include in something like a standard neuropsychological report."

The test battery also included questionnaires about mood and personality. But those scores were not included in the algorithm to determine compensation, he said.

"They're getting full neurologic exams from these neurologists who are able to pick up on other aspects of the nervous system that might be having problems and so forth. Feels very odd for us to put this comprehensive neuropsychological report together and just ignore those pieces of data," Asken recalled.

"Norming by race is not the stance that the NFL ought to take," said Dr. Art Caplan, a New York University medical ethicist. "It continues to look as if it's trying to exclude people rather than trying to do what's right, which is to help people that, clinically, have obvious and severe disability." He noted that the long history of racial bias in medicine includes the long-held myth that Black people feel less pain.

"There's always been this race-norming in medicine," he said, "that has been problematic because it's tied in too closely to racism."

Jenkins, the former Washington player, believes it all comes down to money.

"Race-norming may have had a benign origin, but it quickly morphed into a tool that can be used to help the folks in power save money," he said.

Yet Caplan is not alone in thinking there may be even more at play here: the future of the NFL.

"These may be fights to escape the conclusion that football's too dangerous. That's always looming in the background," Caplan said. "That opens the door to a lot of moms saying 'I'm not sure that's the right sport for my kid.'"

In March, the same month Brody dismissed the civil rights lawsuit, the league announced an 11-year deal with TV partners worth \$113 billion.

'Foot soldiers' of Birmingham to BLM: 'Keep on keeping on'

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Charles Avery had barely started marching when police arrested him, forced

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him into a police vehicle and took him to jail for participating in landmark civil rights protests that helped change the nation in 1963. He spent days in custody and then lived decades haunted by a conviction for the most innocuous of offenses — parading without a permit — that he saw as noble yet others questioned with suspicion.

"I had to explain what it was, that it was from Birmingham," said Avery, 76. "It always came up."

Yet Avery said he'd do it again all these years later, and he has a message for the thousands of demonstrators who have been arrested nationwide during the months-long uprising over police violence and racism: Keep going. A lifelong mark in the name of justice is worth the trouble.

Veterans of the campaign that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. helped lead to eradicate racial segregation in Birmingham nearly 60 years ago remain firmly in the corner of racial justice now that they're old and gray, with some joining in protests that followed George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police last year and others watching at home on TV.

Nonviolence was King's way, and some are put off by scenes of burning buildings and rioting that accompanied some protests, including one in Birmingham. But foot soldiers who first advocated for the idea that Black lives matter decades ago now support the movement of the same name; The Associated Press interviewed some of them ahead of an online commemoration of the '63 Children's Crusade protests held Friday that focused on challenges facing young people today.

The Rev. Jonathan McPherson was walking just a few feet behind King when both were arrested in downtown Birmingham. He spent a night in jail and sees his conviction for illegal parading as a badge of honor.

"It was worth it, every bit of it. I've even told my wife I can't move like I used to but I'll be glad to join those young people today in these protests that we have," said McPherson, 87. He once served as a bodyguard for King and other movement leaders in Birmingham, which came to be known as "Bombingham" for the frequency of attacks on Black churches, homes and leaders.

Arrested the same day as McPherson, Myrna Jackson recently had a stroke and spends most of her time at home. But she stays up to date on the Black Lives Matter movement and mourns every time someone else dies at the hands of law enforcement.

"People are fed up. A lot of times these things are happening so close together it doesn't give you breathing room," she said.

More than 10,000 people were arrested nationwide last year during protests for offenses including curfew violations and failure to disperse; hundreds also were arrested on burglary and looting charges. Protesters often were restrained in plastic zip-ties and taken away in buses, and many times charges were dropped.

Demonstrations continued recently in places including Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, where Daunte Wright was fatally shot by police, and Elizabeth City, North Carolina, where deputies fatally shot Andrew Brown Jr. Both Wright and Brown were Black men, and both died last month.

In Birmingham, local activists including the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth had been confronting racism and legalized segregation of schools, businesses and public accommodations for years by the time King's Southern Christian Leadership Campaign launched the "Birmingham Campaign" in the spring of '63 with weeks of marches, selective buying campaigns and pickets.

More than 1,600 demonstrators, many of them Black students from area schools, were arrested from March through May, city records show, and authorities used police dogs and firehoses to break up marches. Scenes of the mayhem, broadcast on black-and-white TVs worldwide, and a racist church bombing that killed four Black girls in Birmingham months later helped build support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The youngest protesters that year included Paulette Roby, who was arrested as a 13-year-old girl. She didn't face charges and now chairs the Civil Rights Activist Committee, which documents the stories of participants and tells their stories in tours, workshops and seminars that help tie the past together with demonstrations today.

"I didn't realize that things I did at 13 would still be important now," said Roby, 71.

Older teens and adults often were charged with parading without a permit. While some went to city

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court, others say they never did and wound up with misdemeanor convictions on their record despite never having a chance to defend themselves.

Then-Mayor Larry Langford issued a blanket pardon for the convicted protesters in 2009, and many including Avery accepted. While serving both in the Army in Vietnam and later in the civilian workforce, Avery said he'd been singled out for scrutiny because of the conviction and forced to explain his record for years.

Avery, who served as senior class president at Hooper City High School and led fellow students to the demonstration that day in 1963, was allowed to graduate but never received his diploma, which he said the principal refused out of fear of appearing to endorse the protests. Just 18 at the time, Avery soon relocated to Chicago because his mother feared for his safety in Birmingham.

Attending a rally last year in a park near where he was arrested in 1963, Avery was happy to see nearly as many white people and Hispanic people as Black people demonstrating on behalf of racial justice. "I thought, 'This is what it's about, bringing people together,'" he said.

McPherson was among dozens of demonstrators who refused a pardon to wipe away a 1963 conviction. A minister for more than 50 years, he said the case never presented a problem, and it's something he remains proud of decades later.

"The only time I have been in jail was when I went to jail with Martin Luther King on Good Friday, 1963," he said. "So I don't mind anybody seeing that if they want to see it anywhere."

Years from now, he said, perhaps today's demonstrators facing arrest and convictions will look back on their experiences similarly.

"As long as you know what you are doing is right and is for a good cause, keep on keeping on. Keep on protesting because you'll never get anything without some sacrifice being made," said McPherson.

Diplomats, donors concerned about sex abuse reports at WHO

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — British, European and American diplomats and donors have voiced serious concerns about how the World Health Organization handled sex abuse allegations involving its own staff during an outbreak of Ebola in Congo, as reported this week by The Associated Press.

On Tuesday, the AP published an investigation documenting that senior WHO management was informed of multiple sex abuse allegations involving at least two of its doctors during the epidemic in 2018.

A notarized contract obtained by the AP showed that two WHO staffers signed off on an agreement between WHO's Dr. Jean-Paul Ngandu and a young woman he allegedly impregnated in Congo. In it, Ngandu promised to pay the young woman money, cover her pregnancy costs and buy her a plot of land. The contract was made "to protect the integrity and reputation of the organization," Ngandu said.

"The U.K. has a zero tolerance approach when it comes to sexual exploitation and harassment — and that extends to all international organizations that we fund," said Simon Manley, the U.K.'s ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva. "We are speaking with WHO and other major donors as a matter of urgency to establish the facts." Britain is WHO's second biggest donor, after the U.S.

In a statement, the U.S. State Department said more must be done to address sex abuse issues at WHO. Asked about the AP investigation, officials said they were requesting more information about the allegations. "Those responsible for any abuse must be held accountable," it said.

In Congo, the U.N.'s humanitarian coordinator David McLachlan-Karr said he was determined to punish any humanitarian workers found guilty of sexual misconduct like that detailed in the AP report.

"All these allegations must be investigated and the victims must be heard," he said in a statement. "These allegations undermine the trust of the people we serve."

WHO has declined to comment on the specific allegations reported by the AP and said it's waiting for the results of a panel created last October to investigate sexual abuse during the Congo outbreak involving WHO staffers.

"What's alarming is that WHO seems to be keeping this abuse quiet and not publicly condemning these allegations," said Clare Wenham, an assistant professor of global health policy at the London School of

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Economics. "There's a lot of talk about giving WHO more money but I don't think any government should be committing to that until we know it's an organization we can trust."

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the agency's third-largest funder, said it expects U.N. agencies to conduct thorough investigations into sexual abuse as quickly as possible.

"Our role as a funder is to hold organizations that receive grants from the foundation to the highest standards of transparency and accountability," the foundation said.

Lawrence Gostin, director of the WHO Collaborating Center on Global Health Law at Georgetown University, said the ultimate responsibility for WHO's Ebola response lies with director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The AP found that one of the doctors accused of sexual harassment, Boubacar Diallo, bragged about his relationship to Tedros, who mentioned Diallo during a speech in January 2019. The AP spoke with three women who said Diallo offered them WHO jobs in exchange for sex; Diallo denied the claims.

"I find it hard to believe Tedros would have known about these allegations and done nothing," Gostin said. "(He) must meet the highest ethical standards so we must understand what he knew and when he knew it. ... Dr. Diallo may have used his relationship with Tedros as leverage in sexual exploitation, but it would not be Tedros' fault if he wasn't aware of it."

Balazs Ujvari, a spokesman for the European Commission, said it would "thoroughly monitor the investigations" by the AP. He said the commission is ready to review or suspend funding "for any partner who is not living up to the required high ethical and professional rules and standards."

The World Bank said it is "deeply concerned" about the new sex abuse allegations at WHO. The bank paused its negotiations with Congolese authorities for new financing to agencies, including WHO, last year when reports of general sex abuse during the Ebola outbreak surfaced.

"We review our relationship with any organization whose standards are in question," the World Bank said.

Jiress Ngalya, a resident of Beni, Congo, where some of the recently reported sex abuse allegations involving WHO occurred, said it would be a welcome decision if donors reduced their funding to WHO after seeing how the agency handled sex abuse allegations in the country.

"This should be a lesson to all humanitarian organizations to not abuse innocent women in our region," he said. "This would show that they are not untouchable."

Gaetz associate agrees to cooperate in federal investigation

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Florida politician who emerged as a central figure in the federal investigation into Rep. Matt Gaetz has agreed to cooperate with federal investigators and admits paying an underage girl to have sex with him and other men, according to court documents filed Friday.

Joel Greenberg is expected to plead guilty to six federal charges — including sex trafficking of a child — during a court appearance in Orlando on Monday. His cooperation as a close associate of Gaetz signals a significant escalation in the Justice Department's investigation and potentially raises the legal and political jeopardy the Florida congressman is facing.

Federal prosecutors have been examining whether Gaetz and Greenberg paid underage girls or offered them gifts in exchange for sex, according to people familiar with the matter. The plea agreement makes no mention of Gaetz, who has vehemently denied the allegations and any wrongdoing and has insisted he will not resign his seat in Congress.

As part of his plea agreement, Greenberg admitted that he recruited women for commercial sex acts and paid them more than \$70,000 from 2016 to 2018, including at least one underage girl he paid to have sex with him and others.

Prosecutors say Greenberg met the girl online — from a website where she was posing as an adult — and had a first meeting with her on a boat, paying her \$400. He later invited her to a hotels in Florida, where he and others would have sex with her and also supplied the girl and other people with ecstasy, according to the plea deal. In total, prosecutors say Greenberg had sex with the girl at least seven times.

"Greenberg also introduced the Minor to other adult men, who engaged in commercial sex acts with the Minor," the plea agreement states. The plea deal, signed Wednesday, does not identify the men.

Prosecutors say Greenberg also used his position as the Seminole County tax collector to access a state driver's information database to "investigate" the women he was having sex with and had searched for the underage girl at least once because he "had reason to believe the minor was under the age of 18," the plea agreement says.

Greenberg's legal problems began last summer when he was arrested on charges of stalking a political opponent. He mailed fake letters to the school where his opponent taught, signed by a nonexistent "very concerned student" who alleged the teacher had engaged in sexual misconduct with another student, according to an indictment filed against him.

Greenberg was charged in August with sex trafficking a girl between ages 14 and 17 and using a state database to look up information about the girl and other people with whom he was engaged in "sugar daddy" relationships, according to the indictment.

Charges on allegations he embezzled \$400,000 from the Seminole County tax collector's office were added earlier this year, according to the indictment.

Investigators have also been looking at whether Gaetz and his associates tried to secure government jobs for some of the women, the people said. They are also scrutinizing Gaetz's connections to the medical marijuana sector, including whether his associates sought to influence legislation Gaetz sponsored.

The people had knowledge of the investigation but spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to publicly discuss the ongoing investigation.

The unwitting are the target of COVID-19 falsehoods online

By ALI SWENSON and BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

Dr. Michelle Rockwell lost a pregnancy in December and shared her heartache with her 30,000 Instagram followers. Weeks later, she received the COVID-19 vaccine and posted about that, too.

By February, Rockwell was getting past the grief and finally starting to experience moments of joy. But then, to her horror, social media users began using her posts to spread the false claim that she miscarried as a result of the shot.

"They said horrible things to me, like how could I possibly get the vaccine, that I was a baby killer, and that I would be infertile forever and would never have babies again," said Rockwell, a 39-year-old family medicine doctor from Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Even though she knows that research shows the vaccine is safe for pregnant women, she said the posts brought her trauma to the surface and hurt her "to the core."

From a movie prop master in Texas to a professor in New York, people across the country have found themselves swept into the misinformation maelstrom, their online posts or their very identities hijacked by anti-vaccine activists and others peddling lies about the outbreak.

Sharing other people's posts or photos out of context is a common tactic in the disinformation playbook because it's an "easy, cheap way to gain credibility," said Lisa Fazio, a Vanderbilt University psychology professor who studies how false claims spread.

But during the COVID-19 pandemic, experts warn, false or misleading posts can mean the difference between someone taking precautions or not.

"When you're in a situation where the world is confusing, you're trying to latch on to what's true. A common suggestion is to listen to the experts," Fazio said. "If you have people pretending to be those experts or grabbing that credibility, then that can cause a lot of havoc."

Scott Reeder, a movie and TV prop master in Austin, Texas, who frequently shares jokes and film industry secrets with his 1 million TikTok followers, posted a short video in September demonstrating how retractable stunt knives, syringes and icepicks are used on a movie set.

In December, he learned that a clip of the footage was being misused on Facebook and Twitter. Someone had isolated the part of the video where he pushes the spring-loaded syringe into his arm, and falsely

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claimed that politicians overseas are using the devices to fake their COVID-19 vaccinations.

Reeder was able to tamp down the falsehoods with help from TikTok followers who vouched for him and by releasing a second video outlining the misinformation. But it upsets him that his posts were used to promote a conspiracy theory he knows is false.

"I'm just trying to make people laugh with my dad jokes and my prop information," Reeder said. "But people just try to suck you in or utilize your content to push their agenda."

Robert Oswald, a professor of molecular medicine at Cornell University, hadn't even put anything on social media when he learned his name was being used in viral posts claiming the coronavirus was "imaginary and fictitious."

A bogus statement claimed Oswald had done research that found COVID-19 was "just another flu strain." Some of the posts included his professional photo and office address.

"It said I had some sort of lab in California. It said I was a virologist. None of that's true," Oswald said. "I was pretty horrified by it all, obviously."

Oswald, who doesn't study viruses in his work, disavowed the posts on his professional webpage and responded to each message he received with the truth, though some refused to believe it.

Powerful or dramatic claims can be especially difficult to stamp out.

"A Cornell professor warning about COVID, that's boring. The same professor saying COVID is a hoax, well, that's interesting and guarantees traffic," said Dr. Elias Aboujaoude, a psychiatrist and Stanford University professor who studies the intersection of psychology and technology.

Dr. Nicole Baldwin, a Cincinnati pediatrician who posted a video in support of vaccines in January 2020, said she was subjected to harassing messages, calls to her office, one-star reviews of her work, and memes that used her picture and falsely claimed she was under investigation for "drugging" autistic children.

She now offers support over the phone and via email to people who have found themselves in her position — including Rockwell.

"I look back at that time in January now, actually, with gratitude, because it got me to the point where I am right now," Baldwin said. "But in that period that I was there in January, I certainly wasn't saying, 'Yay, this is amazing.' So I'm trying to help other people."

Oklahoma bucks red-state trend, extends early voting

By SEAN MURPHY and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — On Election Day last year, state Rep. Jon Echols was mortified to see a 3 1/2-hour line to vote in his district, which stretches from the edge of Oklahoma City's urban core into suburban neighborhoods that give way to wide stretches of rural land.

A nation like the U.S. — with "real, free and fair elections," Echols said — shouldn't make people wait so long to participate in democracy.

"We should all be humiliated that we had that," Echols said.

He may sound like a voting rights advocate or a Democratic politician set on expanding access to the ballot, but Echols is a Republican and the majority floor leader of the GOP-controlled Oklahoma House. What he did after that Election Day revelation stands in sharp contrast to what the GOP has done in many other states — Echols helped make it slightly easier to vote in deep-red Oklahoma.

Gov. Kevin Stitt, a Republican, signed legislation this week that adds a day to in-person early voting in the state and an extra hour to Saturday early voting, and it also makes changes to ensure mail-in ballots are received in time to be counted. The move comes as voting has become a top issue among Republicans — but in the other direction. GOP-controlled states from Arkansas to Florida have passed laws making it harder to vote, ranging from adding scrutiny to signatures on mail ballots to limiting the time frame drop boxes can be used, and all inspired by former President Donald Trump's false insistence that he lost his reelection bid because of fraud.

In Oklahoma, where Republicans feel little threat from Democrats, the party is acknowledging that easing access to the ballot may increase turnout.

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While restrictions in Georgia led Major League Baseball to move the All-Star Game, and Texas' proposed legislation has sparked protests in the streets and from major corporations like American Airlines, Oklahoma's modest changes drew little controversy. They came in a state worried about its perennially low turnout rate — only 55% of the eligible population voted in last year's presidential election, the lowest in the country, according to ElectProject.org, which tracks turnout since the country's founding. Nationally, more than two-thirds of voters cast ballots.

Oklahoma's entire delegation in the U.S. House — all Republicans — heeded Trump's call about fake election fraud and voted against certifying the Electoral College votes on Jan. 6, and two dozen Republican state lawmakers urged them in a letter to do so. But the bill to expand early voting sailed through the House and Senate with just a handful of opposing votes.

Chad Alexander, a GOP strategist and former chair of the Oklahoma Republican Party, said he thinks part of the reason the measure faced little opposition is that one extra day of early voting isn't likely to slow the Republican dominance in the deep-red state.

"We haven't had a Democrat carry a single county in a presidential race in five election cycles," Alexander said. "Every statewide elected official is a Republican, and they were elected in an off-year for Republicans.

"Oklahoma is very red, and I don't think this change disproportionately affects either party," he said.

That contrasts with other states where Republicans have pushed to change voter laws: political battlegrounds like Florida; states where the GOP fears its hold is slipping, like Arizona and Georgia; or even places where the party is on the upswing but still threatened by occasional wins on the other side of the aisle, like Montana. In several of these states, the changes disproportionately hamper Democratic voters, like college students in Montana, who can no longer use campus IDs as valid voting identification.

Oklahoma has long stood out as a place with restrictive voting laws.

Even with an extra day for Oklahomans to cast in-person, absentee ballots, Oklahoma's 4 1/2 days of early voting are among the fewest in the nation. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, early voting periods across the country range from four days to 45 days, with the average length being 19 days.

Oklahoma Election Board Secretary Paul Ziriach said the additional day will provide a convenience to voters, but he's skeptical that it will have a dramatic effect on turnout in Oklahoma.

"Generally, I think if you look around the country at states with higher turnout, I personally think it has a lot less to do with things like the number of early voting days that states have available and has a lot more to do with the amount of money political parties and candidates are spending on get-out-the-vote programs," Ziriach said.

Pat McFerron, a Republican pollster and strategist, said adding an early day of voting will likely also fend off criticism about Oklahoma's laws, which include a voter ID requirement and notarized mail-in ballots.

"I would actually say the Republican partisans I've spoken to are not enamored with this move," McFerron said, "especially when you consider that generally our locations that are open early tend to really benefit Democratic candidates.

"Honestly, I don't think this is a blatantly pro-Republican type of move at all," he added.

House Minority Leader Rep. Emily Virgin, a Democrat from the college town of Norman, said that while she's pleased the number of voting days is increasing, far more needs to be done to make voting more accessible for Oklahomans.

"It's a step in the right direction, but it is a very small step," Virgin said. "It's fairly hard to vote in Oklahoma, as compared to other states. We need to be doing a whole lot more in terms of increasing voter turnout."

UK eager for a big reopening thanks to vaccine success

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — When London's Science Museum reopens next week, it will have some new artifacts: empty vaccine vials, testing kits and other items collected during the pandemic, to be featured in a new COVID-19 display.

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Britain isn't quite ready to consign the coronavirus to a museum — the outbreak is far from over. But there is a definite feeling that the U.K. has turned a corner, and the mood in the country is upbeat.

"The end is in sight," one newspaper front page claimed. "Free at last!" read another.

Thanks to an efficient vaccine rollout program, Britain is finally saying goodbye to months of tough lockdown restrictions.

Starting Monday, all restaurants and bars in England can reopen with some precautions in place, as can hotels, theaters and museums. And Britons will be able to hug friends and family again, with the easing of social distancing rules that have been in place since the pandemic began.

It's the biggest step yet to reopen the country following an easing of the crisis blamed for nearly 128,000 deaths, the highest reported COVID-19 toll in Europe.

Deaths in Britain have come down to single digits in recent days. It's a far cry from January, when deaths topped 1,800 in a single day amid a brutal second wave driven by a more infectious variant first found in southeastern England.

New cases have plummeted to an average of around 2,000 a day, compared with nearly 70,000 a day during the winter peak.

There are still worries. British authorities expressed anxiety this week about a rise in cases of a coronavirus variant first identified in India, which they say appears to be more transmissible. Officials said Friday they will speed up the date for a second vaccine dose for those 50 and older to increase protection.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said while the new variant could "pose a serious disruption" in Britain's progress to recovery, there appeared to be no evidence of increased cases "translating to unmanageable pressures" on U.K. hospitals.

British health officials have raced to get ahead of the virus by vaccinating hundreds of thousands of people a day at hospitals, soccer pitches and churches up and down the country. As of this week, 36 million people — approximately 68% of the adult population — have received their first dose. About 19 million have had both doses.

It's an impressive feat, and many credit Britain's universal public health system for much of that success.

Experts say the National Health Service, one of the country's most revered institutions, is able to target the whole population and easily identify those most at risk because almost everyone is registered with a general practitioner.

That infrastructure, combined with the government's early start in securing vaccine doses, was key. British authorities began ordering millions of doses from multiple manufacturers late last spring, striking deals months ahead of the European Union and securing more than enough vaccine to inoculate the entire population.

"I don't think it's surprising that the two countries in the world with probably the strongest primary care systems, which are us and Israel, are doing the best with vaccine rollout," said Beccy Baird, a policy researcher at the King's Fund, a charity for improving health care.

"We have the medical records. We can understand where our patients are. We're not trying to negotiate with loads of different insurance companies. ... It's the same standard right through the country," she added. "Whereas in the States, it's going to be harder to really think about how do you reach underserved communities, how do you get out there and provide the same access to everybody to this vaccine?"

David Salisbury, a former director of the government's immunization program and a fellow at London's Chatham House think tank, added that Britain also had an edge because of its track record in successfully rolling out other vaccines, such as the seasonal flu shot.

Many around the world were skeptical about Britain's decision to delay the second vaccine dose by up to 12 weeks to free up vaccines for more people, but that strategy paid huge dividends. The two shots of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were intended to be given three and four weeks apart.

Anthony Harnden, an Oxford academic and a top government vaccination adviser, said "there were lots of questions asked" and "we were up against many countries" who disagreed with spacing out the two doses, but officials stuck to the plan.

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"You have to remember, looking back at that time, there were a thousand or more people dying every day in the U.K. So there was a huge imperative to get our vulnerable people vaccinated," he said. "It was an innovative strategy, a bold strategy, but it was based on our experience of previous vaccines."

The vaccine program's success has been a much-needed boost for Britain.

Many of those who accused the government of poorly managing the outbreak last year say the U.K. is finally doing something right.

"We didn't hand (the vaccine rollout) over to an outsourcing company. That would have been a major failure. And we also didn't delay the way we did in the first wave. We moved quickly," said Martin McKee, professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. "So it was almost like the mirror image of the mistakes we made in the first wave."

Still, McKee said he is worried that too many people may throw caution to the wind too soon.

Young people, who run a much lower risk of serious illness but can still spread the virus, are not yet included in the vaccination program. Official figures also show significant gaps in vaccine uptake among minorities and poor people.

McKee and many others are also concerned about the variants that are turning up. That risk is especially worrying as the U.K. slowly reopens to foreign tourists this summer.

"We've seen very discouraging evidence from Chile and from the Seychelles, both of which have high proportions of people who have been vaccinated and where many restrictions were lifted, and they've had upsurges," McKee said.

Harnden is more optimistic. If the U.K. can roll out a booster vaccine program later this year and if people remain cautious, he said, "we can get ourselves out of this" and get close to normal by the summer of 2022.

"We're not completely out of this yet," he said, "but we're in a much, much better place than in the last few months."

EXPLAINER: Why is Gaza almost always mired in conflict?

By The Associated Press undefined

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Gaza Strip was pounded this week by hundreds of Israeli strikes from sea, land and air, while the enclave's militant Hamas rulers fired hundreds of rockets into Israel.

It's the fourth round of major conflict between Israel and Hamas since 2008, with the tiny enclave's more than 2 million Palestinian residents bearing the brunt of the deaths and the destruction.

The latest eruption of violence has raised the specter of another devastating war and once again drawn international attention to the impoverished, densely populated strip.

Here's a look at the Gaza Strip and its place in the Middle East conflict.

A NARROW COASTAL STRIP

Gaza, sandwiched between Israel and Egypt, is just 25 miles (40 kilometers) long and six miles (10 kilometers) wide. It was part of the British-ruled Palestine Mandate before the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, when it came under Egypt's control.

Large numbers of Palestinians who fled or were driven from what is now Israel ended up in Gaza, and the refugees and their descendants now number 1.4 million, accounting for more than half of Gaza's population.

Israel captured Gaza, along with the West Bank and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories to form their future state.

The first Palestinian intifada, or uprising, erupted in Gaza in 1987 — the same year Hamas was founded — and later spread to the other occupied territories. The Oslo peace process in the 1990s established the Palestinian Authority and gave it limited autonomy in Gaza and parts of the occupied West Bank.

THE HAMAS TAKEOVER

Israel withdrew its troops and Jewish settlements from Gaza in 2005, after a second and far more violent intifada.

The following year, Hamas won a landslide victory in Palestinian elections. That triggered a power struggle

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with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, culminating in a week of clashes in 2007 that left Hamas in control of Gaza.

Hamas has done little in the way of imposing Islamic law on Gaza, which was already very conservative. But it has shown no tolerance for dissent, arresting political opponents and violently suppressing rare protests against its rule.

The militant group has remained firmly in power through three wars and a 14-year blockade.

THE BLOCKADE

Israel and Egypt imposed the crippling blockade after the Hamas takeover. Israel says it's needed to keep Hamas and other militant groups from importing arms. Rights groups say the blockade is a form of collective punishment.

The closures, along with years of misrule and Hamas' long-running feud with the Palestinian Authority, have devastated Gaza's economy. Unemployment hovers at around 50%, power outages are frequent and the tap water is badly polluted.

Palestinians face heavy movement restrictions that make it difficult to travel abroad for work, study or to visit family, and often refer to Gaza as the world's largest open-air prison.

THE WARS

Hamas and Israel have fought three wars and several smaller battles. The worst so far was the 2014 war, which lasted for 50 days and killed some 2,200 Palestinians, more than half of them civilians. Seventy-three people were killed on the Israeli side.

Israel's airstrikes and incursions into Gaza have left vast swaths of destruction, with entire neighborhoods reduced to rubble and thousands forced to shelter in U.N. schools and other facilities. Israel says it makes every effort to avoid civilian casualties and accuses Hamas of using Gazans as human shields.

Palestinian militants have fired thousands of rockets into Israel. The vast majority are intercepted by Israeli missile defenses or land in open areas, but they sow widespread fear and can bring life to a standstill. Their range has steadily increased in recent years, with some striking as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, major metropolitan areas.

Earlier this year, the International Criminal Court launched an investigation into possible war crimes in the Palestinian territories. It is expected to scrutinize the actions of both Israel and Palestinian militants in the 2014 war.

The ICC has also expressed concern about the latest violence.

Gucci marks 100 years with exhibit on Michele code-breaking

By COLLEEN BARRY AP Fashion Writer

FLORENCE, Italy (AP) — Alessandro Michele has radically shifted Gucci codes and challenged fashion norms in his 6½ years as creative director of the brand founded by Guccio Gucci as a travel bag company in Florence 100 years ago.

To mark the centenary, Michele has curated an exhibition in the Gucci Garden gallery, on Florence's Piazza della Signoria, that underlines some watershed moments in his era. Those include an advertising campaign for perfume featuring a transgender model, an all-Black cast for the pre-Fall 2017 campaign and a lipstick campaign featuring everyday faces in all their imperfections.

The exhibition will be reproduced in seven cities, including Shanghai, Tokyo, Sydney and Seoul.

The 48-year-old designer credited CEO Marco Bizzarri, who tapped an unknown Michele from the Gucci design team to take over as creative director in January 2015, with allowing him leeway to go beyond the usual schemes driving the luxury business model.

"No one would have wanted, we can say it, a transexual in the world of beauty," Michele told reporters Thursday in Florence.

He said the campaign, featuring Hari Nef, Petra Collins and Dakota Johnson walking through a field of

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wildflowers, proved conventional fashion world wisdom wrong by creating “an absolutely up-to-date female imagery.”

“If fashion and the fashion market want to continue to have a stage, there needs to be some sort of movement. That campaign, in a very gentle and very poetic way, gave space and voice to a world of very different femininity,” Michele said.

Likewise, Michele said the casting of only Black models in the 2017 campaign was at the time a breakthrough, noting that “things have changed in a dizzying and very fast way in the last year.”

The pandemic year has been a year of collaborations, including with North Face, and Ken Scott and Doraemon. A tie-up with Balenciaga will reach stores later this year. Gucci revenues rose 20% to 2.16 billion euros in the first quarter of 2021 compared with the same period last year, Women’s Wear Daily reported.

Michele’s eclectic style, which has gone a long way toward mainstreaming genderless codes, especially for men, has created a sort of tribal following. Dubbed the Gucci Gang, Michele has fully embraced the power of that very distinct crowd during his pandemic year collections, which have been unveiled as digital presentations.

Those collections include this year’s “Aria” that ends with the runway cast converging dreamily in a garden, to “Overture” last November, with videos by Gus Van Sant featuring an Italian actress moving through a rarified Roman landscape with her Gucci tribe.

Michele said the brand’s real-life fans defy easy description, ranging in age “from 10 to 90.”

“It has happened that someone who could be my mother’s age greets me, or that Marina Cicogna (an 86-year-old film producer) tells me, “When I go in the store, I find crazy things,” Michele said.

“It is strange because (we) also manage to dress someone who is 13 years old. Not only: Yesterday a young person stopped me who had a tattoo that said “Blind For Love,” and it was not the first,” Michele said, referring to one of the popular slogans that have adorned his creations.

“Evidently it was a strong detonation of something that already existed,” Michele said of his collections. “Fashion has the great capacity to interpret and to collect what is happening now to narrate the exact moment.”

Japan expands virus emergency ahead of Tokyo Olympics

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan on Friday further expanded a coronavirus state of emergency from six areas, including Tokyo, to nine, as Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga repeated his determination to hold the Olympics in just over two months.

Japan has been struggling to slow infections ahead of the games. The three additions are Japan’s northern island of Hokkaido, where the Olympic marathon will be held, and Hiroshima and Okayama in western Japan.

Despite the worsening infections, Suga stressed his commitment to holding the games safely and securely while protecting Japanese by strictly controlling the movements of foreign participants, including possibly expelling journalists covering the event if they defy regulations.

“I understand there are various difficulties, but the priority is to stop the further spread of infections and protect the people’s lives and health,” Suga said.

The three additional areas will join Tokyo, Osaka and four other prefectures already under the emergency coronavirus restrictions through May 31, Suga announced at a government taskforce meeting Friday. Bars, karaoke parlors and most entertainment facilities are required to close. Business owners who comply will be compensated; those who don’t could face fines.

“Infections are escalating extremely rapidly in populated areas,” Suga said. “As new variants continue to spread, we judged that now is a very important time to stop the further spread of infections.”

It was the second expansion of the emergency in just one week. Suga declared a state of emergency — Japan’s third — in four prefectures including Tokyo and Osaka starting April 25, then expanded it to six prefectures last Friday. Despite the emergency measures, infections are continuing to spread in wider areas of Japan instead of slowing.

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In the worst-hit Osaka area, hospitals are overflowing with COVID-19 patients. Many are waiting at home or at hotels with oxygen, and more than a dozen have died without being able to get a hospital room. Coronavirus treatment in Japan is largely limited to public or university hospitals, where treatment of non-COVID-19 patients has been largely curtailed.

Dr. Shigeru Omi, who heads a government panel of experts, urged organizers to carefully study how much additional burden Olympic participants will place on already-strained medical systems.

Suga said he will decide on a possible further extension of the emergency by evaluating the virus situation at the end of May.

His government is under heavy pressure from the public, increasingly frustrated by a slow vaccine rollout and repeated emergency declarations. Many now oppose hosting the July 23-Aug. 8 Olympics, and people appear to be less cooperative with non-compulsory stay-at-home and social-distancing requests.

Less than 2% of the public has been fully vaccinated in Japan, one of the world's least inoculated.

The expansion of the state of emergency is a major shift from the government's initial plan that relied on less stringent measures.

The addition of Hiroshima to the areas covered by the emergency measures comes just days after Japanese organizers announced that a visit next week by International Olympic Committee Chairman Thomas Bach to mark the Hiroshima leg of the torch relay has been canceled.

Earlier Friday, organizers of a petition demanding the cancellation of the Olympics submitted more than 350,000 signatures to Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike that were collected since early May. The petition says money spent on the games would be better used on people in financial need because of the pandemic.

On Thursday, Japan reported 6,800 new coronavirus cases, increasing its total to 665,547 with 11,255 deaths.

Irish health system targeted in 'serious' ransomware attack

LONDON (AP) — Ireland's health service shut down its IT systems on Friday after being targeted in a ransomware attack by what it called "international criminals."

Appointments and elective surgeries were canceled at several hospitals and Deputy Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said the disruption could last for days.

"There's lots we don't know but it appears to be a ransomware attack by international criminals," Varadkar said. "The problem could run through the weekend and into next week, unfortunately."

Ransomware attacks are typically carried out by criminal hackers who scramble data, paralyzing victims' networks, and demand a large payment to decrypt it.

Varadkar called the attack "very serious."

"It's coming at a time when the health service is extremely busy doing lots of other things," he said. "It's going to be a very difficult time for the health service."

Health Service Executive CEO Paul Reid told broadcaster RTE that health bosses had "taken a precautionary measure to shut down a lot of our major systems to protect them."

"We are at the very early stages of fully understanding the threats, the impact and trying to contain it," he said.

The health service said appointments for coronavirus vaccinations were not affected. Varadkar said emergency services, ambulance services, GP systems and pharmacy systems also were unaffected, but said there would be "major problems" for radiology services, radiation oncology, elective surgeries and obstetrics and gynaecology appointments.

Dublin's Rotunda maternity hospital said it was canceling most routine appointments due to the IT issues, calling the situation a "critical emergency."

Health care systems have been a target of ransomware tactics before. Two hospitals in France were hit by ransomware attacks in February that crippled their phone systems and forced surgeries to be postponed. In September, an apparently misdirected ransomware attack on a German hospital caused an IT systems failure and led to the indirect death of a woman. That same month a ransomware attack paralyzed a chain

of more than 250 U.S. hospitals and clinics.

In 2017, Britain's National Health Service was hit in a cyberextortion attack, forcing hospitals to close wards and emergency rooms and turn away patients.

The Irish attack highlights concerns about the vulnerability of critical infrastructure to escalating attacks by hacking groups and criminals, said Steve Forbes, government security expert at Nominet, the U.K.'s web domain registry.

"National healthcare services are already under strain from the pandemic, which will make this ransomware attack even more devastating. That fact will not be lost on the hackers," Forbes said.

In the U.S., the nation's largest fuel pipeline was hit with a ransomware attack a week ago. The disruption of the Colonial Pipeline caused long lines at gas stations due to distribution problems and panic-buying, draining supplies at thousands of gas stations. It restarted operations on Wednesday.

Forbes said the attacks on the pipeline and the Irish health care system both show "criminal groups are choosing targets that will have the greatest impact on governments and the public, regardless of the collateral damage, in order to apply the most leverage."

UK backs plans for in-person COP26 climate meeting

By MIKE FULLER Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain hopes to host the U.N.'s delayed COP26 climate summit in person in November despite the challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the U.K. official leading the preparations said Friday.

Alok Sharma, the U.K.'s president-designate of COP26, said "every possible" measure was being explored to see how the talks could be held safely, including involving COVID-19 testing and vaccinations.

In less than six months' time, delegates from across the world are due to arrive in Glasgow for the United Nations' annual climate conference.

The summit was originally set for November 2020, but the pandemic forced it to be postponed for a year. A year later, there are still issues, and limits on international travel remain in place.

"For me, it is vital that developing countries are able to sit at the same table, face-to-face with the larger countries, the big emitters," Sharma said. "The desire for (an in-person summit) is what I've been hearing loud and clear from governments and communities around the world."

Sharma said the world had not done "nearly enough" to act on the emission-cutting commitments of the 2015 Paris climate accord. The treaty seeks to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial times.

The president-designate said COP26 was the "last hope" to keep that commitment.

"We have come to the moment of truth," Sharma said. "This is our last hope of keeping 1.5 degrees alive, our best chance of building a brighter future. future of green jobs and cleaner air.

"I have faith that world leaders will rise to the occasion, and not be found wanting in their tryst with destiny."

Climate activists around the world have remained skeptical about their governments' efforts to live up to the Paris agreement, but April saw some of the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters set out their latest goals for reducing their carbon output.

Sharma also said he hoped the conference would be the moment that coal power is left "in the past where it belongs."

"The science is clear that to keep 1.5 degrees alive, coal must go," Sharma said, calling for Group of 7 countries to lead the way and support developing nations in their transitions to cleaner energy.

Having previously refused to step in, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government in March intervened in plans to build a new coal mine in Cumbria, northwest England. Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick ordered a public inquiry, which is to be held in September, less than two months before COP26, which will run Nov. 1-12.

Afghan police say Kabul mosque bombing kills 12 worshippers

By TAMEEM AKHGAR Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A bomb ripped through a mosque in northern Kabul during Friday prayers, killing 12 worshippers, and wounding 15, Afghan police said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, the latest in a surge in violence as U.S. and NATO troops have begun their final withdrawal from the country, after 20 years of war.

According to Afghan police spokesman, Ferdaws Faramarz, the bomb exploded as prayers had begun. The mosque's imam, Mofti Noman, was among the dead, the spokesman said and added that the initial police investigation suggests the imam may have been the target.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied any insurgent connection to the mosque attack, condemning it and accusing Afghanistan's intelligence agency of being behind the explosion.

Both the Taliban and government routinely blame each other for attacks. The attackers are rarely identified, and the public is seldom informed of the results of investigations into the many attacks in the capital.

One worshipper, Muhibullah Sahebzada, said he had just stepped into the building when the explosion went off. Stunned, he heard the sound of screams, including those of children, as smoke filled the mosque.

Sahebzada said he saw several bodies on the floor, and at least one child was among the wounded. It appeared the explosive device had been hidden inside the pulpit at the front of the mosque, he added.

"I was afraid of a second explosion so I came immediately to my home" he said.

An image circulating on social media shows three bodies lying on the floor of the mosque.

The explosion comes on the second day of a three-day cease-fire announced by the Taliban for the Muslim holiday this week of Eid al-Fitr, which follows the fasting month of Ramadan. The Afghan government has also said it would abide by a truce during the holiday.

So far, many of the attacks in Kabul have been claimed by the Islamic State group's local affiliate, though the Taliban and government routinely trade blame.

Last week, a powerful car bombing attack in Kabul killed over 90 people, many of them students leaving a girls' school. The Taliban denied involvement and condemned the attack.

Earlier this week, U.S. troops left southern Kandahar Air Base, where some NATO forces still remain. At the war's peak, more than 30,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Kandahar, the Taliban heartland. The base in Kandahar was the second largest U.S. base in Afghanistan, after Bagram north of Kabul.

Dump Trump? Kicking him off NYC golf course may not be easy

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump has a rich history of fighting back when he's down and making others pay, and that's exactly how he intends to deal with New York City over its plans to fire his company from running a windswept city golf course in the Bronx.

That abrupt firing was part of the backlash against Trump's businesses over his role in whipping up the mob that attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6. But experts who have reviewed the city's 566-page contract with the ex-president say kicking him off the course may not be so easy.

Trump's son Eric sees the fight as nothing less than a stand against "cancel culture," demanding a payout of more than \$30 million from the city to get out of the deal in what could turn into a potentially costly legal battle dragging on for years.

"They can't throw him out so easily," says John Ray, a lawyer with experience in public contract disputes who noted that the Bronx deal gives the famously litigious Trump plenty of room to protest. "It protects his rights to stay there and run the place."

Geoffrey Croft, president of watchdog NYC Park Advocates, predicts: "The taxpayers are going to get screwed."

In response to questions from The Associated Press, the city referred to legal filings insisting Trump's actions leading up to the riot caused a "plain and irrefutable" breach of the contract and that the Trump Organization's last day running the course will be Nov. 14.

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Area landscaper and sometime Trump course golfer Sean DeBartolo, who often drives past the hillside sign spelling out "TRUMP LINKS" in giant stones, says he could offer a temporary solution: Fill in those letters with sod and wait for tempers to cool.

"Worst-case scenario, it's only going to cost a couple of thousand," says the owner of DeBartolo Landscaping in nearby New Rochelle. "It'd be three guys and it'd be done in a day."

The Trump Organization has been reeling after the Capitol riots, with the PGA of America canceling a tournament at one of his New Jersey courses, banks refusing to lend to him and brokers refusing to help find companies to fill retail and office space in his buildings. The hits come as prosecutors pore over his tax returns and big debts loom.

But Trump likes a good fight. And anyone doubting that he can't emerge victorious when he seems washed up should talk to junk bond investors and shareholders in his Atlantic City, New Jersey, casinos, who lost hundreds of millions as he drove them into bankruptcy several times starting in the early 1990s and yet managed to pull out an estimated \$80 million for himself.

In 2008, Trump defaulted on a giant Deutsche Bank loan for his Chicago skyscraper, but then sued the bank for "predatory lending" and got it to forgive much of that loan and hand over more than \$300 million in a series of new loans.

And after getting blocked from building dozens of homes on golf courses in New York's Westchester County and outside Los Angeles, Trump somehow managed to win more than \$40 million in tax breaks for agreeing not to develop the properties despite claiming in separate documents to tax authorities that they were worth a fraction of that. The New York attorney general is investigating whether Trump illegally manipulated the values to gain breaks.

The city isn't the only Trump partner who might be forced to pay up.

Real estate giant Vornado wants to sell two office buildings it owns with Trump — one in New York, another in San Francisco — but finds itself scrambling after potential buyers who didn't want to be seen enriching the ex-president balked at a deal. One solution Vornado has considered: Buy Trump out of his stake, according to The Wall Street Journal, handing the weaker of the two partners a potential cash infusion of more than \$700 million as he faces a series of deadlines to pay off debt over the next few years.

The PGA of America may also have trouble extricating itself from Trump. When the group said it was pulling a tournament from his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf course, the Trump Organization warned it was in "breach of a binding contract." The PGA of America did not respond to requests for comment.

"Nothing is more satisfying than prevailing when everybody has said he's lost because he gets to turn to everybody and declare his magical abilities," says Trump biographer Michael D'Antonio. "And, you know, it makes other people look foolish, which he relishes."

When New York City's mayor announced he was kicking Trump off the course, he cited Trump's "criminal action" in inciting Capitol rioters, meaning he could fire him "for cause" and not pay him a dime.

"Inciting an insurrection against the United States government clearly constitutes criminal activity," Mayor Bill de Blasio said in January when he announced he would rip up the 20-year contract with Trump for the course, along with separate ones to run two ice rinks and a carousel in Central Park. "The lawyers looked at it and it was just as clear as a bell that's grounds for severing these contracts."

The city is also citing the PGA tournament cancellation, saying Trump can no longer argue he can attract prestigious tournaments to the Bronx course as is required in the contract.

But the contract makes no mention of "criminal action," and it's not clear that Trump's incitement of his supporters before they stormed the Capitol constitutes one. The contract also doesn't state specifically that Trump is required to attract tournaments, but appears to oblige him only to maintain a course that is "first-class, tournament quality."

The city has responded that the Trump Organization is being "overly restrictive" in its interpretation of those four words, saying it need only show that Trump is incapable of attracting tournaments for whatever reason.

Eric Trump, who runs the company's golf business, declined to comment for this story. But earlier this year, he sent the AP a statement saying the city's decision was "political discrimination" and that it will

cost taxpayers at least \$30 million for money it had invested in the venue, though that number may be inflated. The city bore the cost of building the course, not Trump, obliging him to spend a minimum of \$10 million on a new clubhouse.

The Jack Nicklaus-designed course built on a former landfill features native grasses, rolling hills and dramatic views of the Manhattan skyline and nearby Whitestone Bridge. Anyone can play but it costs a hefty \$154 on weekdays for residents. The course made cash profits of nearly \$700,000 in the year through March 2020 before the pandemic forced it to temporarily close.

A half-dozen golfers at the course earlier this month said that whatever the city has to pay to get out of the deal, it's too much.

"A waste of taxpayer money," says Uri Edell at the sixth hole as his partner thwacked a drive. "I don't care what name is on it."

Landscaper DeBartolo couldn't agree more.

"Why not take that \$30 million and help some people in the streets," he says. "This cancel culture is getting a little carried away, if you ask me."

Home cooks find antidote to blandness on TikTok videos

By TRACEE M. HERBAUGH Associated Press

From sourdough to feta pasta, much of the last year at home has been food-focused. And one driver of these delectable fads is the social media platform TikTok.

Many people have embraced cooking during the pandemic, when they've been home, bored, looking to try something new. TikTok was ready to fill the gap as a foodie paradise, and has seen more than 15 billion food posts.

"It's my bedtime routine," Lori Jackson, 54, of Lynn, Massachusetts, said of watching TikTok cooking videos. "I've taken ideas I've seen on there and made them."

One of the burgeoning TikTok celebrity chefs is Harry Heal, a 26-year-old who lives in Dubai.

Heal has a distinct baritone, an English accent, and has garnered about a million followers in the six months he's been posting cooking videos. He isn't a chef by trade, though he learned some cooking skills when working in the French Alps as a teen.

"From then on, I have been a huge cooking enthusiast and loved being in the kitchen," Heal said.

His most viral video – 13.3 million views — is a Valentine's Day dish with seared chicken breast, roasted garlic, sliced mushrooms and cream. Like most TikTok videos, it's set to music and has the feel of something professionally crafted.

Tri Phan of Arlington, Virginia, has amassed 1.5 million followers since he began posting workout and healthy cooking videos in November. The 23-year-old, who is working on his master's degree in data and business analytics at American University, often does two versions of his content, one in English and one in Vietnamese; about 60 percent of his followers are Vietnamese, he says.

"When I first started, it was me wanting to share with the world Vietnamese cuisine, Vietnamese food," he said. "Now I want to take this TikTok further to really help people learn to cook healthy meals that they could eat and they could eat for the rest of their lives."

Phan's love of cooking came despite being told by his traditional mother to stay out of the kitchen. "My mom never wanted the only boy in the family to be in the kitchen," he said.

"And because of that, I always wanted to cook."

Now that he's TikTok famous, he says his mother doesn't quite grasp what that means. "She's like, 'Oh, good job, son. Very good. But your finance major, how's that going?'"

About one year ago – somewhere near the "Tiger King" phase of the pandemic – a whipped coffee drink made the rounds on the internet, starting its viral journey on TikTok. The drink originated in South Korea, where it's called a dalgona coffee. All it required was instant coffee, sugar and hot water to construct a luscious-looking beverage resembling a soft-serve ice cream cone. The hashtag #whippedcoffee has amassed more than 2.3 billion views.

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There's a lot of variety on "food TikTok." You can learn to perfect a hamburger or ferment kimchee, make old-fashioned Japanese candy or fry frog legs.

The video-only platform lends itself to cooking demonstrations, said Crystal King, a social media professor at Boston-based marketing software firm Hubspot. Other social media platforms have multiple features – lots of text or static photos – that can divide a user's attention. TikTok, however, "sucks people in really easily," she said. "The format is simple, easily understood and it connects people into a global understanding of food really quickly."

The vast array of content is a leading attraction of food TikTok, fans say. Many people, like Julie Vick, a 44-year-old writer and college instructor in the Denver area, look there for new ideas.

"The videos are a little mesmerizing at times," Vick said. "I've liked watching the tortilla ones, where people put four different ingredients in different sections of a tortilla and then fold it up and cook it in a skillet."

Although they're generally not hands-on, TikTok's short videos do create interest in cooking skills, says Geeti Gangle, co-owner of Create a Cook culinary school in Newton, Massachusetts.

"If we engage younger people in learning to cook, they will start making food for themselves one day," Gangle said. "And they might become interested in learning the skills later on."

The link between good nutrition and knowing how to cook has been well established. But until the pandemic, cooking skills were on the decline for young people and not frequently taught in school.

Camden Allard, a 21-year-old student in Seattle, has made several recipes from TikTok: bread recipes, the feta tomato pasta that recently broke the internet, trifles, cinnamon rolls and the quarter quesadilla.

"TikTok videos are great to watch because I am able to get the overall information about a recipe – like what it makes, the ingredients, how you cook it – in about a minute," he said. "I can quickly determine if it's something that I would be interested in doing."

Allard, who has been cooking for about eight years, said he enjoys making meals with his girlfriend and family, and TikTok has made it easy for them to expand their repertoire.

"Quarantine has made life bland and repetitive with us staying at home, and having new meals to try out has added some excitement," he said. "That has made making dinners less of a chore and more an exciting thing."

Fully vaccinated can drop the masks, skip social distancing

By ZEKE MILLER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a major step toward returning to pre-pandemic life, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has eased mask-wearing guidance for fully vaccinated people, allowing them to stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings.

"Today is a great day for America," President Joe Biden said Thursday during a Rose Garden address heralding the new guidance, an event where he and his staff went without masks. Hours earlier in the Oval Office, where Biden was meeting with vaccinated Republican lawmakers, he led the group in removing their masks when the guidance was announced.

"If you are fully vaccinated, you no longer need to wear a mask," he said, summarizing the new guidance and encouraging more Americans to roll up their sleeves. "Get vaccinated — or wear a mask until you do."

The guidance still calls for wearing masks in crowded indoor settings like buses, planes, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters, but it will help clear the way for reopening workplaces, schools and other venues — even removing the need for social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated.

"We have all longed for this moment — when we can get back to some sense of normalcy," Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, said at an earlier White House briefing.

In light of the CDC guidance, the Pentagon announced on Friday that fully vaccinated Defense Department personnel no longer need to wear masks indoors or outdoors at Defense facilities.

The CDC and the Biden administration have faced pressure to ease restrictions on fully vaccinated people — those who are two weeks past their last required COVID-19 vaccine dose — in part to highlight the benefits of getting the shots. The country's aggressive vaccination campaign has paid off: U.S. virus cases are at their lowest rate since September, deaths are at their lowest point since last April and the

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test positivity rate is at the lowest point since the pandemic began.

Walensky said the long-awaited change is thanks to the millions of people who have gotten vaccinated and is based on the latest science about how well those shots are working.

"Anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities — large or small — without wearing a mask or physically distancing," Walensky said. "If you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing the things that you had stopped doing because of the pandemic."

The new guidance is likely to open the door to confusion, since there is no surefire way for businesses or others to distinguish between those who are fully vaccinated and those who are not.

"Millions of Americans are doing the right thing and getting vaccinated, but essential workers are still forced to play mask police for shoppers who are unvaccinated and refuse to follow local COVID safety measures," said Marc Perrone, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union. "Are they now supposed to become the vaccination police?"

Walensky and Biden said people who are not fully vaccinated should continue to wear masks indoors.

"We've gotten this far — please protect yourself until you get to the finish line," Biden said, noting that most Americans under 65 are not yet fully vaccinated. He said the government was not going to enforce the mask wearing guidance on those not yet fully vaccinated.

"We're not going to go out and arrest people," added Biden, who said he believes the American people want to take care of their neighbors. "If you haven't been vaccinated, wear your mask for your own protection and the protection of the people who also have not been vaccinated yet."

On Capitol Hill, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she is not changing the rules requiring masks on the House floor.

"No," Pelosi told CNN. "Are they all vaccinated?"

Recent estimates have put the percentage of unvaccinated lawmakers in the House at 25%.

That ambiguity over who is and isn't vaccinated led Lawrence Gostin, a public health law expert at Georgetown University, to declare the CDC guidance "confusing and contradictory."

"The public will not feel comfortable in a crowded indoor space if they are unsure if the maskless person standing next to them is or is not vaccinated," he said.

The announcement came as many states and communities have already been lifting mask mandates amid improving virus numbers and as more Americans have been shedding face coverings after getting shots.

Dan Witte, a 67-year-old musician from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, stopped wearing a mask after receiving the vaccine two months ago and recently rejoined his band playing gigs at crowded bars and weddings. He was encouraged by the CDC's new guidance but said it just confirmed his trust that the vaccines offered protection from spreading infections.

"I went right from being hypervigilant for almost a year to being right in the crowd without a mask," Witte said.

To date more than 154 million Americans, nearly 47% of the population, have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and nearly 119 million are fully vaccinated. The rate of new vaccinations has slowed in recent weeks, but with the authorization Wednesday of the Pfizer shot for children ages 12 to 15, a new burst of doses is expected in the coming days.

"All of us, let's be patient, be patient with one another," Biden said, acknowledging some Americans might be hesitant about removing their masks after more than a year of living in a pandemic that has killed more than 584,000 people in the U.S. and more than 3.3 million people worldwide.

The CDC's announcement that Americans could begin to shed one of the most visible symbols of the pandemic stood in stark contrast to other nations, with much of the world still struggling to contain the virus amid global disparities in vaccinations.

Just two weeks ago, the CDC recommended that fully vaccinated people continue to wear masks indoors in all settings and outdoors in large crowds.

Walensky said that evidence from the U.S. and Israel shows the vaccines are as strongly protective in real world use as they were in earlier studies and that they continue to work even though some worrying mutated versions of the virus are spreading.

The more people continue to get vaccinated, the faster infections will drop — and the harder it will be for the virus to mutate enough to escape vaccines, she stressed, urging everyone 12 and older who is not yet vaccinated to sign up.

And while some people still get COVID-19 despite being vaccinated, Walensky said, that's rare. She cited evidence that those infections tend to be milder, shorter and harder to spread to others. If people who are vaccinated do develop COVID-19 symptoms, they should immediately put their mask back on and get tested, she said.

There are some caveats. Walensky encouraged people who have weak immune systems, such as from organ transplants or cancer treatment, to talk with their doctors before shedding their masks. That's because of continued uncertainty about whether the vaccines can rev up a weakened immune system as well as they do normal, healthy ones.

The new guidance had an immediate effect at the White House, which has taken a cautious approach to easing virus restrictions. Staffers were informed that masks are no longer required for people who are fully vaccinated.

First lady Jill Biden, who was traveling in West Virginia, told reporters that "we feel naked" as she and her party removed their face coverings. Then she paused. "I didn't mean it that way!"

Interfaith efforts strained by Israeli-Palestinian violence

By DAVID CRARY and LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

The escalation of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is dismaying American Muslims and Jews who've been working to build bridges between their communities and are now struggling to quell fear and anger in their own circles.

"We're heartbroken," said Muslim attorney Atiya Aftab, the New Jersey-based co-founder of a major interfaith group, the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. She added that the situation threatens to derail the group's work.

The organization, which seeks to build trust and friendships between Muslim and Jewish women and teenage girls, issued a statement regretting the "violent response" by Hamas, the Islamic militant group ruling Gaza, but was more expansive and forceful in condemning actions by Israeli security forces.

"The Israeli government has a responsibility to stop settlers and extremists from taking over the land and allow those who live in East Jerusalem to rightfully live there in peace," the group said. "As Muslim and Jewish women of faith ... we have a responsibility to rise up and respond to injustice and prejudice."

The grim events in Israel and Gaza have fueled "raw discussions" among members of another Muslim-Jewish partnership, Los Angeles-based NewGround, according to its executive director, Aziza Hasan.

She said a private Zoom gathering is planned for next week to address tensions within the community, which includes Palestinian Americans, Muslims with origins elsewhere and Jews holding a wide range of political views. Many members have relatives or friends in areas wracked by the violence.

"NewGround has been working hard to listen deeply to the enormous anger and fear," Hasan, a Muslim, said via email. "There is fear that the violence is becoming increasingly personal in shared neighborhoods."

"We do not know the immediate path through this, but we are certain that until we humanize one another, there won't be a path at all," Hasan added, "We encourage our community members to reach out to someone else who holds a different view and listen to their story with compassion."

Andrea Hodos, NewGround's associate director, said she has close family in Israel and worries for Israelis taking refuge in bomb shelters. She has Palestinian American friends for whom she is also concerned, including one with family members in Gaza where there's little protection against Israeli air strikes.

"We need to keep all these people in mind," said Hodos, who is Jewish. "It doesn't work all the time ... but our goal is to get as many people to stay at the table as possible, hearing one another's stories. That's what softens our hearts — to be able to be with one another through these times."

Ingrid Mattson, a Muslim scholar and former president of the Islamic Society of North America, wrote this week on Twitter that she fears "meaningful interfaith relationships" among U.S. Christians, Muslims

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and Jews are in jeopardy "if those involved continue to be silent on Israeli attacks on Palestinians in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque" during the holy month of Ramadan.

"This is the crisis of a generation," she wrote.

In an interview, Mattson said she was anguished by what she saw as a muted response from some faith groups as that holy site was attacked, a traumatizing event for Muslims everywhere: "It makes a person question the nature of the (interfaith) relationship."

She said there have been some important statements by allies, citing groups such as Rabbis for Human Rights and Jewish Voice for Peace that have strongly condemned Israeli policies and actions as cruel and unjust. But Western Christian denominations, she said, have been largely silent beyond calls for both sides to be peaceful.

"I feel like people should have learned something from the last year of public education about anti-Black racism and police violence against Black people in America — that you have to say what's wrong," she said.

Jewish Voice for Peace, a California-based advocacy group critical of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians, lists interfaith outreach as one of its core missions.

"We've built deep partnerships with Muslim American groups," said the organization's executive director, Stefanie Fox. "To see this happening, in this most sacred period, is truly horrifying. ... There's this incredibly urgent call to work together to hold the Israeli government accountable."

The conflict came up during a Zoom session this week held by the Interfaith Dialogue Association of Grand Rapids, Michigan, to train medical residents on how to approach patients of different cultures and religions.

"You'd think that subject was far enough away from Israel-Palestine. But no, it actually entered the conversation," said Fred Stella, the president of the association, which is affiliated with the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University. "It's very present right now. Very sadly so, as you can imagine."

"This is such a complicated mess," Stella added. "If you do not approach it with the acknowledgment that there is no 100 percent absolute right guy in this fight, then you're not going to engage in any interfaith dialogue."

The violence has disrupted — but not halted — the work of Kids4Peace, a global organization based in Jerusalem whose work includes a program bringing together young Israelis and Palestinians.

"Since the most recent escalation between Gaza and Israel and the attempted lynchings at night by Arabs and Jews in some mixed cities, the hatred and violence in the streets around us is even more palpable," the director of the youth encounter program, Ittay Flescher, said via email.

Flescher said some members were leery about leaving home to attend the group's events, but attendance was still high at joint Palestinian-Israeli meals during Ramadan.

"Many youth felt it important to come together and share their frustrations, anger and beliefs with one another at this time," he wrote. "If Jerusalem won't be a city that is a true home for all of us, it will not ultimately be a safe home for any of us."

Free offices with a view: 4 lighthouses, courtesy of feds

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Dreading your eventual return to the office? The federal government is making available — for free — some waterfront workspaces with killer views that are sure to entice. But there's a catch.

The General Services Administration says the U.S. Coast Guard has decided it no longer needs four of the nation's most picturesque lighthouses, and it's inviting certain types of organizations to take them over at no cost.

The GSA, which has been getting rid of its large inventory of obsolete lighthouses, said Thursday that Beavertail Lighthouse in Jamestown, Rhode Island — America's third-oldest lighthouse, and a beacon that defeated British forces torched out of spite in 1779 as they withdrew from the new nation — is up for grabs.

So are Watch Hill Light in Westerly, Rhode Island, not far from Taylor Swift's beachside mansion; Cleve-

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land Harbor West Pierhead Light in Ohio; and Duluth Harbor North Pierhead Light in Minnesota.

Conditionally, that is: The government says it'll make the historic lighthouses and their outbuildings available free of charge to federal, state and local agencies; nonprofit organizations; educational and community development agencies; or groups devoted to parks, recreation, culture, or historic preservation.

Beavertail Light "has been determined to be excess to the needs of the United States Coast Guard," which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, GSA spokesperson Paul Hughes said in a statement.

Beavertail Light has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1977. The 64-foot (19.5-meter) granite lighthouse faces south where Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound meet, offering drop-dead-gorgeous ocean vistas.

All that remains of the original lighthouse is its foundation; it was constructed in 1749 and burned down by British soldiers leaving the Newport area in 1779. The current lighthouse was built in 1856 along with six additional structures totaling 5,171 square feet (480 square meters.)

Hughes said the government is asking interested groups to formally express their interest in the next 60 days, and the National Park Service will review the applications.

Perched on a peninsula, Watch Hill Light is a three-story granite block tower with a cast iron and glass lantern on top. It's attached to a two-story brick keepers dwelling built in 1935. Outbuildings on the 4.5-acre complex include an oil house built in 1855-1856.

Cleveland Harbor West Pierhead Light, built in 1911 to guide ships in Lake Erie approaching the Port of Cleveland, housed a Coast Guard Station until 1976. It's best known for its annual transformation into a majestic ice castle when winter temperatures freeze the surf that sprays its facade. A sister lighthouse, Cleveland Harbor East Pierhead Light, was sold a few years ago for \$10,000.

Duluth Harbor North Pierhead Light, built in 1910 and perched at the westernmost tip of Lake Superior, also is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 15, the 135th day of 2021. There are 230 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 15, 1970, just after midnight, Phillip Lafayette Gibbs and James Earl Green, two Black students at Jackson State College in Mississippi, were killed as police opened fire during student protests.

On this date:

In 1602, English navigator Bartholomew Gosnold and his ship, the Concord, arrived at present-day Cape Cod, which he's credited with naming.

In 1918, U.S. airmail began service between Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York.

In 1948, hours after declaring its independence, the new state of Israel was attacked by Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

In 1954, the Fender Stratocaster guitar, created by Leo Fender, was officially released.

In 1963, Weight Watchers was incorporated in New York.

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its unanimous *In re Gault* decision, ruled that juveniles accused of crimes were entitled to the same due process afforded adults. American realist painter Edward Hopper died in New York at age 84.

In 1968, two days of tornado outbreaks began in 10 Midwestern and Southern states; twisters were blamed for 72 deaths, including 45 in Arkansas and 18 in Iowa.

In 1972, Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace was shot and left paralyzed while campaigning for president in Laurel, Maryland, by Arthur H. Bremer, who served 35 years for attempted murder.

In 1975, U.S. forces invaded the Cambodian island of Koh Tang and captured the American merchant ship *Mayaguez*, which had been seized by the Khmer Rouge. (All 39 crew members had already been released safely by Cambodia; some 40 U.S. servicemen were killed in connection with the operation.)

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In 1988, the Soviet Union began the process of withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, more than eight years after Soviet forces entered the country.

In 2000, by a 5-4 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court threw out a key provision of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, saying that rape victims could not sue their attackers in federal court.

In 2015, a jury sentenced Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv) to death for the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing that killed three and left more than 250 wounded.

Ten years ago: Mobilized by calls on Facebook, thousands of Arab protesters marched on Israel's borders with Syria, Lebanon and Gaza in an unprecedented wave of demonstrations, sparking clashes that left at least 15 dead.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama urged graduates at Rutgers University to shun those who wanted to confront a rapidly changing world by building walls around the United States or by embracing ignorance, as he delivered a sharp and barely concealed critique of Donald Trump. "60 Minutes" said goodbye to Morley Safer, honoring the newsman who had been a fixture at the CBS newsmagazine for all but two of its 48 years (Safer died four days later at age 84).

One year ago: President Donald Trump formally unveiled a coronavirus vaccine program he called "Operation Warp Speed," to speed development of COVID-19 vaccines and quickly distribute them around the country. The House approved rules changes allowing Congress to keep functioning while it was partly closed; lawmakers would no longer be required to travel to Washington for floor votes and could assign their vote to another lawmaker who would be at the Capitol to cast it for them. J.C. Penney became the fourth major retailer to file for bankruptcy reorganization since the pandemic began. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo fired the State Department's inspector general, whose office had been critical of alleged political bias in the agency's management. Comedic actor Fred Willard, whose films included "Best In Show" and "Anchorman," died at 86.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-singer Anna Maria Alberghetti is 85. Counterculture icon Wavy Gravy is 85. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is 84. Singer Lenny Welch is 83. Actor-singer Lainie Kazan is 79. Actor Gunilla Hutton is 79. Actor Chazz Palminteri is 75. Former Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius is 73. Singer-songwriter Brian Eno is 73. Actor Nicholas Hammond (Film: "The Sound of Music") is 71. Baseball Hall of Famer George Brett is 68. Musician-composer Mike Oldfield is 68. Actor Lee Horsley is 66. TV personality Giselle Fernández is 60. Rapper Grandmaster Melle Mel is 60. Actor Brenda Bakke is 58. Football Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith is 52. Actor Brad Rowe is 51. Actor David Charvet (shahr-VAY') is 49. Actor Russell Hornsby is 47. Rock musician Ahmet Zappa is 47. Olympic gold medal gymnast Amy Chow is 43. Actor David Krumholtz is 43. Rock musician David Hartley (The War on Drugs) is 41. Actor Jamie-Lynn Sigler is 40. Actor Alexandra Breckenridge is 39. Rock musician Brad Shultz (Cage the Elephant) is 39. Rock musician Nick Perri is 37. Tennis player Andy Murray is 34.